Music covers as vehicles of nostalgia: Exploring fans’ recollections and yearning in the UK indie pop music scene

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by

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to investigate how long-standing members of the UK indie pop music scene reflect on their experiences of music and make sense of the scene. Twelve in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with fourteen indie pop fans, supported by two years of immersion in the scene so I could familiarise myself with the music, practices and community surrounding indie pop. Participants were asked to bring to the interview examples of meaningful single/EP/album covers and it was later investigated what role their chosen covers play in their conceptualisations of their experiences of music and the scene. Taking an inductive approach to research, thematic data analysis revealed that nostalgia and authenticity play a significant role in their conceptualisations. Specifically, participants were nostalgic for analogue media culture, the “golden years” of indie pop and personal recollections bound to music. A DIY mode emerged from the interviews, illustrated via key characteristics of the covers which participants drew on to collectively authenticate and establish the identity of the scene. The covers therefore functioned as vehicles of nostalgia, triggering reminiscences and underlying feelings of belongingness, while also constituting the object of yearning. In an age where the digitisation of music has re-contextualised analogue music, this research offers insight into less visible music practices outside of the mainstream and captures the motivations behind long-standing members of the scene’s commitment to analogue music and fondness for the culture surrounding it. In doing so, it foregrounds the role of music covers in experiences of music, an area which is currently unexplored in academic literature.

Keywords: nostalgia; music covers; indie pop; authenticity; analogue music culture; golden age; Do It Yourself.
Dedicated to George Ward, in loving memory.
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Chapter One: Introduction

My interest in music stemmed from my late childhood and early teenage years. I remember sitting in my parents’ front room, aged thirteen. “Dark Side of the Moon” was blaring out of the speakers and Dad was sat in his armchair, just listening. “You’ve got to listen to Pink Floyd with the volume up”, he told me. I still stand firmly by this now, aged twenty-seven. The reason is that you might otherwise miss the eclectic assortment of background noises that often come before the music kicks in – like the clink of coins falling during the introduction to “Money” or the snippets of speech taken from people’s spontaneous responses to questions about madness, violence and dying that reoccur throughout the album. Listening with the volume up is a different, more detailed experience and one that you need to be tuned in to.

Back in my parents’ living-room, my thirteen-year-old self was also scanning the CD and cassette drawer, something I would do periodically throughout my teens, lowering my expectations each time in case I missed something worthwhile amongst the unmentionables (apparently, Mum was a big fan of Status Quo). I decided I liked Pink Floyd that day, and sat cross-legged on the floor until dinnertime, leafing through the booklet encased in the CD sleeve of “Dark Side of the Moon”, eager to make sense of every lyric and wondering what the prism on the front had to do with anything. I would later explore this, doing my own research into the names I read in that booklet, which would lead me to discover the work of graphic designer Storm Thorgerson and the London-based art design group Hipgnosis, which Storm co-founded with designer Aubrey Powell. Hipgnosis were responsible for many of the highly polished covers of rock bands’ records throughout the late 1960s until the early 1980s. These include Led Zeppelin’s 1973 album “Houses of the Holy”, which shows collaged images of children crawling over the Giant’s Causeway in Northern Ireland; AC/DC’s 1976 album “Dirty Deeds Done Dirt Cheap”, featuring characters with blacked out eyes pasted over an image of the Sunset Strip in West Hollywood, California, and 10cc’s 1980 album “Look Hear?” emblazoned with the question “Are You Normal?” and a tiny photograph of a sheep sitting on a therapist’s chair on a beach.
These covers are of course very different to the more rough-and-ready style of covers that feature heavily in this thesis, but I will address this under the later sub-heading: “Why indie pop?” Throughout the rest of my teenage years, my mind continually came back to cover art. Aged sixteen, much to my excitement, I carried out work experience at an architects next door to St. Pauls Gallery in Birmingham, “the World’s leading retailer in signed limited edition album cover fine art” (St. Pauls Gallery, 2019, para. 1). Alongside exhibited cover art by Storm Thorgerson and Aubrey Powell, the gallery also displays cover art by “Sir Peter Blake (the Beatles, Ian Drury), Karl Ferris (Jimi Hendrix, Donovan), Terry Pastor (David Bowie), and Jim Fitzpatrick (Thin Lizzy)” (ibid.). Along with the joy of being able to view these covers on a large scale and read about their origins, discovering St. Pauls Gallery further legitimised my love for album covers, as I realised that the covers on display were considered pieces of art in their own right. During this period, I included stills of music videos and obscure lyrics in my A-Level Art portfolio, settling on “Iconic album covers” as the title for my final essay. It is no surprise, then, that such a fascination would make its way back into my academic work at the first available opportunity, in my proposal for a Research Methods module in the second year of my undergraduate degree.

In the time between the second year of my undergraduate degree and enrolling on the PhD programme in 2013, my love of music endured. For my undergraduate dissertation, I explored perceptions of branding among four unsigned bands based in Birmingham, given the inherent tension between artistic endeavours and commerce. I focused especially on the interpersonal relationships between band members and how they maintained unity despite espousing different personal views on branding their band and their involvement with marketing more broadly. After graduating, I enrolled on a Master’s course in English Language and Linguistics, where I investigated discursive constructions of female popular culture fans on the micro-blogging website Twitter. The idea was born out of reading about the portrayal of women in the music industry and so I saw the modern “fangirl” as an updated version of the female “groupie”. I returned to the School of Business in 2013 to pursue a PhD, with a proposal on cover art in its early stages.

While initially driven by my passion for cover art, the interview data I gathered ultimately revealed unanticipated insights into the role that nostalgia and authenticity play in some
of my respondents’ – long-standing members of the UK indie pop scene – experiences of music. Participants were asked to bring along examples of music covers which they considered to be “meaningful”, and so the covers functioned as props which grounded the interviews. In light of the findings, the focus of this thesis shifted, resulting in a more inductive approach in which the cover art was no longer the sole object of the research. What the cover art became instead, as this thesis will demonstrate, is an aspect of the analogue music experience which is yearned for by the respondents.

What I had also not considered was how formative childhood and teenage years would be for all participants in terms of their first meaningful encounters with music. Consequently, the interview data was threaded with looking back and nostalgia, adding further depth to their responses. As an avid music fan myself, the significance of cover art in my own recollections of music foreshadowed what would come to be a pertinent finding, which would shape how the rest of the thesis unfolded. In the following section, I explain how the cover art turned out to be so important to so many music consumers and why this thesis is so timely.

1.1 The importance of materiality in an age of digital music

Before explaining how the indie pop scene came to be a fertile environment for researching the interplay between nostalgia and authenticity in experiences of analogue music, it is necessary to understand the broader context of discontinuity in which the idea for this thesis came about. Times of discontinuity are regarded as a potential trigger of nostalgia, as I go on to explain in my literature review. Moreover, as I will demonstrate, music formats and the music industry more generally, have substantially evolved in the last seventy years. These transformations have resulted in often abrupt changes in the ways music is consumed as well as the recent reinstating of the importance of the physicality of music formats in a digital age.

In 1948, when Columbia Records first marketed the long-playing (LP) 33 rpm record with space for twelve tracks (Ogden et al., 2011, p. 123), popular music was transformed holistically – from the way it was produced, packaged and marketed to how it was performed, purchased and experienced (Warr and Goode, 2001, p. 126; Elborough, 2008,
p. 19). Specifically, this new format offered improved sound quality while letting music producers include more tracks per released disc than its precursor, the 78 rpm shellac disc (Shuker, 2010, p. 59). The LP also encouraged consumers to commit to purchasing an album in its entirety, regardless of whether they wanted to hear every track, while the album sleeve brought about “an entire new visual language” (Elborough, 2008, p. 6).

It is generally accepted that the digital age of music consumption started with the release of the first Compact Disc (CD), co-developed by electronics companies Phillips and Sony, in 1982/1983 (Jones and Sorger, 1999, p. 88; Chivers Yochim and Biddinger, 2008, p. 184; Hull et al., 2011, p. 31; Nowak, 2016, p. 15). From a technical standpoint, this new format was considered superior to its predecessor as it allowed for better “audio clarity, disc durability, and storage capacity” (Plasketes, 1992, p. 112). Shortly after the release of the first CD, the launch of the Sony Discman in 1984 enabled music consumers to listen to CDs by themselves and while travelling (Hosokawa, 1984; Nowak, 2016, p. 16). Moreover, while vinyl records required careful attention from their owners (Lepa and Tritakis, 2016, p. 17), CDs and the Discman also simplified and improved the listening experience as record tracks could be played on loop or in a random order (Plasketes, 1992, p. 112). As such, given that the CD quickly became considered the new prime music format (Chivers Yochim and Biddinger, 2008, p. 184), vinyl sales decreased dramatically – so much so that, ten years after the introduction of the digital compact disc, vinyl LPs only represented 1% of the music format shares in the US market (Bartmanski and Woodward, 2015, p. 5).

However, by the turn of the 21st century, the onset of digitisation forced a reinvention of the music industry in order for it to survive (Hull et al., 2011, p. 31). As such, digital music began transitioning to intangible formats. Indeed, in 1992, German researchers designed a new audio compression standard to exchange digital files over the internet (Katz, 2010, p. 137). This standard introduced the new “MP3” digital format, which Sterne (2006, p. 825) describes as a “container technology for recorded sound”. To reduce the size of audio files, this new digital format relied on compression techniques that remove sound frequencies imperceptible to the human ear (Sterne, 2006, p. 832; Katz, 2010, p. 137). However, it was not until the release of the peer-to-peer file sharing service Napster in 1999 that MP3s started to become popular among music listeners (Katz, 2010, p. 139). The online platform allowed users – tens of millions at its peak – to illegally
exchange individual songs stored on their computers (ibid.). This platform affected the music industry both in terms of technological innovation and market linkages; in other words, the financial transactions, or lack thereof, involved in buying music and their associated channels, systems and distribution methods (Oestreicher and Kuzma, 2009, p. 2). Today, online music streaming platforms such as Spotify dominate the music media market in the US and have contributed to drastic changes to the way music is consumed as many listeners no longer own the music they listen to (Datta et al., 2018).

Unsurprisingly, it has also been argued that the gradual fragmentation of music formats, from exclusively analogue before the 1980s to more recent times in which digital formats prevail, generally coincided with the loss of the tangible aspects of the experience. For instance, Jones and Sorger (1999, p. 91) mention the impracticality of flicking through CDs in the shop – an activity that had become associated with vinyl formats. Capturing feelings about this technological shift from the tangible to the intangible music format, Elborough (2008, p. 4) eloquently describes his feelings glancing at a young girl’s music collection on a bus:

“Glancing over, I saw Lilliputian album sleeve after album sleeve whizzing by on the screen of her iPod. Here was what previously would have been the collection of a lifetime for many, housed in something little larger than a fag packet. The distance travelled from the cumbersome lounge furniture of my youth to the nano-technological present suddenly seemed painfully large – and tremendously exciting”.

However, the “cloud-based intangibility” (Jones and Sorger, 1999, p. 34) characteristic of new music formats has also enabled new opportunities for music listeners. For instance, unlike copying older analogue media which was a time-consuming process\(^1\) and often resulted in a copy of lower quality than the original, MP3s, by their very nature, could be identically duplicated, allowing consumers to instantly exchange individual digital tracks (Katz, 2010, p. 141; Reynolds, 2011, p. 68; Fenby-Hulse, 2016, p. 178). Moreover, in stark contrast to purchasing habits of the LP era or even buying habits

\(^1\) As Fenby-Hulse (2016, p. 178) points out, crafting a mixtape was a very social activity that required time and “simultaneous real-time recording and listening”.

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around singles, the new sales model brought on by digitisation means that consumers are now able to purchase any track at all for between 59 and 99 pence on digital music platforms such as iTunes (iTunes, 2019), rather than buying an album in its entirety.

Nonetheless, it would be overstating the case to argue for a single “shift” or “revolution” – the terminology often used to describe the process of digitisation – into the digital age. Instead, there has been a continuing fragmentation of analogue, one aspect of which is a more technology-centric existence. This idea is supported by Nicholas Negroponte (1995, p. 68), who argues that digitisation cannot be reduced to a single event:

“Finding cures for cancer and AIDS, finding an acceptable way to control population[s], or inventing a machine that can breathe our air and drink our oceans that may or may not come about. Being digital is different. We are not waiting on any invention. It is here. It is now.” (Negroponte 1995, p. 68)

As such, digitisation is neither an end state into which we have completely transitioned, nor a continuous process with an ultimate outcome in sight. Indeed, at the time of writing, in 2019, it continues to unfold. On the one hand, the age we live in now is certainly a digital one; it is both “here” and “now”, to use Negroponte’s words. On the other, we must not be fooled into thinking that the stage we have reached is one of stability, homogeneity and constancy, nor indeed “full digitisation”.

This line of thought is also supported by several music scholars who argue that the demarcation between the tangible analogue and intangible digital music eras is not as clear-cut as it might first appear (Chivers Yochim and Biddinger, 2008; Magaudda, 2011; Bartmanski and Woodward, 2015; Bennett and Rogers, 2015; Novak, 2015). As such, digital music consumers, faced with countless music listening options, often rely on modes of consumption that have not changed since prior to the beginning of the digital fragmentation of music. For example, someone may still depend on friends’ recommendations to discover new records (Nowak, 2014, p. 148). Furthermore, Magaudda (2011), drawing on the examples of portable music player the iPod, the hard disk drive and the vinyl, argues that the materiality of music “bites back” and suggests the re-contextualisation of tangible music formats in modern and mostly digital music
consumption. As such, while the CD and vinyl are secondary for most digital music listeners, these formats once considered obsolete represent a key aspect of and augment listeners’ experiences of music (Magaudda, 2011; Nowak, 2014, p. 160).

### 1.1.1 The vinyl revival

The contemporary importance of tangible analogue music media is best illustrated by the recent revival of vinyl records (Shuker, 2010, p. 61; Magaudda, 2011, p. 28; Bartmanski and Woodward, 2015, p. 4; Katz, 2015, p. 276). It has been reported that sales of new vinyl records have steadily increased in the US since 2006 (Katz, 2015, p. 278). In 2010, they were regarded as the “fastest growing music format” (Bartmanski and Woodward, 2015, pp. 4-5) and in 2012 reportedly reached their highest level of sales since 1993. This resurgence has often been attributed to the authentic qualities of this analogue medium which were not perceived as such until the vinyl record was positioned in contrast to the modern attributes of digital music (Chivers Yochim and Biddinger, 2008, p. 192). These include its warm sound compared to the “cold sterility of digital [music]” (Katz, 2015, p. 276), its fragility (Chivers Yochim and Biddinger, 2008, p. 192), the “richness” of the physical medium (Lepa and Tritakis, 2016, p. 27) and its propensity to trigger recollections of past times (Plasketes, 1992, p. 121; Shuker, 2010, p. 65; Reynolds, 2011, p. 74).

However, Sterne (2006, p. 343) suggests that digital audio is not necessarily technically inferior to its analogue counterpart, since the CD allows for a greater “dynamic range” of sound than vinyl records. Furthermore, it has been argued that music listeners are not turning back to vinyl for the quality of the analogue sound as much as for the tangibility and the values seemingly espoused by the medium (Hayes, 2006, p. 60; Katz, 2015, p. 278). Analogue music listeners often praise the uniqueness of each record and the multisensory aspects of the medium, from the “scratch and crackle noises” (Bennett and Rogers, 2015, p. 31) to the large cover art encasing the black circular disc (Plasketes, 1992, p. 119; Jones and Sorger, 1999, p. 70; Chivers Yochim and Biddinger, 2008, p. 191). In contrast to digital tracks that can be downloaded – and skipped – at the click of a button, preparing the turntable, carefully removing the record from its sleeve and contemplating the cover while listening to the music constitute the unique rituals associated with the consumption of vinyl (Hayes, 2006, p. 60; Bartmanski and
Woodward, 2015, p. 19). Such a fixation on the physicality of music is of course not confined to written accounts, but can also be seen in the rise of “Record Store Day”, which is held once a year in celebration of the “unique culture” of “over 200 independent record shops all across the UK” (Record Store Day, 2019).

Beyond the materiality of the format, vinyl and the practices related to its use are often perceived as more authentic than experiences of digital music (Magaudda, 2011, p. 30; Bennett and Rogers, 2015, p. 33). In the case of Hayes’ (2006) study, young music consumers who were born after the original decline of vinyl records recognised the imperfections of the format as markers of authenticity. Further, they interpreted the vinyl era as more faithful to the original intent of the musicians as they associated CDs with the heavy involvement of music producers (ibid.). As Frith (1996, p. 234) argues, the development of recording techniques, propelled by the aim towards higher definition sound, has also widened the gap between the performer and the listener. In this sense, vinyl records, through their fragility, simplicity and imperfections, are considered “true to life” and imbued with human qualities (Chivers Yochim and Biddinger, 2008, p. 187).

The final aspect of the recent resurgence in vinyl is the one that this thesis foregrounds; namely, the salience of the past in listeners’ experiences of vinyl and analogue media more generally. Intertwined with the perceived authentic qualities of the medium, the vinyl record is often considered an “original historical artefact” (Shuker, 2010, p. 65) or, as Plasketes (1992, p. 121) succinctly puts it, “[v]inyl is biography. Vinyl is culture and subculture. And vinyl is history”. In contrast to infinitely replicable digital formats that do not show such obvious signs of the passage of time (Boym, 2001, p. 347), a specific copy of a vinyl record directly connects its owner to past times, harking back to the very moment the record was produced (Bartmanski and Woodward, 2015, p. 21; Bolin, 2015, p. 256).

Precisely, vinyl records have been framed as triggers of nostalgia (Shuker, 2010, p. 66; Reynolds, 2011, p. 74; Katz, 2015). Given this, the multi-sensory experience associated with this once-obsolete artefact is often cited as one of the origins of a longing for a seemingly superior and simpler past (Katz, 2015, p. 280). Moreover, it is suggested that vinyl record owners may specifically associate their records with their youth, since this is when they first began to listen to music (Plasketes, 1992, p. 114; Bennett and Rogers,
However, the nostalgia triggered by the vinyl record is not always grounded in personal experience. As Hayes (2006, p. 55) notes, the rituals associated with vinyl are often romanticised in popular culture. For some people, nostalgia for vinyl may be partly explained by today’s “retromania”, the recent collective obsession for the past and its stylistic features, that Simon Reynolds (2011, p. xxi) attributes to changes in consumption habits and the new opportunities brought by digital technologies which enable instant access to the past.

1.1.2 The role of cover art

In contrast to new digital music formats that have evolved to enable listeners to instantly download tracks and enjoy music on the move, the large 12”x12” cardboard sleeve and the strength of the cover art constitute a major aspect of the appeal of vinyl records (Hayes, 2006, p. 58). Indeed, no format since the advent of the LP in 1948 has lived up to the quality of the multi-sensory experience and the creativity of the aesthetics that such music packaging offers (Plasketes, 1992, p. 119; Jones and Sorger, 1999, p. 70; Chivers Yochim and Biddinger, 2008, p. 188; Bartmanski and Woodward, 2015, p. 9; Katz, 2015, p. 280; Bartmanski and Woodward, 2016, p. 3). As such, the cover art on the front of a record sleeve contributes to the “complete audio-visual experience” of music (Jones and Sorger, 1999, p. 77). In other words, the visual aspects of the vinyl record complete the emotions triggered by the music as they provide a visual and memorable point of origin for these feelings (Frith, 1996, p. 112).

Furthermore, it has been suggested that the features of cover art, as well as the inserts inside the sleeves, contribute to the sense of the past that vinyl evokes (Bolin, 2015, p. 256; Bartmanski and Woodward, 2016, p. 3). This is especially pertinent given that the creative production of cover art culminated in 1973, prior to a substantial increase in the cost of pressing albums (Jones and Sorger, 1999, p. 78). In other words, as Arvidson (2007, p. 56) explains, the introduction of the vinyl record corresponded to “an attempt to bring back the visual” and, beyond marketing the music and making it stand out, “to artistically reflect or comment upon the music” (his emphasis). Specifically, the cover of a record offers an additional visual dimension to the music; one that reveals the history and the “personality” of the musicians (Jones and Sorger, 1999, p. 86). In this sense, the special attention given to the design of the covers often provokes the record owners to
picture the “independent human being” at the origin of the artwork (Chivers Yochim and Biddinger, 2008, p. 192).

While the significance of music covers has been acknowledged, the lack of research foregrounding their visual contribution to the experience of analogue music was what sparked the initial idea for this research. Moreover, given the importance of the physicality of vinyl records in contributing to the perceived authenticity of music and potentially triggering nostalgic recollections, research which explores the role of cover art in relation to these two concepts is, to the best of my knowledge, very limited. As such, although it has been suggested that record covers form part of the complete, multisensory experience of analogue music, in the context of nostalgia and authenticity, they are generally regarded as secondary to the physicality of the medium. Hence, my research addresses this gap. In the following section I discuss how the UK indie pop scene was identified as a rich site to explore my topic.

1.2 Why indie pop?

As O’Reilly et al. (2013, p. 190) explain, a musical “scene” “capture[s] the complexity of and diversity of all musical practices, including both production and consumption, in a particular place” and studies of scenes are pivotal to understanding the consumption of music. In other words, it is not enough to simply look at music as the audio dimensions of a song or album; instead we must take account of the whole context in which it is produced and consumed. Here I will explain how and why I came to explore indie pop music and in particular, the scene that I spent two years immersing myself in. Of course, I discuss this in greater depth in the methodology chapter, under the section “Selecting an empirical site and sampling strategy” and so this account merely serves as a brief explanation and introduction.

This scene centres around indie pop, a type of independent guitar pop music with a “Do It Yourself” (DIY) ethos. In chapter four of the literature review, I discuss the history of indie pop music and how it emerged in the UK as part of the DIY music scene, aiming to contextualise it, yet acknowledging the limitations regarding any attempt to recount its “history” – noting that it is not definitive by any means. There, I explain that DIY is very
much an umbrella term which captures many different styles and sounds of music. The overarching features, then, are that anyone can have a go or take part, yet on a much smaller scale in comparison to the major record labels or indeed established independent labels like Rough Trade. Indie pop therefore has an “unpolished” charm, which those who participated in this study emphasised and which is generally understood as a marker of authenticity (Hesmondhalgh, 1999; Gordon, 2005; Strachan, 2007).

With its roots in Britain and commonly referred to as “alternative rock” in the US, the term “indie” emerged out of the DIY movement. It was coined in the 1980s and is an abbreviation of “independent”, very much wearing its alternative production methods and organisation on its sleeve, and positioning itself in contrast to the mainstream popular music industry (Hesmondhalgh, 1999, p. 35). Moreover, strong narratives circulate which emphasise the professionalism of dominant players in the industry, functioning as something for those in DIY music worlds to resist as a way to make sense of their own activities as independent practitioners (Strachan, 2007, pp. 245-246). With specific reference to its applicability to this thesis though, indie’s opposition to the mainstream popular music industry was one of the reasons that made it well suited to this research.

While the digitisation of music is often understood to have widely obliterated analogue music – an assumption which often underlies discussions surrounding the resurgence of vinyl – these formats continued to be produced and consumed in some non-mainstream contexts. For instance, some independent musicians and collectors have continued to listen to analogue rather than digital music as a matter of preference (Plasketes, 1992, p. 109; Hayes, 2006, p. 56; Winters, 2016, pp. 47-48). Additionally, many music genres and subcultures such as hip hop, ska-reggae, post-punk and dance have held tightly onto the vinyl record, which has remained at the forefront of consumption practices on these scenes in an increasingly digital age (Magaudda, 2011, p. 28; Bartmanski and Woodward, 2015, p. 21). In these scenes, analogue music never actually “died” and so never needed to be “resurrected”.

This is also true of the indie pop music scene. Indeed, many members still actively produce and listen to vinyl, and at most of the indie pop events I attended there were stalls where physical copies of music, from cassettes through to CDs and vinyl records, were sold. The prevalence of analogue music is partly due to digital formats such as MP3s
necessitating more money and skill in the use of recording and editing tools, as opposed to the simplicity and affordability of producing physical music formats. Moreover, the notion of physical music formats connecting the listener to the maker and the human qualities behind the production of the music is in tune with the core values of DIY. These are the “effort to reassert human independence and creativity in production” and “[revalorise] those qualities of humanity that technocratic culture has labelled as counterproductive” (Chivers Yochim and Biddinger, 2008, p. 193). Indeed, indie pop’s quest for authenticity relies on its opposition to inauthentic and mass-produced modern media, as the scene privileges simple and human modes of expression (Fonarow, 2006, p. 74).

Finally, nostalgia pervades the indie pop scene as performers often seek inspiration from and refer to a former “golden age” (Dale, 2010, pp. 239-240). This yearning also facilitates the simplicity and often childlike music and media it produces (Reynolds, 2007, p. 15; Dolan, 2010, p. 464). Thus, the salience of both of authenticity and nostalgia makes the scene a fertile and, to my knowledge, unexplored context to investigate the relationship between these two concepts. Ultimately, consumers of indie pop are more likely to be passionate about cover art or favour physical music formats in comparison to consumers of mainstream popular music, where digital music dominates. Indeed, if such a focus on the mainstream music industry had been chosen, I would likely have focused on consumers who had lived through and experienced all music formats, since many younger consumers have grown up in the era of digital music. In the following section I outline my research questions and detail the structure of this thesis.

1.3 Research questions and overview of chapters

Taking into consideration the starting point and inductive nature of this research, this study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do long-standing members of the indie pop music scene:
   - reflect on their experiences of music?
   - make sense of the scene?

2. How do their chosen covers contribute to their conceptualisations?
The first research question reflects my quest to understand how those I interviewed perceived their experiences of music over the course of their long-term involvement in the scene. Given the emphasis on analogue music within the indie pop music scene and the concurrent transition from analogue to digital music external to the scene, this offers insight into why these members have remained committed to analogue music. This question was also designed to capture how they interpreted the core values of the scene, offering insight into what they value not only about analogue music formats, but their experiences of music within the scene. I have already noted that an exploration of music scenes is important in contextualising and capturing the broader experiences of music beyond simply the listener and the format, taking into consideration the whole context in which it is produced and consumed (O’Reilly et al., 2013, p. 190). The second research question captures the role that participants’ chosen “meaningful” covers play in their long-term experiences. Given the lack of emphasis on cover art in existing literature on the revival of analogue music culture, my aim is to find out how these covers contribute to their experiences of music.

As already outlined, the inductive process of seeking answers to these research questions, prompted by discussions about certain aspects of participants’ chosen cover art, led me to discover the prevalence of nostalgia and authenticity in all twelve interviews. As such, this thesis is organised around these two salient themes. The following chapter is the first of a three-part literature review, which comprises chapters two to four of this thesis. Chapter two introduces the concept of nostalgia and builds a detailed picture of its scope and application. In chapter three, I narrow down my focus to the various objects and triggers of nostalgia to shed light on the role of tangible artefacts in nostalgic recollections. I also consider the more recent literature concerning media nostalgia, including nostalgia for analogue media. In literature review chapter four, I turn to the concept of authenticity and its relationship with nostalgia. It is there that I discuss the role of authentic objects in grounding nostalgic longings. I also discuss the indie pop music scene, emphasising that nostalgia and authenticity are embedded in the scene. At the end of this chapter, I tease out the key findings from the literature review which together shed light on the relationship between nostalgia, authenticity and tangible objects. At this point, I present the conceptual framework that guided the analysis of the data.
Following this, in chapter five, I detail my methodology, outlining the philosophical assumptions that guided this work and justifying the decisions I made regarding my research design and in the two chapters (six and seven) which follow, I present the findings from the twelve semi-structured interviews with fourteen long-standing members of the UK indie pop music scene. While I focus more on synthesising my findings in a separate discussion chapter (eight) following on from the two findings chapters, I nonetheless draw upon the literature reviewed to make sense of the data where deemed necessary to interpret the findings. Chapter six focuses on the multiple objects of nostalgia, with the role of authenticity and the tangible props woven throughout each section of the chapter. Chapter seven presents the characteristics of the visual props and the indie pop music scene more broadly which participants deemed authentic. Finally, the conclusion chapter (nine) summarises the key findings, answering the research questions and identifying potential avenues which I argue would be fruitful to explore going forward.
Chapter Two: An overview of nostalgia

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce and provide background on the concept of nostalgia. I start by discussing its coinage in the section titled “A brief history of nostalgia”, before moving on to consider its various meanings and applications under “Definitions”. Both sections offer a sense of how the usage of the term has shifted over time. In “Conceptual perspectives”, I introduce key approaches taken to studying nostalgia. The aim of this section is also to provide a roadmap for the remainder of this chapter. The sections that follow, “Memory and emotion in nostalgia”, “Subjects of nostalgia”, “Types of nostalgia” and “Functions of nostalgia” all contribute to the detailed picture of nostalgia that I build throughout the chapter. It is thus foundational to chapter three and the remainder of this thesis, where I explore the role that objects play in nostalgic experiences. While I recognise the importance of memory in nostalgic experiences, I do not delve deeply into this body of research. Rather, I discuss the extent to which it contributes to nostalgia, fuelling further discussion of the various forms that nostalgia can take.

2.2 A brief history of nostalgia

The term “nostalgia” was coined in 1688 by Swiss physician Johannes Hofer in his medical dissertation, to refer to the extreme negative physiological and psychological symptoms that Swiss mercenaries experienced while away from their homelands (Anspach, 1934, p. 382). Hofer described symptoms such as enduring melancholy and thinking about home, insomnia, weakness, loss of appetite, fever, anxiety, heart palpitations, shortness of breath and stupor (ibid., p. 386). Causes of this apparent disease were debated by physicians at the time (Sedikides et al., 2004, p. 201) and ranged from attributing the nostalgic condition to sickness caused by thinking about home (Havlена and Holak, 1991, p. 323), to the wildest suggestion, that the continuous sound of cowbells in the Alps impaired the ear drums and brain (Davis, 1979, p. 3).
Hofer himself argued that such a condition had not previously been reported, but evidence suggests that a similar phenomenon had been documented in the early 1600s, referred to by a different name to describe what was thought to be a disease affecting soldiers of the Spanish Army of Flanders (Rosen, 1975, p. 341). Indeed, the phenomenon that we now call nostalgia is believed to have existed unnamed for a long time before it was formally identified and medicalised (Batcho, 2013, p. 1). Throughout the 1700s and 1800s, nostalgia continued to be regarded as a disease, eventually broadening its diagnoses beyond Switzerland to other geographic locations (Sedikides et al., 2004, p. 201). Moreover, in the 1800s nostalgia gradually became more strongly associated with feelings of sadness, eventually being regarded as a type of melancholy (Rosen, 1975, p. 349). Homesickness was ultimately understood to be central to the disease and it was proposed that introverts living away from home were most at risk of the condition (Anspach, 1934, p. 383). It was also posited that feelings of alienation arising from being in an unfamiliar culture may cause individuals to seek comfort via positive thoughts of their homelands. Continuing this line of reasoning, the individual would fall ill as a result of dwelling on the negative aspects of the new or unfamiliar place, causing continuous suffering and longing for their home, to which they could not immediately return (ibid., p. 385).

While these early medical accounts of nostalgia emphasised its negative aspects, psychoanalytic research later highlighted its more positive side as well, studying it as a “function of social forces” (Batcho, 2013, p. 9). As interest in the term amongst theorists of psychiatry wavered, its uptake in psychoanalysis and the subsequent psychoanalytic movement saw nostalgia garner attention in the growing area of psychological research (ibid., p. 3). The psychoanalytic study of nostalgia is credited for contributing much to our understanding of the concept, challenging the medical understanding which considered the homeland to be the focus of nostalgic desire and instead emphasising the “conflicting emotions” underlying the nostalgic condition, moving beyond conceptions of nostalgia as solely melancholic (ibid., p. 4). Indeed, towards the end of the 1800s, nostalgia became entirely “de-medicalised” (Rosen, 1975, p. 351; Davis, 1979, p. 4; Wilson, 2014, p. 22). Further, Batcho (2013, p. 4) suggests that psychological research into nostalgia “contributed definitional precision and objective methodology to the empirical investigation of nostalgia”, spurred on by the evolution and expansion of experimental psychology.
By the mid 1900s, the term “nostalgia” had integrated into US vernacular and was associated with psychology to a lesser extent (Davis, 1979, pp. 4–5). By the end of the 20th century, nostalgia had become a familiar concept in and outside of academia, no longer attached to a specific field of study (Sedikides et al., 2004, p. 202; Wildschut et al., 2006, p. 975) or exclusively associated with homesickness (Sedikides et al., 2004, p. 202; Batcho, 2013, p. 6). These more recent accounts of nostalgia moved away from the prior emphasis on home as the sole object of nostalgic desire, towards the feeling of “being at home in the world” (Boym, 2001, p. 25) and the definition of nostalgia as a “temporal condition” (Reynolds, 2011, p. xxi). Beyond country of origin, this could extend to loved ones, cultural norms, customs and anything which connects the individual to the world (Boym, 2001; Batcho, 2013). As such, the study of nostalgia broadened its horizons beyond external stimuli such as one’s home, also including internal experiences, as its meaning shifted to encompass yearning for past times.

This move thus placed greater emphasis on the psychological benefits that come from nostalgia, guiding the evolution of its meaning along a more positive trajectory. Unsurprisingly then, nostalgia’s rich and complex history as a concept is indicative of the difficulties in capturing what Batcho (2013, p. 9) refers to as “the nature of the sentiment, its source, its significance, and determination of its adaptive or maladaptive character, correlates, and consequences”. Having set the scene for how the concept of nostalgia came into being and developed over time, in the following section I turn to current definitions of nostalgia, shedding light on how it has been used in everyday language more recently and which characteristics it represents.

### 2.3 Definitions

Dictionary definitions of nostalgia reveal its Greek roots, “nostos”, to return and “algos”, suffering (Anspach, 1934, p. 381; Jacoby, 1985, p. 5). Integral to the concept of nostalgia then, is a sense of longing for the past, specifically “one’s place of origin” (Wildschut et al., 2006, p. 975) or a desire “to return to the womb”, as Nawas and Platt (1965, p. 51) put it. Feelings of loss or detachment are therefore considered to underlie nostalgia’s bittersweetness (Nawas and Platt, 1965; Havlena and Holak, 1991; Baker and Kennedy,
1994; Batcho, 1998; Holbrook and Schindler, 2003; Sedikides et al., 2004; Wildschut et al., 2006; Batcho et al., 2008). Implicated in this definition is a sacralisation of the past, a form of looking back through rose-tinted spectacles (Jacoby, 1985, p. 4; Kaplan, 1987, p. 471; Belk, 1990). Such retrospection is thought to most commonly centre around pertinent moments in one’s life narrative or family and loved ones (Cheung et al., 2017, p. 89).

Beyond such idealism, Goulding (2001, p. 583) points to “a degree of imagination, fantasy [and] escape” that underscores nostalgic longing. Consequently, nostalgia can coincide with the construction of a past that never existed (Stewart, 1993, p. 23). Indeed, Batcho (1998, p. 414) foregrounds the role of the individual in fabricating and over-emphasising the positive aspects of the past, arguing that such views are not necessarily “valid”. The idea that it is possible to give objective accounts of time periods assumes that there is a true version of the past grounded in fact, which our memories can access. While literature on the process of memory is relevant here, the focus of this section is on outlining the various definitions of nostalgia. I discuss the role of memory in nostalgia, particularly the extent to which recollections are imagined later in this chapter, under the heading “Memory and emotion in nostalgia”.

While I do not share the same philosophical assumptions as Batcho (1998), I do not fully dismiss her claim either, arguing instead that versions of the past may be considered reasonable to a greater or lesser extent in their telling. By means of illustration, certain periods in history, such as the Great Depression (1929-1939), are widely understood to have been unhappy times to have lived through. A nostalgic recollection of this period would thus ignore the overwhelming difficulties and the complete context of the object of desire, selecting only the positive aspects of the period to reflect fondly upon. Likewise, Jacoby (1985, p. 2) states, “when I see pictures showing how teeth used to be extracted and limbs amputated without anaesthesia, I completely lose sight of how romantic those Good Old Days were and feel very thankful for the medical progress of the twentieth century”. These examples capture the idealism of the nostalgic condition.

Having outlined the various definitions of nostalgia, the following section, “Conceptual perspectives”, provides an overview of major approaches taken to studying nostalgia.
2.4 Conceptual perspectives

As well as outlining the key perspectives on nostalgia that can be found in academic literature, the aim of this section is also to provide a roadmap for the remainder of this chapter. As such, my intention is to highlight the key questions and discussions that have emerged from existing research across a range of disciplines, each of which will be addressed in subsequent sections of this literature review. The first of these is the role of cognition and emotion in nostalgia. The role of remembering and reconstructing former experiences has been highlighted by various theorists, thus emphasising the cognitive aspect of nostalgic experiences (Leboe and Ansons, 2006; Stephan et al., 2012, p. 291). Additionally, nostalgia is also conceived of as an emotional state (Belk, 1990; Hirsch, 1992; Moran, 2002; Sedikides et al., 2004; Cheung et al., 2017), while others have turned their attention to the complex interplay between emotion and memory (Kaplan, 1987, p. 468). This will be explored in the section “Memory and emotion in nostalgia”.

The extent to which people may be predisposed to experiencing nostalgia has also been the subject of much investigation. Indeed, Batcho (1995, p. 141) outlines four perspectives that capture the ways in which individuals’ predispositions have been researched: the generational perspective, which sees age as a primary determinant of nostalgia proneness; the developmental approach, which suggests particular key stages in peoples’ lives give rise to nostalgia more than others; the notion that nostalgia may be a personality trait, meaning that some individuals experience nostalgia more frequently or intensely than others, and the fourth perspective, which conceptualises nostalgia as a mood which can be induced by certain stimuli. Each of these perspectives are considered in the section titled “Subjects of nostalgia”, along with the corresponding research that fits into the various camps.

Following this I turn to the assorted classifications of nostalgia, outlined in the section “Types of nostalgia”. It is here that I consider the argument that nostalgia is experienced by everyone universally (Sedikides et al., 2004; Wildschut et al., 2006), and is not limited to a nostalgia “elite” (Davis, 1979, p. 27). Moving on from this, I consider the extent to which nostalgia can be experienced collectively amongst groups of people (Baker and Kennedy, 1994; Havlena and Holak, 1996; Goulding, 2001, p. 585; Wilson, 2014, p. 43; Lowenthal, 2015, p. 196) and thus the interplay between personal and collective nostalgic
experiences (Davis, 1979, p. 124). This in turn leads to a discussion of the type of nostalgia that is felt, for instance, whether the object of nostalgia is experienced directly or indirectly.

Finally, I juxtapose the positive and negative ways in which nostalgia has been discussed in “Functions of nostalgia”, harking back to the history of nostalgia and the more negative connotations associated with it when the term was first coined to describe what was thought to be a disease. Here, the more positive accounts of nostalgia come from later literature which documented its apparent functions, emphasising its sweeter side (Gabriel, 1993, p. 137; Tannock, 1995, p. 460; Batcho, 1998, p. 421; Sedikides et al., 2004, 2008, p. 307; Wildschut et al., 2006, p. 987; Baldwin et al., 2014, p. 1). Having outlined the key perspectives and themes which emerged from the literature on nostalgia, I conclude this chapter with a summary and a discussion of the key theories and concepts which are most relevant to this thesis and which inform my conceptual framework.

2.5 Memory and emotion in nostalgia

Given that nostalgia emanates from a longing for the past (Nawas and Platt, 1965, p. 51; Wildschut et al., 2006, p. 975), memories are clearly fundamental to experiencing nostalgia. Dames (2001, p. 15) defines nostalgia as consisting of “stories about one’s past that explain and consolidate memory rather than dispersing it into a series of vivid, relinquished moments”, noting that “it can only survive by eradicating ‘pure memory’, that enormous field of vanished detail, that threatens it”. In this sense, nostalgia can be understood as an aid in both remembering important moments and details that make up one’s life narrative, while at the same time forgetting details that surround it as a matter of necessity. As such, nostalgia can be read to concern both remembering and forgetting, as well as reconstruction. Supporting this, Storey (2003, p. 103) argues that memories are not stable, but “forgotten, revised, reorganised, updated, as they undergo rehearsal, interpretation and retelling”.

In the field of psychoanalysis specifically, the concept of screen memory has been applied to nostalgia, since it captures the imagined impression that results from the purging of unwanted memories via the connection of an assortment of only positive recollections
Therefore, when we recollect personal experience, it does not stem from one single memory, but an assemblage of memories which we have unknowingly edited. However, as Hirsch (1992, p. 390) notes, while the connection between memory and nostalgia is evident, screen memory is one facet of nostalgia, which is more broadly an emotional condition, a longing for a filtered version of the past. Importantly, the role of screen memory underlines the romanticised vision of the past that Dames (2001, p. 15) refers to, which is partly recalled, partly reconstructed by the individual. Underlying this discussion is the philosophical assumption that a true past existed; while I do not as I have suggested already subscribe to such a viewpoint, this nonetheless emphasises the agency of the individual in glamorizing the object of their longing (Jacoby, 1985, p. 4; Belk et al., 1989; Batcho, 1998).

Moreover, Storey (2003, p. 103) asserts that elements of the past which are deemed to be of greater personal importance to the individual, and thus more often remembered and narrated to others, are more conducive to modification. This argument serves to demonstrate that nostalgia is not experienced in isolation, but can also be affected by interactions with others. Indeed, the argument that remembering is not a solely individual project is well supported; we look to others to help complete our fragmented memories, thus rendering remembering a partly collaborative process (Lowenthal, 2015, p. 311). Drawing on this, Grainge (2003) explains that our memories are established collectively, via the memories of others. Indeed, memories are passed down generations via history, folk tales, stories and so on. This contrasts with Freud’s argument that the unconscious functions to complete memories (Freud, 2012, p. 168). As explained in the previous section, “Conceptual perspectives”, the extent to which nostalgia can be experienced collectively amongst groups of people will be examined more fully in the later section “Types of nostalgia”.

While the role of memory in nostalgia has received much attention from various authors working within psychoanalysis and beyond, its status as an emotion has also been asserted (Belk, 1990; Hirsch, 1992; Moran, 2002, p. 159; Sedikides et al., 2004, p. 202; Cheung et al., 2017, p. 89). Indeed, Belk (1990, p. 670) argues that nostalgia is primarily emotional rather than cognitive. Supporting this claim, Hirsch (1992, p. 390) explains that nostalgia necessitates longing for an “emotional state”. In this sense, the feelings associated with the moment are foregrounded as the object of longing rather than the
focus of the memory itself. For Gabriel (1993, p. 123), however, the emphasis on “yearning” in definitions of nostalgia seems to suggest it is more of a desire than an emotion. However, he argues that nostalgia cannot be conflated with desire, since desire requires fulfilment. There is no return in nostalgia; it is a yearning which, on the one hand, has seemingly already been fulfilled and, on the other, cannot be fulfilled due to the irrevocable passage of time. In a slightly different vein, Kaplan (1987, p. 465) argues that nostalgia may be conceived of as a mood as opposed to a feeling, regarding it as a more generalised and lasting state of mind rather than a specific, time-limited sentiment. Ultimately, there is no clear consensus regarding the predominance of any of the various psychological nuances of nostalgia among those who have debated it. However, Gabriel concludes that theorists generally concur “that the emotional tone of nostalgia is not a loud one, but a contemplative, quiet one” (Gabriel, 1993, p. 123).

Amongst the research which foregrounds the emotional aspects of nostalgia, the extent to which it may be considered a positive or negative experience has been debated. Most notably, Davis (1979, p. 18) argues that nostalgia is fundamentally a “positively toned evocation of a lived past” and states that it very rarely concerns negative memories, more often focusing on versions of the past which emphasise positive emotions and perceptions such as “beauty, pleasure, joy, satisfaction, goodness, happiness [and] love” (ibid., p. 14). Using similar language, Kaplan (1987, p. 465) refers to the nostalgic experience as “joyous”, resulting in “a feeling of elation”. Sedikides et al. (2004, p. 202) fully support these claims, adding that nostalgia is a “self-relevant emotion”; in other words, it is a unique experience as objects of nostalgia and the meanings attached to them differ from one person to another.

That said, such a positive conception of nostalgia excludes the feelings of loss or detachment which underpin the bittersweetness of nostalgia (Nawas and Platt, 1965; Havlena and Holak, 1991; Baker and Kennedy, 1994; Batcho, 1998; Holbrook and Schindler, 2003; Sedikides et al., 2004; Wildschut et al., 2006; Batcho et al., 2008). Indeed, Sedikides et al. (2004, p. 203) explain that, because nostalgia evokes an overly positive vision of the past, this can often result in “mild discontent and sadness” due to the sharp disparity with the present moment. This line of reasoning is seconded by Wildschut et al. (2006, p. 977) who point out that the “sadness” inherent in nostalgia comes from the unattainable elements of the past which are desired. Batcho (1998, p. 412)
also underscores the combination of bitter and sweet affection in nostalgic experiences, as well as the interplay between cognition (memory) and emotion. This claim is strengthened by the empirical findings of Barrett et al. (2010, p. 393), who analysed the emotions evoked in participants in nostalgic, “non[-]nostalgic” and “non[-]autobiographical” episodes via their responses to an assortment of music of varying degrees of personal relevance. Nostalgic episodes gave rise to a wider range of emotions in comparison to “non[-]nostalgic” episodes (ibid., p. 400).

Having discussed and debated the roles of emotion, cognition and various other aspects of the human psyche in nostalgia, the following section will deal with research which has investigated who tends to be nostalgic, addressing issues of whether nostalgia is a universal experience open to everyone, as well as the extent to which it may be personally but also collectively experienced.

### 2.6 Subjects of nostalgia

Interest in measuring the degree to which certain individuals are likely to experience nostalgia started to pick up amongst academic psychologists around the mid 1990s, leading to a wave of studies which analysed individual traits as well as external factors and their relationship with nostalgia proneness. This research generally centred around four major perspectives, put forward by Krystine Batcho. The first of these, as briefly indexed earlier, is the “generational” perspective (Batcho, 1995, p. 141), in which the generation an individual belongs to – in other words, the broad age category they fall into – is a predictor of nostalgia proneness. Indeed, findings from Batcho’s (1995) survey research of 648 respondents ranging from 4 to 80 years old suggest that people generally experience “increasing nostalgia to a peak during the college years, followed by a decline”, which stands in contrast to the common argument that nostalgia is experienced more by the elderly than younger generations, emphasised in seminal work such as Davis’ (1979, p. 71) “Yearning for Yesterday”. However, Batcho (1995, p. 142) considers that many college students go through an important life transition when they move away from home, which could result in homesickness and thus increased nostalgia. This is in tune with earlier conceptions of nostalgia, which conceived of homesickness as the root cause of nostalgia (Anspach, 1934, p. 383; Nawas and Platt, 1965, p. 51).
The survey findings also indicated that as respondents grew older, they were less nostalgic for “pets, toys and holidays” yet increasingly nostalgic for music (Batcho, 1995, p. 138), suggesting there may be a relationship between age and objects of nostalgic yearning. Moreover, while Batcho (1995, p. 142) acknowledges the limitations of her research, concluding that the results of her survey are “not adequate to yield definitive conclusions concerning generational differences”, she notes that her findings were not consistent with earlier research conducted by Strauss and Howe (1991). Their research categorised US generations and the associated personality patterns common across each, relative to their age and the context in which they grew up. In particular, the generations which overlap with Batcho’s (1995) study include the “silent” generation born 1925-1942 and aged 48-65 in 1990; baby boomers born between 1943-1960, aged 30-47 and the “13ER” generation born 1961-1981, aged 9-29.

According to Strauss and Howe (1991, p. 392) those classified as members of the silent generation were considered to be particularly nostalgic for their childhoods, despite the backdrop of war and the Depression during their upbringing. Batcho’s (1995, p. 142) findings also pointed to higher levels of nostalgia amongst “13ERS” than baby boomers or the silent generation. Given that baby boomers grew up in a society in which children were at the centre, in stark contrast to the 13ERS (Strauss and Howe, 1991, p. 328), Batcho’s (1995, p. 142) results thus questioned the foundations of prior assumptions, that one is nostalgic for “objectively” positive times. This reasoning would of course suggest that higher levels of nostalgia would be experienced by the baby boomers in comparison to the 13ERS.

Ultimately, Batcho (1995, p. 142) concludes that “[f]actors which promote the development of nostalgia may be more prevalent or more intense in certain time periods, leading to generational differences, or in certain individuals’ lives, increasing the probability of the development of a “nostalgic” personality”. This points to common factors experienced collectively by generations, as well as factors which are unique to one’s circumstances. Moreover, a content analysis of 42 personal accounts submitted to the periodical “Nostalgia” between 1998-1999, alongside those of 172 undergraduates, indicated that nostalgia was “a common experience” across the diversity of age groups represented in the sample (Wildschut et al., 2006, p. 980). While this captures the
frequency of nostalgia among different age groups, further research into age would be needed to assess whether underlying patterns exist regarding objects of nostalgia, triggers and so on. In tune with this line of reasoning, while age may play a role in determining nostalgia proneness, it has been argued that in isolation it is not enough to predict nostalgia. For instance, in the context of nostalgia evoked by products, Holbrook (1993, p. 255) contends that we must consider both age and degree of nostalgia proneness in order to predict which products are likely to have a lesser or greater nostalgic appeal to consumers. This again underscores the importance of the individual’s disposition, alongside age, in determining the likelihood of experiencing nostalgia.

The second perspective is the “developmental” approach (Batcho, 1995, p. 141), in which individuals are more or less likely to experience nostalgia during different life stages. This differs from the generational perspective as it foregrounds the role of life stages such as youth, adolescence and adulthood, rather than studying the degree of nostalgia proneness among peer groups. Batcho (2013, p. 4) points to adolescence as the stage in which individuals may start to experience nostalgia for bygone childhood years. Furthermore, rather than remaining relatively stable per individual, nostalgia ebbs and flows (Batcho, 1995; Havlena and Holak, 1991) and objects of yearning depend to some extent on the responsibilities which each individual has (Batcho, 1995), which implies a connection to life stage. Furthermore, there is some speculation that middle aged people and those who are retired are more susceptible to nostalgia (Havlena and Holak, 1991, p. 324). Specifically, Schindler and Holbrook (2003, p. 294) found that styles of cars that were popular during the youth of the male participants in their study tended to be preferred and thus looked back upon favourably later in life. This sheds light on the relationship between life stage and objects of nostalgia, and I explore the body of literature that deals with nostalgia, marketing and consumption in the following chapter, under the heading “Nostalgia, marketing and consumption”.

The third perspective conceives of nostalgia proneness as a personality trait (Batcho, 1995, p. 141), rendering individuals innately more or less susceptible to experiencing nostalgia. With regards to this viewpoint, empirical findings suggest that those prone to nostalgia are more averse to being regarded as prejudiced against stereotyped groups (Cheung et al., 2017, p. 91). This emanates from research which emphasises the greater degree of empathy and willingness to interact in social groups displayed amongst
nostalgia prone individuals (Turner et al., 2013). Moreover, they may be more emotional, introverted and less independent (McCann, 1943, p. 99) and perceive themselves to have stronger memories than less nostalgia-prone individuals (Batcho, 1998, p. 419). Those scoring highly on Batcho’s (1995) nostalgia inventory, which measures the individual’s rating of the frequency and depth of their nostalgic experiences, ranked themselves higher on the scale in these areas in comparison to individuals who scored lower (Batcho, 1998, p. 418-420). It should therefore be underlined that Batcho’s study captures the individual’s own judgement of where they rank on the scale in response to statements included in the nostalgia inventory, as opposed to being the result of an alternative method such as observation, for instance.

These findings are consistent with McCann's (1943) comparative study of homesick and non-homesick college students, which contributed to discussions surrounding “nostalgic temperament” popular at the time McCann was writing. This study highlighted a clear contrast between the two groups of students. Results suggested that homesick students displayed higher levels of emotional attachment to and dependence on home and loved ones. Moreover, they were generally more introverted and less emotionally stable and proactive than the non-homesick group. This is also in tune with Turner et al.’s research which indicates that “[p]articipants in the nostalgia condition reported greater social connectedness than did those in the control condition” (2013, p. 418). Taken together, these findings resonate with the observation that those who are more emotional are more nostalgia prone.

Conversely, those who are more optimistic, future-orientated and proactive in the pursuit of their goals have been deemed generally less nostalgic than those who fixate on the past. This further supports arguments that nostalgia is evoked by concern or pessimism regarding one’s future (Nawas and Platt, 1965, p. 55). However, challenging existing preconceptions, those who scored highly on the nostalgia inventory in Batcho’s research did not perceive themselves as less content than those who scored lower on the inventory (Batcho, 1998, p. 418). Related to this point, Batcho (1995) suggests that a pleasant childhood may contribute to a more optimistic outlook in adulthood, thus resulting in reduced nostalgia. As such, pessimism here seems to induce greater nostalgia, despite a less happy childhood, which is in some ways paradoxical, given that youth is a common object of nostalgic yearning.
Finally, the fourth perspective, according to Batcho (1995, p. 141), is that nostalgia is a mood evoked by certain factors, thus suggesting that the factors themselves trigger nostalgia and shifting emphasis away from individual predispositions. Factors could include sights, objects, music or smells (Belk, 1990) as well as negative times in one’s life (Wildschut et al., 2006, p. 984) and periods of change (Grainge, 2000, p. 28). I explore the various factors which trigger nostalgia in greater depth in chapter three, but this claim contrasts with the three perspectives considered thus far, which attribute predictors of nostalgia to demographic and psychographic characteristics of the nostalgic subject: personality, life stage and age. Kaplan (1987, p. 465), then, asserts that nostalgia is a mood experienced by everyone, which “results in a heightened mental state, an enhancing, uplifting mood related to particular memories of the past”.

Indeed, understanding nostalgia as a mood is closely connected to the functions of nostalgia. As Hirsch (1992, p. 391) points out, the “positive mood state” of the nostalgic subject is generally accompanied by “a vivid visual image”. The idea here is that we long to occupy a mental state which is somehow superior to that of the present moment, and this is represented in our vision of “paradise” (Jacoby, 1985, p. 4). In this regard, nostalgia can be understood as “a mood that embellishes and colors the entire state of mind by adding a sense of exuberance that transforms the total personality and elevates self-esteem” (Kaplan, 1987, p. 470). In this regard, nostalgia can be understood to serve a positive function and is a resource which can be drawn on universally (Kaplan, 1987, p. 465).

As I have already mentioned, I discuss the functions of nostalgia in greater depth later in this chapter. Having reviewed the various approaches taken to understanding the subjects of nostalgia, their characteristics and the extent to which it may be a universal mood experienced by everyone, I turn next to the types of nostalgia outlined in the literature.

2.7 Types of nostalgia

Existing literature identifies many different forms of nostalgia, some of which overlap or are characteristically similar, albeit with different labels. The first distinction that ought
to be made is between three types of nostalgia which are referred to in psychodynamic research as follows: “pathological nostalgia that causes debilitating negative affect, pathological nostalgia that performs defensive screen functions, and prototypical nostalgia that performs beneficial functions” (Erickson, 2014, p. iv). While the aim of this thesis is not to analyse the psychological forces driving experiences of nostalgia, as would be the case in psychodynamic research, the notion of both pathological (Kaplan, 1987) and prototypical (non-pathological) nostalgia is helpful in that it clearly delineates between the perceived positive and negative functions of nostalgia. This is an area which I return to in a later section of this chapter, “Functions of nostalgia”. Meanwhile, I shall provide an overview of the various classifications of nostalgia which emerge from the literature. The table at the end of this section provides a summary of the key characteristics of each type of nostalgia discussed below (see Table 1).

The types of “restorative” and “reflective” nostalgia were coined by seminal commentator Svetlana Boym (2001, p. 41), who emphasises that these two forms of nostalgia may overlap and interweave and do not necessarily exist as distinct forms. “Restorative nostalgia” is concerned with re-gaining a former time in its entirety. In tune with the definitional Greek roots of nostalgia, this type of nostalgia focuses on returning, i.e. “nostos”, that is, reconstructing a “freshly painted” past and thus creating meaning in the present moment (ibid., p. 49). “Reflective nostalgia” (Boym, 2001) on the other hand, is contradictory in the sense that it is characterised by a yearning for specificities or details from the past, decontextualised from the moment in time and circumstances in which they occurred. This type of nostalgia thus shifts attention to “algos”, suffering. In this sense, “reflective nostalgia” does not seek to wholly recreate the past and instead “lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history, In the dreams of another place and another time” (ibid., p. 41). This type of nostalgia captures the idealism underpinning nostalgic longing (Batcho, 1998; Goulding, 2001, p. 583; Moran, 2002, p. 156).

Relatedly, Davis (1979, pp. 17–26) outlines three orders of nostalgia, which he emphasises are “analytical categories” which emerged from his analysis of various cultural texts such as newspaper articles, as well as interviews he conducted. In other words, individuals can move fluidly between the orders when experiencing nostalgia (ibid., p. 28). “First order” or “simple nostalgia”, describes the nostalgia felt by individuals who believe that things were better in the past while knowing that a return to
such a period is not possible. This underlines the bittersweet nature of nostalgia put forward in the “Definitions” section. “Second order” or “reflexive nostalgia”, describes individuals who question or analyse the past and thus show more criticality when experiencing nostalgia. In “third order” or “interpreted nostalgia”, the individual undergoes deeper critical analysis of the nostalgic longing itself, questioning whether the past was actually superior. These types of nostalgia capture the degree to which the individual experiencing nostalgia reflects critically on the object of their nostalgic desire and thus, the extent to which they are conscious of the process itself.

While some, particularly earlier, accounts of nostalgia take for granted the personal nature of the nostalgic experience (see for example Wildschut et al., 2006), other research underscores the role of collectivism in nostalgic experiences (see for example Baker and Kennedy, 1994; Havlena and Holak, 1996; Goulding, 2001, p. 585; Lowenthal, 2015, p. 310). Moreover, Davis (1979, p. 124) has studied the interplay between personal and collective nostalgia, further reinforcing that nostalgic experiences are not entirely personal. As well as exploring the extent to which nostalgic recollections may be both personal and collective, this section will also address discussions surrounding whether the object of nostalgia is experienced directly or indirectly.

First, I will consider “private nostalgia”, exemplified by Davis (1979, p. 123) as “the memory of a parent’s smile [or] the garden view from a certain window of a house once lived in”. This type of nostalgia captures the “direct experience” of the object of desire and is described as “personal” since it refers to individualised longings with a set of distinct meanings (Havlena and Holak, 1996, p. 38). As Stern (1992, p. 16) points out, the object of yearning is revised and reimagined and need not have been an exclusively positive experience as and when it actually happened. This is in tune with earlier notions of the utopian aspects of nostalgia (Jacoby, 1985, p. 4; Batcho, 1998; Goulding, 2001, p. 583; Moran, 2002, p. 156). The concept of private/personal nostalgia is also similar to the notion of “real nostalgia”, so called by Baker and Kennedy (1994, p. 171). The adjective “real” is used to describe “a sentimental or bittersweet yearning for the experienced past” (ibid., p. 172), capturing the “idiosyncratic” nature of personal nostalgia outlined by Davis (1979, p. 123).

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2 This is not to be confused with Boym’s (2001) “reflective nostalgia”.

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However, while sharing some similarities with real/true nostalgia, private nostalgia differs in that it captures the fantastic elements of the experience, whereas the concepts of real nostalgia emphasise the unmediated quality of this type of nostalgia. Interestingly, returning to the notion of both pathological and prototypical nostalgia (Erickson, 2014, p. iv), Rumke (1940, cited in Nawas and Platt, 1965, p. 51) identifies two distinct forms of nostalgia, “the healthy, biologically founded or “true nostalgia” and the pathologic or “pseudo-nostalgia””. The former therefore reinforces the unmediated quality of true nostalgia, even going so far as to suggest that it is “healthy” and “biologically founded”. The use of such language implies that nostalgia is not only ingrained in the human psyche, but that it serves a positive function. This stands in contrast to “pseudo-nostalgia”, which is conceived as a product of mental instability or illness, an experience outside the realms of what is considered “normal”. Of course, such an argument has more essentialist underpinnings, given the taken-for-granted assumptions that allow “normal” and “abnormal” to be outlined. True nostalgia is thus conceived of as a natural process of yearning for home and our origins and “a manifestation of the homing instinct” (Nawas and Platt, 1965, p. 51).

Having outlined the various ways in which more personal and unique experiences of nostalgia have been classified, I now turn to the more collective conceptions of the experience. Indeed, the terms “displaced nostalgia” (Vanderbilt, 1993) and “simulated nostalgia” (Baker and Kennedy, 1994) are used simply to refer to nostalgia for times which were not directly experienced. On the one hand, underlining the role of collectivism in nostalgia could be argued to contradict definitions which emphasise the origins of the longing in the “lived past” (Davis, 1979, p. 18). On the other, and as this section demonstrates, numerous variations of nostalgia stemming from indirect experiences have been documented and are widely regarded as nostalgic. Additional labels given to the more nuanced and overlapping conceptualisations within the broader categories of “displaced nostalgia” (Vanderbilt, 1993) and “simulated nostalgia” (Baker and Kennedy, 1994), then, include: “interpersonal”, ”intergenerational” and “generational” nostalgia, through to “cultural”, “virtual” and “historical” nostalgia. Each of these I review in turn below.
According to Havlena and Holak (1996), interpersonal nostalgia refers to when an individual does not have any direct personal experience of the object of their nostalgic longing, but instead is influenced directly by other people who did, particularly family members or other loved ones. This type of nostalgia is argued to still be largely individual as it is simply experienced second hand rather than together with others as part of a group. However, the reliance on someone else with direct experience of the object of yearning clearly indexes a more collective role here in comparison to the personal and direct experiences of nostalgia outlined earlier in this section. There are countless examples of this; for instance, feeling nostalgic for the era of our older loved ones because we have grown up with stories about their upbringing, their adolescent years and the way things were at the time. Exemplifying this, in a 2017 podcast “Nostalgia – its Benefits and Downsides” (McKay, 2017), presenter Brett McKay explains: “I often get nostalgic for the World War II era and that’s probably because both my grandfathers fought for World War II. And so as a kid they showed me their pictures from the war, so that was my connection to that era”.

As the example demonstrates, this type of nostalgia is closely linked to “intergenerational” nostalgia, described by Davis (1979, p. 62) as the nostalgia felt amongst a particular age group for past experiences lived by a previous generation. Consequently, “strong symbolic bonds” may be formed between the younger and older generations (ibid., p. 61). A further example of intergenerational nostalgia is a yearning for aspects of the 1980s amongst the millennial generation, who were not alive to experience the decade themselves, but have their own understanding of the era formed by piecing together fragmented accounts of the time based on narratives around the period. This example serves to illustrate the key differences between intergenerational and interpersonal nostalgia. Namely, interpersonal nostalgia refers to second hand experience of nostalgia directly passed on from someone who is not necessarily of the previous generation. Intergenerational nostalgia, on the other hand, takes generations as its starting point, but may or may not involve a direct connection with the person who experienced the object of nostalgic longing.

Moreover, Havlena and Holak (1991, p. 325) explain, when a generation “both privately and collectively reminisces about its adolescence, these memories become, in essence, a new experience for the next generation”. In this sense, as well as being experienced across
generations, nostalgia can also be experienced by those within the same generation. I refer to this type of nostalgia as “generational nostalgia” as it is discussed by Davis (1979) but not formally named. Generational nostalgia captures the role that nostalgia plays in the construction of a collective identity amongst generations (ibid., p. 101). It is constructed from individuals’ “own distinctive biograph[ies] [that are] revealed, exchanged, and shared among a people so as to lay groundwork for a collective nostalgia response” and thus creates bonds between individuals within a particular generation (ibid., p. 114).

Exemplifying this, Stubbings (2003, p. 73) highlights common themes across personal accounts reflecting on what the experience of going to the cinema was like in the 1930s in Nottingham in the UK, in a series of local press releases. She argues that these narratives reinforced themes such as “community, city building, leisure practice, and social behaviour” (ibid., p. 78), which shape how going to the cinema is remembered and understood by a generation of cinema goers of the 1930s. I elaborate on the relationship between media and nostalgia in chapter three, under the heading “Media and nostalgia”. Building on this example, Davis (1979, p. 124) explains:

“a nostalgic summoning of “everybody’s favorite song of 1943” (essentially a collectively oriented symbol) may inwardly shade off into some very private reminiscences of a particular romance in a particular place on a particular day, replete with special fragrances, sounds, and visual traces”.

This example underlines the overlapping nature of collective and individual recollections, which applies to any type of collective nostalgia.

Cultural nostalgia then, emanates from personal and direct experience and is grounded in shared understandings (Baker and Kennedy, 1994; Havlena and Holak, 1996), thus fostering a sense of community and “reflect[ing] the individual's connection to other members of the culture” (Havlena and Holak, 1996, p. 38). For example, the term could be applied to nostalgia for a generation or a country (Baker and Kennedy, 1994). As such, cultural nostalgia differs from generational nostalgia in the breadth of its meaning. Essentially, it is experienced first-hand amongst members of the same culture, which captures not only generations but specific groups of people, bound together by shared
values and norms. Generational nostalgia, on the other hand, experienced by and has as its object generations.

Virtual nostalgia, on the other hand, refers to longing for a “cultural history”, to which an individual may or may not have a personal connection. This type of nostalgic longing does not stem from personal experience as it is “highly romanticised” and relies on fabricated “virtual unreality” (Holak et al., 2005, p. 196). It is thus collective and indirect (Havlena and Holak, 1996), unlike cultural nostalgia which reflects longing for a personally experienced past. In Havlena and Holak's (1996) study, which required participants to collectively put together collages which captured nostalgia in their eyes, some of the participants reflected on past phenomena which they did not directly experience, but which intersected with their own personal past experiences. For instance, participants did not directly experience the suffrage movement, but learnt about it at school and thus it intertwined with their own personal memories of sitting in the classroom and learning about history. Feelings of nostalgia could then be evoked by the “costumes and demeanor” of the suffragettes depicted, which are inextricably bound to their memories of going to school (Havlena and Holak, 1996, p. 37).

Another example of virtual nostalgia is the Canadian photographer Rafael Goldchain’s monograph entitled “Nostalgia for an unknown land” (Snyder, 1989, p. 8). Goldchain grew up in Chile, before moving to Israel to study and then settling in Canada. His monograph features photographs taken during his travels to Mexico and Central America during the 1980s, and capture his nostalgia for Latin American cultural history. Growing up in quite a closed, western community in Chile, he claimed never to have directly experienced the Latin American culture, despite its strong personal relevance (ibid.). The difference between virtual and interpersonal nostalgia then is that interpersonal nostalgia emanates from stories and recollections told by loved ones, while virtual nostalgia also encapsulates more general, collective communications that give rise to this indirect form of nostalgia. However, given that the period of longing need not be of personal relevance to the subject, the yearning could be based on shared understandings of an alternative culture.

“Historical nostalgia”, the final type of nostalgia to be outlined, is a longing for a distant and indirectly experienced past considered to be in some way better than the present; for
instance, the past may be regarded as less complicated or more meaningful and a “retreat from contemporary life” (Stern, 1992, p. 13). For example, historical nostalgia could arise from watching the British historical period drama “Downton Abbey”, set in the early 1900s (Sedikides et al., 2015, p. 6). Even though the audience were not alive during this period, they may yearn for aspects of it, based on the dramatized representation of the early 1900s and their own imaginations. Historical nostalgia can also be applied to Stubbing’s (2003) discussion of mediated accounts of cinema-going in Nottingham during the 1930s. It captures the way members of the public who did not live through this era compare the seemingly more social and collective aspects of going to the cinema with present circumstances (Stubbing, 2003, p. 70). Clearly, historical and virtual nostalgia share similar characteristics. However, it appears that the degree of personal relevance to the past is not discussed in accounts of historical nostalgia.

Moreover, Stern (1992, p. 16) compares personal and historical nostalgia, pointing out that while both “idealize” the past, personal nostalgia does so in relation to direct, personal experience, whereas historical nostalgia does so for times which have been “imaginatively recreated”. While both historical and personal nostalgia involve a degree of fantasy in their reconstruction of events, this line of reasoning suggests that nostalgic recollections predicated on personal and direct experience require less imagination than nostalgia based on indirect and impersonal experience. This is a useful contribution to the literature which emphasises the imagined elements of nostalgia (Jacoby, 1985, p. 4; Belk, 1990; Batcho, 1998; Goulding, 2001, p. 583; Moran, 2002, p. 156).

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pathological</td>
<td>Negative functions; defensive screen functions</td>
<td>Kaplan, 1987</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Erickson, 2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prototypical</td>
<td>Positive functions</td>
<td>Kaplan, 1987</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Erickson, 2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>Restorative</td>
<td>Restoring a “freshly painted” past in its entirety; recreating the past to add value to the present moment</td>
<td>Boym, 2001</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reflective</td>
<td>Longing for only specific details of the past</td>
<td>Boym, 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First order/simple</td>
<td>Belief that the past was better than the present; yearning for return; bittersweet</td>
<td>Davis, 1979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second order/reflexive</td>
<td>Some degree of questioning whether the past was better</td>
<td>Davis, 1979</td>
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Having outlined the various types of nostalgia and the areas in which they overlap and diverge, I now turn to a discussion of the purpose of nostalgia in the next section.

2.8 Functions of nostalgia

Having considered the context in which nostalgia emerged and developed over time, as well as the range of literature which has explored the various forms it may take, I now turn to the apparent functions of nostalgia. Underlying this body of research is the notion that nostalgia is a coping mechanism. One may be nostalgic during times of hardship and consequently long for happier, more comfortable or meaningful times of their life (Goulding, 2001, p. 579; Sedikides et al., 2004, p. 207; Wildschut et al., 2006, p. 988).
In this sense, the positive feelings generated by nostalgia are experienced in the present moment, counteracting negative feelings and easing the discomfort of present circumstances. Nostalgic recollections can therefore be understood as a “reservoir” of recollections eliciting pleasant feelings, counteracting negative emotions felt in troublesome or apparently less meaningful times (Sedikides et al., 2004, p. 206; Wildschut et al., 2006, p. 986). More precisely, the research on functions can be categorised into three parts: social functions, self-oriented functions and existential functions (Sedikides et al., 2015, p. 21). I review each of these in turn.

With regards to social functions, it has been posited that nostalgia may help one to reconnect figuratively with family or other loved ones (Sedikides et al., 2008, p. 307). In this sense, fond recollections of loved others can be drawn on and the feelings associated with these memories may provide a sense of closeness to the people involved. Indeed, the prevalence of social connections in nostalgic recollections is supported by Batcho's (1998) study of 113 undergraduate students’ responses to nostalgia, memory and personality measurement scales. Individuals who scored highly on the nostalgia scale did not demonstrate better “immediate free recall” of words they were introduced to during the study compared to the low nostalgia group. However, their recollections were “more people-oriented” and their memories more “autobiographical”. Further, Turner et al. (2013) suggest that there may be a positive correlation between a need to feel socially connected and nostalgia proneness (ibid., p. 420).

Specifically, nostalgia has been associated with loneliness due to the feelings of deep and meaningful connections with others which may be simulated through recollections (Batcho, 1998, p. 430). Further to this, it has been suggested that nostalgia serves to recreate and maintain meaning espoused in “the cultural worldview” (Sedikides et al., 2004, p. 206), that is, collective cultural norms and values assimilated by individuals in specific contexts across generations (Ng and Lee, 2015, p. 13). In this regard, nostalgia may allow one to feel belongingness to a group or community to which they were formerly part of or associated with (Wilson, 2014, p. 86). While this reasoning applies to nostalgia emanating from the personally experienced past, it is questionable whether one would feel a sense of belonging or social connectedness in the case of indirect forms of nostalgia. Indeed, Batcho et al. (2008, p. 241) argue that nostalgia for the indirectly
experienced past \(^3\) “may foster a sense of social separation by promoting greater individuation”. This resonates with earlier views on nostalgia which regarded it as an alienating condition, where the sufferer struggles to let go of the past and find meaning in their present circumstances (Sedikides et al., 2008, p. 306).

Turning to research on the self-oriented functions of nostalgia, nostalgic recollections may also be understood as resources which are drawn upon by individuals to deepen their sense of self in relation to a web of social relationships (Batcho, 1998, p. 430). This is illustrated in a study by Baldwin et al. (2014, p. 15) in which participants’ mood and broad personality traits were controlled, “isolat[ing] the contribution of nostalgia to intrinsic self-expression and well-being over and above those other variables, thus providing a strong test of nostalgia’s unique contribution to positive psychological functioning”. In other words, nostalgia is thought to play a positive role in maintaining mental wellbeing. This is since nostalgic recollections can provide insight into “the intrinsic self-concept”—who people think they truly are”, thus strengthening “intrinsic self-expression” (Baldwin et al., 2014, p. 1). To put it differently, our sense of self can be strengthened by connecting aspects of our lived past together and building a consistent picture of who we are (Sedikides et al., 2004, p. 206). In the case of self-identity, looking back favourably to the past helps to foster a sense of continuity, which provides “connectedness with parts of self over time” (Batcho, 1998, p. 430).

Taking this into consideration, it is unsurprising that nostalgia is considered to be triggered by self-discontinuity \(^4\). Indeed, self-continuity is considered “psychically rewarding, providing certitude and agency” (Lowenthal, 2015, p. 117). Sinking back into romanticised visions of the past can therefore help individuals to adapt to sudden changes either in society or in their unique situation (Davis, 1979, pp. 57, 104; Tannock, 1995, p. 459). Further, changes unique to the individual such as through life stage or role transition are often considered to compromise “individual agency, sense of identity, and participation in community” (Tannock, 1995, p. 459). Ultimately, nostalgia “softens the

\(^3\) In the article, the authors use the term “historical nostalgia” as a catch-all term for the forms of nostalgia stemming from indirect experience. However, in the earlier section of this chapter, “Types of Nostalgia”, I review the various labels which have been given to indirect forms of nostalgia and distinguish between them.

\(^4\) I discuss this further in chapter three, under the heading “Triggers of Nostalgia”.
feeling of loss and has the advantage of regulating depression and heightening self-esteem, thereby functioning as a form of compensatory narcissism” (Kaplan, 1987, p. 482).

Beyond personal feelings of isolation or alienation, a perceived deficiency of the present can also trigger a desire to return to a seemingly superior past (Gabriel, 1993, p. 121). Feeling nostalgic can involve conjuring up a visual image of something deemed to be more meaningful and truer than the present moment (Wilson, 2014, p. 26). Consequently, one’s current state becomes “more bearable” through the imagined recollection or scenario (Gabriel, 1993, p. 131). Nostalgia can therefore provide a sense of meaning to individuals and thus serves an existential function. In this sense, we can conceive of it as a psychological response to seeking a deeper meaning in life. Ultimately, returning to the past may help to reinforce one’s sense of self, restore value to familiar cultural practices and connectivity to communities one was part of, and aid in the search for deeper meaning or purpose in life.

In the following section I draw this chapter to a close, reviewing the key insights attained thus far in the literature on nostalgia.

### 2.9 Summary

As stated in the introduction, the aim of this chapter was to introduce and provide background on the concept of nostalgia. The intention was to build a strong foundation on which the remaining chapters of this thesis rest upon. Dating back to its coinage in 1688 when it was regarded as a disease (Anspach, 1934), conceptions of nostalgia have gradually moved towards emphasising its positive functions (Batcho, 2013). More recent research has documented its social, self-oriented and existential functions (Kaplan, 1987; Batcho, 1998; Wildschut et al., 2006; Sedikides et al., 2008; Turner et al., 2013; Baldwin et al., 2014; Wilson, 2014), thus positioning nostalgia as a coping mechanism during challenging times (Sedikides et al., 2004, p. 206; Wildschut et al., 2006, p. 986). Indeed, existing research suggests that times of discontinuity are fertile ground for nostalgia to be experienced (Davis, 1979, pp. 57, 104; Tannock, 1995, p. 459). Discontinuity can take numerous forms, such as life transitions, loss of a loved one or social change and the
resulting fear about the future. However, true to its Greek roots “nostos”, to return and “algos”, suffering (Anspach, 1934, p. 381; Jacoby, 1985, p. 5) nostalgia continues to be regarded as a bittersweet phenomenon.

Effectively, the emphasis on nostalgic longing has shifted from spatial to temporal (Boym, 2001; Reynolds, 2011; Batcho, 2013). That is, nostalgia was originally conceived as a sickness caused by yearning for one’s distant homeland, but gradually broadened in scope to encompass longing for past times, whether directly or indirectly experienced. Beyond the extent to which nostalgia may be experienced directly or indirectly, my exploration of the types of nostalgia distinguished between its more private and collective forms and the role of others in shaping the experience (Davis, 1979; Stern, 1992; Baker and Kennedy, 1994; Havlena and Holak, 1996; Stubbings, 2003). For instance, stories about an era we did not live through which are told by our loved ones may become objects of yearning. Moreover, types of nostalgia rooted in collective understandings, stemming from the media for example (Davis, 1979), further emphasised the degree to which the object of yearning may be fabricated. While this section highlighted the scope of what is considered to constitute nostalgia and its many different guises, it is also evident that types of nostalgia are not entirely clear-cut. As such, all forms of nostalgia will be both collective and private to some degree. In this sense, we can view the various types of nostalgia as leaning more towards private, collective, direct and indirect than others (Havlena and Holak, 1996).

Research into the extent to which individuals are predisposed to experiencing nostalgia has also highlighted that age alone is not enough to predict nostalgia proneness and that other factors such as personality traits must also be taken into consideration (Holbrook, 1993, p. 255). However, transitionary periods in one’s life, such as going to college, have been suggested to increase nostalgia (Havlena and Holak, 1991; Batcho, 1995; Schindler and Holbrook, 2003). Homesickness has thus been posited as a potential reason behind this, harking back to earlier conceptualisations of nostalgia which argued that feeling homesick was the root cause of the condition. Moreover, a connection between objects of yearning and age has been suggested (Batcho, 1995, p. 138). This is explored in greater depth in chapter three. Higher levels of emotional attachment to and dependence on home and loved ones is considered to contribute to increased nostalgia, as well as higher levels of introversion and lower levels of emotional stability (McCann, 1943). Moreover, those
who are more optimistic, future-orientated and proactive in the pursuit of their goals have been deemed generally less nostalgic than those who fixate on the past (Nawas and Platt, 1965, p. 55). Despite differences in predispositions towards nostalgia, it is conceived as a universal feeling which can be induced by certain stimuli (Sedikides et al., 2004; Wildschut et al., 2006). These stimuli are also explored in chapter three.

I also discussed the interplay between memory and emotion in nostalgia, emphasising that nostalgia involves as much remembering as it does reconstruction of past events (Hirsch, 1992; Dames, 2001; Storey, 2003). In other words, there may be differing levels of fantasy and imagination in nostalgic recollections. Nostalgia also involves yearning for an emotional state which is represented in the object of longing (Kaplan, 1987; Belk, 1990; Hirsch, 1992; Gabriel, 1993). Of course, memory is inextricably bound to this emotional state as it often stems from lived past experiences (Davis, 1979; Havlena and Holak, 1996). Nonetheless, while memory is a key aspect of nostalgia, I have emphasised in this chapter that the focus of this thesis is not on the act of remembering itself, but on nostalgic experiences and the role that objects play in these. Indeed, objects, both abstract and tangible, are the focus of the following chapter.
Chapter Three: Objects of nostalgia and nostalgic objects

3.1 Introduction

Leading on from the previous chapter where I introduced the concept of nostalgia, this chapter considers both the focus of nostalgic yearning and the role of physical objects in the experience of nostalgia. The first section, “Objects of longing”, is concerned with what the nostalgic subject tends to long for. The term “objects” here is used to denote anything which is the centre of the yearning rather than solely material artefacts. Reviewing common objects of nostalgia that have been documented in academic research, this section lends itself to a discussion of tropes surrounding the “golden age” and highlights the importance of home, loved ones and childhood for nostalgic individuals (McCann, 1941, p. 174; Jacoby, 1985, p. 5; Belk, 1990; Grainge, 2000, p. 28; Havlena and Holak, 1991; Stern, 1992; Tannock, 1995, p. 456; Boym, 2001, p. 25; Wildschut et al., 2006, p. 976; Cheung et al., 2017).

Objects of nostalgia are interwoven with the literature which explores both internal and external triggers of nostalgia, and it is there that the most well-known triggers are outlined, ranging from emotions fuelled by discontent or fear of the future to feeling disconnected with one’s past self (Nawas and Platt, 1965, p. 55; Davis, 1979, p. 34; Stern, 1992; Batcho, 1995, p. 141; Goulding, 2001, p. 578; Wildschut et al., 2006, p. 980; Baldwin et al., 2014; Sedikides et al., 2015). Additionally, I consider the role of sensory inputs such as music (Holbrook and Schindler, 1989, 2003; Batcho, 1995; Drake, 2003; Tacchi, 2003; Barrett et al., 2010, p. 390; Cross, 2017), tangible objects (Belk, 1990; Havlena and Holak, 1991; Baker and Kennedy, 1994; Moran, 2002; Holbrook and Schindler, 2003; Wilson, 2014; Cross, 2017) and images (Belk, 1990; Havlena and Holak, 1996; Moran, 2002; Meijers, 2015). Each of these speak to the context of this thesis, which explores the role of music covers as triggers and objects of nostalgia.

This leads on to a discussion of nostalgia, marketing and consumption, which clearly interweaves with the above triggers since they may also be classed as consumables. The key difference in this section, however, is that nostalgia is viewed from a marketing perspective, as I consider the nostalgia “boom” across advertising, entertainment and cultural goods from the 1970s onwards (Havlena and Holak, 1991, p. 323; Grainge, 2000,
and its subsequent popularity in marketing literature from the early 1990s onwards (Baker and Kennedy, 1994, p. 169).

Finally, I turn to the related but separate body of literature which mostly emerged from 2015 onwards and which applies the conceptual framework of nostalgia to media such as cinema and TV (Niemeyer, 2018, p. 7). There is unsurprisingly much overlap with the previous sections where I discuss triggers of nostalgia, sensory inputs such as music and images as well as advertising, since they all fall under the umbrella of “media”. As such, references to various forms of media as objects or triggers of nostalgia are evident within this recent wave of research. Given that media have become increasingly used as vehicles for communicating and remembering in the digital era, they have consequently become common objects of nostalgic longing in themselves (Davis, 1979, p. 123; Pickering and Keightley, 2006; Menke, 2017, p. 627).

3.2 Objects of longing

Given that nostalgia is a seemingly “self-relevant emotion” (Sedikides et al., 2004, p. 204) it is widely agreed that many of the objects of nostalgic longing centre around personal memories and experiences. Drawing on the various types of nostalgia outlined in the previous chapter, this line of reasoning privileges more the personal and direct types of nostalgia than the indirect forms that it can take. However, this section will cover not only the objects of direct nostalgic longing but also those of its indirect counterpart. I begin with a consideration of the more concrete forms of nostalgic desire that feature heavily in the literature, before then drawing attention to the more abstract facets of the experience. Types of nostalgia thus interweave throughout the discussion, as I build a picture of the broad range of objects that are understood to be central to nostalgic experiences.

Firstly, in keeping with earlier conceptualisations of nostalgia, the homeland is often at the centre of nostalgic desire (Anspach, 1934, p. 383; McCann, 1943; Nawas and Platt, 1965, p. 51; Rosen, 1975; Havlena and Holak, 1991; Sedikides et al., 2004, p. 202; Wilson, 2014, p. 32). However, as Holbrook and Schindler (2003, p. 121) emphasise, “home” may be interpreted in different ways, whether as a geographical location, such as
a home town, or a place we associate with family, such as a house. McCann (1941, p. 174) explains that what constitutes home is unique to each person and context-dependent. As such, within the literature on nostalgia, “home” has been used to denote anything from a past milieu, circumstances or situation and thus can be interpreted as “any part of, or even all of, the environment circumscribed by a dwelling, a neighborhood, a town, or even an entire state or nation” (ibid.).

Adding to this discussion, Boym (2001, p. 25) asserts that the object of our yearning is less about home than the connection and sense of intimacy with the world. In this sense, nostalgia is not connected with any specific location per se, but an imagined moment when an individual felt comfortable in a specific situation or place. It is thus common to yearn for the safety and tenderness that we associate with idealised guises of home (Davis, 1979; Stern, 1992, p. 16). Continuing the focus on settings in nostalgic experiences, Wildschut et al. (2006) carried out a comparative content analysis of British undergraduate students’ personal written narratives of nostalgia and American and Canadian readers’ narratives featured in the periodical “Nostalgia”. Their findings indicated that the most common objects of nostalgic longing included meaningful settings such as the place one grew up, or sunsets and lakes. Moreover, significant or memorable personally experienced events such as birthdays, anniversaries and holidays were also found to be salient across nostalgic experiences (also see Holak and Havlena, 1992).

Moreover, the social aspects of nostalgia are generally considered to be pivotal to the experience and have been documented in qualitative studies (Wildschut et al., 2006, p. 976; Cheung et al., 2017). In the study by Wildschut et al. (2006), alongside settings, loved ones such as family, friends and partners were also found to be the most frequently occurring objects of nostalgic reverie across the two sets of narratives analysed. However, Jacoby (1985, p. 9) emphasises the role that detachment plays in triggering nostalgia and in turn questions the nature of the desire, in tune with the point made earlier that loss is integral to the bittersweetness of nostalgia (Nawas and Platt, 1965, p. 53; Havlena and Holak, 1991, p. 323; Baker and Kennedy, 1994, p. 169; Batcho, 1998; Holbrook and Schindler, 2003, p. 8; Sedikides et al., 2004; Wildschut et al., 2006; Batcho et al., 2008, p. 240).
Exemplifying this, Jacoby (1985) continues, where loss or detachment occurred in the child-parent relationship, a strong desire for one’s parents was observed, in most cases for the mother. He explains that these feelings were sustained even in instances when the mother was physically present, suggesting that the yearning “was not directed at the real, personal mother, but rather at a mother of the inner world who does not exist, or no longer exists – and perhaps never did exist – in external reality” (ibid., p. 9). The inner world is used here to refer to an imaginary reality or dream world and is contrasted with our physical reality. This therefore extends arguments surrounding the more fantastic elements of nostalgic reverie, further emphasising the fictitious nature of the object of desire (Jacoby, 1985, p. 4; Stewart, 1993, p. 23; Batcho, 1998, p. 414; Goulding, 2001, p. 583).

More broadly, Batcho (1995, p. 139) acknowledges the role of both those in our “immediate social circle” and those who are part of our wider social network. The importance of social interactions in nostalgic longings may also help to explain yearning for times which were generally unpleasant or to which one would ordinarily not want to return. This is since the individual does not necessarily crave the time in its complete context: “rather, there is longing for values of family and community which, compared to the present, may seem healthier and more intact” (Wilson, 2014, p. 27).

Interestingly, findings from Batcho’s (1995) empirical work also emphasise that popular cultural artefacts such as music and films and the characters and settings that feature in them can induce nostalgia for the values, customs and practices that they represent. This demonstrates a longing for phenomena which are not necessarily tied to unique personal experience, but rather the broader aspects of the socio-cultural environment. Elaborating on this, Brown et al. (2003b, p. 20) posit that “it might be expected that in times of threat or of sociocultural and economic turbulence, nostalgia would provide a sense of comfort and close-knit community, a safe haven in an unsafe world”. I elaborate on the closely associated triggers of nostalgia in the section that follows.

So far I have discussed the more concrete objects of nostalgic longing, each of which are inextricably bound up with more abstract concepts. For instance, a desire for home may seem concrete at face value, but underlying this is a yearning for the feelings associated with our origins such as love and security (Davis, 1979; Stern, 1992, p. 16; Boym, 2001).
Similarly, Batcho's (1995) study found items “which may reflect cognitive-emotional aspects of nostalgia (the way people were, not having to worry, things you did, having someone to depend on, not knowing sad or evil things, feelings, and the way society was)” (ibid., p. 138). Supporting this point, an important abstract feature common across accounts of nostalgic reverie is the longing for seemingly simpler times. This parallels with the point made by Brown et al. (2003a, p. 135) that, as time has progressed, life has become increasingly faster paced, competitive and thus more stressful. This has naturally culminated in a collective desire to return to a slower, more relaxed period.

3.2.1 A “Golden Age”

Specifically, the notion of a “golden age” is frequently referred to in discussions surrounding objects of nostalgic longing (Belk, 1990, p. 670; Havlena and Holak, 1991, p. 325; Stern, 1992, p. 16; Tannock, 1995, p. 456; Grainge, 2000, p. 28). This generally involves the idealisation and isolation of only positive aspects of the past (Havlena and Holak, 1991, p. 325; Wilson, 2014, p. 27), connected to the earlier points considered regarding the utopian aspects of nostalgia (Jacoby, 1985, p. 4; Batcho, 1998; Goulding, 2001, p. 583; Moran, 2002, p. 156). Precisely, as Stern (1992) notes in relation to romanticising the past, this refers to the idealisation of the imagined past in cases of historical nostalgia and the directly experienced past in personal nostalgia. That is not to imply that personal nostalgia is not imagined to some degree – in tune with my earlier argument – but that there are differences in how these two forms of nostalgia are remembered/(re)constructed and thus romanticised. Moreover, the idea of a “golden age” corresponds more readily with Davis’ (1979, p. 17) first order/simple nostalgia, rather than second or third order, which approach the object of yearning from a more critical standpoint.

Notably, it has been posited that many members of social groups such as organisations or societies conceive of a former “golden age” in which they “perceive, interpret and judge” the present situation (Gabriel, 1993, p. 125). The “golden age” then becomes a point of comparison for the present. This is an important point in that it emphasises the influence of nostalgic yearning on the present moment, since it is perceived in relation to a romanticised past. For those who have lived through this period and experienced it directly, it is therefore considered both “a personal and a collective heritage” (ibid.).
Building on this, Gabriel (*ibid.*, p. 130) notes that within an organisation “buildings, […] leaders, departed colleagues, and social functions” are often objects of nostalgic yearning and are generally considered to be in many ways more genuine than whatever the present moment offers. This underscores the role of physical, tangible objects in representing particular ideals and is something which I elaborate on in the following section, “Triggers of nostalgia”.

Notably, the “golden age” has been connected to particular life stages, such as youth (Plater, 2014, p. 107) while “adolescence and early adulthood” are thought to be the most strongly desired periods of life (Havlena and Holak, 1991, p. 324). However, as Holdsworth (2011, p. 121) points out, the aspects of the “golden age” that make it so compelling are unique to each individual. That said, it has been argued that there are common features of “innocence” embedded in our collective understanding of childhood, which drive our yearning for our earlier years (Jacoby, 1985, p. 5). Alternatively, as Moran (2002, p. 170) explains, childhood is often retreated to as a means of escaping “the burdens and obligations of adulthood”. As such, nostalgia is posited to be “a socio-cultural response to forms of discontinuity, claiming a vision of stability and authenticity in some conceptual “golden age”” (Grainge, 2000, p. 28). It is this point that I consider in the opening section of “Triggers of nostalgia”, where I extend the discussion to phenomena that evoke nostalgia.

The idealisation underpinning the concept of a “golden age” has unsurprisingly received substantial critique, in part for disregarding a complete picture of the past and suggesting there was in some sense an “intact world” (Jacoby, 1985, p. 4). At the time Jacoby was writing, he stated that the notion of “the good old days” was an outmoded belief and a means of avoiding reality (*ibid.*). While the concept of a “golden age” has been scorned for being the product of fantasists’ imaginations, it continues to be discussed in relation to nostalgia in more recent works, appearing no less pervasive. Continuing the critical commentary, the notion of a prelapsarian world embedded in some guises of nostalgia insinuates a demise, which raises questions about how the perceived downfall came to be. The causes of the downfall may be ignored or attributed to outside influences rather than emerging from within the “golden age”, for this would compromise its idyllic nature. This is of course contradictory and reinforces the constructed and glorified nature of former times (Tannock, 1995).
The spirit of idealising the past has also been critiqued for its misrepresentation of former times. One of the most notorious critics is Gayle Greene (Greene, 1991, p. 296), who argues that society, especially in the global west, was more patriarchal in the past and in many respects an unpleasant period for women to have lived through. Indeed, she argues that looking back fondly may make sense to those who profited from the system, but not to those who were disadvantaged by it. Supporting this claim with specific reference to historical nostalgia, Rosaldo (1989) argues that such glorification of the past both ignores the negative aspects of society which pervaded and imaginatively recreates other aspects of it.

On an individual level and in tune with Jacoby’s (1985) assertion that fixating on the “golden age” is a means of avoiding reality, personal nostalgia may be read through the lens of escapism (Moran, 2002, p. 170). In this sense, it is “a form of sentimentalization in which people retreat to the security blanket of childhood and thereby avoid the risk-taking necessary to achieve maturity” (Stern, 1992, p. 20). As such, it has been argued that clinging to the past may negatively impact upon our experiences in the present (Sedikides et al., 2008, p. 306). Countering this, Tannock (1995) points out that on the one hand it is important to recognise the limitations of nostalgia and acknowledge its potential negative functions on both the level of historical analysis and retelling, as well as personal experience. On the other hand, it is as much “a valid way of constructing and approaching the past – recognized, that is, as a general structure of feeling, present in, and important to individuals and communities of all social groups” (ibid., p 461). Regardless of the extent to which the construction of a “golden age” may be regarded as positive or negative, it is integral to many experiences of nostalgia. Having outlined common objects of nostalgic reverie, I explore triggers of nostalgia in the following section.

3.3 Triggers of nostalgia

The term “triggers” refers to phenomena which evoke nostalgia. This was the focus of much attention in earlier literature. In a 1989 publication, Shaw and Chase argued that three factors induce nostalgia: the feeling that time is “linear”, that the current moment is somehow lacking, and access to “objects, buildings, and images” from former times.
Moreover, Belk (1990, p. 670) argues that nostalgia may be induced by sensory stimuli such as tangible artefacts, visuals such as images or scenery, smells and music. As such, the following review of research addressing triggers of nostalgia is structured around each of these points. First, I outline the literature that deals with discontent in the present moment and concern over the future. I then move on to discuss negative emotions and the concept of self-discontinuity. It is there that connections can be made to the functions of nostalgia, which I outlined in chapter two. Following this, I turn to the impact of sensory inputs, which funnel down to music, objects and images.

In line with the earlier discussion surrounding the “golden age” as a common object of nostalgic yearning (Jacoby, 1985; Belk, 1990; Havlena and Holak, 1991; Stern, 1992; Tannock, 1995, p. 456; Grainge, 2000, p. 28; Wilson, 2014), the results of Batcho’s (1995, p. 141) study indicated that the belief that the past was in some way superior positively correlated with feelings of nostalgia. While this does not necessarily imply causation, it is important to note the correlation between this belief and nostalgia. Nawas and Platt (1965, p. 55) also point out the trope of the “good old days” and its use among older generations. The explanation they offer for this is that the older we become, the more we fear death and the passing of time, which pushes us to recall more “ego comforts”.

Such anxiety over the future has also been noted by numerous authors. For instance, political uncertainty and socio-economic transformation are factors which have been attributed to heightening nostalgia (Davis, 1979, p. 103). This view is further substantiated by the concept of the “fin de siècle” effect (Stern, 1992), where nostalgia is found to be more prevalent towards the end of centuries, as people begin to feel daunted by what the new century will bring. This however stands in contrast to the findings of Batcho’s (1995, p. 141) study, which did not substantially support the notion that feelings of discontent in the present moment or worry over the future are positively correlated with nostalgia. Likewise, Sedikides et al. found a connection between the perception that the past was somehow superior to the present, but not between nostalgia and “substantial dissatisfaction with the present or anxieties concerning the future” (2004, p. 209).

Moreover, negative emotions have been cited as a frequently occurring trigger of nostalgia (Davis, 1979, p. 34) with 38% of participants reporting experiencing these more than anything else in the study by Wildschut et al. (2006, p. 980). Similarly, in Goulding's
(2001, p. 578) empirical study of nostalgia in living museums, she noted a powerful sense of grief for glorified past times which were experienced either directly or indirectly. The present was starkly contrasted with this and “perceived as volatile, intimidating, pressurizing and impersonal, a society where machines have taken over artisan skills and the sense of satisfaction derived from work practices has been eroded” (ibid., p. 579). Supporting this, Baldwin et al. (2014) suggest that participants who were prompted to reflect on times when they felt their “intrinsic” self-expression was suppressed felt negative emotions, relived their sense of suppressed self-expression and were more nostalgic.

Alongside a focus on the discontinuity of the present moment brought on by external triggers, the concept of self-discontinuity has been analysed in relation to nostalgia and found to be positively correlated. This often but not always stems from negative life events (Sedikides et al., 2015, p. 59). Specifically, returning to Goulding’s (2001, p. 577) study, it was found that elderly participants who had undergone “multiple role loss”, in other words, had experienced life transitions such as losing a partner and consequently no longer fulfilling their former role as spouse, were more prone to nostalgia. If we consider that multiple role loss, such as through the death of a loved one or life stage transition, as a specific form of self-discontinuity, then this further bolsters this line of reasoning. Moreover, Sedikides et al. (2015, p. 55) “suggest that geographical mobility or relocation (a discomforting event [...]), in particular, is a potent predictor of nostalgia” and further that “death of a loved one, health deterioration, relationship breakup or divorce, occupational crises (e.g., layoffs), and drops in standards of living” all constitute self-discontinuity (Sedikides et al., 2004, p. 208). Davis (1979) also considers the apprehension of transformative life events in the near future to be triggers.

Having outlined the relationship between discontent in the present moment and concern over the future, negative emotions and the concept of self-discontinuity, I turn to the impact of sensory inputs, which I then funnel down to focus on music, objects and images. Sensory inputs – from sights, sounds, smells, taste and touch – are understood to induce nostalgia (Wildschut et al., 2006, p. 982; Hyman, 2011, para. 2). For example, Holbrook and Schindler's (2003, p. 112) study into the role of nostalgia in consumption found that numerous respondents made connections between meaningful objects and “various pleasurable sensory experiences from their youth”. The often-cited literary example is of
the novelist Marcel Proust tasting a madeleine biscuit for the first time after many years, and recalling his childhood in Paris and the time he had spent with his aunt, since their meetings would often involve eating the same type of biscuit. However, the existing literature on nostalgia and sensory inputs largely focuses on the role that smells, sight, sounds and touch play in nostalgic longing, whereas taste itself is more rarely documented (see for instance, Vignolles and Pichon, 2014).

As such, it is well documented that individuals associate scents from former times with special memories, such that when the same smell is detected, the emotional connections and memories are awakened (Holbrook and Schindler, 2003, p. 112). Indeed, Hirsch points out that smell is the strongest emotional trigger, explaining that the connection between memories and smells, known as “olfactory-evoked recall”, is “universal” and refers to when “the nose directly connects with the olfactory lobe in the limbic system – that area of the brain considered the seat of the emotions” (1992, p. 391).

Additionally, Baker and Kennedy (1994) explain that visual depictions connected to memories help to trigger recollections since people are “better able to “picture” in their mind the actual event which has been elicited by a certain stimulus” (ibid., p. 172). Turning to sounds, however, a study by Tacchi (2003) explored the relationship between radio and nostalgia. Findings suggested that rather than “visual images, or actual specific events”, radio is more likely to evoke “a feeling, a mood, a kind of experience, which does not interfere with the present, but enhances it” (2003, p. 3) thus demonstrating the complexity of the various forms that nostalgia can take, as well as the different effects that sensory triggers may have. In the following subsections, I discuss existing research which examines the relationship between nostalgia and music, tangible objects and images, given that this encompasses the key phenomena which my research brings together.

3.3.1 Music

The idea that music can evoke memories of a period, such as college years, time spent with a group of friends or an event, is well documented (Kaplan, 1987, p. 465; Drake, 2003, p. 184). Supporting this idea, the charity “Playlist for Life” encourages the creation of playlists for people with dementia with the aim of helping them to reconnect with their
sense of self and recall pertinent memories. This is based on research which suggests that if people with dementia frequently listen to songs that are meaningful to them, it can help to lift their mood as they listen, as well as increasing their level of consciousness and ability to perceive what is going on around them (Playlist for Life, 2016). Unsurprisingly then, connections between music and nostalgia have been made (Barrett et al., 2010). Specifically, it has been posited that the connections we make between music and the past – in other words, “the autobiographical salience of a particular song for a given person” – as well as the feelings that music evokes more generally trigger nostalgia (ibid., p. 391).

Further emphasising the idiosyncratic nature of experiencing music, Barrett et al.’s (2010, p. 390) study delineates between “context level” and “personal level” constructs. The context level refers to both the context in which a song was originally experienced and the present listening circumstances. This includes how familiar the song is and the memories and emotions connected to the song. The personal level, on the other hand, refers to “individual differences between listeners”. This refers to listeners’ personality traits, degree of nostalgia proneness and mood state. Essentially, the notion that nostalgia can be evoked in an individual to different degrees depending on the song may be explained by context level constructs. Personal level constructs relate to individuals generally experiencing different levels of music-evoked nostalgia.

Additionally, song lyrics have also been found to elicit nostalgia, since they are “a rich vehicle for the exploration of the characteristics and psychological functions of nostalgic sentiment” (Batcho et al., 2008, p. 237). Indeed, Batcho et al.’s (2008) research distinguished between participants who were more prone to experiencing personal versus historical nostalgia. Findings indicated that those prone to personal nostalgia preferred lyrics that centred around relationships rather than lyrics with “solitary themes”, which were the preference of those prone to historical nostalgia. This exemplifies the connection between social relationships and song lyrics for some people.

Age and life stage are also salient themes in the literature which examines the relationship between music and nostalgia. There is thought to be low nostalgia for music from one’s childhood but that such nostalgia increases with age (Batcho, 1995, p. 138). It has also been posited that inclinations towards music which was fashionable when one was growing up are likely to remain stable throughout one’s lifetime (Holbrook and Schindler,
1989; Schindler and Holbrook, 2003). Indeed, “late adolescence or early adulthood”, specifically the age of 23.47 years old, are thought to be when individuals’ musical preferences peak (Holbrook and Schindler, 1989, p. 122). And these preferences are said to be more likely to remain stable if shared by one’s present group of friends (Holbrook and Schindler, 1989, p. 119). This again reinforces the role of social relationships in nostalgic recollections. One study refers to late teenage and early adulthood years as “a period of intense affective consumption”, where music is “likely to elicit intense good feelings for adolescents and young adults” (Schindler and Holbrook, 2003, p. 279). Offering some explanations for this, it has been argued that individuals may feel powerfully connected to songs because of the personal associations with objects of yearning from their youth, rather than the music itself (Holbrook and Schindler, 2003, p. 119; Barrett et al., 2010, p. 401).

3.3.2 Tangible objects

Holbrook and Schindler's (2003) study found that objects featured frequently in nostalgic recollections as triggers and representations of nostalgia. Beyond functional value, objects present when certain emotions are felt may carry meanings and evoke nostalgia (Hirsch, 1992, p. 390; Moran, 2002, p. 171; Wilson, 2014, p. 110). As such, people often obtain and keep items to remind them of specific times or moments, so that the object takes on “sentimental value”, becoming a tangible manifestation of a particular moment or memory and a way of holding on to it (Belk, 1990, p. 669). An example of this is wedding favours, which are gifted by the newlyweds to their wedding guests as a memento of the day, a souvenir to remember the occasion. This also extends to photos, holiday souvenirs, antiques, toys and even ordinary, seemingly valueless objects (Belk, 1990; Holak and Havlena, 1992). In keeping with the literature on music and nostalgia, it has been found that collectable items such as old cars or music elicit “memories of the transition from childhood to adulthood” (Cross, 2017, p. 101).

Extending this line of reasoning further, Belk (1990, p. 669) explains that comfort objects, such as a teddy bear or safety blanket from childhood, can afford us with a sense of grounding during unstable times as they connect us to periods of “continuity”. Indeed, Holbrook and Schindler (2003, p. 117) found that individuals enduring hardships in their relationships with family or other loved ones often associated certain objects with more
stable, secure times and even “freedom in general and […] the freedom to travel in particular” (ibid., p. 118). Interestingly, however, objects associated with life stage transitions or role change, such as the outfit worn on one’s graduation day, often trigger feelings associated with the “discontinuity [rather] than continuity in our lives” (Belk, 1990, p. 670).

3.3.3 Images

Much of the literature on images and nostalgia centres around photographs. Ultimately, they can be understood as visual representations of a “memory bank” (Belk, 1990, p. 670) and may be part of a wider package of photo albums or scrapbooks, for instance (Stewart, 1993, p. 139). Indeed, relating photographs to our sense of self, Belk (1990, p. 670) points out that photographs of loved ones during meaningful moments such as life transitions or time spent with family “are meant to serve as edited markers and stimuli for future reflection, communication, and consolidation of sense of self”. In contrast to memories, which are “reshaped and reconfigured” and “fade and are rescripted”, they are fixed markers of events, yet may be interpreted differently depending on the context in which they are viewed (Sturken, 1997, p. 21).

Moreover, in Havlena and Holak's (1996) research, their findings indicated that particular features of photographs were deemed by participants to be more evocative of nostalgia than others, such as black and white rather than colour images and more dated photographs (p. 38). Interestingly, as Moran (2002, p. 162) points out, with the gradual fragmentation into an increasingly digital age, photographs and the “more primitive technologies of previous eras” may be understood to be more genuine or authentic. This would include black and white photography, for instance. Very much related to this point is the study of the social media website and mobile application Instagram, which as Meijers notes makes use of both digital media and the concept of analogue photography, as multiple filters are available which give the image a vintage effect through “mak[ing] the photograph look as if it was printed on photographic paper, simulating the decay caused by time, for example desaturation and scratching” (2015, p. 15). While Instagram is one of the most popular examples at the time of writing, there are numerous examples of other digital technologies which produce more authentic or “real” images, such as modernised versions of the original Polaroid camera. I elaborate on this point in the later
section “Media and nostalgia”, where I consider emerging research which applies the framework of nostalgia to media technologies. I also introduce the concept of authenticity and discuss its association with nostalgia in chapter four.

In the following section I turn to nostalgia, marketing and consumption, examining the role of nostalgia in marketing literature, where it became a popular topic of discussion in the 1990s.

3.4 Nostalgia, marketing and consumption

Throughout the previous section which addressed triggers of nostalgia, I touched on the role of products in evoking nostalgia, given that they intersect discussions of objects and sensory experience. Indeed, possessions can be thought of as physical manifestations and triggers of “an evolving network of vivid memories [which] "lead to" other memories in an interwoven net that grows rich in associations, moods, and thoughts” (Belk, 1990, p. 671). While it is well documented that objects can convey meaning beyond their original or intended function (Belk, 1990; Moran, 2002; Wilson, 2014), this statement captures the complexity of the web of memories, thoughts and feelings that possessions can trigger. The purpose of this section, then, is to explore the relationship between nostalgia and consumption. This encapsulates both genuine products and advertising that come from a bygone era and period styled objects or advertising which are new but have a vintage feel (Havlena and Holak, 1991, pp. 325–326).

Indeed, the global media and entertainment industry have capitalised on nostalgia, using it to stir emotion in audiences across a range of popular media, such as advertising, TV series, and films5 (Davis, 1979, p. 118; Boym, 2001, p. 38; Brewis and Jack, 2005). The reasons behind what we might see as the recent upsurge of nostalgia have been attributed to challenges of the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries, such as the “communal mid-life crisis of the baby boom generation” and the “stresses and strains of today’s tumultuous world” (Brown et al., 2003a, p. 135). Moreover, Boym (2001, p. 28) asserts

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5 While I focus here on marketing and consumption and thus touch on forms of mass media, I consider the relationship between media and nostalgia in greater depth in the following section.
that “mass nostalgia” came after “world wars and catastrophes”. This resonates with the argument made in chapter two, under the heading “Functions of nostalgia”, that nostalgia arises from discontinuity or fear of the future. In this section, I start by first discussing the importance of early associations with possessions, before moving on to discuss the use of nostalgia as a marketable style and how this intersects both products and promotion.

Earlier I outlined the concept of “a period of intense affective consumption”, where inclinations towards certain products which were fashionable when one was growing up are likely to remain stable throughout one’s lifetime (Holbrook and Schindler, 2003, p. 279). In reference to collecting items from one’s youth, Cross (2017, p. 106) points out that as a child, “not only is everything new, but makers of playthings, who know how to excite wonder and sustain desire in the market, intensify and individualize that freshness and delight”. This statement serves to emphasise two observations: first, that during our younger years, we are more impressionable, as much of what we experience is new. Secondly, product designers seek to heighten that experience and ensure that it feels personal to the consumer. While there are various ways in which nostalgia is played upon in marketing, fostering a personal connection between individuals and possessions is foundational to evoking feelings of nostalgia. Indeed, as adults, some consumers begin to collect the possessions they consumed during their youth, nostalgic for their personal memories of the product like the rest of their peer group (Cross, 2017, p. 106).

Beyond the attachments consumers have to products from their youth, nostalgia has been conceived of as a style or “mode” in its own right (Davis, 1979, p. 73). Davis explains:

“So frequently and uniformly does nostalgic sentiment seem to infuse our aesthetic experience that we can rightly begin to suspect that nostalgia is not only a feeling or mood that is somehow magically evoked by the art object but also a distinctive aesthetic modality in its own right, a kind of code or patterning of symbolic elements, which by some obscure mimetic isomorphism comes, much as in language itself, to serve as a substitute for the feeling or mood it aims to arouse” (ibid.).

In other words, feelings of nostalgia intertwine with our sensory experiences in a way that has become a recognisable style, familiar enough to be associated with feeling nostalgic.
As such, the style is considered representative of nostalgia. Indeed, the rise of heritage tourism and possibilities for digital reproduction “all helped develop nostalgia as a cultural style, a consumable mode” (Grainge, 2000, p. 27) since they offer means of reconstructing and representing the past on a mass scale.

Like the toymakers who know how to intensify the experience we have with toys in our early years and therefore foster close bonds between individuals and their possessions (Cross, 2017, p. 106), marketers and/or designers are also said to often make a conscious effort to evoke nostalgia in their audiences. According to Davis (1979, p. 82), as a result of “training, intuition, and prior exercise”, they understand “what configuration of lines, pigments, sounds, movements, or words will touch nostalgic “chords” in the audience”. The audience then feels nostalgia which stems from the recognisable stylistic features of the nostalgic mode, rather than personal connections to the object of longing (ibid.).

Relatedly, referring to Jameson’s work, Grainge (2000, p. 29) explains that the intention behind this mobilisation of the nostalgic mode is not to accurately represent the past in its full context, but to highlight the most appealing aspects, reconfiguring them into an attractive style that draws on “cultural stereotypes”. Thus, the composition of the past is reduced, squeezing out unappealing details and leaving only the most palatable and marketable remnants. Unlike the nostalgic mood, the nostalgic mode does not necessitate loss, since we may yearn for something which we never personally or directly experienced (ibid., p. 28). This resonates with the indirect and collective types of nostalgia discussed in chapter two, which likewise do not emanate from loss.

In relation to textual narratives of nostalgia, Stewart (1993, pp. 22–23) reaches a similar conclusion regarding the fabric of mediated nostalgia. She asserts that once the personally experienced past is repackaged into narrative form such as a textual account, it becomes mediated experience. As such, it “transcends” the context in which it was experienced, losing its wholeness along with its “authorial voice”. Taking this into consideration, while nostalgia may be understood as a reconstructed version of past lived experience, the nostalgic mode undergoes further filtering. It is neither lived experience nor nostalgic recollection, but a reconfigured version of it, one which is intended to appeal to a wide audience.
In the case of advertising, the nostalgic mode has been used in promoting products for longer than we might realise. For instance, American consumer goods from the latter part of the 1800s symbolised the collective preference for styles from the colonial period. This ranged from kitchen design through to the settings of popular novels, as well as the use of names from the era in advertisements (Wilson, 2014, p. 158). In tune with this example, Havlena and Holak (1991, p. 327) point out that nostalgia used in advertising is largely evocative of first order or simple nostalgia (Davis, 1979, p. 17), rather than giving rise to more critical reflection on the realities of former times.

Indeed, Havlena and Holak (1991, p. 327) suggest that since the point of using nostalgia in marketing is to foster positive connections between consumers and the brand, such critical thinking may even be detrimental to marketing efforts. The intention of the nostalgic features of the advertisement, after all, are to imbue the brand with the positive connotations associated with a romanticised past, causing the consumer to respond more favourably to it (Mayer, 1991, cited in Stern, 1992, p. 15). Moreover, considering the effectiveness of the advertisement itself, research has shown that a poor advertisement could prevent the consumer from feeling the nostalgia intended (Baker and Kennedy, 1994). This further emphasises the importance of context, demonstrating that nostalgia is not an isolated phenomenon but inextricably bound to aspects of lived experience.

In relation to the styling of products, “retro” refers to the “stylistic currency that borrows from the past” (Grainge, 2000, p. 29). Particularly in the era of digitisation, technological progress has resulted in an upsurge of both legitimate products from the past and reinvented versions (Havlena and Holak, 1991, p. 325; Grainge, 2000, p. 29). A recent example of this is the trend towards retro style radios which are similar in appearance to analogue radios, yet have digital functionality. This could also extend to “artificial shutter-snaps on digital cameras, USB keyboard typewriters [and] iPod docks dressed as jukeboxes” (Lowenthal, 2015, p. 53). As Brown et al. (2003b, p. 20) note, replicas of old products are not always appealing in a modern context because of their often inferior qualities. Retro products then address this by combining the appealing characteristics that associate the product with the past and modern day features.

The demand for such products can on one hand be connected to the concept of nostalgic bonding and the resulting lifelong preferences that are evidenced (Holbrook and
Schindler, 2003) as consumers look fondly upon older and familiar features, drawn in by the positive connotations they offer. In this sense, retro products may be understood as portals to one’s childhood (Brown et al., 2003a). At the same time, they are also fashionable in the present moment (Brown et al., 2003a, p. 136), which also attracts a younger audience, one which has not directly or personally experienced the classic features of the commodity.

I elaborate on retro marketing and media more broadly in the following section “Media and nostalgia”.

3.5 Media and nostalgia

In the previous section, I discussed the role of sensory inputs in evoking nostalgic feelings and memories. The section that followed, “Nostalgia, marketing and consumption”, explored triggers of nostalgia through the lens of marketing and consumption, focusing on products and advertising. This research differentiated between genuine products and advertising from bygone eras and period styled objects or advertising which are new but have a vintage feel (Havlена and Holak, 1991). This distinction underlines the degree to which objects of nostalgia may be experienced directly or indirectly. Additionally, the section shed light on the use of nostalgia as a marketable style for products and promotion. This raised questions about the authenticity of the object of nostalgia, which undergoes filtering and reconstruction when it is transformed into a marketable mode. I explore the interplay between nostalgia and authenticity in chapter four.

Now I turn to the growing body of literature which applies the conceptual framework of nostalgia to media (Niemeyer, 2018, p. 7). Given that digital media are increasingly used as vehicles for communicating and remembering (Lizardi, 2015) it is unsurprising that the relationship between the two has been the subject of recent attention (Pickering and Keightley, 2006; Menke, 2017, p. 627). Of course, there is much overlap with the previous sections where I discuss triggers of nostalgia, sensory inputs such as music and images as well as advertising, since they all fall under the umbrella of “media”. As such, references to various forms of media as objects or triggers of nostalgia are evident within this wave of research and so I explore this from a new standpoint throughout this section.
Notably, distinctions have been made between the various ways in which media and nostalgia interweave. People may be nostalgic for the medium itself, its style, subject matter or a compound of any of these features (Schrey, 2014, p. 29). Specifically, “media nostalgia” refers to longing for aspects of media. This could include “media culture, technology, or content” (Menke, 2017, p. 630). Taking the example of Nirvana’s album “Nevermind” released in 1991, one might be nostalgic for the cassette itself, the music, or the creation and exchange of mixtapes with others which were fundamental aspects of cassette tape culture. Alternatively, “mediated nostalgia” sees media as vehicles for the object of longing (Lizardi, 2015). In this sense, mediated nostalgia relies on media as channels to past experiences which did not directly involve media (Niemeyer, 2014; Lizardi, 2015; Menke, 2017). In this section, I first discuss media nostalgia, which encompasses the concepts of “analog nostalgia” (Marks, 2002, p. 152) and technostalgia (Pinch and Reinecke, 2009). I then discuss mediated nostalgia and the role of mass media as a platform for disseminating accounts of the past, thus stimulating memories and nostalgic reverie.

3.5.1 Media nostalgia

Schrey (2014, p. 28) argues that digitisation has evoked a strong sense of nostalgia for aspects of pre-digital times. This form of sentimentality is referred to as “analog nostalgia”, a phrase coined by Marks (2002, p. 152) to refer specifically to the longing for analogue characteristics of videos, such as static noise, otherwise known as “TV snow”, caused by an imperfect signal. The term has now broadened in scope to encompass longing for the qualities of any kind of analogue media (Schrey, 2014, p. 28). Such qualities could include signs of age or wear and tear, indicating usage and often signalling what the most popular page, track or moment was (ibid., p. 35). For instance, in the case of vinyl records, the most well-thumbed pages of lyric booklets may reveal the listener’s most loved tracks.

Likewise, imperfection is understood to be central to the appeal of analogue media. With regards to old instruments, Pinch and Reinecke (2009, p. 163) point out that the flaws and distortions characteristic of instruments produced prior to mass production are considered particularly valuable, for they come to represent the uniqueness of the instrument. As
such, these flaws and idiosyncrasies may be picked up on analogue recordings, quite unlike digital recordings which have a much more polished finish. Ultimately, such flaws are associated with human qualities. “Labour investment” was also found to be a pertinent feature of analogue media in a study by Bolin (2015) which presented the analyses of focus group interviews across four different generations of Estonian and Swedish media users. An example of this presented in the article is the time and effort spent on producing cassette mixtapes by the participants who grew up with this music format. The media users recalled the careful attention which was required to avoid capturing radio advertisements following the song being recorded, as well as the work invested in producing a quality mix (ibid., p. 257).

The physicality of the medium is further considered integral to the analogue experience, as individuals seek “tangible interactions” (Campopiano, 2013, para. 8). For instance, physically removing a vinyl record from its sleeve and placing it onto a record player before listening is considered an important feature of pre-digital experiences of music (ibid.). This contrasts with digital music, which can be listened to at the click of a button. The difference between film cameras and digital cameras or smartphones is less pronounced, as the process still involves handling the camera or phone and operating it by pressing buttons, but not physically loading the film or developing the photos. In this sense, the level of tangibility which is yearned for differs depending on the medium.

Related to the concept of analogue nostalgia, the term “technostalgia” is used to describe nostalgia experienced “when using a familiar, but increasingly “obsole” material medium” (Lepa and Tritakis, 2016, p. 27). Examples of material media include film cameras, mobile phones from the pre-smartphone era and early gaming consoles. In 2009, Fickers observed that technostalgia appeared to be trendy and that, upon searching for the term online, “more than 14,500 entries popped up, most of them referring to blogs where amateur collectors of truck accessories, early computer games, or adult fans of model railways act out their nostalgic passion for yesterday’s technologies” (2009, p. 136). Running the same search in 2019, around 126,000 results are yielded. What the concept of technostalgia demonstrates is that media themselves can function as gateways to memories and triggers of nostalgia (Pickering and Keightley, 2006, p. 925). As Amy Holdsworth (2011) points out in her book “Television, Memory and Nostalgia”, for those
who grew up watching it, the box-shaped analogue television set is as evocative of memories and nostalgia as the television series they served to broadcast.

While technostalgia is largely equated with nostalgia for analogue media, Niemeyer’s recent research refers to nostalgia for the video game “Mario Bros” under the umbrella of technostalgia (2018, p. 16). Given its status as a video game, “Mario Bros” is digital, provoking questions surrounding whether technostalgia extends to digital formats. If so, how modern do such formats need to be before we consider them too modern to evoke nostalgia? For instance, it could be argued that the first iPhone, released in 2007, could conceivably stir feelings of sentimentality in some iPhone users. Indeed, Niemeyer (2015, p. 96) refers to nostalgia for digital media, which she defines as “a yearning for the early vintage digital culture, a longing for the human relations it created and the objects it produced – those on the computer screen, but also their devices”. This could include interactions with online friends on early instant messaging platforms such as MSN Messenger and the basic emoticons and GIFs commonplace at that point in time in online forms of communication.

Niemeyer therefore contends that whether media can elicit nostalgia is dependent upon the context in which it was experienced and its personal relevance, rather than the temporal distance between past and present technology (Niemeyer, 2018, pp. 16–17). This line of reasoning is supported by Schrey (2014) who emphasises the difficulty in differentiating between analogue and digital. Indeed, returning to the example of the video game Mario Bros, despite being digital, it is likely to have been played by many on an analogue television set. This highlights the blurred boundaries between analogue and digital. For this reason, while analogue nostalgia may be considered to greatly overlap with the concept of technostalgia, the boundaries of technostalgia can be understood as more porous and fluid, following Niemeyer’s assertion (2018, pp. 16–17).

With regards to the types of nostalgia elicited, technostalgia refers to both longing for direct experiences one has had with a material medium as well as media that are bound to “social relations and situations” (Bolin, 2015, p. 256). This is in line with Niemeyer’s (2015, p. 96) point that “human relations” are often at the centre of the longing. It also resonates with the assertion that relationships with family and other loved ones as well as values, customs and practices from former times are often connected to objects of
nostalgic yearning (Batcho 1995; Wilson, 2014). In this sense, a medium can be “a tangible connection to our cultural heritage” (Campopiano, 2013, para. 10). Illustrative of this is a study by Fickers (2009), which investigated how transistor radios are represented across one hundred popular song lyrics in English, French, Dutch and German. Findings suggest that the transistor radio triggers technostalgia because it is a tangible representation of a romanticised past.

Relatedly, it has been argued that “[t]echnostalgia is highly collective and represents a shared media experience of people who have similar experiences of bygone or outdated media technologies” (Bolin, 2015, p. 261). Indeed, former listeners to transistor radios may connect personal and unique memories to the medium, as well as the cultural memories they share with others who also formed attachments to the medium. This is consistent with research on nostalgia and consumption and the observation that, as adults, consumers may begin to collect the possessions they consumed during their youth, nostalgic for their personal memories of the product along with their peer group (Cross, 2017, p. 106). This is premised on the concept of “a period of intense affective consumption”, where lifelong preferences are formed for products which were fashionable when one was growing up (Holbrook and Schindler, 2003, p. 279).

Extending this argument, Lepa and Tritakis (2016) apply the concept of technostalgia to the recent resurgence of vinyl records. They argue that it helps to explain the popularity of the medium amongst people who grew up with it and formed attachments to it. However, Marks (2002, p. 153) points out that “analogue nostalgia seems especially prevalent among works by students who started learning video production when it was fully digital”. As such, it may be inferred that while phenomena that we bond with during our youth influence our lifelong preferences, the appeal of analogue phenomena, at least in terms of video, is broader than we might anticipate.

Technology can therefore be understood as an aid in remembering (Niemeyer, 2018, p. 14). In this sense, the technology itself is not the end goal of one’s longing, but “an enabling medium” (Boym, 2001, p. 346). Furthermore, the medium can bridge the “distances and disjunctures between times and spaces” which are characteristic of nostalgia, providing a sense of return that ordinarily cannot be fulfilled (ibid.). In other words, “technostalgia can be ‘cured’, as it is possible to successfully revisit old
technologies (although one, just as Odysseus, revisits this ‘home’ as a different self)” (Bolin, 2015, p. 261). This resonates with Hofer’s original definition of nostalgia and his assertion that soldiers could cure their nostalgia by returning home (Anspach, 1934).

### 3.5.2 Mediated nostalgia

The concept of mediated nostalgia depicts media as powerful vehicles for “nostalgising” (Kalinina, 2016, p. 12). Indeed, studies have shown that media such as “film, photography, television, music, networks, literature, art works, home videos and printed advertising” function as carriers of “nostalgic narratives” and “can be, in themselves, the creative projection spaces for nostalgia” (Niemeyer, 2014, p. 11). Essentially, it has been argued that websites, mobile apps and other popular media technologies “not only fulfil the role of archival and mnemonic means but rather and more often serve as ‘performative’ instruments for (online) self-representation and memory dissemination” (van der Heijden, 2015, p. 106). In other words, as well as aiding in documenting moments, media technologies are also platforms for retelling and reconstructing events. For instance, Facebook is commonly used to upload photos, check in to locations and communicate with friends via status updates. All of this can be curated by the user and looked back upon as a form of archive of past, personally experienced events.

Beyond memory and nostalgia on an individual level, mass media play an important role in “collective remembering because they mediate collective and individual experiences across large groups of people” (Kalinina, 2016, p. 12). Furthering this line of reasoning, Alison Landsberg (2003, p. 144) refers to “prosthetic memory” as a catch-all term for the overlapping of personal memories with collective, public memories. Moreover, it has been pointed out that popular culture such as films or articles which depict certain periods also play a role in constructing and maintaining stereotypes. Essentially, mass media contributes substantially to how we remember or look back to moments in time, broadcasting “dominant ideology” and reinforcing clichés (Wilson, 2014, p. 43). This is illustrated via Drake’s research, introduced in chapter two. He argues:

“mediated memories have become increasingly important to how we articulate ourselves and our tastes in the present. Thus we can be nostalgic about, or invest
in, an experience that we have not actually had, or a period never personally experienced” (2003, p. 198).

Stubbings’s (2003, p. 78) research also underlines the relationship between personal and public memory, as she highlights common themes across stories reflecting on what the experience of going to the cinema used to be like in Nottingham in the UK, in a series of local press releases. She argues that these narratives reinforced themes such as “community, city building, leisure practice, and social behaviour”, which shape how going to the cinema is remembered and understood by older generations. Similarly, Holak and Havlena (1992, p. 386) refer to a man’s longing for the Woodstock music festival held in the US for the first time in 1969:

“Woodstock makes me nostalgic although I was barely born when it was happening (I was born in 1964). I’ve seen videos of it, and a lot of it makes me happy. I wasn’t there since I’m not really into oppressive crowds, being rained on, being stoned/high, etc., and so on. But, when I hear the music that came from that time period, it makes me nostalgic for an idealized past (that wasn’t really ideal). I think of a time period when people stepped out of the tight social structure, broke some (narrowly conceived) rules, and made history. The music of Jim Hendrix, Eric Clapton, Janis Joplin, Stevie Winwood, Country Joe and the Fish, Arlo Guthrie, and so many others, makes me “nostalgic” for a past which, not so much represents a reality I would have liked had I been there, but which I can experience vicariously by taking the best of what happened then and incorporating it into my reality now”.

Their example illustrates the role of the previous generation in constructing and passing on a vision of the Woodstock music festival via their direct lived experience of it. In the excerpt, the man points to media such as music and videos as key vehicles through which he came to understand and piece together accounts of not just the festival itself but the era as well. Consequently, this leads him to experience the era “vicariously”, only selecting the most appealing aspects of it.

Moreover, it is argued that “cultural memories are shaped not just by the production qualities of an era […] but by subtle properties of the recording media themselves”
(Reynolds, 2011, p. 331). To put it differently, the media technology itself cannot be separated from its content or stylistic features, which are interwoven with the content being broadcasted. The relationship between nostalgia, memory and media is therefore a complex one, and the three can be considered to intertwine in interesting ways (Niemeyer, 2014, p. 5). In chapter four, “Authenticity, nostalgia and indie pop”, I discuss the ways in which authenticity has been studied as a component of nostalgia.

3.6 Summary

The aim of this chapter was to foreground the role of physical and abstract objects of nostalgia. In “Objects of nostalgia”, I drew on the literature reviewed in the previous chapter to emphasise the role of objects not only in personal and direct nostalgic experiences, but also indirect experiences. Reviewing first the concrete objects of nostalgia and then more abstract objects, this helped to paint a picture of the various levels of nostalgic longing. Indeed, objects can be considered physical manifestations or vehicles of yearning, rather than the end state of what is being desired (Belk, 1990). For example, one might be nostalgic for home (as in the physical building or location), yet this desire is underpinned by feelings of security and belongingness that one felt while at home (Davis, 1979; Stern, 1992, p. 16; Boym, 2001). Social aspects, especially centring around family and other loved ones, were found to be particularly pertinent and frequently cited as objects of nostalgia (Wildschut et al., 2006). The fictitious and fantastic elements were also highlighted, emphasising that nostalgic longing is often “inaccurate” and aspects of it imagined (Jacoby, 1985; Stewart, 1993, p. 23; Batcho, 1998, p. 414; Goulding, 2001, p. 583). Moreover, one may be nostalgic for values, customs and practices that are represented via popular culture and relate to broader aspects of the socio-cultural environment and thus not necessarily tied to personal experiences. (Batcho, 1995; Brown et al., 2003b, p. 20).

The notion of a “golden age” is frequently referred to in discussions surrounding objects of nostalgic longing (Belk, 1990, p. 671; Havlena and Holak, 1991, p. 325; Stern, 1992, p. 16; Tannock, 1995, p. 456; Grainge, 2000, p. 28). This generally involves the idealisation and isolation of only positive aspects of the past (Havlena and Holak, 1991, p. 325; Wilson, 2014, p. 27), connected to the earlier points considered regarding the
utopian aspects of nostalgia (Jacoby, 1985, p. 4; Batcho, 1998; Goulding, 2001, p. 583; Moran, 2002, p. 156). The “golden age” thus becomes a metric against which the present moment is measured.

In “Triggers of nostalgia”, I referred to the notion that possessions – from holiday souvenirs to seemingly unremarkable items – can carry meanings and thus evoke nostalgia. Triggers range from discontent in the present moment and concern over the future (Davis, 1979; Stern, 1992; Sedikides et al., 2004), to feelings of self-discontinuity (Goulding, 2001; Sedikides et al., 2015) and sensory inputs such as music (Kaplan, 1987; Holbrook and Schindler, 1989; Drake, 2003; Schindler and Holbrook, 2003; Barrett et al., 2010), objects and images (Belk, 1990; Stewart, 1993; Havlena and Holak, 1996). Interestingly, song lyrics have been found to elicit nostalgia, since they are “a rich vehicle for the exploration of the characteristics and psychological functions of nostalgic sentiment” (Batcho et al., 2008, p. 237). However, research into other aspects of music has not been carried out. The research on images and nostalgia is generally dominated by photographs. For example, features of photographs, such as black and white rather than colour images and sepia tones indicate age are known to commonly trigger nostalgia (Havlena and Holak, 1996).

I also returned to the concept of “a period of intense affective consumption” where inclinations towards certain products which were fashionable when one was growing up are likely to remain stable throughout one’s lifetime (Holbrook and Schindler, 2003, p. 279). The point that during our younger years we are more impressionable as much of what we experience is new was also made (Cross, 2017, p. 106). Indeed, collective nostalgia for products experienced in our youth was also noted, although such nostalgia would also be bound to that individual’s personal memories. It is thus the object/consumable item that is the trigger. In this section I also introduced the concept of the nostalgic mode (Grainge, 2000), a recognisable style designed to trigger nostalgia in its audience. This led me to discuss retro items, which encompass genuine products from bygone eras as well as period styled objects, potentially with modern features (Brown et al., 2003a).

In the final section of this chapter, I made the point that media play an increasingly important communicative role in our day to day lives and that they can thus function as
gateways to memories and triggers of nostalgia (Pickering and Keightley, 2006; Niemeyer, 2014; Menke, 2017). The concept of media nostalgia demonstrated that one can be nostalgic for aspects of media, such as “media culture, technology, or content” (Menke, 2017). Indeed, literature on analogue nostalgia and technostalgia emphasises that imperfection, labour investment and the physicality of the medium are all qualities that are regarded as superior in comparison to modern forms of media (Pinch and Reinecke, 2009; Campopiano, 2013; Bolin, 2015). Mediated nostalgia, on the other hand, sees media as vehicles for the object of longing (Lizardi, 2015). This literature highlights the role of mass media as a platform for disseminating accounts of the past, thus stimulating memories and nostalgic reverie (van der Heijden, 2015; Kalinina, 2016).
Chapter Four: Authenticity, nostalgia and indie pop

4.1 Introduction

In the previous two literature review chapters, I briefly touched on the concept of authenticity and the role it plays in nostalgic experiences. While there is literature that brings together nostalgia and authenticity, their relationship is rarely discussed explicitly. It is often either taken for granted that the two intersect, or discussed superficially rather than in-depth. In this chapter, I first introduce the concept of authenticity in the section entitled “An overview of authenticity”. It is here that I define the concept of authenticity and highlight the characteristics which are most relevant to this thesis. In the following section, “Nostalgia and authenticity”, I describe how nostalgia – which was the focus of the previous two literature review chapters – and authenticity intersect. In doing so, I foreground research on authenticity and objects and how authenticity interweaves with nostalgia in responses to modernity.

In the fourth section, “Indie pop: origins and values”, I seek to contextualise indie pop, the music scene which I focused on in this research. I explain that indie pop is a specific genre of independent music, which comes under the umbrella of DIY music. I therefore discuss the DIY movement in the UK, and the subsequent rise of independent music, emphasising the core values of DIY and indie and how these relate to authenticity and nostalgia. The discussion then funnels down to indie pop and I demonstrate that the overarching values of DIY and indie music carry through into this subgenre. At the same time, I explain the core distinguishing features of indie pop, offering an insight into the scene I got to know empirically over four years. Here I draw on existing scholarly and experiential accounts.

4.2 An overview of authenticity

The term “authentic” is derived from the Greek word “authentes”, which refers to both “one who acts with authority” and “made by one's own hand” (Bendix, 1997, p. 14). Being “authentic” is synonymous with being “original, genuine, natural, naïve, noble and innocent, lively, sensuous [and] stirring” (ibid., p. 15). Moreover, in the context of
cultural experience, the qualities of being “unspoiled, pristine, genuine, untouched and traditional” are generally considered characteristics of authenticity (Handler, 1986, p. 2). In this section, I touch upon the main tenets of authenticity to provide an overview of what the term means in a contemporary context. I first discuss approaches to authenticity, including the philosophical underpinnings of its usage, which are important to establish before moving forward with any discussion of authenticity and its various applications. I then consider key characteristics of authenticity, such as being “true” to oneself, lacking mediation and having an authentic story. Finally, I consider the extent to which authenticity relies upon its other, the inauthentic.

4.2.1 Materialist versus constructivist approaches

Embedded within the literature on authenticity are the materialist and constructivist approaches (Jones, 2010, p. 182). A materialist approach to authenticity assumes that authenticity is a fixed, naturally occurring attribute which can be objectively determined. This assumption is often made in the conservation and restoration of cultural heritage sites, where the authenticity of an artefact is determined by “its origins in terms of its date, its material, its form, its authorship, workmanship, construction, and, in many cases, its primary context and use” (Jones, 2010, p. 182). Likewise, while it is often difficult to determine the authenticity of artworks, judgements of authenticity are made by specialists in the relevant period (Conklin, 1994 and Harrington, 2004, cited in Peterson, 2005, p. 1090). In both cases, there are precise criteria which can be drawn upon to measure the extent to which phenomena may be considered authentic.

Jones, on the other hand, notes that the constructivist approach is “popular amongst academics and cultural critics” (2010, p. 182). A constructivist approach views authenticity as socially and culturally constructed (Handler, 1986, p. 2; Jones, 2010, p. 182; Peterson, 2005) rather than an embedded characteristic. In other words, while there may be ingrained assumptions as to what constitutes and does not constitute authenticity, phenomena are not by definition authentic. In this perspective, the term refers to something that originates with the observer. As Moore (2002, p. 210) notes, “[w]hether a performance is authentic, then, depends on who ‘we’ are”. An observer can therefore make a claim regarding whether something is authentic or not and this can be contested by others (Peterson, 2005, p. 1086). In other words, the judgement may differ depending
on who is making the claim and the contextual factors surrounding it (Jones, 2010, p. 182).

As such, judgements of authenticity are driven by “regimes of meaning and exchange” (Jones, 2010, p. 182). In this sense, authenticity is subjective to the extent that there may be disagreement regarding what is and is not authentic. That said, in as much as it is contested, there is also agreement as to which qualities may be regarded as authentic in certain contexts. This is exemplified in Peterson’s (1997) earlier research into country music, which suggests that the music must be original to be authentic, setting the artist apart from others and demonstrating creativity (pp. 3-4, 209-11). Interestingly, in Peterson’s (2005, p. 1091) later work, judgements of authenticity were ultimately made by “everyone active in the field”, including country music fans. As such, he asserts that there is no group of “experts” who dictate whether the music is authentic. Relatedly, in the later sections of this chapter I outline the values inherent in independent music and specifically indie pop, which leads to a discussion of the notion of authenticity which is used in the academic literature on independent music scenes, but rarely in relation to indie pop as a specific genre of independent music.

Within the constructivist camp and in the context of music, three types of authenticity are put forward by Moore (2002) which emphasise the role of different individuals in the process of authentication. The first of these is authentic expression, i.e. “first person authenticity”, which occurs when a music performer appears to have “integrity” via unmediated communication with their audience. For instance, heartfelt vocals or facial expressions may contribute to making the experience appear more genuine and sincere (p. 214). This type of authenticity emphasises the role of the performer rather than the content of their act. “Second person authenticity” refers to when a performance is perceived by the audience to confirm their “experience of life” by accurately representing their own reality (p. 220). Here, judgements of authenticity are based on the lived experiences of listeners, as they seek in the performance a “place of belonging” (p. 219). This places the audience at the centre of the authentication.

Finally, “third person authenticity” is when a performance convincingly represents “the ideas of another”, connecting the audience to the performer via shared ground (p. 218). An example of this is the song by John Lennon, “Working Class Hero”. The rhythm stays
constant throughout the song, evoking a “lack of pretension” and confirming that the
singer understands the “other” – in this case, the “Working Class Hero” – resulting in a
genuine portrayal of the protagonist (p. 217). The audience must therefore be able to relate
to the main character and thus subject matter of the song. In this sense, the “absent other”
is being authenticated. Importantly, Moore acknowledges that these types of authenticity
are not entirely distinct in practice, but that differentiating them in this manner is
necessary to judge music performances (p. 220). Thus, placing the emphasis on “who” is
being authenticated serves the purpose of foregrounding the role of the various actors
involved in judgements of authenticity, rather than overlooking the overlap that naturally
occurs between such roles.

4.2.2 Being “true” to oneself

Authenticity has also been connected to self-identity. Lionel Trilling, in his seminal work
“Sincerity and Authenticity”, highlights the similarity between sincerity and authenticity⁶
and suggests that authenticity can be considered a stricter definition which captures the
modern ideal of “being true to one’s own self” (1972, p. 11). Indeed, the notion of the
“true” self is often used to refer to the self that is not presented to others, but which is
perceived to be more genuine and real in comparison to the public self (Handler, 1986, p.
3; McLeod, 1999, p. 145). However, Trilling (1972, p. 5) also explains that “sincerity is
the avoidance of being false to any man [sic] through being true to one’s own self”,
pointing to openness and honesty as authentic human qualities. As such, being genuinely
oneself privately and publicly is integral to contemporary definitions of authenticity
(Handler, 1986, p. 3).

However, Trilling (1972, p. 9) argues that one is not necessarily authentic if they
consciously try not to appear false to others, since being authentic means being true to
oneself without concern over the opinions of others. Paradoxically, it is a societal
expectation that an individual be sincere and the judgements of others ultimately validate
whether one is authentic or not (Trilling, 1972, pp. 10-11). Further to this, and much
earlier, Rousseau, referred to by Trilling, notes that “what destroys authenticity is society”

⁶ The terms “sincerity” and “authenticity”, while outlined by Trilling (1972), are often
used interchangeably in later publications by different authors. For instance, Simon Frith
conflates the two in his book “Performing Rites on the Values of Popular Music” (1996).
Here, society is considered detrimental to authenticity given its influence over individuals’ thoughts and behaviour. This line of reasoning is further supported by Heidegger (cited in Baugh, 1988, p. 478), who discusses society in opposition to authentic individuals, who “decide for themselves what it is to be a human being”. An inauthentic person is thus different to what Rousseau describes as the “ideal authentic person” in that they are unaffected by the opinions of others and “[live] in a paradisiacal state of innocence” (Bendix, 1997, p. 16). While an exploration of the relationship between the self and authenticity is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is nonetheless fundamental to the concept of authenticity and to aspects of authentic experience.

4.2.3 Lack of mediation

In a similar vein to personal authenticity, Trilling advises that for a phenomenon to be sincere, it must not be “adulterated” or “sophisticated” (1972, p. 13). It must therefore be simple and intact, without contamination or corruption, much like the concept of the “true” self. Therefore, for an experience to be authentic, it should be “unmediated”, stemming from “an absence of cognitive understanding” and preserving the authentic phenomenon as it naturally occurs (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998, cited in Fine, 2003, p. 155). As Moore (2002, p. 213) succinctly puts it, “the distance between [the authentic phenomenon’s] (mental) origin and its (physical) manifestation is wilfully compressed to nil by those with a motive for so perceiving it”. In other words, a consistent message should be communicated between the creator and the observer of the authentic phenomenon.

However, in practice, performances are often engineered or “staged”, resulting in them being perceived as authentic by their audiences but without conforming to these stricter notions of authenticity (Weisethaunet and Lindberg, 2010, p. 468). An example of staged performance is the UK television show “Strictly Come Dancing”, where celebrities pair up with professional dancers and compete. Before each couple performs, the audience are offered a backstory. This generally includes emotional footage from dance rehearsals, a visit to where the celebrity grew up, went to school, or a clip of them at home with their family. This of course contradicts Rousseau’s argument that the essence of authenticity becomes compromised when the authentic subject relies upon the judgment of others. In the case of “Strictly Come Dancing”, the stories are staged narratives to win over the
viewers, rather than unmediated. Indeed, a study of reality television shows has suggested that viewers authenticate performances in relation to aspects of their own lived experience (Rose and Wood, 2005).

4.2.4 Biographies and stories

Indeed, these examples also serve to demonstrate the significance of the background and biography of an artist or originator. Simon Frith (1996, p. 171) offers the example of the French singer Edith Piaf, whose shows were authenticated not by the quality of her stories or her delivery but by how vividly autobiographical her music was. As Fine (2003, p. 175) puts it, “to be authentic is, typically, to have an authentic biography”. As such, an authentic performance also creates a sense of intimacy with the “inner world” of its originator (Weisethaunet and Lindberg, 2010, p. 471). This is particularly true for country music, as exemplified by Peterson’s (2005) research, which suggests that the more difficult and unique the background of a musician, the more authentic their music is perceived to be (p. 1088). In other words, the context and past of a creator gives value to their art, especially when the circumstances highlight the human qualities of the creator and demonstrate the effort required to produce their work.

The importance of stories is also well exemplified in Fine’s (2003) research into self-taught artists. Since they have not been formally trained, their background and their development as artists “infuse the meaning of the work” (ibid., p. 156). Here, authenticity emanates from the purity of their education, as they have not been tainted by the theory of their discipline, allowing them to produce something unmediated and which stems directly from a “basic creative urge” (ibid., p. 160). Such art may connect the observer to a time before an artist was skilled – a time of apparent innocence. This relates to my earlier discussion of nostalgia in the sense that people are often nostalgic for their childhood, pining for a seemingly purer and more innocent period in their lives. The appeal for self-taught artists then may stem from a desire to escape adulthood to return to the “security blanket” of earlier years (Jacoby, 1985, p. 5; Stern, 1992, p. 20; Moran, 2002, p. 170).

In line with the previous subsection, the notion that professionalism is a marker of inauthenticity underlies much research into authenticity and music. In the specific context
of rock music, characteristics which signal that the music might be too “professional” include, for example, the use of technology when recording music, or the impression that the musician is “trained” (Walser, 1993, cited in Moore, 2002, p. 213). In contrast, unpolished, rough and ready qualities in rock music are deemed to be authentic (ibid.). This is also illustrated in relation to indie music in a later section of this chapter, “The origins and values of indie pop”.

4.2.5 Opposing the inauthentic

Of course, authenticity necessitates inauthenticity, in that its definition relies an opposition to that which it is not: disingenuous, unoriginal, imitated (Bendix, 1997, p. 9). Connected to the literature on the authentic self, the term inauthenticity is often applied when discussing “inauthentic living, false-self behaviors, or self-deception” (Kernis and Goldman, 2006, p. 284). Returning to the work of Heidegger, Baugh (1988, p. 478) asserts that to be inauthentic is to follow the crowd and behave as is expected, rather than take ownership of one’s decisions and actions and be true to oneself. Indeed, a person regarded as blatantly and comfortably inauthentic has been contemptuously dubbed a “tourist” (MacCannell, 1973, p. 592).

Applying this logic to artwork, inauthentic pieces are those which “fail to make the world their own” either due to being unoriginal, or to the other extreme, through lack of connection with previous art (Baugh, 1988, p. 483). In other words, authentic art must neither wholly reproduce past works of art, nor entirely ignore the influence of previous artwork. It must accept the work that precedes it, and reinterpret it in a contemporary context. The new artwork must therefore be true to the context in which it is produced, acknowledging present constraints and limitations. Furthermore, the conflict between authenticity and commerce has received a great deal of attention (Moore, 2002, p. 212) and is very much relevant to this thesis, as the section, “The origins and values of indie pop”, will demonstrate.

Trilling (1972, p. 67) distinguishes between “serious” and “commercial art”, the former being art for art’s sake while the latter is profit-driven, conforming to mainstream ideals. The underlying tension comes from the influence of money, which is considered to compromise artistic motive and integrity (Trilling, 1972, p. 124). Paradoxically, authentic
artwork is in high demand, rendering authentic artwork marketable and threatening the essence of its authenticity (Bendix, 1997, p. 8). The problem with this is exemplified in former museum director Bruce Johnson’s quote, “I have trouble with many of these [twentieth-century works] because the artists, as soon as they reach a point of commercial success, quickly lose the innocence I like about folk art” (cited in Fine, 2003, p. 166). Essentially, artworks that are influenced by the dominant culture or “sell out” to commerce are considered contaminated, losing the untarnished quality which is indicative of authenticity.

Moreover, Peterson (2005, p. 1088) states that “the value of the work of art depends not so much on its quality but on whether the artist is untouched by influences from the fine art world”. This further underscores the importance of purity in judgements of authenticity. Alongside money, professionalism is considered a contaminant. This is reflective of the point made in the earlier subsection, “Lack of mediation”, regarding the avoidance of intervention via high tech recording processes or training, for example, to preserve authenticity. There it was emphasised that authentic art reflects one’s self-identity. This is further supported by Pickering, in relation to listening or viewing experiences (1986, p. 201):

“At one end of the typical spectrum there is the ‘authentic’ moment where the listening is an affirmative expression of individuality, of one’s own unique and real self. At the other is the moment where the experience of listening to music is a standardised response to the existence of a product made for the sake of profit, a mere unit of bought time in an unvariegated flow of consumption”

For example, commercial rap is considered inauthentic since it is far removed from its African American hip-hop origins, while rock ‘n’ roll music is argued to have appropriated and commercialised authentic forms of folk music (Frith, 1996, p. 42). Listening to such mainstream music genres would therefore be considered inauthentic and simply “following mass trends” (McLeod, 1999, p. 145). As I have already noted in the subsection entitled “Being “true” to oneself”, self-identity, while very much relevant to this thesis, is not the focus of this research. Simply, I wish to note its importance in defining the concept of authenticity and acknowledge that it is inextricably bound to any
study of authenticity. In the following section, I foreground research on authenticity and objects and how authenticity interweaves with nostalgia in responses to modernity.

4.3 Authenticity and nostalgia

Having outlined the key characteristics of authenticity, I now turn to literature which brings together nostalgia and authenticity. Precisely, authenticity has been discussed in terms of a response to modernity, which relates to my earlier discussion of the “golden age” as a seemingly superior and more authentic period in chapter three.

As discussed in that chapter, nostalgia may be triggered by changes and discontinuity on both societal (Davis, 1979, p. 103; Stern 1992) and personal (Goulding, 2001, p. 577; Sedikides et al., 2015) levels. More specifically, Elliott and Turner (2012) connect nostalgia to authenticity and posit that nostalgia stems from “a loss of simplicity, personal authenticity and emotional spontaneity” (p. 48). This is also the argument that Baudrillard (1994) puts forward as he suggests that nostalgia is at its peak when “the real is no longer what it used to be”. In other words, nostalgia is evoked when the present moment appears somehow deficient in comparison to a seemingly superior and more authentic past. This resonates with the argument made in the previous section under “Opposing the inauthentic” since the highly desired “essence” of the authentic past is contrasted with the inauthentic present (Bendix, 1997, p. 8). Specifically, when an individual revisits the past, authenticity and nostalgia together can help to foster an authentic sense of self via continuity between past and present (Bennett, 2018, p. 461). Thus, Wilson (2014) argues that, like nostalgia, at the heart of authenticity lies a “feeling of distance or loss” (p. 58). As such, as discussed in the first chapter of the literature review under the section “Functions of nostalgia”, nostalgic individuals long for times which they perceive as more meaningful and truer than the present moment to fill a perceived void (ibid., p. 26).

As such, the rupture between the authentic past and the inauthentic present is at the core of nostalgic longing (Batcho, 1995, p. 141; Goulding, 2001, p. 578). Indeed, the “golden age” is often perceived as immutable and secure (Grainge, 2000, p. 28) while the present is regarded as a more fleeting, less stable and unappealing version of the past (Green-Lewis, 2000, p. 69). This dichotomy and the quest for an authentic past can be explained
by the changes engendered by modern times and the apparent loss of authenticity associated with them (Moore, 2002, p. 210; Jones, 2010, p. 186). These disruptions encompass geographical relocations, the division of communities (Jones, 2010, p. 197; Weisethaunet and Lindberg, 2010, p. 478) and needing to make important decisions (Wilson, 2014, p. 55) which require the establishment of a “secure ground” and a “point of origin” (Moore, 2002, p. 216) to anchor one during periods of instability.

Particularly, increasing commercialism and mass mediatisation are often associated with inauthenticity. In contrast, the past is deemed authentic because it was less manipulated and misrepresented by mass media (Huyssen, 2006, cited in Kasabian, 2017). In this sense, the past is out of reach of the corrupted present, so “the familiar warmth of nostalgia [counteracts] the coldness of an alienating life in the present” (Shonk Jr and McClure, 2017). However, Bendix (1997) suggests that the term “authenticity” has been adulterated in the modern context, since a vast array of items and performances are now labelled as “authentic” in response to the demand for authentic experiences (p. 7). This is illustrated via the example of tomato sauce, which is now labelled “authentic”, diluting the meaning of authenticity. This is related to the example of artwork which, once declared authentic, loses its “authentic” quality since the demand for it increases and thus it becomes more commercialised (ibid., p. 8). Nostalgic longing thus seeks the truly authentic, untainted by society which has redefined and corrupted the meaning of authenticity by acclaiming it (ibid., p. 8).

While it has been suggested that nostalgia and authenticity may work together symbiotically, the two have also been positioned in opposition to one another. For instance, Bennett (2018, p. 453) suggests that authenticity establishes continuity between past and present, whereas nostalgia divides past and present, depicting the present as inauthentic. Furthermore, as discussed in the chapter two of the literature review under the section entitled “Types of nostalgia”, nostalgia does not necessitate direct exposure to the object of longing. Moreover, nostalgia may stem from former times which have been embellished in retrospect, relying on “artificial images of the past” (Pavda, 2014, p. 26). Unlike authenticity, which is concerned with details which establish phenomena as genuine, nostalgia does not demand that the object of its yearning be bona fide (Green-Lewis, 2000, p. 66). Stewart (1993) suggests that such longing is therefore inauthentic as it relies on idyllic and mediated memories, perhaps even of things that have not been
personally experienced (p. 23). In other words, individuals are often nostalgic for times that are not authentic since their nostalgia does not depict reality as it was.

This is related to the recent development of digital technologies and the rise of digital reproduction, which have created the possibility of accessing the past without concern for its specific details. As such, nostalgia “can be fed forever by quick access to an infinitely recyclable past” (Hutcheon and Valdés, 2000, p. 20). This is at the core of the argument I discuss in the following subsections in which I consider the role of tangible objects as vehicles of authenticity, connecting this to chapter three where I discussed their importance in nostalgic longing. I underline the point that objects can function as vehicles for both nostalgia and authenticity.

4.4 Authenticity, nostalgia and objects

4.4.1 Materiality

Chapter three emphasised the role of tangible objects in evoking nostalgia. Building on this, material artefacts may also convey authenticity (Jones, 2010; Wilson, 2014; Lowenthal, 2015). As Handler (1986, p. 3) puts it, tangible artefacts exist both independently, in and of themselves, and more broadly in relation to a network of other physical entities, rendering them “ipso facto authentic” (Lowenthal, 2015, p. 395). They facilitate a complete sensory experience; for instance, “the touch of the object, the creaks of the floor of the antique shop, the smell of the old objects” (Wilson, 2014, p. 118). This is connected to the point made in chapter three, that sensory inputs play a significant role in evoking nostalgia, given that they are symbolic of a seemingly superior past (Hyman, 2011, para. 2; Wildschut et al., 2006, p. 982). Indeed, they may function as material entities which bring the past into the present (Bennett, 2018, p. 451; Dragojlovic, 2014).

Particularly, the role of hard copy photographs as an authentic window to the past been noted as they are “the ne plus ultra of faithful documentation” (Lowenthal, 2015, p. 407). They are often taken as future proofs of personal stories (Bennett, 2018, p. 455) and are carefully chosen, organised and preserved in family albums (Stewart, 1993, p. 139; Lowenthal, 2015, p. 408). As such, photographs are immediate connections to a lived past and are “the final resting place of the truly authentic” (Green-Lewis, 2000, p. 71). This is
in keeping with the literature I reviewed in chapter three on images and nostalgia, which also centres around photographs. There, I made the point that they are fixed markers of events (Sturken, 1997, p. 21) and that, in a digital age, photographs and “more primitive technologies of previous eras” may be considered more genuine and authentic than digital technologies (Moran, 2002, p. 162). This adds a further dimension to judgements of authenticity, in the sense that material artefacts are not only considered innately authentic for simply being physical but, in the context of an increasingly digital age, they may also be considered symbolic of an apparently more authentic past.

4.4.2 Being true to origins

An authentic object is “true to its origin” and has characteristics that are consistent with the context in which it was originally used (Jones, 2010, p. 184). Earlier in this chapter I draw on the example of a historical artefact, which is authenticated per “its origins in terms of its date, its material, its form, its authorship, workmanship, construction, and, in many cases, its primary context and use” (ibid., p. 182). As such, an artefact’s roots can be verified (Jones, 2010, p. 188), which helps to ground it in the past, making it seem more authentic as tangible evidence that, for example, an event occurred. Importantly, it is often the human character of the past of certain objects that confirm their authenticity as they can present “signs of life”, such as “thumb marks in the pottery, hair caught in oil paint on a canvas” (Green-Lewis, 2000, p. 54). This line of reasoning is furthered by Regina Bendix (1997, cited in Fine, 2003, p. 155), who argues that “the core of authentic expression is that it is linked to the moral authority of the creator and simultaneously to the fact that the object was made by hand, not mechanically reproduced”.

4.4.3 Signs of wear and tear

In Lowenthal’s (2015) seminal piece “The past is a foreign country revisited”, he also describes the role of wear and tear in the process of the authentication of objects from the past. Indeed, their visible deterioration marks the passage of time and confirms “both age and authenticity” (ibid., p. 254). Lowenthal draws on the example of vinyl records to support his argument, explaining that their value comes from the “worn” sounds that “powerfully evoke the past” (ibid., p. 248). Trilling also emphasises the power of the natural and “organic” degradation that has become particularly cherished in modern
society (Trilling, 1972, pp. 127-128). The prevailing thought is that being “organic” is a marker of authenticity, and this continues to be reinforced in an increasingly “artificial” world as we move further away from what is perceived to be a more natural environment (Trilling, 1972, p. 127). Moreover, the decay and loss of an object’s original qualities and performance is not necessarily considered negative providing it happens in a steady, natural and uncontrolled manner. Time can thus “ripen” items from the past, as their purpose shifts from functional to decorative and/or symbolic (Lowenthal, 2015, p. 268).

The notion that wear and tear can be indicative of authenticity again harks back to chapter three, in which I emphasised that wear and tear and imperfection are amongst the charms of analogue media as they signal the human qualities of objects of nostalgia. It is the “patina” of old objects that link their owners to a “splendours” and “familiar” past (ibid., pp. 275, 284). And this nostalgia is not limited to the materiality of the items themselves but also encompasses the context and relationships of which they were once part (Jones, 2010, p. 190). These tangible artefacts not only connect their owners to their makers but also to other people that have interacted with them throughout their lifetime (Lowenthal, 2015, p. 99). Thus, human connections can be considered a deeper layer of more superficial authentic qualities such as signs of use and imperfection.

4.4.4. Uniqueness

The authenticity of objects has been further argued to stem from their “aura” (Benjamin, 1936) – that is, their distinctive quality or atmosphere – and the uniqueness of the experience associated with them (Jones, 2010, p. 189). Belk (1990) draws on the example of a wedding ring to highlight the importance of the uniqueness of tangible items. He argues that a duplicate of a wedding ring does not convey the same level of the authenticity as the “real thing” as it was not present during the “sacred experience”. Relatedly, the quality of being “original” is central to authenticity (Baudrillard, 1994; Baugh, 1988, p. 477; Benjamin, 1935, p. 677). Indeed, Benjamin (1935, p. 676), commenting on art in the mechanical age of reproduction, argues that “[e]ven the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be”. In other words, what replicas lack are the context in which the original was produced. In tune with the previous
section, this could extend to the material wear and tear that the artwork has been subject to (ibid.).

In this sense, industrialization brought with it the reproduction of many forms of art that are merely imitations of the authentic (Peterson, 2005, p. 1094). This resulted in a persistent “search for “the real thing”, as we mistrust the ability of machines to reproduce “originals”” (Orvell, cited in Fine, 2003, p. 163). Aged, “refinished” and “restored” objects such as furniture thus started to be considered valuable, as opposed to more modern-looking pieces (Peterson, 2005, p. 1094). Moreover, ““authenticity” is closely associated with questions concerning authorship – questions that, in the era of digital reproduction, have become increasingly crucial” (Weisethaunet and Lindberg, 2010, p. 468). In this sense, mass production, whether by humans or machines, produces inauthentic outputs because the maker cannot “infuse into the artefact the quality of his [sic] being” (Ruskin, cited in Trilling, 1972, p. 127). Nonetheless, as I discuss in the introduction chapter of this thesis, the infinite replicability of digital music has re-contextualised the uniqueness of each vinyl record, even though vinyl records are also mass-produced (Bartmanski and Woodward, 2015, p. 21; Bolin, 2015, p. 256).

4.5 The origins and values of indie pop

The aim of this section is to provide an overview of the origins of indie pop music, where it originates from and how it is related to DIY and indie music more broadly. In this outline, I also highlight the role of nostalgia and authenticity in indie pop music, making connections to the literature I have already discussed. Particularly, nostalgia for one’s childhood is embedded within indie pop and childlike amateurism is considered a marker of authenticity. In terms of the structure of this section, I first discuss the “Do It Yourself” – or DIY – movement, from which indie pop emerged, and provide an overview of the core values of DIY and indie music. In the subsection that follows, I narrow my focus to indie pop as the specific subgenre of music that this research centres around.

4.5.1 The DIY movement and indie

The DIY ethic is said to foster an environment where many people work collectively, contributing their skills to help achieve shared goals, doing what they can to ensure that
operations run smoothly, or indeed run at all. Illustrating this, Strachan (2007, p. 247), referring to micro-independent DIY labels in the UK, offers the following definition:

“[micro-independent DIY labels] are small-scale operations usually run from private addresses by one or two individuals who undertake all the tasks necessary for the commercial release of a recording themselves (from making contractual arrangements with musicians to organizing finances, from designing and packaging to promotional activities and the organization of distribution).”

While Strachan refers to “micro” or small labels specifically, rather than any of the larger labels that exist in the DIY “world”\(^7\), the definition, save for the specific numbers stated, could be broadly applied to DIY labels of any size. Moreover, there is often no clear distinction between DIY producers and fans, since individuals involved in the DIY world may play a role in production while also being fans of the music. Ultimately, to be involved in the DIY scene assumes some form of fandom and appreciation of the music it revolves around. As one interviewee in a three-part BBC Four documentary “Music for misfits: The story of indie” (2015), which offers an evocative account of the development of indie music in the UK, states: “instead of 10,000 watching or, 5,000 watching, actually there was [sic], twenty of you in there, loving this moment” (The DIY movement, 2015).

In this sense, a small number of individuals take on multiple roles, distinguishing this kind of music making from the big mainstream record labels which manifest a more hierarchical structure and exert greater control over the creative practices of the musicians and artists (Tschmuck, 2006, p. 148). However, Bannister (2006, p. 78) notes that, unlike post-punk music which naturally developed out of punk music, mass media played a key role in bringing about indie music. Therefore, while accounts of it stress its collectivist nature, it was to some extent “stratified, hierarchical, parochial and traditional” (ibid., p. 78).

To explain the above use of the terms “DIY” and “indie”, “DIY” itself can be thought of as an umbrella term, embracing an array of different types of music, rather than acting as

\(^7\) Nonetheless even these larger labels never come at all close in size to the “big three” mainstream record labels that dominate the industry: Universal Music Group, Sony Music Entertainment and Warner Music Group.
a descriptor for one genre or an associated “sound”. That said, there are of course distinguishing features of DIY music which give it its “unpolished” charm and which major labels often try to replicate when working with artists or bands with an “indie” image. This raw sound is often considered a marker of authenticity, a salient quality of DIY music (Gordon, 2005; Hesmondhalgh, 1999; Strachan, 2007). Additionally, common features of DIY are the ethos and organisation behind it, alongside a reluctance to make money.

Indeed, indie has been portrayed as a scene that strives for both autonomy and authenticity by putting distance between itself and the mainstream (Luvaas, 2013, p. 96). This inclination is common in the scene as its members refuse to compromise their indie values “for the sake of a quick buck” (ibid.). This is unsurprising given the tension between creativity and commerce, which I touched upon in the previous section, under the subheading of “Reliance upon the inauthentic”. I go on to explore the various markers of authenticity in the context of indie and indie pop music, drawing on a range of sources, some of which are “scholarly” and others more anecdotal from individuals involved in the movement.

Episode one of the 2015 BBC documentary “Music for Misfits”, entitled “The DIY movement”, to which I have already referred to, was recommended to me by numerous research participants. It features interviews with individuals and bands who were deemed by the BBC to be heavily involved in the DIY world and well-known for their efforts from the 1970s onwards, when the DIY “story” is often said to have begun. Understandably, nostalgia comes through in the interviewees’ recollections, as they offer their accounts of a former golden era of indie, before it started to become increasingly commercialised in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Hesmondhalgh, 1999, p. 35). Nostalgia is pervasive in the indie scene as it strives for the re-establishment of past musical customs (Fonarow, 2006, p. 29). As such, indie recreates a glorious past while at the same time being musically innovative (ibid., p. 50).

Of course, any mention of a “golden age” or “classic” period in any account of a social movement or community is subjective and thus imagined in terms of individual experience and preferences (Gordon, 2005, p. 164). And, as I argue in chapter two, while there may be collective longing for a specific period, this is interwoven with personal
nostalgia. On this note, I disregard any quest for specific dates and simply acknowledge that there is a consensus about a former period where indie was in its heyday, which may be understood as occupying different stages in time, featuring different music and bands and not necessarily appreciated for the same characteristics from one person to the next.

As such, the discussion that follows both looks back at this era, while also referring to current practices which now exist as fringe phenomena but are still in keeping with these original indie values. Having not lived through such an era, “Music for Misfits” was useful for me to watch during my data collection to help “fill in the gaps” in my knowledge and also because it came to be an interesting and provocative talking point in some of the discussions I recorded. While the documentary is, on the one hand, an excellent resource of interviews, it is not without its limitations. Of course, the problem with anything that promises to recount a history or “story” of a movement is that it will always be through one or a combination of perspectives, and for this reason, will miss something. This is also supported by the point made in chapter two, that recollections constitute forgotten details and reconstruction (Dames, 2001, p. 15; Storey, 2003, p. 103).

Echoing this in his thesis on the ethics of punk music as a particular subset of DIY music, Gordon (2005, pp. 16-17) highlights the problem with books that claim to be “definitive” stories or guides to music movements such as punk. He notes the tendency to herald particular individuals above others and to recycle the same narratives, which are not always echoed by other individuals who were actually there and experiencing the movement at the time. In this sense, the BBC Four documentary looks upon the DIY movement through a single lens, rather than living up to its claims to be “the story”, which I argue does not exist in such a universalist way. As such, I seek to provide background into the DIY music movement, drawing on a range of sources, from various ethnographic works of different DIY scenes to accounts from speakers from the BBC documentary. This is intended as an informative, background account, rather than a definitive narrative.

In terms of the literature that exists on the topic of DIY music, it is largely ethnographic in nature and offers in-depth insights into various DIY scenes, covering a range of music styles and sounds. Strachan (2007, p. 247), for example, describes the catchment of his research as small or micro labels that release what has come to be known as “indie” music, referencing Hesmondhalgh’s (1999) paper, renowned among music scholars for its
insights and background on indie as it exists now: a popular music genre. With its roots in Britain and commonly referred to as “alternative rock” in the US, the term “indie” emerged out of the DIY movement. Indie as a term was coined in the 1980s and is an abbreviation of “independent”, very much wearing its alternative production methods and organisation on its sleeve, and positioning itself in contrast to the mainstream popular music industry (Hesmondhalgh, 1999, p. 35).

Giving an indication of the type of music that indie is often associated with, many consider music magazine NME’s 1986 C86 compilation tape, featuring songs by the bands Primal Scream, the Pastels, the Wedding Present, Big Flame, the Soup Dragons, the Wolfhounds, the Shop Assistants, and the Weather Prophets, as emblematic of indie music (Fonarow, 2006, p. 41). That said, as Hibbett (2005, p. 59) points out, any explanation of “what is indie” depends on the person. Their background, social class and age are strongly tied to what kind of indie music and which bands individuals come to know and appreciate. Some indie fans suggest the “C86 period” marked a shift in focus away from politics and towards the music itself (Dale, 2010). For Hibbett (2005, p. 59), his loyalty lies with indie rock as a subgenre of indie music, and he associates it with musicians such as “Will Oldham, a.k.a. Palace, Bonny Prince Billie; the Silver Jews; Smog [and] Sebadoh”. In drawing on these points I emphasise the broad nature of indie music, the idea that it can mean different things to different individuals and demonstrate that it encapsulates a wide range of artists.

Moreover, strong narratives circulate among members of the indie movement which emphasise the professionalism of dominant players in the industry, functioning as something for those in DIY music scenes to position themselves against, as a way to make sense of their own activities as independent practitioners (Fonarow, 2006, p. 26; Strachan, 2007, pp. 245-246). The mainstream music industry is generally viewed as having “a lack of substance or artistic creativity”, favouring standardised, formulaic music produced with the aid of technology and driven by goals of commercial success and profit maximisation (Hibbett, 2005, p. 62). In stark contrast, the rise of indie “was a statement of this is what I wanna do and a lot of bands just put their records out without even a record deal” (Iain McNay, Cherry Red Records, The DIY movement, 2015). In sum, such a “countercultural movement”, as it has been dubbed (The DIY movement, 2015) visibly differed to the mainstream music industry precisely due to its Do It Yourself approach –
essentially, people playing music, putting records out and organising gigs themselves, with little or no ties to the dominant record labels of the time.

In tune with the notion of authenticity and the raw, unpolished sound, which I noted was a salient quality of DIY music (Gordon, 2005; Hesmondhalgh, 1999; Strachan, 2007), indie music itself is therefore “personal, live, youthful, organic, self-made, original, and motivated by concerns of artistic expression rather than commercial acquisition” (Fonarow, 2006, p. 188). Instead of using expensive production techniques or relying heavily on technology, indie is about simplicity and takes a straightforward, no frills approach to music production very much in tune with its punk roots (Fonarow, 2006, p. 42; Wallach, 2008, p. 100).

The DIY ethos acclaims the simple, human essence of creativity, in opposition to modern technologies which enable mass production (Chivers Yochim and Biddinger, 2008, p. 193). The indie scene is nostalgic for these qualities and therefore cherishes human touch via personal exchanges and manual production (Fonarow, 2006, p. 74). Vinyl is thus symbolic of the more natural, human qualities espoused in the scene, quite apart from the “metallic, synthetic, digital, modern CD”, for instance (ibid., p. 49). As such, vinyl represents both scepticism vis-à-vis progress and nostalgia for one’s first contact with indie music for those who have grown up listening to music on vinyl records (ibid., p. 48).

The goal is not to make money like the major record labels, but to make good music accessible to whoever wants to come along and listen. This again ties in with the discussion of art versus commerce and gives indie something to position itself in opposition to. As indie pop musician Pete Dale (2010, p. 251) suggests, the emergence of such a disinterest in commercial success and moving beyond the indie scene was likely frustrating for music journalists, such as those at the NME, whose careers were at risk as a result of these “indie no-hopers”.

Consequently, regardless of the lack of drive to make money and the accepted view that money will more often be lost rather than gained, if indie music is successful, this would be purely happenstance, since music-making is not seen as a business, and any profits made go back into funding activities like putting bands on or releasing records. In this
sense, music making is largely considered a hobby rather than any kind of commercial pursuit. Moreover, Fonarow (2006, p. 30) extensively discusses related indie values, such as the intention for the audience to have the “purest possible experience of music”. This is exemplified in the indie performance, which emphasises the amateur nature of the music rather than professionalism; a deliberate attempt to avoid eye contact with the audience as well as spoken comments and engagement and, interestingly, shunning of classic mainstream music “performance postures” (ibid., p. 192).

Moving beyond musical considerations, the emergence of indie marked an alternative way of organising driven by “not just a sound, but an attitude and an ethos” and with it, came a “clear […] sense of rebellion” (The DIY movement, 2015). This opposition towards the mainstream is bound to a politics of resistance and a more ethical and moral approach to organising, which banished hierarchies and aimed to liberate artists and musicians (Strachan, 2007, pp. 250-251). Such a strong code of ethics and politics was born in the era of punk and post-punk music in the 1970s through to the 1980s, to which as suggested earlier DIY indie music very much owes its heritage (Hesmondhalgh, 1999, p. 38). There was a certain “attitude” and ethos which centred around the idea of doing things yourself and moved not just across but journalism and fashion as well (The DIY movement, 2015). Jayne Casey of Liverpool bands Big in Japan, Pink Military and Pink Industry comments: “it was across fashion, there were fanzines rather than magazines. People were just doing it, you know, regardless” (Jayne Casey, Big in Japan, The DIY movement, 2015).

Specifically, the indie fashion style is about “dressing down” in a way that means performers blend with their audience. T-shirts and jeans are common and second-hand clothes particularly popular (Fonarow, 2006, pp. 43-46). Furthermore, when asked what they liked about the DIY indie pop world, many of the people I met during my time getting to know the indie pop scene in England commented on its inclusiveness, noting how the community was anti-racist and anti-sexist and generally very welcoming and friendly. These characteristics again highlight how DIY culture is about people collectively positioning themselves against dominant ideas and politics and carving out a space which goes some way towards resisting the structures and hegemonies ingrained in society as a whole.
While the liberating and rebellious qualities of DIY music and indie specifically are widely celebrated, as with any form of opposition, it relies upon a “mainstream” of sorts to position itself against. As Kruse (2003, cited in Dolan, 2010, p. 460) notes, indie music “has therefore been continually engaged in an economic and ideological struggle in which its “outsider” status is re-examined, re-defined, and re-articulated to sets of musical practices”. In this sense, against the best intentions of the DIY ethos, indie still depends to some extent upon the very systems it opposes. Moreover, Dolan (2010, p. 460) recognises the potential irony underlying indie, that it could become unintentionally elitist. This is given that such a fixation on countercultural and niche interests simultaneously liberates yet excludes people. Indeed, due to the small-scale distribution of indie music, actually finding new alternative bands takes a significant amount of “time, effort and curiosity”. As such, indie consumers tend to turn to fanzines, social media platforms such as indie labels’ websites and blogs as resources of commentary, valuable information and the latest updates (ibid., p. 465). In other words, indie “has value precisely because it appeals (or appears to appeal) to a smaller elite segment of society” (ibid., p. 460).

Moreover, by the turn of the 1990s, indie had come to transcend its original audience of “students and (lower) middle-class youth” (Hesmondhalgh, 1999, p. 35), encapsulating a broader audience and moving more towards the “popular” than ever before. Nowadays, “indie” may be used as a descriptor for a broad range of music, not necessarily obscure, and some of which may be affiliated with major labels. The line between independents and majors is less overt – although still visible – and the terrain of the music industry consists of “amateur, semi-professional bands, hobbyist record labels and reissue imprints, collectors, fanzine writers and small-scale distributors working across a variety of genres” (Strachan, 2007, p. 246). I now turn to a description and discussion of indie pop music as a narrower subset of indie music.

4.5.2 Indie pop

“Indie pop” refers to the interesting dualism of the independent, as described above, and the popular, or as Dale (2010, p. 232) puts it, “the outsider who wants to be inside and yet still, impossibly, remain outside, it could be argued”. Moreover, Dale (ibid.) notes the
inherent problems with the term, due to the point I made earlier regarding how indie came to be a descriptor for a broad range of music, not necessarily obscure, and some of which may be affiliated with major labels (Strachan, 2007, p. 246). For this reason, Dale (2010, p. 234) refers to the scene as “cutie”, since he notes it was the term used to describe the music at the time it emerged in the 1980s; this is in keeping with his commitment to the language of the movement, which is validated by his own experience in the scene and a “heavy reliance” on fanzines, rather than terms applied to the scene by outsiders. Personally, I will continue to use “indie pop” as the common descriptor as I note that this is the current term of choice used by those in the English scene, where I undertook my research.

In the previous subsection “The DIY movement and indie”, I emphasised core value pervading the DIY movement and indie music: authenticity. Authenticity is thus also a central concern of indie pop music. Indeed, Dolan (2010, p. 462) asserts that the style of indie pop music is particularly concerned with Moore’s (2002) first-person or “personal authenticity”, characterised by “honesty, sincerity [and] realness”, which are subjective qualities and which may be felt and interpreted differently from one person to another. Such concerns over personal authenticity can be found in indie pop lyrics, and Dolan (2010, p. 457) includes the following excerpt from Stephin Merritt’s “This little ukulele” as a prime example:

“I wish I had an orchestra behind me
To show you how I feel
Well, the orchestra remains imaginary
But this little ukulele’s real

I wish I had an orchestra behind me
When you lose faith, an orchestra gives proof
Well, an orchestra can tell you pretty stories
But this little ukulele tells the truth”

Dolan (ibid.) points to the irony in Stephin’s lyrics as he insincerely expresses a desire for the validation of an orchestra – “an orchestra gives proof” – yet at the same time states “But this ukulele’s real […] this little ukulele tells the truth”, making a claim to
authenticity and thus denouncing it at the same time. The lyrics therefore suggest this is a parody, but nonetheless highlight the significance of the pursuit of authenticity. This underlying academic or intellectual tone in the lyrics is another quality of indie pop music. Indeed, a large proportion of indie fans are university educated and/or work in universities (Fonarow, 2006, p. 52).

In terms of common features of the cutie style, musically many groups took inspiration from the 1960s. For instance, Primal Scream took influence from the Byrds’ “guitar sound, tambourine parts” and, beyond the music itself, they even mimicked the Byrds’ haircuts, while at the same time staying true to punk influences and maintaining strong opposition to the mainstream (Dale, 2010, pp. 239-240, p. 249). Moreover, discussing the implications of the entrance of so-called popular music into music scenes outside of the mainstream, Kruse (1993, p. 38) asserts that this kind of “pop” remains alternative and strictly avoids the key distinguishing features of its popular counterparts, such as “the mammoth guitar solos of heavy metal, the life and death seriousness and sonic overload of hardcore, the technological excesses of experimental music” and so on. This is certainly the case in indie pop, which is partly exemplified in the common use of words among scene members, such as “poppy”, “fuzzy”, “dancey” and “shouty”, to describe indie pop gigs and activities. Such descriptors suggest “pop” is more indicative of the upbeat moments shared at gigs, rather than any ties to commercialism or selling out to the mainstream.

Relatedly, Dolan (2010, p. 463) emphasises the kitsch nature of indie pop music, explaining that a kitsch style is a result of any kind of borrowing of past ideas on which to put a new spin, rather than using the term in a pejorative sense. Specifically, in the same way that indie music is nostalgic for simpler and supposedly “purer” times (Fonarow, 2006, p. 29), indie pop adopts a simplistic style and often uses unusual instruments and old equipment such as the melodica, “thus preserving the memory of some distant and imaginary past” (Dolan, 2010, p. 464). In doing this, indie pop is not trying to hide this process of reclaiming old pop culture and revitalising it – instead, it celebrates this and makes no attempt to hide it, in tune with the honesty at its heart. Consequently, the “lo-fi sound” of indie pop “not only acts as a self-critique, but as a justification – it declares through its production that it is unpretentious”, allowing musicians “to indulge in unabashedly tuneful melodies, sentimentality, over-used clichés
and other elements that we would usually cuss as traditional markers of mainstream music” (ibid., p. 465). Additionally, the authentic “lo-fi sound” foregrounds the media itself in indie pop productions, as the listener is deliberately made aware of the technologies used to generate, record and broadcast the indie pop music (ibid.).

In tune with this fixation on the past as a purer, simpler time and related lo-fi production, indie pop has been said to show signs of refusal to grow up by music journalist Simon Reynolds (Reynolds, 2007, p. 15). As Reynolds (ibid.) also notes, simply scanning the names of indie pop bands offers support to such a claim: “Soup Dragons, Woodentops, Five Go Down To The Sea, Flowerpot Men [and] Talulah Gosh”. At the same time, themes of “innocence” and childishness are evident not just in indie pop lyrics, but across cover art and fanzines, too (Reynolds, 2011, p. 15). The nostalgic longing for the past also translates to amateur performances (Dale, 2010, p. 268). In particular, the indie scene often takes inspiration from and refers to the sixties as it was a period where themes of “childhood and lost innocence” were commonly present (Reynolds, 2007, p. 16). Reynolds (2007) argues that at the heart of the nostalgic yearning of indie pop lies an idealised and pure image of childhood – a period often described as “simpler, happier and more genuine” – which stems from “grief for a lost spontaneity, impulsiveness and unselfconsciousness” (pp. 15-16).

More broadly, Fonarow observes that the term “indie” is itself a “diminutive”, suggesting “smallness, childhood, affection, and, at times, derision” (2006, p. 45). Taking as an example the Glaswegian group the Pastels, who were key players in the indie music scene in the 1980s, Dale points to the theme of “childishness” running throughout their music (2010, p. 257). Specifically, he notes that in their single “I Don’t Know Why”:

“the one-note piano part which interjects towards the end of the song recalls an infant joyously stabbing repeatedly on the key of a toy instrument; the vocal is delivered in a register most prepubescent boys could easily attain; the guitar, as noted, sounds as if it is in the hands of a near-beginner; and so on.”

As well as capturing the childlike qualities of the music, reflected in the playful “one-note piano part” and “prepubescent” vocals, this quotation also emphasises the unprofessional, simplistic nature of the music, “as if in the hands of a near-beginner”
(Dale, 2010, p. 257), again demonstrating the characteristics of indie pop discussed throughout this subsection. Luvaas also suggests that the sound of indie pop is particularly simplistic and melodic (Luvaas, 2013, p. 95). Having shed light on indie pop music and its unique qualities, I turn next to a discussion of aesthetics and visuals, to focus on the sensory aspects of experiencing music.

4.6 Summary

In the first section of this chapter, I introduced the concept of authenticity, drawing on a range of literature that define authenticity as a synonym of “unspoiled”, “genuine” and “innocent” (Handler, 1986, p. 2; Bendix, 1997, p. 15). Moreover, I distinguished between materialist and constructivist approaches that see authenticity on one hand as an inscribed quality (Jones, 2010, p. 182) and on the other as ascribed by the observer and influenced by the social context in which the authentic phenomenon is appreciated (Handler, 1986; Moore, 2002; Peterson, 2005). Furthermore, I noted the significance of being “true” to oneself in definitions of authenticity (Trilling, 1972, p. 11). While self-identity is not a topic that I explore in depth in this thesis, the dichotomy between the “true self” and corrupted society is significant as it demonstrates the tension and binary nature of the narratives circulating around authenticity, as well as being indicative of the human qualities that underlie authenticity.

I then turned to the “unmediated” quality of “authentic” performances, emphasising that the message between creator and observer should be uncontaminated and consistent (Trilling, 1972, p. 13; Moore, 2002, p. 213; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998, cited in Fine, 2003, p. 155). The authentic value of the stories and background behind the creators and their pieces was also highlighted, using the striking example of self-taught artists who are uninfluenced by formal education (Fine, 2003) and who can thus transport their audience back to more innocent times. I also underlined that professionalism is regarded as a contaminant of an “authentic” performance (Walser, 1993, cited in Moore, 2002, p. 213). Finally, I argued that authenticity relies upon the inauthentic to define itself (Bendix, 1997, p. 9). The conflict between authenticity and commerce was then discussed as a pervasive theme within the DIY and indie pop scene.
The following sections “Nostalgia for an authentic past” and “Objects as symbols of an authentic past” teased out the overlap between the two in academic literature. In the former, I built on the “Triggers of nostalgia” section of the previous chapter, noting that nostalgia is evoked by a perceived loss of authenticity, as one seeks to restore a seemingly more authentic past (Baudrillard, 1994; Batcho, 1995, p. 141; Bendix, 1997, p. 8; Goulding, 2001, p. 578; Elliott and Turner, 2012, p. 48; Shonk Jr and McClure, 2017). Thus, authenticity and nostalgia together can help to establish continuity between past and present (Bennett, 2018, p. 461). In a contemporary context, nostalgia is triggered due to increasing commercialism and mass mediation, which are perceived as inauthentic (Huysen, 2006, cited in Kasabian, 2017).

The differences between nostalgia and authenticity were also outlined. Namely, that authenticity bridges past and present, providing continuity, while nostalgia divides the two, polarising the present moment as insincere (Bennett, 2018, p. 453). Further, one may be nostalgic for fabricated former times (Pavda, 2014, p. 26), whereas authenticity is concerned with details which establish phenomena as genuine (Green-Lewis, 2000, p. 66). Moreover, digital reproduction has allowed the past to be reproduced entirely decontextualized, rendering it a copy and thus inauthentic. This is connected to retro goods, which evoke indirect, collective nostalgia for former times which may never have been experienced (Grainge, 2000; Brown et al., 2003a; Brown et al., 2003b).

In the latter section, “Objects as symbols of an authentic past”, I turned to the literature on authenticity and tangible objects, and particularly, features of objects which are deemed authentic. In outlining these features, I built on my argument in the previous chapter, in which I discussed tangible objects as vehicles of meaning and evocations of nostalgia (Belk, 1990; Hirsch, 1992; Holbrook and Schindler, 2003; Wilson, 2014, p. 110). As such, objects can be viewed as both symbols of authenticity as well as vehicles of nostalgia. In particular, the complete sensory experience that tangible artefacts has been deemed a significant marker of authenticity (Wilson, 2014, p. 118) as well as a trigger of nostalgia (Wildschut et al., 2006, p. 982; Dragojlovic, 2014; Lowenthal, 2015, p. 395; Bennett, 2018, p. 451).

The importance of being true to origins emphasised the role of the history, biography, story and workmanship behind objects in establishing authenticity (Bendix, 1997, p. 15;
Green-Lewis, 2000, p. 54; Jones, 2010, p. 188). Additionally, signs of wear and tear and natural aging of physical artefacts were deemed indicative of human qualities (Trilling, 1972, pp. 127-128; Lowenthal, 2015, p. 254). This is in line with the argument I made in chapter three, where I discuss the appeal of imperfections in analogue media (Pinch and Reinecke, 2009, p. 163). The human qualities and “aura” of unique tangible objects were then highlighted (Benjamin, 1935; Belk, 1990; Baudrillard, 1994) and opposed to inauthentic mass production (Ruskin, cited in Trilling, 1972, p. 127; Weisethaunet and Lindberg, 2010, p. 468).

Finally, in the section “The origins and values of indie pop”, I discussed the importance of authenticity as a prevailing feature of DIY music (Gordon, 2005; Hesmondhalgh, 1999; Strachan, 2007). This is exemplified in the anti-commercial nature of indie music and resistance of the mainstream music industry (Fonarow, 2006, p. 26; Strachan, 2007; pp. 245-246) which is seen to be too focused on profit maximisation (Hibbett, 2005, p. 62). Moreover, this is also represented via a raw, unpolished sound and image. Indie is about simplicity rather than high cost production and embellishment, and this comes through in performances of indie music (Fonarow, 2006, p. 192). I also emphasised the fondness of the indie scene for simple and outdated means of productions (Chivers Yochim and Biddinger, 2008, p. 193), highlighting the role of the vinyl record as a symbol of more natural and human qualities (Fonarow, 2006, p. 48).

Turning to indie pop as the specific subgenre of music that this research is concerned with, I touched on the dualism of “indie” and “pop”, drawing on the work of Kruse (1993, p. 38) to highlight indie pop’s avoidance of certain features of popular music to distance itself from the mainstream. Moreover, I note the signs of “a refusal to grow up” (Reynolds, cited in Kruse, 1993, p. 36) exemplified in themes of childishness and “innocence” in indie pop lyrics, fanzines and cover art (Dale, 2010, p. 231). Of relevance to this research is the importance of “lo-fi” production, the simple approach to music-making and resistance towards using the latest technology. With a preference and nostalgia for the past, indie pop thus lends itself well to this research, given that physical music formats such as cassettes and LP records are still widely produced and consumed.
4.7 Conceptual framework

Having summarised the key arguments in this chapter, I now turn to the conceptual framework underpinning this thesis (Figure 1). Bringing together the literature reviewed in chapters two to four, driven by the findings from my data, the framework highlights the role that authentic media play in evoking nostalgia. As explained in the introduction chapter, discussions with participants centred around personally meaningful music covers, and so these constitute the authentic media referred to in the framework. This contributes to the lack of literature addressing the significance of music covers in relation to nostalgia and authenticity. As is evident from the diagram, nostalgia is the summoning of private and/or collective recollections which centre on one or more objects of yearning. The objects of yearning are thus symbolic of comforting feelings such as belonging, security and love, which contribute to counteracting feelings of discontinuity by providing a sense of continuity. I delve into each of the components of the framework in more detail in the remainder of this section.

![Figure 1 - Conceptual Framework](image-url)
The starting point of the conceptual framework is a feeling of discontinuity, which I have argued is fertile ground for nostalgic longing (Davis, 1979, pp. 57, 104; Tannock, 1995, p. 459). A sense of discontinuity may be caused by life transitions, loss of a loved one or social change and the resulting fear or uncertainty surrounding the future (Davis, 1979, pp. 57, 104; Tannock, 1995, p. 459; Lowenthal, 2015, p. 117). In the context of this thesis, the move away from analogue towards digital music is a known form of discontinuity, as explained in the introduction chapter. A sense of discontinuity engendered by the changes of life stages of the long-standing members interviewed is also posited to be a trigger of nostalgic recollections. Hence, I have foregrounded this in the framework. The inclusion of continuity demonstrates the existential function nostalgia plays as a compensatory mechanism by providing meaning and thus counteracting perceived deficiencies in the present moment (Kaplan, 1987, p. 482; Gabriel, 1993, p. 121; Wilson, 2014, p. 26).

Tangible, authentic media are characterised by uniqueness (Benjamin, 1936; Pinch and Reinecke, 2009, p. 163; Jones, 2010, p. 189), imperfections (Schrey, 2014, p. 35) and wear and tear (Schrey, 2014, p. 35; Lowenthal, 2015, p. 254). Additionally, being true to origins is a marker of authenticity (Jones, 2010, p. 184) and may be expressed via a genuine story or background (Frith, 1996, p. 171; Fine, 2003, p. 175; Peterson, 2005; Weisethaunet and Lindberg, 2010, p. 468). The concept of “technostalgia” discussed in chapter three demonstrates that media themselves can function as gateways to memories and triggers of nostalgia (Pickering and Keightley, 2006, p. 925); hence, the authentic media are positioned as evocative of nostalgia. Taking into consideration the context of this research, “authentic” indie pop music, is characterised by being “lo-fi”, amateur, simple and childish (Fonarow, 2006; Reynolds, 2007; Dale, 2010; Dolan, 2010; Luvaas, 2013).

In chapter two, I identified types of nostalgia, as exemplified in Table 1. Teasing out such classifications within the literature allows for the identification of the various categories of nostalgia and provides a sense of its apparent boundaries. For instance, Davis’ (1979) orders of nostalgia demonstrate that there is room for criticality within nostalgic reflections; in this sense, one may be consciously aware of their nostalgia to the extent that they acknowledge that the object of yearning may be romanticised. The literature reviewed in this chapter thus allows me to identify nostalgia within the data I collected and either classify these instances in accordance with existing categories, or
problematise/extend these categories. Furthermore, the distinction between private/personal nostalgia (Davis, 1979; Havlena and Holak, 1996) and virtual/historical nostalgia (Stern, 1992; Havlena and Holak, 1996; Holak et al., 2005) confirms that the object of yearning need not be experienced first-hand; also, nostalgia may be felt collectively if related to a shared history. Hence, I highlight that nostalgia concerns both private and collective recollections.

Beneath the private and collective memories evoked lie objects of yearning, which, as chapter two outlined, may be tangible or abstract. Settings (Batcho, 1995), loved ones (Batcho, 1995, p. 139; Wildschut et al., 2006), home (Anspach, 1934, p. 383; McCann, 1943; Nawas and Platt, 1965, p. 51; Rosen, 1975; Havlena and Holak, 1991; Sedikides et al., 2004, p. 202; Wilson, 2014, p. 32), a “golden age” (Belk, 1990, p. 670; Havlena and Holak, 1991, p. 325; Stern, 1992, p. 16; Tannock, 1995, p. 456; Grainge, 2000, p. 28; Wilson, 2014, p. 27) and childhood (Plater, 2014, p. 107; Havlena and Holak, 1991, p. 324; Holbrook and Schindler, 2003) were all discussed as objects of yearning. In addition, authentic media not only act as triggers of nostalgia but also become objects of nostalgic longing in themselves (Batcho, 1995; Pinch and Reinecke, 2009, p. 163; Schrey, 2014, p. 29; Bolin, 2015; Lepa and Tritakis, 2016, p. 27).

These objects of yearning have been connected to deeper feelings such as belonging, love and security (Davis, 1979; Stern, 1992, p. 16; Boym, 2001; Sedikides et al., 2008, p. 307; Wilson, 2014, p. 86). For instance, the homeland is often at the centre of nostalgic desire (Anspach, 1934, p. 383; McCann, 1943; Nawas and Platt, 1965, p. 51; Rosen, 1975; Havlena and Holak, 1991; Sedikides et al., 2004, p. 202; Wilson, 2014, p. 32) as it is symbolic of a connection and sense of intimacy with the world (Boym, 2001, p. 25).

Categorising concepts which are central to this thesis and presenting them in this manner allows me to clearly present the relationships between them. However, I note that there is also the possibility of overlap between them. For instance, private and collective memories are presented in separate boxes, yet one may experience both conjointly. My reasons for separating them are guided in part by the literature, some of which focuses on features of analogue nostalgia and the shared memories of analogue culture, to emphasise the collective nature of the experience across generations in relation to specific media. Thus, I see the conceptual framework as a communicative tool rather than a reductionist
means of reading my data and remain open to the complexities and overlaying of its various components.

This thesis explores what long-standing members of the UK indie pop music scene, triggered by discussions of personally meaningful cover art, are nostalgic for. This is especially timely given the growing body of literature on technostalgia and analogue nostalgia that have primarily focused on physical media but not, as of yet, on the broader features of analogue media culture. In doing so, this research aims to unearth underlying feelings at the heart of participants’ longing. The choice of cover art is significant, as it intersects music, images and objects, which I have outlined as powerful sensory inputs which are known to trigger nostalgia. Additionally, this thesis aims to explore the role that authenticity plays in grounding these indie pop fans’ nostalgic yearning. As demonstrated in chapter four, judgements of authenticity contribute to establishing the past as superior to present circumstances. Moreover, objects perceived as authentic can function as vehicles of meaning which transport the beholder to earlier times. This study extends these discussions, exploring the relationship between nostalgia and authenticity in greater depth than existing research, in a scene which is fertile ground for nostalgia and upholds a salient set of values relating to authenticity.

Given that tangible objects can be longed for in and of themselves, I also ask what role authentic media play in these indie pop fans’ experiences of music. This is especially timely given the move away from analogue music, towards digital music and the collective fear over the loss of analogue music culture.

In the following methodology chapter, I offer a detailed account of how I operationalised my research.
Chapter Five: Methodology

5.1 Introduction

As is evident from the research questions presented in the introduction chapter of this thesis, my primary aim is to explore how long-standing members of the indie pop music scene reflect on their experiences of music and make sense of the scene, while shedding light on the role of their chosen covers in their conceptualisations. As such, this research foregrounds the role of tangible and visual aspects of music in indie pop consumers’ experiences, given that physical formats continue to be produced and consumed by members of the scene.

My research was rather more inductive than deductive as I did not originally set out to discuss the themes of nostalgia and authenticity nor have in mind the conceptual framework that later emerged from the review of the literature on these two themes. As I explain in the last section of this chapter “Analysing the data”, I did not code the data striving to “fit it” to pre-established theory, since nostalgic reminiscences and the role of props perceived as authentic by the participants only became apparent from my analysis of the transcribed interviews (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 83). However, once the participants’ nostalgic yearning and the perceived authenticity of the props were clearly demarcated, I could present the findings through the lens of the conceptual framework described at the end of the previous chapter.

As I discuss in more depth later in this chapter under the heading “Selecting an empirical site and sampling strategy”, I do not seek to generalise my findings; by its very nature indie pop music stands apart from the mainstream popular music industry and my sample was not chosen with the intention of representing the wider population of indie pop fans. This chapter outlines my research approach, detailing the ontological and epistemological beliefs underpinning my research; ethical issues; the choice of an empirical site and the sampling strategy employed when selecting participants; methods of data collection, including my reasons for conducting semi-structured interviews and my role as a participant observer in the scene under study; and the process I followed to analyse the collected data.
Before proceeding, however, I consider my own position within this research, and the impact this is likely to have had both on the research design and outcomes of the study. This is fuelled by Olson’s (2011, pp. 13-14) reflections on the “standpoint” of the researcher. Olson argues that everyone influences the research they undertake regardless of how objective they try to be. As such, we should question how our background, both academic and personal (if such a clean-cut distinction can be made) will affect the research questions and the collection and analysis of data. Olson (ibid., p. 13) therefore encourages us to ask: “What do you bring to this field of study? Why is this topic important to you? What experiences have you had in relation to your research topic?”.

My answers to these questions are bound up with issues of how I relate to and portray those who participate in this study, given that I was not a member of the indie pop scene prior to starting this research, nor even aware of its existence. The implications of this are discussed in greater detail later in this chapter under the umbrella of “Research ethics”. While I cannot claim to be “local” to the scene I studied, at least in the early stages of my research, this thesis stems from a long-standing appreciation of the visual elements of music, and a strong interest in independent artists and creativity outside of the mainstream music industry, as I explain in the introduction. This has inevitably shaped my research design as well as the interview process. As such, I seek to avoid “[hiding] behind the cloak of alleged neutrality”, as Fine et al. (2003, p. 169) put it, instead acknowledging that my existing beliefs, ideas and understandings of this research terrain have inevitably shaped my empirical work.

Reflecting on how this unfolded in practice, I noticed I engaged with participants in the earlier stages of my research more through a shared appreciation of album, EP and single cover art across a range of music genres not specific to indie pop, a personal preference for independent music and the indie pop events we had attended. In the latter stages, however, I felt more deeply connected to participants through discussions surrounding people we both knew – in other words, those that I had interviewed and gotten to know, albeit briefly, who were also friends of the participant(s). For example, I got to know Andy, an illustrator and fan based in Nottingham who has designed covers for artists and
bands on the indie pop scene. Numerous other participants then referred to Andy and his work during their interviews.

So Pete B, an indie pop musician, producer and fan based in Stoke-on-Trent, mentioned that many indie pop bands ask Andy to design their covers and asked me if I knew him. When I confirmed that I did and expressed an appreciation for his illustrations, we were then able to have a detailed discussion of a cover he produced for a single by the UK-based band the Fireworks. Having become familiar with Andy’s work during my immersion in the scene, I was able to picture the cover of the particular single and have a richer discussion with Pete B. Similarly, in his interview, Trev – who was based in London at the time the interview was conducted, and runs Oddbox Records – praised Andy for the artwork he had done for Oddbox, which led me to ask about a portrait of Trev that Andy had brought along to his own interview. Moreover, references to influential indie pop music became more familiar to me, opening up new avenues for discussion and deepening my understanding of how those I interviewed related to the artwork they had brought along to the interview. In short, without the knowledge attained from my immersion in the scene, I could not have held in-depth conversations and built as much rapport with the participants, both of which led to the generation of the rich insights which I present in this thesis.

Intertwined with my personal feelings towards the topic and experiences born out of my exposure to the indie pop scene during my enrolment on the PhD programme is my academic interest in independent musicians, which, to re-state Olson’s (2011, pp. 13-14) point, is interwoven with my personal interests. As discussed in the introduction chapter where I consider the motivating factors which led me to this thesis, I previously undertook a small-scale study of independent musicians based in the Midlands of England for my undergraduate dissertation. In terms of the methodological approach I took, this involved conducting group interviews with three bands and sending a self-completion questionnaire to a fourth band to shed light on how they related to the idea of branding their music. The combination of these methods aimed to illuminate how these groups of

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8 I discuss how participants agreed for me to not anonymise their identity and use their real names for this research in the following section “Research ethics”.
musicians collectively worked towards resolving the underlying tensions between creativity and commerce.

As such, while indie pop was unfamiliar to me prior to starting this research, I held pre-existing ideas about independent music and its relationship with commerce, which played an important role in my subsequent exploration and interpretation of the scene. Additionally, I was aware of potential issues arising as a result of discussing indie pop music using academic language relating to the consumption of music as a product – something which could alienate or frustrate my participants who may not view music as a commodity but as a creative outlet. Having outlined my prior experience of and interest in independent music, I elaborate on my use of language in the following discussion of “Research ethics”.

5.2 Research ethics

Before collecting data, the ethical implications of this research were reviewed and addressed to ensure as far as possible that no harm, “physical, emotional, or any other kind” (Fontana and Frey, 2008, p. 142), would be inflicted on anyone directly or indirectly involved in the study. I note here that my interpretation of ethics and thus what constitutes “ethical practice” in research derives in large part from the process of applying for ethical consent via my institution. This process differs broadly from one institution to the next, and indeed the University of Leicester had recently revised the application process when I applied, making it more extensive and nuanced than it had been previously. I was required to submit my application online. Since it was not deemed to be of significant risk, my application was simply considered and approved at School level (University of Leicester, 2016). Still, in total, I submitted three iterations of my application before my research was deemed to meet the university’s requirements, covering a broad range of issues which I detail in this section.

Some of these issues have been widely addressed in research methods literature, while others were less overt, or more contextual. For example, issues surrounding confidentiality and anonymity are central to ethical discussions in the existing literature on research methods, while the use of particular language when collecting data, for
instance, is less common. One aspect of my research that the reviewers of my ethics application asked me to clarify was my supervisor Jo Brewis’ involvement in the indie pop scene. In the early formation of my research proposal I did not have a specific research site in mind to study and so Jo’s involvement offered access to the site first and foremost because I would not have known about the indie pop scene had she not suggested it. As Easterby-Smith et al. (2015, p. 108) note, all research is bound up in specific relationships such as those with supervisors, funders and so on, which all impact upon decisions made relating to where to research, how to collect and interpret data and how to evaluate and reflect on the research. In the case of this research, both of my supervisors and I considered that the indie pop scene was ideally suited to the research context as a critical case, for reasons which I discuss under the heading “Selecting an empirical site and sampling strategy”, and so the decision was not taken by one person but collectively agreed upon.

In this sense, Jo acted as a “gatekeeper” as she helped to “smooth the path” of my research (Bell et al., 2018, p. 412) while allowing me to maintain my autonomy and independence as a researcher. Further, while I did see Jo at the same events during my immersion in the indie pop scene, there was mutual respect on both sides, where I tried not to interfere too much in her social life outside of the workplace and she avoided getting caught up too deeply in the research. She was able to balance her role as supervisor and gatekeeper, introducing me to individuals in the scene at opportune moments but then stepping aside to allow me to introduce my research and get to know the individuals in question better. This was particularly helpful as it allowed me to gather momentum. As noted in the section on “Selecting an empirical site and sampling strategy”, once I began to get to know individuals in the scene, the next steps of data collection quickly snowballed.

Moving on to confidentiality and anonymity, Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008, p. 73) state that preserving the anonymity of individuals or groups being studied should be of primary importance to the researcher. Further, the authors argue that confidentiality should be maintained in all cases, and any loopholes allowing information to be traced back or participants to be identified should be closed. As such, real names of participants should not feature in any of the data stored by the researcher, whether it is publicly available or privately stored (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008, pp. 73-74). Wiles et al. (2007, pp. 417-418) offer support to this claim, while also drawing distinctions between the terms
“anonymity” and “confidentiality”, which they say should not be used interchangeably. Anonymity, they argue, is simply “one way in which confidentiality is operationalized”.

However, in contrast to the majority of commentary on anonymity and confidentiality, Grinyer (2002) challenges the assumption that all research participants desire anonymity and/or confidentiality. She draws on empirical research where participants spoke out about their feelings towards anonymity, acknowledging that, in some cases, using pseudonyms or destroying any trace back to the original source may cause participants to “lose [...] ownership” of their comments and contributions (ibid., para. 4). At the same time, she does not deny the importance of maintaining this in contexts where it would be inappropriate and potentially harmful to disclose information which could identify participants, Drawing also on the work of Finnegan (1989, p. 263), who emphasises the importance of names to a band’s identity and thus identifies her participants by name throughout her work, I therefore opted to give participants the choice as to whether or not they preferred to be identified or remain anonymous. In fact, all participants preferred to be named rather than choose a pseudonym.

Other ethical issues were less explicit. For example, drawing on theories of discourse and power, it could be argued that language frequently used in consent forms is inappropriate for its purpose. This was not an issue raised in the process of applying for ethical consent, but one that my supervisors and I felt was important based on prior experience of interviewing. As Thompson (1991, p. 18) so eloquently puts it, “[l]inguistic utterances or expressions are always produced in particular contexts or markets, and the properties of these markets endow linguistic products with a certain ‘value’ [...] For different speakers possess different quantities of ‘linguistic capital’”. In other words, the researcher designs the ethical consent form and the interview questions and may use specialised language, unintentionally alienating or confusing participants.

As such, researchers, “the holders of linguistic capital” (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 51), are elevated to a position of power over the participants, who may not fully understand terminology specific to the research being undertaken, or may feel uncomfortable questioning something. Ultimately, as Easterby-Smith et al. (2015, p. 179) argue, using “the appropriate language” is of great importance; using overcomplicated sentences and unnecessary theoretical terms might “baffle a potential gatekeeper” or confuse or belittle
an interviewee. This approach is further supported by a systematic overview of research into obtaining informed consent in the field of medicine, which suggests that, through simplifying the content of the form and ensuring that information is concise, participants are more likely to have an improved understanding of the research topic (Flory and Emanuel, 2004, p. 1595).

Given that this research is based on the indie pop music scene, I chose to approach the issue from a common-sense standpoint by explaining my research in an accessible manner. I have already noted in my literature review that indie pop often attracts people who are university affiliated, and indeed some members of the scene were academics working across a range of disciplines. However, this was not the case for all participants. Out of the people I interviewed, only one person – Ian – was working in academia. Consequently, rather than discussing my research exactly as I would in my thesis write-up, I opted to say, for example, “My research aims to highlight the importance of visual aspects of music to fans and/or producers, and to better understand how and why people use these visuals when listening to and experiencing music. For this research, the visual aspects of music that I am specifically interested in are single/EP/album artwork.” This is detailed in the informed consent form (Appendix 1).

While it could be argued that, through simplifying language, the nuances of research are lost, I suggest that the likelihood of participants understanding theoretically heavy, jargon-ridden language is low, and it is more beneficial to present an overview which can be fully understood by anyone who is not familiar with research in this area. Realistically, this is the majority of my participants. Moreover, my simplified description did not stray far from a more academic description of my work and so I felt comfortable with the language I settled on to set the tone for discussions leading into the interviews.

Another theme in discussions of research ethics is contamination of the research. Fine et al. (2003, p. 169) observe that, historically, social science researchers are perceived as “potential contaminant[s]”; it is believed that they must be kept distinct from their research participants, at a safe distance, to avoid causing unnecessary harm or intrusion into their lives. The result of this is that “[o]ur informants are then left carrying the burden of representation as we hide behind the cloak of alleged neutrality”. The question this raises is whether it is ethically sound to expect participants to share their experiences,
beliefs and opinions when we as researchers have no intention of disclosing any information other than the minimal amount which we believe is necessary to inform participants about our study, or to enhance the likelihood of obtaining the data we seek.

Taking this into account, I took care to introduce myself and to briefly discuss my own interest in music and its visual accompaniments with my interviewees. The aim of this was to create a more comfortable environment, and to blur the boundaries between interviewer and interviewee and therefore encourage a more conversational element to the interview. The original intent before carrying out the pilot interview was to maintain this throughout the interview process, where I would also discuss my own feelings towards my preferred album covers, creating a more natural exchange between the participants and myself. However, retrospectively I believe I overstated the importance of sharing my thoughts in the context of this research and opted to do this less than I had envisaged in practice. In most cases, interviewees were eager to discuss the examples of single/EP/album covers they had brought along to the interview and did not need much prompting. Having outlined the ethical issues deemed significant in conducting this research and how I dealt with them, I now turn to the philosophical assumptions that guided this study – essentially, my approach to this research. Following this, I review my choice of empirical site and my sampling strategy, methods of data collection and finally turn to my methods of data analysis.

5.3 Research approach

Seeking to better understand how long-standing members of an indie pop scene reflect on their experiences of music, and the role played by record covers in their reflections, this research is guided by a social constructionist ontology which assumes that there is no external and objective reality “out there”, no set of social facts which we can neutrally observe and deconstruct. Instead, reality is understood as fluid and ever changing: it is (re)constructed by members of any given society collectively (Bell et al., 2018, p. 27). In other words, social constructionism is based on the understanding that together we create the world around us, from what we perceive about other people and objects in our immediate milieu to what we contribute towards the construction and maintenance of – or resistance to – wider social and cultural norms (Berger and Luckmann, 1966, p. 51).
Specifically, I assume that the participants actively interpret the images that constitute album/EP/single cover art. That is to say, they have the capacity to consider and reflect on an image, although the degree and depth to which they do this will vary.

Regardless of the level of involvement in interpreting an image, such interpretations are likely to differ to varying extents from the meaning that whoever designed the artwork had in mind, thus putting a distance between the authorial intention of the piece and how the recipient makes sense of it (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982, p. 132; DeBerry-Spence, 2007; Cova and Dalli, 2009, p. 321; Rancière, 2009, p. 105). Rancière (2009, p. 107) expands this argument, explaining that an image contains “unthought thought” in the sense that it has meaning yet is physically detached from its creator. However, it also has an impact upon the viewer, who reflects on the image. Rancière (2009, p. 107) refers to this state as “pensiveness” and notes that it lies somewhere on a continuum between active and passive.

The “pensive image” (ibid.), then, is problematic in the sense that it challenges both the idea of the image as a reproduction of whatever it represents and also as a form of artistic expression. Instead, images exist in an indeterminate state which is very much dependent on context, making them difficult to discuss and deconstruct or analyse. Indeed, viewers in many cases create their own meanings which are not only a matter of interpretation but more fittingly described as new and creative ways of understanding or making sense of the original piece which can deviate from the artist’s own intentions. Relating this back to my research, in the same way that an art piece in a gallery does not have an external, objective meaning or conclusion at which the viewer must arrive through a process of deconstruction, cover art is open to interpretation, which depends upon both the spectator and the context in which they are interpreting the piece. In line with this argument then, objectivity of interpretation is impossible and subjectivity inevitable.

Furthermore, subjectivity is not only inevitable, but also non-harmful to research. I shall go on to explain the reasons behind this by drawing on Guba and Lincoln’s (1982) article on researching within the naturalistic – closely resembling the social constructionist – paradigm. In line with my ontological position, the interpretivist epistemology appears to mirror my approach to knowledge, both theoretically and methodologically. Bell et al. (2018, p. 31) define interpretivism as a method of reasoning which focuses on the
interpretation of human action rather than assuming there is an external objective reality out there to investigate, as would be the case in a realist tradition. Taking this approach to research, I assume that my engagement with and representation of reality is via “social constructions such as language, consciousness, shared meanings and instruments” (Myers, 2009, p. 38). As I note in the introduction to this chapter, constructions such as language were limitations felt by the participants as well as me as the researcher in discussing the visual aspects of music. Moreover, I emphasise that my own subjectivity frames this research in the sense that my own feelings and opinions shape how I make sense of and present the matters this thesis is concerned with.

Having explained my ontological and epistemological positions in this research, it is important to note that classifying these beliefs in an absolutist way may be misleading. While it is widely accepted that ontological and epistemological beliefs underpin and thus shape all research, Olson (2011) reminds us that, when it comes to research design, the act of categorising ways of viewing the world into neatly defined categories is in many ways problematic, as in reality there is often much more overlap between these ideas. For example, while it is common for qualitative designs to lean more towards the combination of a social constructionist ontology and interpretivist epistemology, such a pairing is not rigid. In other words, it would be oversimplifying the case to depict a spectrum ranging from a realist ontology and positivist epistemology at one end to a social constructionist ontology and interpretivist epistemology at the other (Olson, 2011, p. 17).

In the case of my own research, I simply broadly recognise the dominance of social constructionism and interpretivism. Further complicating matters, there are a multiplicity of terms used to describe approaches to research, some of which are commonly conflated and others which stand in clear opposition. Historically speaking, researchers have used the terms “realism” and “positivism” in very different, even contradictory ways (Schlick, 1932, p. 82). This has subsequently made it difficult to settle on a straightforward definition of either term and to understand when and where their meanings overlap and differ (ibid.). To minimise confusion as far as possible, I committed to using “social constructionism” to describe my ontology and “interpretivism” for my epistemology, while “realism” and “positivism” are roughly positioned as markers far removed from my own viewpoint and more in line with the research traditions of the hard sciences.
Translating these beliefs into practice and returning to the point made earlier in this section regarding subjectivity and how it is non-harmful to my research, I draw on the seminal work of Guba and Lincoln (1982). The article considers how a naturalistic approach to research can be assessed in terms of “credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability” (ibid., p. 246). These judgement criteria are positioned as alternatives to orthodox terms such as “internal validity”, “external validity”, “reliability” and “objectivity” used in the rationalistic paradigm. I note here that the term “rationalistic” encapsulates the realist research approach, to match the language used by Guba and Lincoln with my own choice of terminology.

To assess the credibility of my own research then, I must question whether my participants accept my “analysis, formulation and interpretations” of the interview data and how I have framed this within the wider body of the thesis (Guba and Lincoln, 1982, p. 246). Known as “respondent validation” or “member checking”, this process concerns participants reading through the data themselves and either providing feedback or confirming that they are happy with how the data has been presented and analysed (Creswell and Miller, 2000, p. 127; Johnson and Waterfield, 2004, p. 125). In the case of my own research, this involved sending a copy of the first version of the findings and discussion chapters to all fourteen interviewees once I had a completed draft. This is in line with Creswell’s (2009) recommendation, that it is better to send a “polished” version of the data rather than raw data in the form of transcripts, so that participants can see how excerpts from their interviews were used in context. However, the final version of the data analysis chapters present my findings through the lens of nostalgia and authenticity. It is important to note that this was not sent to the fourteen interviewees for “member checking”. Given that I conducted the second phase of the data analysis two years after the final interview, and the time constraints regarding the completion of my thesis, it would have been impractical to obtain participants’ approval and factor in their feedback. I reflect on this in the concluding chapter of this thesis, in the section “Limitations and recommendations for future research”.

While respondent validation is often criticised for assuming there is some form of “truth” (Angen, 2000, p. 383), I opted to do this not in the pursuit of representing a fixed narrative, but to check that I had not misinterpreted any information or used excerpts in a way that participants were not comfortable with. Given that those I interviewed knew
many of the indie pop bands and musicians which they discussed in their interviews and opted to use their real names in the research, I argue that this important, since it could potentially impact upon participants’ relationships with others in the indie pop scene. Indeed, I looked upon this decision as basic courtesy.

Next, transferability can be understood as the extent to which research findings might apply outside of the context of the research (Guba and Lincoln, 1982, p. 247). In this sense, I am not seeking to generalise my findings, as I have already explained how this research is contextually bound and subjective. Instead, I focus on using “thick description” and details gained from my participant observation in the scene, which may be transferable to some extent in terms of shedding light on other, similar contexts or scenes. Specifically, all interviews were audio recorded and I made written field notes where I felt it was necessary. For instance, following an interview I noted down anything that stood out to me that I thought might not be captured via audio recording. This could include, for example, the use of humour or parody, or the mood of the participants, i.e. if they were noticeably excited about their chosen cover art.

Dependability is outlined as the stability of the research, allowing for the fact that it is subjective and may therefore differ from the findings of similar studies. Whereas a researcher operating within a rationalistic framework may seek replicability – i.e. standardisation of results from one study to the next, or clearly defining variables and context so that another researcher could replicate the methods used – the naturalistic researcher acknowledges that this is not a goal worth pursuing. That said, simply because a study is subjective does not mean that the research produced cannot be dependable. Thus, anything that can be kept consistent which cannot be attributed to the logical changes arising from differing research designs or the subjectivity of the researcher would thus ensure the research is dependable. For instance, in the case of this research, I ensured that I covered the same key discussion points in all interviews with participants by referring to an interview guide, yet still allowing them freedom to stray from these areas to offer new insights if they wished to do so.

Additionally, I strived to maintain consistency when contacting participants prior to the interview to explain what the research was about and provide instructions on what they should bring along, as indicated in the informed consent form in Appendix 1. Moreover,
when conducting the interview, I followed a protocol as indicated in the interview guide in Appendix 2. This included “Part One: Information and Consent”, which involved first reiterating what the research is about and obtaining consent. Completion of this stage then signalled a move into part two, the interview. This was followed up by “Rounding up”, where I thanked participants for their involvement in the study and reminded them of my contact details. I also explained that I would contact them at a later stage during the analysis of the interview transcripts, leading to part three, “Respondent validation”. In this third and final part, I also stressed that I will use the data in my final thesis and asked for feedback on the interview questions and process, which I discuss in the following section, “Methods of data collection and immersion in the scene”.

Thus, such a protocol offers a measure of consistency (Boyce and Neale, 2006, p. 5) fostering greater “stability”, a core feature of dependable research (Guba and Lincoln, 1982, p. 247). Finally, in an earlier article, Guba (1981) argues that to seek confirmability researchers should ensure “prolonged engagement” in the field; “persistent observation”; “triangulation” of data sources and methods; substantial documentation of the field – i.e. field notes, videotapes, audio recordings and so on; and, lastly, the researcher should ask participants to “check” their interpretation of the research phenomena. The latter point regarding respondent validation I have already addressed in this section. I discuss observations emerging from my “prolonged engagement” (ibid.) in the indie pop music scene, along with my chosen methods of data collection later in this chapter, under the heading “Methods of data collection and immersion in the scene”. Finally, the audio recordings of the semi-structured interviews and peripheral field notes which I have also mentioned in this section constituted my documentation of the indie pop music scene, strengthened by my immersion in the field. Having outlined the underlying beliefs guiding my research, I next explain how and why I selected the empirical site and detail my sampling methods.

5.4 Selecting an empirical site and sampling strategy

Drawing parallels with ethnographic studies carried out by Cohen (1991) and Finnegan (1989), the music scene I focused on in this research can broadly be considered to consist of “amateur musicians in a local context” (Finnegan, 1989, p. 3) as well as producers,
promoters and fans\textsuperscript{9}. I was first introduced to the scene in the Midlands of England, although some events and activities happen in other parts of the UK and in other countries. I initially started attending music events hosted by one independent team of East Midlands-based promoters in early 2014. The team were previously unknown to me, but suggested by my supervisor who is involved in the indie pop scene, as indicated in an earlier section, “Research Ethics”.

I chose to focus my attention on indie pop as a subsector of the “Do It Yourself” (DIY) music scene as indicated in my introduction chapter and described in greater detail in chapter four. There I explain that DIY music is produced independently of large corporate record labels and therefore strongly characterised by a self-sustainable ethos of doing things by hand, without the aid of large-scale production, expensive equipment, complex distribution networks, access to corporate venues, significant budgets and/or marketing expertise of any kind. The decision to focus on this kind of music scene was for several reasons. Firstly, the scene in the Midlands was accessible to me both in the sense that it was brought to my attention by my supervisor and also because it was local to where I was living, in Leicester, at the time.

Secondly, the indie pop scene is ideally suited to this research as a critical case for examining members’ relationships with tangible music artefacts and cover art given their long-standing commitment to physical music formats such as vinyl, cassettes and CDs. Particularly, as discussed in chapter four under “The origins and values of indie pop”, the scene makes extensive use of authentic “lo-fi” media and actively embraces the imperfections and idiosyncrasies of such formats (Dolan, 2010, p. 464).

Thirdly, DIY practitioners are often considered the “early adopters” of more mainstream trends. As Hebdige (1979, p. 155) notes, non-mainstream cultures are often appropriated by marketers and reimagined into commercial trends, or what he refers to as the “ideological form”. The “ideological form” is the manifestation of the original trend after it has been transformed into a mainstream fashion or ideology. In this sense, my research could potentially offer some insights into the mainstream industry, especially given that

\textsuperscript{9} I note though that in many cases there is overlap given that individuals tended to occupy multiple roles.
many of the discussions I had with my participants encompassed an overlap of mainstream and independent music, and centred around describing experiences and relationships with music that were by no means limited to indie pop.

Moreover, Jacques (2001, p. 50) notes that movements do not exist in isolation from other scenes and influences. In other words, there is much more of an overlap in reality between not only music scenes, but also in politics, fashion, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Queer (LGBTQ) groups and so on. In the case of my own research, this became apparent rather quickly when I began attending gigs and talking to people and discovered that many worked in academia. Indeed, one particular individual headlined a gig I attended in the Midlands and was the keynote speaker at a music conference some weeks later. Additionally, the leftist leanings and attitudes of inclusion at the heart of this music scene came through in lyrics, merchandise, gig posters and live performances which often challenged gendered norms, embracing all manner of sexual orientations and gender identities.

In terms of sampling, a non-probability method was employed. Despite the fact that it was not possible to obtain a comprehensive list of fans that meet this criterion or self-identify as members of an indie pop music scene, a probability method would have clashed with my ontological and epistemological beliefs as I have already emphasised that I do not seek to generalise my findings. Prior to making any contact with the indie pop scene in question, I envisaged purposive sampling to be the most appropriate method, where participants are recruited because they are believed to be of most relevance to the study and most able to answer the research questions (Bryman, 2008, p. 458). Purposive sampling is especially relevant for research in which not all members of the field of studies would be able to best answer the researcher’s questions (Tongco, 2007, p. 151). This method also facilitates reproducibility, as other researchers are likely to uncover the same themes and results by selecting participants based on the same consistent set of criteria (ibid.).

As such, I selected individuals who had been involved in the indie pop scene for numerous years, either as long-term fans, promoters, musicians and/or producers. I did not however set a specific limit for the number of years that members had to be active in the scene for me to select them as participants. As I discuss later in this section, most of the participants
of this study were recommended to me by other members because of their role(s) and experience in the scene and I did not exactly know how many years they had been active in the scene until I interviewed them. Retrospectively, all participants had been involved in the scene at least since the 1980s or 1990s, and provided rich insights in the evolution of their music listening habits and experiences over several years. Their period of involvement in the scene, as outlined during the semi-structured interviews, is reported in Table 2.

I also sought members who embraced the DIY values and ethos of the scene that I outline in the previous chapter under the heading “The origins and values of indie pop”. Specifically, I approached individuals who favoured the “lo-fi”, simple, authentic and “unprofessional” aesthetics and performance that are particularly salient in indie pop and DIY more broadly. Additionally, I looked for individuals who had a close relationship with cover art and other physical music formats on both consumption and production sides. This could be because they had been producing records with very specific DIY aesthetics (for example, Caroline and Darren), that they were a popular illustrator in the scene (Andy) or that they were devoted indie fans with large record collections as well as musicians (like Jen). I relied upon the recommendations of participants to determine these criteria, while I elaborate on later in this section when I discuss the snowballing component of the sampling strategy.

Such participants were deemed the most relevant to this study as they would be able to reflect on the evolution of their experiences with tangible music artefacts across a substantial number of years and often several life stages. The salience of nostalgia in the interviews then is not surprising given how this yearning is characteristic of indie pop (Fonarow, 2006, p. 29; Reynolds, 2007, p. 15) and how people can become increasingly nostalgic for music as they progress through different life stages (Batcho, 1995). Based on the nostalgia literature reviewed earlier in this thesis and my observations of the scene, more “casual” and less committed indie pop fans would not have provided the same depth and richness of experience that the participants I selected could.

Furthermore, I did not directly ask the age of my participants. As I further explain in the next section, “Methods of data collection and immersion in the scene”, I quickly learnt during my immersion in the scene that asking participants about their age and personal
background was not always appropriate as the scene heralds inclusiveness and an “anyone can do it” ethos. With regards to the overall aim of this thesis and the exploration of nostalgia, I also mentioned in chapter two, in the section “Subjects of nostalgia”, that age is not, in isolation, a useful predictor of nostalgia (Holbrook, 1993, p. 255). However, this information could be approximately deduced from discussions about past life stages and dates during the interviews. Based on this, I estimate that participants’ ages ranged from early 30s to late 50s.

Considering the research sample in its entirety, I strived to gather perspectives from different actors in the scene, including musicians, producers, record label owners, promoters and fans, all in various combinations. However, I did not try to isolate each viewpoint since such an approach would not fit my epistemological assumptions nor the nature of this DIY scene where many members take on multiple roles. Given the emphasis on co-production within this indie pop music scene and consequently, the overlapping roles occupied by individuals, those I interviewed could comment from multiple perspectives. This is indicated in the “Roles” column in the following table (Table 2), which presents the profiles of the fourteen participants, their roles and experience in the scene, as well as the date and locations of the respective interviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Name(s)</th>
<th>Roles</th>
<th>Experience in the scene (extracted from participant interviews)</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location of interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 (Pilot)</td>
<td>Ian</td>
<td>Promoter; musician; fan</td>
<td>Started to perform and produce artwork in the late 1990s</td>
<td>28.02.15</td>
<td>Nottingham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Promoter; fan</td>
<td>Started putting on gigs in 1992/1993</td>
<td>22.04.15</td>
<td>Nottingham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Andy</td>
<td>Illustrator; promoter; fan</td>
<td>Fan since his teen (1980s) and active member for 10/12 years</td>
<td>26.06.15</td>
<td>Nottingham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Trevor (“Trev”)</td>
<td>Promoter; runs a record label; fan</td>
<td>Started his own record label in 2009 and went to his first indie show when he was 16/17</td>
<td>16.08.15</td>
<td>London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Role(s)</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Pete B</td>
<td>Musician; producer; fan</td>
<td>Started to play in bands in the mid-1980s</td>
<td>12.09.15</td>
<td>Stoke-on-Trent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Jen</td>
<td>Musician; fan&lt;sup&gt;10&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Joined her first band in the early 1990s</td>
<td>13.10.15</td>
<td>London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Matthew</td>
<td>Musician; promoter; fan</td>
<td>Started reading fanzines in 1987</td>
<td>18.10.15</td>
<td>London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Miguel</td>
<td>Musician; fan</td>
<td>Joined his first band when he was 12/13 and started an indie band in 2005</td>
<td>29.10.15</td>
<td>London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Caroline, Darren</td>
<td>Promoters; musicians; fans; run a record label</td>
<td>Members of the band The Manhattan Love Suicides since 2006 and started their own record label in 2001</td>
<td>31.10.15</td>
<td>Leeds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Matloob</td>
<td>Promoter; musician; fan</td>
<td>Been in the scene since the 1980s</td>
<td>09.11.15</td>
<td>Cambridge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Mark, Vinnie</td>
<td>Promoters; musicians; fans; run a record label</td>
<td>Mark has been a member since he was 19/20, joined bands in the 1990s, ran a record label in 2000 and they now run their own record label</td>
<td>14.11.15</td>
<td>Bristol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Pete G</td>
<td>Musician; fan</td>
<td>Member since the late 1980s and has played in bands and solo since</td>
<td>29.01.16</td>
<td>Sheffield</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 - Participants profile

As with many qualitative studies, there was also an element of convenience sampling, in that participants who were present at gigs and therefore easily accessible were favoured (Marshall, 1996, p. 523). I also found that my research naturally spread to other parts of

<sup>10</sup> Notably, Jen did not personally identify as an indie pop musician or fan. In her interview, she explained that the term has different connotations in the US, being more akin to popular music, as opposed to in the UK where it is understood as a type of independent music.
the UK once I began interviewing. This was due in part to suggestions from participants of other people to interview, as well as gigs or events to attend hosted by other music promoters, particularly in London. Moreover, my own enjoyment as a by now converted indie pop fan led me further afield. As such, my sampling strategy evolved as I became more familiar with the scene, resembling more closely the “snowball sampling” method. This technique, where research participants identify other people to interview, is deemed by Lee (1993, p. 67) to result in a more homogeneous sample, since participants are more likely to put forward the names of those similar to themselves. Whether a homogeneous sample is something to strive for, avoid, or simply take note of, depends on the context and aim of the research.

I argue that the evolution of my sampling method did not contradict the purposive sampling strategy discussed earlier. Indeed, while others suggested potential participants, I was able to discuss and confirm whether these individuals met the sampling criteria I had already established. Then, the snowball sampling method I followed added an extra criterion to the initial set of purposive criteria: how much other members of the scene believed that a potential participant fit my existing criteria. This strategy was especially practical for my research as I did not know the scene prior to entering it. As such, relying on the opinions of other knowledgeable members helped me select participants that I could be confident matched my set of criteria.

Reflecting on this, I would first question how far this sampling technique did result in me interviewing participants who are similar to one another. In many ways it is difficult to determine, given the nature of the indie pop music scene as inclusive and all-embracing of differences, while also drawing in a crowd characterised by certain similarities as with any community. However, most participants suggested either other members of their band or of bands that they worked with or had worked with previously. Interestingly, the same names began to circulate, and part-way through my data collection I found I had already interviewed many of the people that had been suggested to me. This I understood to be an indication that I had interviewed a particular circle of people known to each other, rather than individuals picked simply out of convenience.

In this sense, there was an element of consistency rather than homogeneity, with many connections being made between participants, linking their interviews via shared content
and references to one another. For instance, I have already referred to Andy, an illustrator and indie pop fan based in the East Midlands, in the introduction to this chapter. Andy was known amongst those I interviewed for the covers he designed for various artists and bands on the scene, which he created alongside his “day job” in an unrelated field. I interviewed Andy in the early stages of data collection, following which he was mentioned by three participants I later interviewed, who positioned him as very much the “go-to” illustrator. Having already interviewed him and noticed his work for indie pop artists while immersed in the scene, I was able to engage more in discussion in these later interviews and found this background knowledge and mutual contact helped to establish a more conversational and relaxed exchange. Thus, while snowball sampling is commonly discussed in terms of its usefulness in research contexts where individuals are difficult to access (Saunders, 2012, p. 43), I argue that, accessibility aside, this type of sampling succeeded as a more organic method which was well suited to this particular research.

In terms of how many interviews were required for this research, Guest et al. (2006) and Francis et al. (2010, p. 60) suggest that a researcher should plan for how many interviews will be conducted before entering the field of study. As such, I originally aimed to interview between ten and twenty individuals as multiple studies have shown that this number of knowledgeable interviewees was sufficient to expose the large majority of the codes and themes necessary to understand a particular phenomenon when engaged in qualitative research (e.g. Guest et al., 2006; Russell, 2007; Francis et al., 2010). For example, Guest et al. (2006) identified 100 codes after twelve interviews while only fourteen new codes emerged from the following 48 interviews. It is also to be noted that I originally contacted more than twenty members of the scene for this research. Even if this number was larger than the number of individuals I intended to interview, I expected some members not to come back to me and thus started with this larger number of people initially.

Furthermore, Francis et al. (2010) suggest that the researcher should also plan for how many more participants should be interviewed without new ideas and codes becoming apparent (p. 1237). This point in data collection, often referred to as “data saturation”, is crucial to the researcher who can be confident that the conducted interviews are sufficient to capture all codes and themes (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 61). For this research, as
suggested by Francis et al. (2010), I initially decided that three interviews with no new codes or ideas would be appropriate as the stopping criterion.

This systematic method for determining how many interviews were necessary for answering my research questions is especially appropriate to this thesis given the characteristics of the participants I selected. Indeed, Romney et al. (cited in Guest et al., 2006, p. 74) suggest that participants who “possess a certain degree of expertise about the domain of inquiry” are well suited to a smaller sample size. Guest et al. (2006, p. 76) also assume that purposive sampling is beneficial to early discovery of all relevant themes since all participants present similar characteristics – in my case, evidencing a commitment to the indie pop scene and a close connection to tangible music artefacts. Additionally, semi-structured interviews provide some level of consistency between the questions asked across the range of participants and thus contribute to the rapid emergence of a set of themes (ibid., p. 75).

As I further explain in the final section of this chapter, “Analysing the data”, interviews were transcribed and analysed shortly after being conducted. This allowed me to continually identify new and existing codes in the transcribed data to guide the next interviews and to notice when data saturation was reached. As such, the large majority of the codes identified in my research had emerged by the ninth interview. The following three interviews provided more depth to specific arguments and ideas that had already been explored with previous participants (e.g., belongingness) but no new major code or theme emerged at that point. As such, consistent with my initial definition of the stopping criterion (Francis et al., 2010), my data collection ended three interviews later with my discussion with Pete G in Sheffield.

5.5 Methods of data collection and immersion in the scene

Having identified the context of my research, twelve semi-structured interviews were eventually undertaken with fourteen long-standing members of the UK indie pop music scene. As I note towards the end of this subsection, I also attempted to gather data using self-completion questionnaires, but without success. I reflect on possible reasons for this following a discussion of the rather more fruitful methods employed in gathering data for
this research. With regards to the interviews, I relied on an interview guide to encourage participants to provide answers to my research questions (Dilley, 2000, p. 133), but allowing enough freedom for them to express their thoughts liberally, as well as flexibility for me to change the course of the questions to home in on a particular theme or pursue a new line of enquiry (Bell et al., 2018, p. 439).

Interviews took place in different cities across the UK, in a variety of venues, ranging from pubs, restaurants and cafes to one participant’s home. All interview locations were proposed by the participants prior to meeting them. Apart from the convenience aspect, letting participants select the interview locations was particularly important since it often means interviewees are more comfortable and the power dynamic with the researcher is more balanced (Elwood and Martin, 2000). To record the interviews, I used a digital voice recorder that was activated once I had asked the first interview question – usually asking about how long they had been involved in the scene. Most interviews started with some unrecorded informal chats with the interviewee(s) in which my immersion in the scene proved helpful. Moreover, I did not take any notes while interviewing as it could have distracted the participants and interfered with the flow of the interviews. However, notes about the participants’ attitudes and reactions that could not be recorded on tape were written down shortly after concluding the interviews. The length of the interviews varied significantly between participants, as the recorded portions ranged from 40 minutes to 135 minutes with an average duration of 85 minutes.

In keeping with the interpretivist epistemology that underpins my research design, I am against the assumption that standardising questions in terms of specific words, language or structure contributes to a more rigorous piece of research. Indeed, as I have addressed under the heading of “Selecting an empirical site and sampling strategy”, I seek “credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability” (Guba and Lincoln, 1982, p. 246) in line with more naturalistic modes of inquiry. As such, this research is guided by the understanding that language is open to interpretation by individuals, meaning it will be interpreted differently between one individual and the next. Hollway and Jefferson (2000, p. 11) note this in their research into fear of crime, arguing that “the theory of the transparency of language” has been discredited in research on language and communication. Thus, fixating on presenting questions in a uniform manner in terms of very specific wording and sentence structure is in no way fruitful for this research.
That said, care was taken to produce an interview guide (see Appendix 2) that would be effective in facilitating a discussion where participants could speak openly and freely about their chosen meaningful covers and involvement in the music scene, functioning more as a set of prompts than an attempt to steer the discussion or be too leading. In line with recommendations from Boyce and Neale (2006, p. 5), who suggest asking “no more than 15 main questions”, accompanied by probes where it is deemed useful, I designed twelve questions in total. These were divided into “Warm up questions”, where I first aimed to gather background information about the interviewee and ease them into the interview, before moving into the more open-ended, opinion-based questions in “Visual props” (ibid.). This second section centred around examples of meaningful covers that I asked participants to bring along to the interview with them.

With regards to participants’ choices of meaningful covers, I explained that this could be for any reason, positive or negative and that this could encompass physical or digital music formats. I did not specify a certain number of examples to bring and ultimately left this as open as possible for participants to interpret. I argue that if I was to specify a certain number of covers, this could either limit participants and thus not demonstrate the range of covers that they consider to be meaningful, or force them to bring along examples that they would not ordinarily have chosen, simply to meet a required minimum. Moreover, given that individuals are likely to have different sized music collections and levels of enthusiasm for cover art, it would be unfitting for me to have personally dictated a minimum or maximum number of examples.

Thus, the questions under the heading “Visual props” aimed to first establish what participants’ initial responses were when I asked them to bring along examples of meaningful covers and how easy or difficult they found this task. The next questions two to seven focused on their analysis of each prop, aiming to uncover why they chose it, how it works with the sound of the music, what role it plays in their experience of music, whether it played a role in their decision to purchase the music and their interpretation of it. After sharing this in-depth analysis of their chosen props, I designed a broader question to draw the interview to a close: “Do you think visuals are an important part of the overall music? (Both in this specific case and in general)”.

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The aim was to encourage participants to reflect on this question after having thoroughly considered the role and meaning of particular examples of visual material and also to provide the opportunity for them to express their feelings about the music scene and music covers more generally. In this sense, anything that participants felt was missed in the previous questions could be contributed. Furthermore, I followed this up in all cases once the interview questions had been completed when I asked participants if they felt there was anything else I should be asking. This intention was to further refine my interview guide if required. I found that participants were happy with the questions I was asking and so took this as confirmation of the suitability of the interview guide and approach taken. It is also to be noted that the interview guide did not include any questions explicitly related to nostalgia and authenticity and as such, themes associated with these two concepts emerged directly from the analysis of the interview transcripts, as I further detail in the final section of this chapter “Analysing the data”.

Despite my aim to produce an interview guide that facilitated open and free discussion about the relationship between music and visuals, after conducting my first initial pilot interview and playing back the recording to transcribe it, I felt I had still maintained too much control over the discussion and that future interviews would benefit from a more open approach. That said, this commitment to asking a more “standardized” set of questions during the first interview helped me to “get an overall “lay of the land”” and to identify which themes I should explore in greater depth (Alvesson and Ashcraft, 2012, p. 248). On reflection, my dependence on the interview guide waned as I gained more experience of interviewing, and consequently I found that this resulted in a more free-flowing conversation, which allowed participants to guide me as opposed to me guiding them. The interview guide then became more of a checklist than a device to structure the interview.

Individual interviews were deemed to be more appropriate than group interviews or focus groups in this instance, since “less depth and detail”, which is paramount in the context of this research, can be obtained in a group setting (Morgan, 1997, p. 10). Moreover, Fontana and Frey (2005, p. 705) note that in a group setting, a dominant or overarching perspective may naturally prevail and suppress individual expression, which would be problematic. Given that individuals relate to single/EP and album artwork in different ways and that the subject matter is highly subjective and difficult to explain I committed
to individual interviewing early in the process of designing my research, in line with the inductive approach for this research. I also opted for quality and depth of data analysis over quantity of participants (Mason, 2012, p. 30).

However, while I was conducting interviews and talking to people in the indie pop circuit, I came across two separate instances of couples who ran record labels together: Vinnie and Mark in Bristol and Darren and Caroline in Leeds. Both couples had been suggested by numerous participants and referred to as a unit because of their close working relationships. Indeed, when I first contacted both couples, I spoke mainly to Vinnie on Facebook Messenger and solely to Darren via e-mail correspondence. When arranging the interview, it would have felt odd to conduct separate interviews with each person in the couple individually. Moreover, in the same way that Bennett and McAvity (1985, p. 89) point out in their study of marital negotiation of family identity, interviewing them as couples was simply the “legitimate unit of study”. Consequently, this led me to conduct two group interviews.

In terms of existing studies related to my research, one study closely matches my choice of method or perhaps more accurately methodology. Researching “the (re)emergence of vinyl as an alternative format for music consumption in the digital age”, Hayes (2006) conducted in-depth interviews with eight pro-vinyl music consumers. Since he examines consumers’ feelings towards vinyl and their reasons for consuming records over digital formats, I argue that the same approach is applicable to my own research. Other studies, such as Cohen’s (1991) research into the lives of the “hidden musicians” or Finnegan’s (1989) study of independent musicians in Milton Keynes, utilised more fully ethnographic methods to shed light on the interrelationships between amateur musicians and their relationship with commerce. My own research does not require such an approach since, like Hayes (2006), I am interested in consumers’ use of visuals when consuming music, data which I argue can be generated equally as successfully via interviews.

However, while a full ethnography, i.e. a longer, full-time immersion in the scene, was not deemed necessary for this study, there are undoubtedly many benefits to this methodological approach. Numerous authors in the field of research methods have outlined these. For example, Fetterman (2010, p. 1) argues that an ethnographic approach
presents a more “credible, rigorous, and authentic story”. This is since the researcher is not simply studying participants outside of their context and through his or her own lens, but becoming immersed in the specific setting, becoming a participant and understanding and perceiving communities from a much closer range. In this sense, visual and contextual factors play a role in decreasing the opportunity for too much “outsider” subjectivity, which might shade into bias. Still it would be naïve to subscribe to the belief that an ethnographic approach is free of subjectivity, since all research is in some ways guided by existing opinions and judgements and the very presence of a researcher or an “outsider”, can disrupt the social norms of the setting in question.

On a similar note, considering the role of the researcher in an interview setting, Cassell (2005, pp. 167-168) reminds us that interviews are specific sites where meaning is “co-created” by both the interviewee and the interviewer, highlighting that whether intentionally or not, the interviewer plays a role in producing the reality under investigation. In this sense, having some level of background knowledge and understanding of the indie pop music scene was deemed helpful in terms of establishing a connection with participants and ultimately fostering a more comfortable environment for both the researcher and the participants. Indeed, referring to participant observation as a mode of ethnographic research, Kawulich (2005, para. 3) offers the following definition:

“the process of establishing rapport within a community and learning to act in such a way as to blend into the setting or community so that its members will act naturally, then removing oneself from the setting or community to immerse oneself in the data to understand what is going on and be able to write about it.”

This excerpt further highlights the benefits of participant observation for my project: to become a familiar face in the scene rather than being an outsider and to deepen my understanding of how the indie pop scene operates and what it means to participate in it.

Consequently, I opted to immerse myself in the indie pop scene and act as participant observer. It provided me with a detailed understanding of the functioning of the scene and allowed me to build rapport with its members prior to conducting the interviews (Musante and DeWalt, 2010, p. 100). As such, I did not consider my immersion in the scene as a
means to actively collect data but a way to select my participants and provide context for the interviews (*ibid.*, p. 2). Additionally, it is suggested that participant observation is beneficial to the interpretation of data gathered via other methods (Elliott and Jankel-Elliott, 2003, p. 217; Musante and DeWalt, 2010, p. 10). Immersion in the field of study also allows a researcher to avoid certain mistakes when conducting semi-structured interviews (Becker and Geer, 1957; Aagaard and Matthiesen, 2016, p. 41). For example, via exposure to the field of study, a researcher would know when not to ask certain questions or notice when an interviewee answers a question “through a distorting lens” (Becker and Geer, 1957, p. 31).

By becoming a familiar face in the scene and gaining trust from its members, my goal was also to address the issue of “reactivity” by reducing the differences in responses and behaviours from participants who know they are being studied (Russell, 2011, p. 267). Further, Silverman (2011, p. 63) insists that it is of great importance to accurately and fairly represent individuals, and thus it is the duty of the researcher to provide a contextual backdrop to the data they present, so that the excerpts used do not misrepresent them. Thus, furthering my understanding of the music scene and its members is helpful not simply in terms of collecting, analysing and interpreting the data, but also in how it is reported and presented.

In terms of how I operationalised my immersion in the scene, I attended gigs and events largely hosted by the aforementioned promotional team in the East Midlands, so as to obtain a better understanding of the community itself and get to know people on a more informal basis, encouraging a more conversational approach to my research. Returning to Cassell’s (2005, pp. 167-168) point that the interviewer plays a role in co-creating meaning with the interviewee, I argue that this stage of my research does reflect participant observation because the approach I took went beyond simply observing. In attending indie pop gigs and events, I became a fan of the music and an active audience member in the same way that an interviewer actively contributes to an interview.

I entered the indie pop scene in the last week of March 2014 as I attended my very first gig in the East Midlands at a small venue used for local DIY gigs and recording music. As the sign on the building indicated, the low-key venue was located at a former fruits and vegetables merchants and I must have initially driven by the place half a dozen times
before I noticed people hanging around outside and smoking in front of what turned out

to be the main entrance. When entering the place, I got my wrist stamped with the venue’s

logo and the person behind the desk explained it was a “BYOB” (bring your own beer)
event, and offered directions to the nearest off-license a short walk away. I was then
directed to the stage where the band was about to start its first song of the set. The room
resembled a living room, with furniture and lighting creating a homely feel. The audience
that day was particularly small.

In the following months, I attended another four DIY gigs and returned to the initial venue
once. I was also introduced to a few members in the scene by my supervisor Jo who was
present at some of the later events. As Russell (2011, p. 269) and Musante and DeWalt
(2010, p. 4) suggest, I had prepared a brief informal pitch of my research to explain the
reasons why I was attending those gigs. Only a few dozen fans attended the events I went
to (even fewer during week nights) and I quickly realised that the improvised style and
intimate feel of the performance was a common feature of all the venues I had visited. By
this point, my experiences were consistent with the first two stages of participant
observation described by the reviewed literature: “entering the field” and “first contact”
(Musante and DeWalt, 2010).

I attended my very first “all-dayer” in September 2014. The longer format gave me the
opportunity to “hang out” and talk to some of the fans present that day. Indeed, “hanging
out” is known to be an efficient way of building “trust” and “rapport” with members of
the field under study and facilitates “ordinary conservations and behaviours” with and
from its members (Russell, 2011, pp. 278-279). Moreover, I started to recognise regular
fans who also attended or organised some of the gigs I attended earlier that year. On this
occasion, I was introduced to my first participant and pilot interviewee Ian by my
supervisor and met the second participant, Sam, both of whom I later contacted to arrange
my first two semi-structured interviews.

I continued to attend indie pop events on a monthly basis until my last gig at the end of
October 2015 at the very same venue where I first entered the indie pop scene eighteen
months earlier. By that point, I had been introduced to my complete set of participants,
either face-to-face or via email or social media, and had arranged interviews with them
within the following three months. I also became a fan of DIY and indie pop music, often
eagerly listening to some of the headlining bands’ records in between attending events. My immersion in the scene, the observation of DIY and indie pop practices as well as the numerous chats that I had with fans and organisers (indeed often the same people occupied both roles) contributed to my extensive knowledge of the scene. As such, I was able to “talk the talk” and “walk the walk” – described as the two final stages of participant observations (Musante and DeWalt, 2010, p. 13). In other words, I gained sufficient knowledge to be able to communicate about bands, events and practices within the scene and, I believe, be accepted as one of its members.

In total, I estimate that I attended around twenty different events within the indie pop scene, alongside the twelve interviews. These consisted mainly of gigs organised by the aforementioned East Midlands promoters, which were usually on weeknights. Events happening over the weekend tended to be all day or across Saturday and Sunday, referred to as “all-dayers” and “weekenders”. Those that I attended took place across the East Midlands and in London and attracted a broader circle than the weeknight gigs.

The largest event I attended was the Indietracks festival held in Derbyshire, UK, in July 2015, which has taken place every year since its inception in 2007. The festival is set on the site of a steam railway and features performances from around fifty DIY and indie pop musicians (Indietracks, 2017, para. 3). The venue is usually accessed via a short steam train ride from Butterley Station, Ripley, and bands perform across four stages, including a church and even on the moving train itself. Attending this yearly festival marked an important milestone in my observation of participants of the indie pop scene as it punctuated a series of events and smaller gigs in the Midlands that I had attended in the previous fourteen months. In hindsight, the event represented the “breaking through” moment of my observation as I felt like I had proved commitment to and built “true rapport” with my participants (Musante and DeWalt, 2010, p. 54). The 2015 Indietracks festival was also well-timed and beneficial to my immersion in the scene as I came across many indie pop members that I had previously met and that I had planned to interview in the following months. Additionally, at one of the many art and craft stalls that had been crammed under the main marquee due to continuous rain that weekend, I met one additional illustrator that I later contacted and sent a copy of the self-completion questionnaire.
Having outlined and justified my chosen methods of research, I now turn to consideration of these questionnaires that I opted to distribute to indie pop fans who were not available to interview face-to-face. As indicated in Table 2, despite the indie pop music scene I was involved in being based primarily in the East Midlands, only three interviews took place locally, in Nottingham. Four interviews were conducted in London and one each in Stoke-on-Trent, Leeds, Cambridge, Bristol and Sheffield. Despite these locations being further afield, participants all travelled around the UK frequently to attend indie pop events in other cities, or to produce music and perform at gigs and events. That said, interviews were better conducted away from indie pop gigs and events, which tended to be very noisy and sometimes crowded. Moreover, some participants helped organise or promote these events and so it would not have been possible to interview them at the same time.

The idea to send out self-completion questionnaires via email, then, came about when I met the aforementioned illustrator at the Indietracks festival held in Derbyshire, UK, in July 2015, who was happy to take part in the research but lived in a remote part of the South of England. Following this, one participant, Pete B, recommended other people involved in the indie pop circuit for me to contact outside of the UK, in Copenhagen, Denmark and California, US. Thus, I designed a self-completion questionnaire to be sent via e-mail, presented in Appendix 3. While this method does not afford opportunities to prompt and probe participants as with interviews (Bell et al., 2018, p. 233), my motivations for doing so were that firstly I did not want to dismiss potential opportunities to gather data. Secondly, given the nature of the study and the passion for indie pop amongst those in the music scene, I felt participants may be generally interested in the research and thus willing to fill out a questionnaire via e-mail. This is in tune with Bourque’s recommendations that “[r]espondents should be motivated, have a personal interest or motive in carrying out the questionnaire and wanting to know the outcomes of the study” (2003, p. 34).

Moreover, Bourque emphasises the importance of designing a user-friendly questionnaire, favouring closed over open-ended questions and offering clear and concise instructions (ibid., p. 47). While I did endeavour to provide clear instructions, the nature of the research did not lend itself well to closed questions and so I did ask open-ended questions, closely replicating those from my interview guide. In hindsight, I suspect the self-completion questionnaire was too daunting to participants, particularly when re-
examining the construction of the sentences and the various prompts accompanying each. This is further supported by feedback from one individual I had contacted who explained that it would be too difficult to respond to the questions within a reasonable time frame. Given my commitment to ask open-ended questions, in retrospect, I would have only included the questions themselves without prompts underneath and asked fewer questions, opting for a more “succinct” approach and design in order to increase the response rate (Burns et al., 2008, para. 16). Retrospectively, interviewing via video or telephone may have been a more fitting approach in these cases, given that individuals all had access to the internet.

5.6 Analysing the data

As explained already in this chapter, my findings emerged from my immersion and semi-structured interviews conducted in an indie pop music scene. Given that in-depth interviews were the primary method of data collection, the analysis presented in the following chapter is mostly of excerpts from interview transcripts and associated images of artwork where applicable. Due to potential copyright restrictions, I have opted not to reproduce any of the visual material that I discuss. Instead, I have included hyperlinks to online sources containing this material which may be accessed in the digital version of this thesis. I also include in-text descriptions to accompany each example for the hard copy of the thesis.

As Warren (2005, pp. 191-192) notes when reflecting upon the analysis of her data which emerged from three months of participant observation, semi-structured interviews, photographic images and field diary entries, data analysis was itself “ongoing and hard to separate as a distinct stage of the research” (ibid., p. 192). In a similar vein, having attended my first indie pop event in March 2014 and conducted interviews between February 2015 and January 2016, the process of analysis was very much ongoing and not confined to a neatly defined period post-data collection. Indeed, transcription is thought to be a fundamental part of data analysis (MacLean et al., 2004, p. 113). In tune with this line of reasoning I opted to transcribe the interviews myself, since this required listening back to the audio files multiple times and fully immersing myself in the data. This decision was also based on my previous experience of transcribing interviews I had
conducted, which I felt had made it easier for me to identify patterns and themes in the data set I was working with.

When playing back the interview recordings, how they are “heard and perceived by the transcriptionist and the form and accuracy of its transcription play a key role in determining what data are analyzed and with what degree of dependability” (MacLean et al., 2004, p. 113). In this sense, I was by no means neutral in the transcription process even prior to identifying patterns and themes in the data. Indeed, transcription can be understood as a “creative, authorial act that has political effects, and many of these effects cannot be anticipated” (Bulcholtz, 2000, p. 1461). This argument is in tune with the emphasis I have placed on my own subjectivity as a researcher, which I have discussed at various stages throughout this chapter. As such, I did not aim for objectivity and acknowledge that my transcriptions and interpretations of the data are very much subjective. Rather, I sought to be “reflexive”, reflecting on the impact of my transcription practice and my subsequent presentation of participants in this chapter (ibid., p. 1462).

For instance, there were inevitably parts of the audio recordings that I could not decipher or decisions I made to cut out certain word fillers or noises which I felt interrupted the flow of the narrative. Moreover, given the large number of references to indie pop bands, musicians, events and people threaded throughout each of the interviews, it would have been difficult to outsource transcription to someone without specific knowledge of the scene and some of the more obscure references. On reflection, transcription became easier in the later stages when I was more familiar with some of these recurring references. I looked upon this as evidence of my own learning and increasing familiarity with the music scene resulting from my immersion and participant observation. As such, I had to return to earlier transcriptions to edit them.

In terms of the approach taken to transcription, on one end of the scale is verbatim transcription, also known as “naturalized” transcription (Oliver et al., 2005, p. 1273), which is highly detailed since it involves writing exactly what is heard – including repeated words and fillers such as “um” and “ah”. On the other end of the scale is a more concise method which involves cutting parts of the interview thought to disrupt the flow of the discussion (Bulcholtz, 2000, p. 1461; Carlson, 2010, p. 1106). This is often referred to as “denaturalized” transcription (Oliver et al., 2005, p. 1273). While denaturalised
transcription has been critiqued for missing details which may be important to the overall meaning of the discourse represented, naturalised transcription can arguably produce an account which is difficult to read and potentially come across as “alien” to the reader (Bulcholtz, 2000, p. 1461). Of course, as I have already noted, these approaches represent two ends of a scale and my decision was to sit somewhere between the two rather than fully subscribe to either. That said, I leaned more towards naturalised transcription, in tune with Schegloff’s (1997, pp. 165-166) emphasis on the importance of keeping discourse in context. Indeed, when listening to the recordings and transcribing, my aim was to bring the participants to life and so maintaining as much of their natural speech as possible offered an insight into their character.

Once all twelve interviews had been transcribed, they were uploaded into the computer software package NVivo 10 for analysis, and analysis was undertaken. As Burnard et al. (2008, p. 430) explain, a qualitative data package such as NVivo is simply an instrument with the potential to progress data analysis by helping the researcher to “manage, sort and organise large volumes of qualitative data, sort, annotate and retrieve text, locate words, phrases and segments of data, prepare diagrams and extract quotes”. In this sense, NVivo is not a tool which analyses the data for the researcher, but instead simply aids the process.

As Attride-Stirling (2001, p. 386) points out, “[i]f qualitative research is to yield meaningful and useful results, it is imperative that the material under scrutiny is analysed in a methodical manner”. As such, I chose to employ thematic analysis as it offers a flexible approach to data analysis that is able to “generate unanticipated insights” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 79). As the name suggests, this necessitates the identification of themes within the dataset and to “verify, confirm and qualify them by searching through the data and repeating the process to identify further themes and categories” (Burnard et al., 2008, p. 430). Successfully teasing out themes thus allows the researcher to report patterns found within the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Beyond simply identifying patterns in the data, it is imperative that such patterns speak to the research questions (ibid., p. 82). With this in mind, I ensured that my research questions were a driving force behind my analysis by repeatedly referring back to them throughout the process.

Furthermore, Attride-Stirling (2001, p. 387) refers to the concept of “thematic networks”; here, the term “network” captures the relationships between the themes and the “different
levels” that they represent in the data. As such, themes may on one level be mostly descriptive, or on a deeper level, more interpretative, grouping the data according to overarching similarities identified (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 161). Indeed, Attride-Stirling (2001, p. 389) proposes three types of themes. A “basic theme” is specific and offers little insight into the meaning of the data overall. An “organizing theme” captures these basic themes, sorting them “into clusters of similar issues”. Finally, a “global theme” represents “the principal metaphors in the data as a whole” (ibid.).

The process of thematic analysis involves “seeing”, “encoding” and “interpretation” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 1). As such, the researcher first notices a significant phenomenon, generates a code to represent it and then interprets it in relation to the rest of the data set and the research questions. The code, then, can be thought of as “the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon” (ibid., p. 63). Codes are thus more narrow and specific in comparison to themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 88). In tune with these procedures, Attride-Stirling (2001, p. 389) suggests that the researcher should first identify basic themes, then organising themes and ultimately a global theme.

To carry out a successful thematic analysis, it has been proposed that a researcher should follow six key stages (Boyatzis, 1998; Attride-Stirling, 2001; Braun and Clarke, 2006). Even if the execution differs slightly, the approaches described by these authors present many commonalities. Firstly, the researcher should start by reducing the data by creating an initial set of codes before searching for, refining and defining the themes that will structure the data analysis. The overall aim of these stages is for the researcher to produce a compelling report in which the identified themes are summarised and analysed based on the concepts and research questions developed in the earlier portion of the thesis (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 394). Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 88) note that prior to undertaking thematic analysis, transcription of verbal data is an effective initial step for the researcher to familiarise oneself with the data set. The thematic analysis steps described by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Attride-Stirling (2001) are summarised and collated in Table 3.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Familiarising yourself with</td>
<td>For example, transcribing and re-reading the interview transcripts.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Generating initial codes</td>
<td>Producing initial codes from the entire data set.</td>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Coding the material</td>
<td>Reducing the data set into manageable codes.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Searching for themes</td>
<td>Organising codes into themes and connecting themes and sub-themes.</td>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Identifying themes</td>
<td>Finding commonalities between codes and identifying underlying specific themes.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Constructing the networks</td>
<td>Organising themes into thematic networks, identifying basic, organising and global themes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Reviewing themes</td>
<td>Reviewing codes with regards to each theme and themes with regards to the whole data set.</td>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Exploring the thematic networks</td>
<td>Interpreting the data set based on the thematic networks.</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Defining and naming themes</td>
<td>Analysing each theme in-depth and in relation to the research questions and the overall “story”.</td>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Summarising the thematic networks</td>
<td>Writing up the most salient characteristics of the main themes.</td>
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6. Producing the report
Selecting and presenting key excerpts, interpreting them and synthesising them with reviewed literature and research questions.

Interpreting patterns
Analysing the themes based on the conceptual framework and research questions.

| Table 3 - Thematic analysis steps according to Braun and Clarke (2006) and Attride-Stirling (2001) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 6. Producing the report | Selecting and presenting key excerpts, interpreting them and synthesising them with reviewed literature and research questions. | Interpreting patterns | Analysing the themes based on the conceptual framework and research questions. |

The last stages of thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Attride-Stirling (2001) highlight the importance of the research questions and conceptual framework in shaping the data analysis. Furthermore, Braun and Clarke (2006) explain the differences between inductive and deductive (or “theoretical”) perspectives in the process of generating and organising themes. An inductive approach, which was taken in this research, indicates that themes emerge from the data set, thus shaping the rest of the research. As such, they do not follow automatically or even necessarily from the initial research questions and interview questions posed to the participants. A deductive approach on the other hand takes research questions as the central point from which the codes and themes are deduced (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 83).

As explained earlier in this chapter, my approach to the thematic analysis of the data was rather more inductive, since nostalgia and authenticity were not themes that I had focused on and explored before interviewing my participants but emerged from the data set. Indeed, my initial research questions targeted how long-standing members of the indie pop scene reflect on their experience of music as well as the role of cover art in their conceptualisations. The themes of nostalgic yearning and the role of authenticity emerged from my analysis of the data and eventually shaped my overall research. Even if my approach was predominantly “bottom-up”, the conceptual framework which is based on my review of the literature of nostalgia and authenticity has shaped how I define and present the themes (steps five and six) in chapters six and seven.
In terms of how I operationalised my thematic analysis, prior to uploading my transcriptions onto NVivo, I re-read all twelve transcripts, making notes which were intended to sum up the point being made, whether it was illustrated in the transcript through a word, phrase, or a large section of text. Once complete, I identified initial codes from each transcript, without considering how they mapped to larger categories. Then, I logically grouped the codes identified into larger categories which constituted my first set of themes. At this stage, I noticed the connection and overlap between some of the themes that I had teased out. A first version of the thematic networks that I developed at this point is shown in Figure 2. The figure presents six interconnected organising themes (e.g. “Comparing past and present experiences of music”) from which the “basic” themes stem from (e.g. “Nostalgia for pre-digital music”) (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 389).

![Thematic Networks Diagram]

**Figure 2 - First version of thematic networks**

Next, I returned to the coded extracts for each theme to check that the themes previously teased out formed logical and coherent categories and that they were meaningful and relevant in encompassing the overall set of extracts (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 91). During this stage, the prevalence of nostalgia as a theme in the transcribed data became more evident as the excerpts associated with “Comparing past and present experiences of music”
music”, “The scene back then”, “Complete experience” and “Childhood” were all reflective of participants comparing superior past experiences associated with music with their seemingly inferior current habits. Similarly, the perceived authenticity of the DIY cover art, “DIY themes/values” covered, along with “Inauthentic DIY”, the majority of the remaining excerpts I had originally identified.

At this stage, returning to the literature on nostalgia and authenticity and designing the conceptual framework presented in chapter four were essential to organise the thematic networks into their final form. For example, I was then able to distinguish personal nostalgia for unique aspects of participants’ youth from collective and cultural nostalgia for aspects of analogue media. Finally, I refined the themes based on the research questions and conceptual framework developed in the literature review chapters. The hierarchy of themes was especially scrutinised to ensure that sub-themes were clearly differentiated from themes. Sub-themes, are “themes-within-a-theme” and are useful to organise and offer detailed insights into a broader theme (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 92). The final version of the thematic networks, which guide and structure the following findings chapters (six and seven) and the discussion chapter (eight), is shown in Figure 3.
As shown in Figure 3, the final thematic networks used for this research comprise two “global” themes – nostalgia and authenticity – from which five organising themes are identified. Then, “basic” themes derive from these to provide detailed support. In some cases, “sub-themes” are necessary to describe multiple facets of a given theme. For example, from the first organising theme “Collective nostalgia for analogue music” stem three “basic” themes: “The medium”, “Record shop rituals” and “Effort” and from the latter are associated four sub-themes: “Music as deep and complex”, “Commitment to music”, “The search” and “Taking a chance on a record”. The findings chapters six and seven are organised according to this final version of the thematic networks.

5.7 Summary

In this chapter, I outlined the ethical issues specific to this research; my research approach, detailing the ontological and epistemological beliefs underpinning my
research; the choice of empirical site and sampling strategy employed when selecting participants; and methods of data collection, including my reasons for choosing semi-interviews and a participant observation at the expense of alternative methods. The aim was also to provide an insight into how I operationalised the transcription and analysis of the collected data as part of my inductive research approach and explaining how nostalgia and authenticity emerged during the analysis of the interview transcripts.

My research questions are thus as follows:

1. How do long-standing members of the indie pop music scene:
   - reflect on their experiences of music?
   - make sense of the scene?
2. How do their chosen covers contribute to their conceptualisations?

The aim of the next two chapters is to present the findings from the twelve in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted with fourteen participants involved in the indie pop music scene. The discussion chapter which follows details the overall contribution of this thesis.
Chapter Six: Recollections and nostalgia

6.1 Introduction

The thematic maps outlined in the previous methodology chapter offered an iterative overview of the findings from the twelve interviews with fourteen participants, which took place between February 2015 and January 2016. As explained in that chapter, these were supported by my immersion in the scene and participant observation which began in March 2014. In presenting the following themes, I emphasise that they are bound together as much as they are technically separable. I have organised them as separate for the purposes of presenting my analysis and interpretation of the data. Moreover, while the process of thematic analysis arguably overlooks some of the nuances of the data in favour of categorisation, it is necessary so that commonly recurring points raised by participants can be articulated and emphasised.

This is the first of two findings chapters and focuses on participants’ recollections and nostalgia which emerged from the interview data. In contrast, in the following findings chapter (chapter seven), I present the perceived authentic characteristics of music covers that ground their reminiscences. As such, connections to the aspects of nostalgia teased out in the chapters two and three of the literature review are made in this chapter, as a means of identifying when nostalgia occurred, what forms it took and what participants reminisced about and yearned for. In chapter seven, “‘Authentic’ DIY music covers”, the features of the covers which participants discussed are connected to the chapter four of the literature review, “Authenticity, nostalgia and indie pop”. In chapter eight, the discussion, I contextualise both findings chapters in relation to the conceptual framework used in this research, which I presented at the end of chapter four.

Before proceeding to present the findings, it must be noted that nostalgia was not always discussed and expressed by the participants in the direct way that was, for example, suggested by Davis (1979). As such, participants did not always explicitly mention that “THINGS WERE BETTER (MORE BEAUTIFUL) (HEALTHIER) (HAPPIER) (MORE CIVILISED) (MORE EXCITING) THEN THAN NOW [sic]” (ibid., p. 18). Instead, underlying tropes of nostalgia became more evident once I had transcribed and analysed the data and re-read the notes I had taken at the end of each interview. Moreover,
drawing on the literature reviewed in chapter two, I reiterate that nostalgia functions as a memory tool and so fundamentally requires forgetting as part and parcel of the process (Hirsch, 1992; Dames, 2001, p. 15; Storey, 2003, p. 103). As such, the participants’ recollections I cite in these chapters are to some extent “forgotten, revised, reorganised, updated, as they undergo rehearsal, interpretation and retelling” (Storey, 2003, p. 103).

The chapter has been organised into three sections, with themes and sub-themes under each. The first of these addresses the organising theme “Collective nostalgia for analogue music”, which captures longing for analogue music media and wider aspects of former experiences of music. In section two, addressing the organising theme “Nostalgia for a “golden age” of indie pop”, I go on to discuss participants’ nostalgia for what they conceived of as the better years of indie pop. Finally, in section three, addressing the organising theme “Personal nostalgia for youth”, I consider their more personal, unique memories associated with music.

6.2 Nostalgia organising theme 1: Collective nostalgia for analogue music

The first section of this findings chapter hinges on nostalgia that participants collectively felt for aspects of their experiences with analogue music. This organising theme encompasses both the physicality of analogue media, which I discuss next to address the basic theme “The medium”. It also extends to wider aspects of the analogue music experiences remembered and cherished by participants, which I discuss under the second and third basic themes, “Record shop rituals” and “Effort”. In this context, the media props played a role in the interview not just as triggers of nostalgia, but as the object of yearning. As I go on to explain, all bar one participant expressed their preference for physical formats, suggesting that tangibility is an important feature of analogue music for them.

6.2.1 Analogue music basic theme 1: The medium

As outlined in my interview guide (see Appendix 2), prior to the interview participants were asked to bring along or be prepared to show examples of cover art that meant something to them. I have already noted chapter four that indie pop favours what might be regarded as outmoded methods of production (Fonarow, 2006; Chivers Yochim and
Biddinger, 2008, p. 193) and that physical music formats such as cassettes and vinyl records are still widely produced and consumed in the scene. It was therefore unsurprising that all participants brought physical examples of cover art to their interviews as opposed to showing and discussing digital examples on the tablet I had brought along with me. As suggested above, all bar one participant emphasised how important they felt the physicality of music was:

“I want the artefact. I want the physical thing in my hand.” (Matthew)

“[…] being able to hold something in your hand, it’s got to be tangible.” (Darren)

“I’ve never listened to, I wouldn’t buy, unless it was a band I knew and really really really loved I wouldn’t buy something that was just to download. I personally prefer to have a physical [copy].” (Vinnie)

In these excerpts, Matthew, Darren and Vinnie highlight their fondness for physical music over digital formats, while Matloob was the only participant to state his preference for digital music:

“As someone who’s got a shed full to the absolute brim of CDs, I’m highly in favour of digital music… I think, digital sort of, it allows music to live longer, because the bands who are around now, their music will live far longer than the bands who were around just fivem, six, seven years ago, because I think it’s an absolute crying shame that these songs that I’ve heard, and to me are some of the most beautiful that I’ve ever heard, all of those record labels have gone bust and because […] the physical CD’s gone… it’s almost lost and someone should, for the public good, actually archive all music, like the way they do with books.”

From his excerpt, it is clear that Matloob’s preference for digital music is to some extent practical in focus; CDs take up space that digital music does not, while digital media allow for longer term storage of music. At the same time, on a more emotional level, Matloob mourns the loss of physical music which he attributes to the shutting down of
various record labels which would formerly have sold this medium. Matloob’s deep appreciation for music comes through when he refers to some of these songs as “some of the most beautiful I’ve ever heard”, suggesting that his preference is not through dislike of analogue music, but more in the interests of preserving it.

Beyond the preference for and inclination towards tangible music formats which emerged in eleven of the interviews, nostalgia was evident in some participants’ accounts:

“I’ve had, you know, nearly half a century of listening to music on something physical, and, normally, in really big format, something that you gazed at over the lyrics sheet to pour over, and I find it very hard to get away from that.” (Mark)

“[…] we don’t just sit there [now] with a record in our hands, sort of looking at every word that’s on it, because I don't and I understand you don't, errrm, which is a shame, because I used to love doing that.” (Sam)

In these two excerpts, Mark and Sam express nostalgic feelings for carefully observing records and their sleeves, contrasting their past experiences with their current listening habits which do not live up to those from the past. Mark explains that his preference for physical formats stems from his earlier encounters with music. He seems to be referring to LP records when he describes the “really big format” that he has always known and feels attached to. Specifically, he remembers closely studying the lyrics booklet that would be encased in the record sleeve. Likewise, Sam recounts holding and scrutinising the written text on the record, suggesting that this was a memorable part of his experience of music. Despite physical music formats still being popular among members of the indie pop music scene (Fonarow, 2006, p. 48; Chivers Yochim and Biddinger, 2008, p. 193), the excerpt from Sam’s interview implies that he misses the physical engagement that he had with music, suggesting that he no longer experiences it in this way. The salience of the sleeve and the cover art in these excerpts highlight the importance of the record packaging in the participants’ nostalgic recollections of analogue music. As such, I argue that the nostalgia for analogue music felt by participants is not confined to the possibility of physically holding the record (Campopiano, 2013, para. 8) but also foregrounds the record sleeve as the object of their nostalgic longing.
Further to the longing for a deeper engagement with tangible music media, twelve participants offered accounts of their past experiences of physical music formats, indicative of media nostalgia that was discussed in chapter three of the literature review. This is illustrated in the following excerpts:

“[…] when you used to copy a cassette and you’d fill a 90-minute cassette up with loads of different music or you’d, if you’re into the Top 40 charts, you’d do the thing where you actually develop one hell of a skill to catch the song that you wanted to catch before the DJ kicked in and spoke over the top of it and all that kind of thing.” (Darren)

“When I was in sixth form I was just like constantly, if I wasn’t like recording stuff on 4 track cassette recorders I was like you know kinda writing or reading fanzines kind of doing these you know fake record sleeves and all the rest of it.” (Ian)

“I prefer vinyl and I don’t think anything beats the sound of when the needle hits the groove and the [imitates crackling noise] it’s kind of like, the equivalent of like smelling onions and garlic cooking at the same time […]” (Jen)

“[…] you took it out, you handled it very carefully, you put it on the deck, and you went to your, favourite listening position [laughing] as it were, and you sat down and you took note, and, you loved, when, when the needle goes on the record, you know you get crackles on the surface and it was fantastic.” (Pete B)

While Darren referred to cassettes as “a bit annoying” – a sentiment shared by Caroline – due to their obvious impracticalities, he fondly remembered carefully recording individual tracks on cassette. Notably, he mentions the “skill” required to create a

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11 In this case, Darren was referring to the need to forward cassettes to the end of the tape if you happened to want to listen to the last track. Despite this, he still professed his love for the format.
seamless mixtape which avoids radio talk and only captures the desired track, mirroring Bolin’s (2015, p. 257) findings that the time and effort invested in producing mixtapes is fondly remembered by consumers. Darren also referred to the “hiss of the cassette” and the “sound”, both of which are unique to the format. In this sense, it is the imperfections of the cassette, as well as the investment associated with producing a mixtape (Fenby-Hulse, 2016, p. 178), compared to more recent digital music formats which lack such flaws and can be instantly duplicated and edited that Darren fondly remembers. This extract underlines Darren’s nostalgia for analogue media, described by Marks (2002, p. 152) and Shrey (2014) as a longing for the flawed features of outdated media.

Similarly, Ian remembers recording music on cassettes, but also making mock record covers. In his interview, he explained that these were “little bits of card or paper” and “very badly hand-drawn”. In these excerpts, Darren and Ian are not only nostalgic for the medium but the interactions they had with the different media involved in their experiences of music, often spending long periods of time crafting mixtapes or mock record sleeves. This resonates with the “labour investment” associated with analogue media (Bolin, 2015) and which I discuss further under the basic theme “Effort” later in this chapter. Jen mentions the characteristic sound of the needle before the first track of a vinyl record and Pete B similarly positions the vinyl record at the forefront of his reminiscing, as he enthusiastically describes the idiosyncrasies of this medium in particular – namely, the moment the needle hits the record and the “crackles on the surface”. During his interview, Pete B also stated that vinyl records “sound right” (his emphasis) and “wholesome” as opposed to digital music formats which do not meet his expectations. These excerpts highlight the perceived superiority of vinyl records and the multi-sensory aspects associated with their listening (Bennett and Rogers, 2015, p. 31). These insights are unsurprising given that members of the indie and DIY scenes are inclined to avoid modern and mass-produced objects while privileging formats that reflect imperfect human characteristics (Fonarow, 2006, p. 74; Chivers Yochim and Biddinger, 2008, p. 193).

In this basic theme, most participants long for specific aspects of their past experiences with tangible media, while the overall circumstances in which these experiences took place were rarely discussed. As such, participants’ nostalgia for tangible music media can be said to be “reflective” as they focused on the attribute of the covers, records and
cassettes without dwelling on the spatial and temporal contexts of their longing (Boym, 2001). In this sense, the previous excerpts emphasise the active reassembling and filtering of the memories associated with the physicality of analogue media as participants often dissociated their experience of the tangible medium from the broader aspects of their listening experience. However, as I go on to demonstrate, participants also reflected on the multiple wider facets of their experiences of analogue media.

6.2.2 Analogue music basic theme 2: Record shop rituals

While the above theme emphasises nostalgia for specific details associated with the physicality of the medium itself, participants longingly spoke of their past routine in the lead up to, during and after purchasing music. The record shop was often at the heart of these recollections and was mentioned in most interviews, sometimes being the only place that participants could find and purchase music. However, even before entering the shop, the rituals could begin, as exemplified in the excerpt below:

“Do you remember the Chart Show? Used to be on a Saturday morning and they’d get the Indie chart or something and you’d get mid-day on a Saturday, you’d get the tiniest little clip of a Pavement song and then you’d go into town and you’d go to the shop and you’d just go “Have you got that new Pavement record that I’ve just heard about ten seconds of on the Chart Show?” and all that kind of thing.” (Darren)

In Darren’s case, the process of finding and purchasing music was triggered by the Chart Show, a TV programme aired between 1986 and 1989. As well as counting down the top ten songs of the week, the show had an indie music segment, providing independent artists with exposure and offering an alternative to mainstream pop music. Darren recalls the common occurrence of hearing a small snippet of an indie song and then heading to the record shop to seek it out. Here, I argue that the nostalgia felt for the record shop also encompasses the broader context in which participants purchased analogue music – namely, the trigger and reason behind their visit to the shop in the first place. As well as seeking out specific music, six participants described physically leafing through the racks of records, as illustrated in the following excerpts:
“I used to [flick through record sleeves] obsessively as a teenager… probably until my mid-20s.” (Trev)

“I think, for me, part of the whole experience of being a music fan you know, involved, you know, you go through, you flick through the stacks at the store […]” (Ian)

Trev’s excerpt captures the compulsiveness he remembers and associates with looking for music, as he admits he used to do it “obsessively” during his adolescent years and into early adulthood. Ian, on the other hand, positions looking through the record racks as contributing to a wider experience associated with “being a music fan”. In this sense, as well as being an element of the physical medium fondly remembered, the record sleeve is associated with wider aspects of the browsing and purchasing rituals connected with analogue music. While the local record shop was frequently referred to by most participants, two participants did not have access to a local shop selling their preferred music and spoke of the alternative methods through which they obtained music:

“I grew up in Grimsby, on the coast, and it was just a million miles away from, where any of this stuff was happening so, umm, it was great, discovering Sarah Records and being able to mail order the stuff and get handwritten notes and all the newsletters, and stuff from the label, so although I could never get to any of these gigs in London, or Oxford or Bristol, it kind of felt like, you just, a little bit like you started to belong to something for the first time.” (Pete G)

“[…] a band called City Bar… they had already split up by the time I was into them, and I had to send ten dollars in an envelope to uhh, to one of the guys in the band and he posted the CD to me. And there was a lot of that sort of stuff going on, and it, to me it just felt like we were back in the days of proper indie.” (Matloob)

In Pete G’s interview, he talked about how he came to be a fan of indie pop music despite not living in proximity to the scene, or having access to the music in a local record shop. In this excerpt, he refers to his discovery of Sarah Records, the “classic” UK-based
independent record label (Dale, 2010, p. 191), which was active between 1987 and 1995 and which was mentioned by eight of the participants, often praised for the consistent DIY aesthetics of its records’ sleeves. Pete G acquired the music via mail order. Yet, he recalls the personalised material he received in the post, including “handwritten notes” and “newsletters”, suggesting that this was a special experience, which felt personal. Indeed, he explicitly describes the feeling that he belonged to something for the first time, through his engagement with and subscription to the music. As such, Pete G’s recollection of his first purchase of tangible music sheds light on the deeper level of nostalgic yearning that some participants experienced – namely, this sense of belonging “for the first time”.

Like longing for home, a common object of nostalgic longing (Anspach, 1934, p. 383; McCann, 1943; Nawas and Platt, 1965, p. 51; Rosen, 1975; Havlena and Holak, 1991; Sedikides et al., 2004, p. 202; Wilson, 2014, p. 32), Pete G’s nostalgia for ordering and receiving physical formats of music through the post unveils longing for the more abstract concept of belongingness (Davis, 1979; Stern, 1992, p. 16; Boym, 2001).

Similarly, in his interview, Matloob described how he purchased music either by contacting people via email, or through obscure websites that sold records online. In this excerpt, he notes that it “felt like we were back in the days of proper indie”, which he appears to attribute to the “Do It Yourself” nature of the process, the personal interactions with others on the scene and often the bands or musicians themselves who were selling the music. In his interview, he noted that these distribution websites have since closed, seemingly because consumers are listening to music via the streaming website Bandcamp, which he expressed his unhappiness over.

Of those who did have access to a local record shop, some also commented on aspects of the experience post-purchase, and the unveiling of and engagement with the music once reaching home:

“[…] when I used to buy records, it was fun because you were going home and there was that anticipation. And you’d put it on and you’d be engrossed in the sleeve […]” (Pete B)

“I think maybe, you know when I was in my teens I’d do that thing of kind of, you know, getting the CDs back from the shop and, on the first listen
you flick through the sort of, lyric book and things, and obsessively, and I’ve sort of gone beyond that really, out of laziness I’d say [laughing] I should get back to that, because it certainly meant something, or it signalled that the record meant something to you. These days, nah, I’d just, skip that basically…” (Ian)

Notably, Pete B describes how he would be “engrossed” in the record sleeve while listening to the music, while Ian admits he used to read the lyrics booklet “obsessively”, using the same language as Trev to describe the irresistible pull of this component of the physical medium. Specific feelings are also associated with their memories. Pete B references the “fun” and “anticipation” of waiting to get the music home to listen to it and examine the cover and inlays of the record. Ian, on the other hand, sees this ritual as a more meaningful engagement than his present listening circumstances. During his interview, Ian spoke of having less time to devote to music in the same way that he did while he was younger, suggesting that this was a product of changes in music production and consumption and more broadly living in a “capitalist society”. These differences, alongside getting older and having less time, appear to be the reasons why he does not engage with music in the same way.

In the excerpts presented above, the nostalgic feelings for the purchase of analogue music expressed by the participants are not limited to specific characteristics of the medium and encompass spatial and temporal aspects of their past experiences with music. Indeed, their exposure to analogue music often centred around the record shop, as the physical location in which they searched through stacks of music. In other cases, this centred on getting the post, if visiting a physical shop was not practical. Moreover, their purchase at the record shop is part of a wider and more durable experience, often associated with their childhood and teenage years. In the case of Darren, the shop was visited after hearing a snippet from a song played on television, while Pete B and Ian fondly remember their excitement as they headed back from the shop, eagerly waiting to play the record and analyse the sleeve. The nostalgia for the record shop is thus more “reflective” than the nostalgia solely felt for the media. In this sense, the past experience which revolves around the record shop appears to be a return to the “prelapsarian moment” as participants assiduously reconstruct their “freshly painted” purchase of analogue music (Boym, 2001, p. 49). In these excerpts, the record sleeve and cover art are central to the nostalgia felt for the post-
purchase experience of vinyl. As such, participants felt nostalgic for the record sleeve and its role in intensifying their first listen of a recently-purchased vinyl record.

6.2.2.1 The anticipation: record release day

Beyond yearning for the context associated with purchasing physical music formats, three participants expressed nostalgia specifically for the build-up to a record release day, a momentous and long-awaited event for music fans that had been waiting for months to not only purchase but also hear analogue records for the first time. Under this sub-theme, Jen, who was working at a record shop at the time, recalled her excitement when an album finally came out:

“I think something that I miss, about the follies of youth is uh, when a new album would come out and you could not wait to get it, and this was before, streaming… I remember when Guns N’ Roses Use Your Illusion came out, and people camped outside of record stores to be the first to buy them… so when those albums came out, people camped out. And I remember when Dirty from Sonic Youth came out, and I was working at a record store, and we didn’t give advance copies, and I remember, it was on my day off but I got to the store early and was there to buy it, and I built it up so much in my head like “oh it’s gonna sell out and you know like, I live in a town where like, this is the one wacky record store, we sell like eight records a day, it’s gonna be fine”.” (her emphasis)

In this excerpt, Jen explains that her excitement not only stemmed from the wait but was also generated by the record shop owners who did not sell any copies of the record before the very day of its release. As such, she associates the anticipation of the release of a new record with “the follies of youth” as she explains her reaction to the build-up that she admittedly heightened herself. Record release days were also often contrasted with the more recent accessibility provided by modern music platforms. For example, Andy commented:

“[…] records, they’re previewed months in advance, and by the time the record comes out it’s kind of lost it’s uhh, uhhm, it’s lost its, the event is lost, the event was three months ago when the record was first previewed
on whatever website you know or whatever. And yet, you know, I’m old enough [laughing] to remember it was a big thing, record release day, you know, because, often you hadn’t heard the records or you’d heard them once on the radio and, you know, maybe didn’t get to tape it, so y’know, you didn’t get the chance to hear it over and over again.”

In this excerpt, Andy emphasises the dichotomy between past and present music release practices, explaining that today “the event is lost”. Andy’s experience highlights the loss of the excitement that he used to feel before a release and that is now diluted over a longer period and several online previews. As for Jen’s recollection of record release day, the tropes of nostalgia in Andy’s interview extract are also particularly striking here. Indeed, the longing for the “big” event that constituted the release day in previous years and the excitement felt during this glorious period is opposed to the bland online previews of digital music consumption. These excerpts underline the importance of the symbolic event that constituted the record release day. As such, these findings support the argument made in chapter three in which I highlighted the salience of memorable and personally experienced events in nostalgic episodes (Holak and Havlena, 1992). Additionally, Mark suggested that the anticipation for new analogue records was also built up by other media – here, the music press:

“The other thing I don’t do now is religiously read music press, because that’s the other thing when I was younger, I’d sort of read Smash Hits! when I was in my teens and moved on to the NME, and knew what was coming out when, and would be all set to buy it on the day it came out, um, but, these days, it’s only when I happen to go into a record shop and flick through the racks that I’ll go “oh it’s a new LP” that I’d kind of realise that something’s appeared.”

Here, Mark not only describes the changes in the ways he used to look forward to release days but also contrasts his experience in his younger years, “religiously” keeping up-to-date with the latest music updates, with his time now after “nearly half a century of listening to music on something physical”. Again, Mark’s excerpt is an example of the nostalgia felt for the wider rituals of purchasing analogue music; in this case, including other media that he would frequently turn to, to find out about the record release day.
As exemplified in these extracts that hinge on nostalgia for past purchasing habits as well as anticipation for a record’s release day, all participants implicitly or explicitly referred to their younger years. For instance, Trev explained that he used to flick through records “until [his] mid-20s” while Pete G mentioned his discovery of the indie label Sarah Records while growing up in Grimsby. As such, the excitement that these respondents felt often coincided with the “period of intense affective consumption”, described by Schindler and Holbrook (2003, p. 279) as a time when teenagers and young adults form long-lasting bonds with music. Furthermore, these excerpts highlight the role of being younger in grounding experiences of music, in line with the fascination of respondents for “being like a child again” and the idealised image of innocence and purity affiliated with it (Reynolds, 2007, p. 15).

6.2.3 Analogue music basic theme 3: Effort

The third theme which emerged from my analysis of the interview data under the organising theme of “Collective nostalgia for analogue music” revolves around the effort required from the participants in their experience of analogue music. In this section, I outline the various guises that this effort reportedly took: from the notion of a “complete” experience to be had when dealing with analogue music, and how challenging it could be, to the commitment that was required “back then”. While the “labour investment” associated with analogue media is documented in the literature on media nostalgia (Bolin, 2015), I present in this section findings that demonstrate participants’ nostalgia for the wider effort related to listening habits of analogue music as well as its tangible format. As with the former two basic themes, participants contrast this with digital music, either implicitly or explicitly, often highlighting the differences between their more recent and past experiences.

6.2.3.1 Music as deep and complex

As I have already outlined in the introduction chapter to this thesis and in my methodology chapter, one of my original intentions at the time I conducted the interviews was to explore the role of cover art in some of the indie pop scene long-standing members’
experiences of music. A recurring sub-theme when discussing the artwork was for participants to refer to the “whole package” of the music, extending beyond simply the sound and encompassing the physical medium itself. Given that participants were aware of the topic of the research at the time and that the interview questions were designed to investigate the role of artwork in the participants’ experiences, it is important to note that these conversations did not emerge without prompting. However, many participants went on to discuss other ways in which their experiences of analogue music were more complete or somehow superior to digital music. For instance, Andy and Ian commented on their own listening habits:

“[…] how I usually listen to music, I’m not just sat at the computer, it’s not just a passive experience, me with headphones plugged in just sat at the computer.” (Andy)

“[…] when you’re on a bus and people listening to music, I mean, fair play but for me it can never just be background, it’s not just noise, I mean, I’m not saying that every time I put a record on I’m doing that kind of deep listening thing, but, errm, I can’t just have it as something that, you know, is there. It means far more than that, to me, umm, so I suppose in some ways I am giving it my full attention […]” (Ian)

In the first excerpt, Andy implies that he listens to music very much actively by comparing his listening habits to the passive experience of sitting in front of a computer. The impression from his statement is that he is comparing his own behaviour, as someone who prefers analogue music, to listeners to digital music. This dichotomy emerged in most interviews. Likewise, Ian explains that he prefers to give music his “full attention”, while acknowledging that he does not always do “that kind of, deep listening thing” all the time. Similarly, Ian contrasts his listening habits with those of people who listen to music on the go and who he assumes are not engaging with music in the same depth as he does. Mentioning a deeper level of course implies that Ian sees listening to music as potentially profound. In tune with this, seven participants recalled the effort they had to put before “breaking through” with some music:
“I think umm, listening to Belle and Sebastian when I was eighteen or twenty or whatever, it was like easy to listen to. While, some bands that I remember maybe a friend giving me a CD and I gave it a listen and I didn't listen to it [again]. Eight years later I went back to it and thought “wow this is amazing”. But I think there’s also a kind of learning or something, an appreciation. Some bands I really like now maybe I didn’t like before… so I think there is that sort of, umm, learning to appreciate things I guess.” (Miguel)

“[The internet is] taking away the bit I loved when I was a kid, of not knowing what was on that LP, the stuff that… Yes so you heard the single once with probably no idea [what] the other nine or ten songs on there sounded like… That’s a thing, I think that’s what the internet… in a way, it’s the way that sort of effort of loving something… And also the stuff that… I bought when I was a kid that was utterly brilliant but I didn’t get it first time and it took me about a lot of listening to actually understand what was great about it… bands who’d hook you in with a great single and then do a really dark, impenetrable LP… Echo & the Bunnymen did that quite a few times for me. Like the second Echo & the Bunnymen out there, they are really abrupt. But it has a beautiful cover so I quite happily put it on every night after I bought it, listening to it, looking at the cover “This is such a beautiful cover. My God this is difficult music!” And then eventually I was hooked.” (Mark)

In the first excerpt, Miguel explicitly refers to the learning that he believes is required to appreciate some music, implying that not all music is instantly likeable. Similarly, Mark recalls his appreciation of a more accessible single by the British band Echo & the Bunnymen when he was a “kid”, only to discover that the remaining tracks on the LP were very inaccessible. He goes on to explain the effort it took him – namely, repeatedly listening to the entire record – until he became “hooked”. This excerpt captures both the time and the commitment required to “understand” the music, which in Mark’s interview he compares to streaming digital music, explaining that the immediacy of the internet has replaced the charm of the uncertainty about the content of a record. Mark thus implies
that analogue music required more effort since you could not easily skip songs, meaning that this aspect of the experience and learning to like music is lost.

As this sub-theme illustrates, participants’ listening habits, as they reported on multiple occasions, are strongly associated with the effort they put into and their affection for music, ever since their very first contact with it. However, the nostalgia observed in the previous excerpts is not always obviously temporal – that is, explicitly stating that things were better in the past (Davis, 1979, p. 18). That said, yearning can be deduced when participants compare digital and analogue experiences of music. Having discussed the effort required to appreciate the depth and complexity of music, I elaborate on the notion of commitment in the following sub-theme.

6.2.3.2 Commitment to music

Building on elements of Miguel’s and Mark’s excerpts, which imply the long-term investment required to appreciate analogue music and which was associated with former times, other participants mentioned the commitment that was inevitably part of the experience of analogue music:

“[…] it’s a case of “well now I’ve bought it I’m gonna have to like this record, so I’m gonna have to play it and if I don’t like it the first time I’m gonna have to keep trying til I do” and I think that’s quite a good kind of education for like listening to music is that some music is challenging and you do have to give it a few listens […]” (Andy)

“[…] when you bought a record, you were kind of stuck with it, you know […] some records you might not like them, right away, but for me, there was always a little voice saying, “there’s something there, there’s something there that you’ll connect with and come back”, and I, I had a load of records like that, and I’m not quite sure, if I do like it or if I don't like it, but I know I’ll come back to it, and that’s why I say the record will sort of reveal itself over time, if you give it the time.” (Pete B)
In the first excerpt, Andy, in a similar manner to Mark who also repeatedly listened to whole albums to appreciate each track, highlights the significance of the investment in analogue music. To Andy, buying music was a commitment in the sense that he had spent money on it and thus had to put effort in to like what he had bought, for fear of it otherwise being a waste of money. He reflects positively upon this, referring to it as an “education” and implying his approval of the effort needed to be a music fan before digital formats were available. This is supported by Pete B’s assertion that sometimes a record will “reveal itself over time, if you give it the time”. Essentially, listening to music and learning to appreciate it involves both time and patience. Pete’s analogy of being “stuck” with a record further highlights the commitment to the music, contrasting with his perception of the more widespread throwaway music consumption habits associated with digital music.

These two observations extend the definition of effort that Bolin (2015) and Lepa and Tritakis (2016) posit as characteristic of analogue media. As such, the longing felt by Andy and Pete B, mentioned by seven participants in total, goes beyond the nostalgia felt for simply handling the physical music artefact and producing analogue music. In these cases, it is faithfulness to the media that is highlighted, as if records also possessed the authentic human qualities heralded by the indie pop scene (Fonarow, 2006, p. 49; Chivers Yochim and Biddinger, 2008, p. 193). As such, I argue that in the context of music media, technostalgia (Pinch and Reinecke, 2009) and analogue nostalgia (Marks, 2002, p. 152) also encompass the effort that was required to commit to and appreciate the depth of some music available on analogue formats.

6.2.3.3 Taking a chance on a record

Beyond the hard work and commitment to analogue music that participants mentioned, eight respondents also reminisced about “taking a chance” on a record – in other words, buying a record based on the appearance of the cover. Indeed, the phrase “taking a chance” was mentioned verbatim in five of the interviews. In total, eleven participants shared their personal memories of specific music they bought, sound unheard, under this sub-theme:
“I’ve always been one for just going into a record shop and, if you don’t know it but you like the look of it, then I’ve thought “well I’ll risk it” […]”
(Caroline)

“[young people are] not going into a record shop and taking a chance on a record by the way it looks any more. They might listen to a song by a band on Bandcamp that they’ve never heard of before, but there’s no layer between the listener and the music any more, whereas, that was what cover art was.”
(Sam)

“[…] it was the second Pulp album and that was 1987 and I bought it cos it looked a bit weird and had a good review but if it happened to have a bad review, I wouldn’t have bought it but it had a good review and looked kind of interesting, put the two together and thought I’d take a chance. And that’s long before Pulp were famous and it was just like “I’d take a chance on that” cause I’ve read a good review and it’s given eight out of ten or something, and it looks like something I might like, so I don’t think that happens [now]… It’s quite sad.”
(Trev)

In the interview with Darren and Caroline, Caroline identified parts of the experience of analogue music that she remembers being particularly meaningful. In this case, the risk of buying a record based on the strength of the sleeve is significant to her as she reflects on the fact that it has “always” been part of her music purchasing habits. Likewise, Sam’s nostalgia is apparent as he directly compares his past buying habits to those of listeners to digital music. He mourns the diminished role of the cover as the first interaction between the listener and the music, which he sees as a superior characteristic of the experience of analogue music. Sam later explained that he bought records based on the strength of the cover several times but clarified that “some of them ended up being good bands and some of them ended up being awful”. Still, his comments suggest that he did not particularly regret buying a bad record solely based on the sleeve, seeing this as part and parcel of the experience of analogue music.

In Trev’s excerpt, he remembers the details of the second album by the British band Pulp, on which he took a chance based on its review and its appearance, which he describes as
“interesting” and “a bit weird” although he does say he would not have bought it purely based on the aesthetic of the sleeve and without reading a good review. When discussing the loss of spontaneity in buying music, Trev is also torn between the advantages of the possibility of previewing songs online and the lack of commitment to a record solely based on the strength of its cover, mentioning that “people don’t explore as much”. Additionally, Ian suggests that he would not buy a record if the sleeve is not appealing and that ultimately, he needs to know about the band who produced it before purchasing a record:

“I think the music’s good enough to overcome it, umm, it’s, it’s not you know, it ain’t the end of the world, is it? But it’s just, initially, if I didn’t know the band, I wouldn’t buy it, and I know they say you shouldn’t judge a book by its cover, but everybody always does, all the time, uh… I wouldn’t buy that, I’d just be like “what’s this, some kind of horrendous”…” (Ian)

Here, Ian also indicates that the quality of the songs and the music on a record with a bad sleeve may balance out the disappointing visuals. While the role and particular DIY aesthetics of record sleeves are discussed in chapter seven, these interviews suggest that there is a collective longing for aspects of the purchase of tangible music artefacts based on the cover art. As such, I argue that the record sleeve also constitutes an object of participants’ nostalgia for their purchase of analogue music since they fondly remember the risk and spontaneity associated with “taking a change on a record”. These recollections then support Reynolds’ (2007, pp. 15-16) argument which places the loss of child-like “impulsiveness” at the centre of indie pop’s nostalgia.

6.2.3.4 The search

The final sub-theme of the collective nostalgia felt for the effort associated with the participants’ experiences of analogue media centres around their passionate search for tangible music. With regards to seeking out specific music, the idea of “searching” for tangible music artefacts recurred throughout the interviews. Caroline, for example, recounted a story of finding a single by the British band The Jesus and Mary Chain she had been looking for:
Caroline: Well this didn’t actually mean anything to me at the time that this got put out because I was only a child, but, I learnt about it afterwards and then I was hunting for it, and I knew what it looked like, so when I found it in a record fair I was like [looks shocked] “I know that one, and I think there’s meant to be a postcard inside that one or something and there’s not”…

Darren: There’s err there’s like a little slip of paper to get a t-shirt on some copies. Look at the label, look at that, that is just like handwritten!

Caroline: I don’t know if each one is individual, the design is… and I think I sniffed it as well when I bought it.

Darren: What, if it smelt musty?

Caroline: Yeah then and I was really pleased with myself when I found it, I was looking for it and when I found it, I was like, you have that bit where you go cold…”

In this excerpt, Caroline underlines the pleasure derived from encountering a record that she first discovered when she was a child and that she had been searching for. Here, the role of the materiality of the medium is particularly striking as the design of the cover guided Caroline in her hunt while the content of the sleeve and the “musty” smell of the record helped her confirm that the record was the one she had been looking for. While she does not directly compare the ease of access to digital music to the dedication required to find the album in this excerpt, Caroline mentioned recent changes in music listening habits and buying behaviours throughout her interview. For example, she explained that before the rise of the internet and digital technologies more broadly, people “needed to put more effort in in those days”, further emphasising her nostalgia for all facets of the effort associated with analogue media.

Similarly, Ian compares his past search in record shops with today’s online platforms that allow music fans to instantly search for their favourite songs or albums:

“[…] for me, part of the whole experience of being a music fan you know, involved, you know, you go through, you flick through the stacks at the store, searching for, say you have a band that you’re obsessed with, say you know you’ve got all the tracks, the B sides and all this sort of obscure
stuff, back then, you know, the excitement if you actually found something, you know, that you’d been looking for, you know, some old single or something, was incredible. But now you can just go “right, I’ll just go on YouTube or Spotify” you know and it’s just kind of there […]”

Here, Ian fondly remembers searching for analogue records and the “incredible” satisfaction he felt when finally finding the object he had been searching for. For him, the exhilarating search characteristic of past times contrasts with the immediacy of recent music retrieval experience on online platforms such as YouTube or Spotify. In line with the earlier basic theme “Record shop rituals”, Ian highlights the role of the shop as the location of his search while he explains his dissatisfaction with the ubiquity and ease of access of online platforms that are “just kind of there”. His investment in the bands that he was “obsessed with” and in all of their releases including the “obscure stuff” is also to be noted, as Ian explains that the modern straightforward means of listening to music privileges “individual tracks” instead of albums that should be listened to “from start to finish”. As well as committing to and taking a chance on a record, highlight that nostalgia can be felt for times in which they were more involved and dedicated to choosing music.

Throughout the first section of this first findings chapter, I have strived to present a faithful picture of the nostalgia felt by my respondents for multiple aspects of their past relationships with analogue media – namely, the physicality of the experience, the role of the record shop and the effort that had to be put into listening to music back then. Regarding the type of nostalgia that is present in the excerpts I present, I argue that this is very much collective and cultural, as originally described by Baker and Kennedy (1994) and Havlena and Holak (1996). In this sense, all participants’ longings stem from their direct past experience of music; for example, they narrated going to the record shop or listening to vinyl records. Moreover, while I discuss this further in the discussion chapter (eight), I argue that the shared appreciation for the “depth” of analogue music formats, favoured on the indie pop scene (Fonarow, 2006; Yochin and Biddinger, 2008, p. 193), constitutes a means for them to ground their nostalgia for personal and human qualities. I now turn to the analysis of the second organising theme: a nostalgic longing for the “golden age” of the indie pop scene.
6.3 Nostalgia organising theme 2: Nostalgia for a “golden age” of indie pop

As well as being nostalgic for analogue music, participants also reflected on what they remembered or considered the indie pop music scene to be like in the past. While these reminiscences in part stemmed from the “warm up” questions in the interview guide (see Appendix 2) which encouraged interviewees to discuss when and how they first became involved in the scene, many participants appeared nostalgic for what the scene was “back then”. Ten participants referred to certain aspects of the scene, which sheds light on how they make sense of it via their recollections and the qualities they stressed. Across all twelve of the interviews there were also significant similarities between what participants valued in the scene. However, there were also points of divergence, as exemplified in the following excerpts. Notably, a “golden age” of indie pop was referred to by some participants, which was collectively considered to have taken place during the 1980s and often coincided with the time participants first entered the scene:

“[…] so you had sort of the eighties indie, which was real indie, so the labels were genuinely independent, and then in the nineties you started getting fake indie, and it was the big labels, like EMI bought Food or created Food, and then various other labels had a kind of indie style…” (Matloob)

“[…] if you’re asking about the original indie pop, err, bands were around in the mid-eighties.” (Pete B)

In the first excerpt, Matloob refers to indie in the 1980s as “real” indie, suggesting that this period of indie music was more authentic than other periods. He explains that the record labels during this time were “genuinely independent”, again drawing on language to denote authenticity (Bendix, 1997, p. 14). Matloob then explains that after the golden years of indie pop, in the 1990s, larger labels bought the independents, which gave rise to “fake” indie as he positions this later inauthentic era of indie music in contrast to the genuineness of the 1980s, in line with Hesmondhalgh’s (1999, p. 35) assertion that the indie scene became increasingly commercialised in the late 1980s. This account implies that the independence of the record labels was key in establishing the authenticity that he perceives to be characteristic of the previous decade. That Matloob blames forces outside of the indie pop scene for its downfall is in tune with Tannock’s (1995) critique of the
perceived idyllic nature of former times, where the nostalgic subject avoids acknowledging that the demise stems from within the prelapsarian world.

In a similar vein, Pete B’s use of the word “original” is very much in tune with tropes surrounding authenticity (Bendix, 1997, p. 15). In his interview, however, Pete B spoke of a second revival which he argued started around 2004. For instance, he described meeting one of his band mates, Ian, who was playing in another band at the time in a local pub in Stoke-on-Trent. Back then, Ian was in a band called The Mittens, and Pete B recalled:

“The first time I saw The Mittens, my eyes just, widened, and I felt me jaw dropping and, I just thought, this just takes me back […] I started going to Sheffield to see a couple of bands and, the discos up there were playing sort of eighties indie pop, which I’d never ever heard, and I was really, really surprised there were people who seemed really into it and you could sense there was something in the air, the same as it was for me. I could feel the same thing through the air as it were, in the eighties, erm, and it was an enthusiastic approach to music, you know people doing, records and club nights in Sheffield…” (his emphasis)

Here, Pete B remembers the first time he met Ian, the first participant that I interviewed and who plays in the same band as Pete B. In the excerpt, he reflects on his reaction to the atmosphere in the room during the performance by Ian’s band at the time, The Mittens. Pete B suggests that his response was triggered by the collective enthusiasm of the audience which he struggles to capture, mentioning that “there was something in the air”. As such, Pete B suggests that the “original” indie pop scene was founded on the positive energy that emanated from its members as well as their dedication to genuine “artistic expression” (Fonarow 2006, p. 188). Likewise, Matthew reflected on the past enthusiasm of members of the scene:

“[…] my brother came out of that sort of post-punk time, where The Fall and, Joy Division and had been quite, you know, and the music that came out of 86, 87 was very, was more optimistic, it was very up, it was not into the doldrums of punk, sorry not into the doldrums of post-punk and, and it was
kind of, when you went to the gigs it was very up. It wasn’t like everyone was on E or everything because that was a couple of years before E. But there wasn’t an artificialness to it, it was like a natural, a natural, positive thing, you know like, the energy of the Buzzcocks and the energy of the Ramones with all the energy and the enthusiasm of, of, just being happy for that moment you know, like “oh yeah this is really great”, and having that energy […]” (his emphasis)

Matthew recalls his music taste being at odds with that of his brother, who preferred music from the post-punk era, which began in the late 1970s. Matthew positions indie pop as much more upbeat in comparison to the melancholic mood of post-punk. He clarifies that this was not due to the widespread influence of drugs, such as ecstasy (“E”), in the scene, suggesting that it was naturally occurring and emanated from people’s “energy” and “enthusiasm” for the music. Emphasising the natural and spontaneous nature of the liveliness that was cultivated, Matthew authenticates the golden years of indie music, again occurring in the late 1980s, in his account. As per the previous excerpts, I argue that one of the most prevalent features of the indie scene “back then” was the collective energy of the performers and fans. Moreover, as Matthew’s interview suggests, members were “just being happy for that moment”. In other words, members of the scene were only interested in having “the purest possible experience of music” (Fonarow, 2006, p. 3) rather than being interested in commercial success (Dale, 2010, p. 251).

Similarly, Miguel explicitly stated that the “golden age” of indie pop was “obviously” in the 1980s, but also echoed Pete B in suggesting there was a more recent yet smaller scale revival “around 2006/7/8”. As one of the youngest long-standing members of the indie pop scene I interviewed, Miguel was not involved during the 1980s, yet recognises its pertinence as a golden period of the scene. This is indicative of interpersonal nostalgia, which is indirect and informed by close others – in this case older members of the indie pop music scene with whom Miguel is friends with and who were part of the scene then (Davis, 1979; Holak and Havlena, 1992; Havlena and Holak, 1996). Elaborating on this, he continued:

“I went to see The Clientele, and uhh, I bumped into, this girl who used to run one of the clubs around then and we were like “oh, oh you! I haven’t seen you
in a long time”. And she was like, we were talking about “is there much going on these days?”, and she said “no”, and we said “well we will have to make a movie about the golden years” […] I don’t know why there’s not any clubs like there used to be when we were doing it, so yeah there is this sort of nostalgia about it, I don't know if… there are a few things that I don't really know why, but I think age has something to do with that… but also the fact that maybe there were radios or, someone mentioned, a friend mentioned once, one of the reasons was because of Myspace, Myspace was really good for, spreading music ehh, there were a few years only, then it disappeared, and Facebook has never been the same [as Myspace].”

In Miguel’s excerpt, he discusses an encounter with a fellow indie pop fan and their shared observation that the indie pop scene is no longer as lively as it was formerly, perhaps between 2006 and 2008, again in tune with Pete B’s earlier statement regarding its mini revival. The pair joke that this period was “the golden years” and Miguel explicitly states that there is nostalgia for it in the scene. Seeking to explain the decline since then, he suggests that media popular in the past, such as the social networking website Myspace which was used to promote music online, were one of the reasons behind the revival. As such, when Facebook, which Miguel describes as “for personal stuff” and not appropriate for bands to share their music, largely replaced it, activity in the scene decreased.

Sam also made explicit reference to nostalgia, speaking about how he felt the scene differed back then in comparison to now:

“[…] and nostalgia is a horrible thing, I hate it, but there just seem to be a lot more smaller venues around than there were, there were in Leicester as well and there were in Derby, there certainly was, then, you know you could easily count them on one hand, outside of the DHP12, and you still probably got a dozen decent bands, and it seemed a lot easier to put gigs on then. I don’t know if it was or not, at the time, but, it just seemed, it just seemed as far as

12 The DHP family, formerly known as the DHP group, owned various live music venues across the East Midlands and has now expanded further afield to other European cities (DHP Family, 2019).
booking venues was concerned, it seemed a lot easier back then. And there seemed to be a lot more people doing it uhh and it seemed to be a lot bigger scene, and maybe it wasn't, I dunno, maybe it was because I was young and it seemed big. I dunno, I can’t tell […]”

In this excerpt, Sam describes the scene when he moved to Nottingham in the early 1990s and when, as mentioned at the start of his interview, “a whole new world opened up” to him. As such, Sam characterises the scene referring to how easy it was to “put gigs on”, since they were a large number of music venues in the Midlands and in London. He suggests this stemmed from the wider reach of the indie pop scene as more people seemed to be involved at the time. Here, Sam’s nostalgia points to the inclusiveness of the scene and contrasts with the nostalgia felt by participants for the effort that they had to put into enjoying music on analogue formats.

Notably, Miguel’s and Sam’s excerpts constitute the only examples of participants directly addressing their awareness of their own nostalgia. For instance, Sam highlights that he is aware of his nostalgia by introducing his recollection with “nostalgia is a horrible thing, I hate it” and later, when suggesting things were easier and the scene being bigger, preceding this with the statement “I don’t know if it was or not”. This contrasts with the majority of the nostalgic reminiscences that I have introduced so far in this chapter. These I classify as “first order” nostalgia (Davis, 1979) as participants mention the past as superior to present circumstances. In this sense, Miguel and Sam demonstrate “third order” or “interpreted nostalgia” as they critically engage with their nostalgic recollections and wonder whether their yearning for the “golden age” of the scene is accurate and faithful to what the scene was back then. I argue that this critical degree of analysis is explained by the fact that their recollections of the scene are not grounded in tangible evidence or idiosyncratic direct experience, unlike the nostalgia felt for their exposure to analogue media, but rely on a broader and less specific sense of what the scene was back then.

Additionally, Caroline reflected on the scene but stated that it was more difficult back then to find bands and be accepted as a member:
“[…] you couldn’t really get in there; you couldn’t penetrate unless you knew at least obscure bands and there wasn’t a way to find out about those obscure bands in those days because I didn’t know about fanzines and all those sorts of things […]”

In the context of her full interview and as further exemplified in the following chapter, Caroline positions indie pop music as involving more effort and hard work in the past than nowadays when music is more readily available. As such, this excerpt suggests a continuation of this sentiment, as she suggests that becoming involved in the scene and finding “obscure” bands was more difficult back then. Taken together with Sam’s excerpt, this also highlights how the scene can be both experienced and reflected on differently from one person to the next, depending on the context in which they first became involved and what they personally focus on and remember (Hirsch, 1992; Dames, 2001, p. 15; Storey, 2003, p. 103).

In this section, I have highlighted the common characteristics of the “golden age” of the indie pop scene, in line with the description of the scene in chapter four, under “The origins and values of indie pop”. As such, it represents a period that occurred in the 1980s and during which the “original” indie pop music could be enjoyed by enthusiastic fans who were mostly concerned about performers’ “artistic expression” (Fonarow, 2006, p. 188). According to the participants, a “natural” and “positive” energy was perceptible, along with the inclusiveness of the scene. Finally, the perceived authenticity “back then” was often compared to the inferior, “fake” and more commercial indie that emerged in the 1990s. In the following section, I turn to the third organising theme under the global theme of nostalgia: the more personal memories of music associated with youth, which most participants shared in their interviews.

6.4 Nostalgia organising theme 3: Personal nostalgia for youth

This final organising theme captures the themes which emerged from participants’ personal recollections of music. The nostalgia illustrated via the following interview excerpts centres around personal memories of directly experienced episodes, often stemming from participants’ younger years. The reminiscences presented in this section
do not only focus on the analogue media or the indie pop scene but delve into the deeper values and meaning that music conveyed “back then”. The meaning of participants’ first encounter with music is discussed first, while the next two basic themes capture the sense of belonging and independence associated with early experiences of music, respectively.

6.4.1 Personal memories basic theme 1: The meaningfulness of first engagements with music

As I have already pointed out in chapter three, young music listeners are thought to experience a “period of intense affective consumption” (Schindler and Holbrook, 2003, p. 279). These preferences, which usually peak around the mid-twenties, are maintained throughout one’s lifetime if they are shared with others (Holbrook and Schindler, 1989, p. 119). Indeed, participants’ fondness for moments of their youth associated with their experience of music was evident in the data generated by the interviews. Notably, their recollections were not only associated with the sound of the music (Barrett et al., 2010, p. 390) or its lyrics (Batcho et al., 2008, p. 237), but also captured the wider aspect of their personal experiences associated with music. These recollections can be considered “private nostalgia” (Davis, 1979, p. 123), or “personal nostalgia” (Havlena and Holak, 1996, p. 38), since they capture the individualised longings of participants, unlike the shared, collective nostalgia exhibited in the previous two organising themes. For instance, eight participants could recall their first music purchase. As Sam remembered his mother accompanying him to buy “a seven-inch of Shakin’ Stevens” from the UK high-street retailer Woolworths when he was six or seven years old, he continued:

“I was only six, seven and yeah the cover art’s terrible, it’s just embarrassing really… have a look at it online, check it out, trying to look like Elvis, in all denim, so yeah, I remember it very vividly, and errm that, because I was quite proud that I’d got a record. I took it home like “yeah look at it, I’ve got a record”, you know and that, that, you know, you’d heard it on the radio and you'd got it.”

Similarly, Miguel described his first music purchase, going to the record shop accompanied by his brother:
“[…] me and my brother, I was nine, you know. I went to the record shop, I think I remember my mum reminding me, the guy in the record shop was really shocked. Not because I was in a record shop but because I was buying old music. There was an album by U2… it was black, the whole artwork, except for… the everything was black and white, I don’t really like it very much but it was my first album.”

In these two excerpts, Sam and Miguel both describe their first music purchase as a very distinct milestone in their journey as music fans. As they mention the role of their close family members in taking them to the record shop, Sam and Miguel both comment on the cover art as the most striking feature of the object they had acquired. Even if their reminiscences about the artwork were presumably influenced by the context of the interviews and the focus on cover art, both still vividly remember the act of buying their first piece of music in a shop as well as what the records looked like and not just how the music sounded. Here, I argue that the role of family members in participants’ first purchase of analogue music formats constitutes one of the objects of their longing, in line with Sedikides et al. (2008, p. 307) and Cheung et al. (2017, p. 89) who highlight the place of loved ones at the centre of nostalgia. Offering further support to this, eight participants commented on the meaningfulness of music when they were younger and which they associated with the physicality of the medium. For instance, Vinnie and Mark commented:

“Can you imagine now, I mean I don’t, I’m speculating a bit now, but can you imagine someone who is, eighteen, who’s waited for an artist to release something, and having that same emotional response to something which has just been [released] electronically? … I mean maybe they do, maybe that’s why the YouTube videos are very important because they do need a more – that sounds really pretentious… but a more multisensory experience with it. But I find that really hard to imagine that they have that same reaction, because they can just steal it can’t they? They can nick it, whereas you couldn’t go into a record store and take something without paying for it.” (Vinnie)
“I think for me it’s, the whole experience, but I think that’s especially true of the stuff I bought when I was a lot younger when I did have the time to just sit and gaze at the sleeve, and get to know it really intimately.” (Mark)

In the first excerpt, Vinnie implies that experiences of music in a pre-digital era were more profound than they are today, when teenagers can often acquire music for free. Notably, Vinnie suggests that not having to wait for music to be released and invest in it are the reasons why she believes people now respond less emotionally to music. This echoes the anticipation and excitement felt by participants for record release days that I described earlier in this chapter. In this sense, Vinnie suggests that the tangible and visual aspects of music contribute to the “emotional response” of young music fans. Moreover, Mark draws on his experience when he was in his early teens and would have the time to gaze at the music’s sleeve and “get to know it really intimately”. This is again indicative of the effort and the depth of the experience of analogue music that participants were longing for and that I discuss in the first section of this chapter, although in Mark’s example this is bound to his age rather than the context of the pre-digital era as is the case in Vinnie’s excerpt.

The intensity of music in one’s youth was further exemplified by Jen. During the interview, Jen and I sat next to her shelved record collection and discussed her favourite examples of cover art that she pulled out, while listening to the music on her record player. Some of the examples that she discussed necessitated looking back or seemed nostalgic in nature. This aside, in this excerpt, she painted a vivid picture of her first impressions of the sound of and the music video from the US alternative rock band Throwing Muses single Juno. The video switches between clips of the band performing on stage and seemingly amateur, jerky, black and white footage of a woman breaking eggs, kneading dough, wringing out a cloth and later walking on a sandy beach. Jen explained:

“This is my favourite album of theirs, this is actually one of the albums that changed my life, I was, thirteen, uhm, and on MTV they used to have 120 Minutes, a show called “120 Minutes”, so it was on Sundays, from midnight till 2 in the morning and then of course I had a bedtime. So I would sne- and this is like, total, middle class rebellion, I would set my alarm so I could wake up and sneak into the TV room, but I’d have to have
the volume on like 1, with my ear pressed against the screen, listening to
the song. And Juno came on, off this album… and it just kind of, I’d never
heard a song like that, you know those moments where you didn’t even
know sound could exist like that, it was different than anything I’d ever
heard before. And then the video, just kind of black and white, with like
old vintage home video stuff, kind of art school you know. But, you know,
at thirteen it, I didn’t, you know, I didn’t know videos could look like that.
I didn’t know music could look like that, and I didn’t know that anything
could be like that, it changed – actually, in every way it was a life-changing
moment […]”

Discussing how this experience pushed the boundaries of her relationship with music, Jen
first describes the impact of the sound, followed by the effect of the music video: “I didn’t
know music could look like that”. Moreover, Jen’s recollection of the video as “black and
white, with like old vintage home video stuff, kind of art school” indicates that it was not
only the sound, but the visual aspects of “Juno” that came to be particularly memorable
for her. Like Mark’s example, the intensity of the experience is tied to her age at the time
but is also temporally bound in the sense that the moment cannot be divorced from the
context of experiencing the music in analogue format.

In the next basic theme, I tease out examples in the interviews of a sense of belongingness
that participants felt through music.

6.4.2 Personal memories basic theme 2: Sense of belonging through music

In addition to the more intense and meaningful first engagements participants
remembered having with music, some also spoke of feeling connected to the music and,
more specifically, of belonging to something through their early experiences. For
instance, Matthew spoke of how he first “got into” his older brother’s music when he was
fourteen years old. Notably, he expressed the close connection he felt to the singers and
the lyrics, which touched on the feelings he had felt as a child but did not know were
shared by other people:
“[...] all those things I’d been feeling inside as a child, and feeling umm, alienated, umm, apart from, totally apart from the world in which I’d lived in, totally, totally on my own and totally umm, isolated and completely, not part of anything, not part of where I was from where I grew up, um, kind of came out in all of this music. And it was just like it was just like a complete point of discovery and like, an amazing, amazing… unbelievable sense of, finding out that, a person was, a person was articulating all these things, that I’d been feeling and thinking and that it allowed me, it allowed me a language, it allowed me a sense of, connection with something that was just like, that I’d never ever ever had, or felt like I’d never had, never ever had. And so all of a sudden all of this was happening [...]” (his emphasis)

Matthew’s vivid account of his early engagement with music demonstrates the power and depth of the experience. In this sense, he sees music as a vehicle which allowed him to express himself and his feelings as well as the close connection with the singer/songwriters, such as Ian Curtis of the band Joy Division. At a similar age, Jen reflected on what music meant to her:

“I like how sometimes you can listen to a song and you don’t need to know what it’s about you can just connect with it, and that was a lot about what Throwing Muses were about for me. Especially at thirteen, it’s really hard to crack the codes of things. But, it just, there’s just something about it, like, no matter how weird or how dark, not dark it sounded, there was just something, it was such poetry to me. And even though like I would never, I don’t consider myself, never did, am not a poet, there was something within it, that I felt like I belonged, you know.”

Jen’s excerpt also captures the profoundness of the experience of music, as she remembers it, aged thirteen. She mentions the strong connection she felt to the band Throwing Muses and explicitly states that she felt as though she “belonged” to something through the music. Likewise, Pete G reflected on how, despite living far away from the hub of indie music activity, he felt connected to the scene through the tangible medium of music. He explains:
“Growing up in a small town and feeling marginalised, and these records and this music offer you kind of the lifeline and the glimpse of the outside world. And looking at the photography on The Orchids’ sleeve which is very much about place, umm, err, and, you know and, there’s a real sense of the local about this, which I love. And you could look at a sleeve like this and imagine yourself leaving your family behind and getting on a train to somewhere like Glasgow and just tracking down bands and fans to make friends with and immerse yourself in a new life. So that’s what I get when I look at this sleeve.”

Pete G recalls feeling a sense of loneliness and separateness from what he refers to as “the outside world” – presumably, the liveliness of British cities. The artwork was particularly poignant for him, as he would gaze at it and imagine meeting others involved in the music scene and escaping the mundanities of his everyday life in a small town. While Sam had greater access to record shops, he expresses a sense of belonging and membership of the community of music fans upon becoming a familiar face at his local record shop:

“[…] I don’t think anything [sigh] you know, something for the first time, when you’re fourteen fifteen, thirteen fourteen fifteen, you know, record shops then, and probably still are now, to people the same age, it’s like entering a sort of secret club, it’s very intimidating, in a way, but once you’ve been a few times you’re like oh yeah I’m in, sort of thing […]”

From these excerpts emerges a deeper object of some of the participants’ nostalgic yearning – namely, the sense of belonging that they felt via their engagement with music in their childhood. In particular, the tangible aspects of the broader experience of analogue music, such as the record shop and cover art, can be considered as vehicles of more abstract values, in a similar manner to the nostalgia for one’s homeland that underlies the yearning for love and security (Davis, 1979; Stern, 1992, p. 16; Boym, 2001). I elaborate on this in the discussion chapter. The final basic theme, however, concerns nostalgia beyond participants’ experiences of music, highlighting yet another object of nostalgia that came through in the interviews.
6.4.3 Personal memories basic theme 3: How things used to be

This third basic theme teases out participants’ nostalgia for how things used to be more generally in the past. This encapsulates their memories of music, their own past and society more generally. For instance, Matthew recalled being in infant school in the 1970s and how it was “so bright and vibrant and colourful and amazing” and the “specialness” of it. He continued:

“[…] there was the luxury of time and there was the luxury of making mistakes and the luxury of discovery, and the luxury of everybody’s individual learning curve, which has gone out the window now. It’s like it’s gotta be this now, it’s gotta be this now, it’s gotta be, so that kind of, prescriptive umm, that prescriptive frame of mind ethos that is very very now, is completely against what, what I had as a child, and, in terms of that lovely, naivety that you can have at that [age].” (his emphasis)

During his interview, Matthew reflected on his occupation as a primary school teacher and his feelings about how schooling and education were superior in the past in comparison to now, when children are under a great deal of pressure to perform and be examined, in comparison to a time of “innocence” and “naivety”. Jen similarly expressed her yearning for times she remembers from her youth:

“I do miss, I guess, the innocence of discovery and the kind of endless possibilities, and of course there’s always, time to like, learn and discover more music […] but you get older and busier and I guess time’s not so much a luxury in the same way.”

As well as the “innocence of discovery” that Jen remembers from her childhood, she refers to the time she used to have, which she suggests is no longer at her disposal due to her busy adult life. As such, the salience of nostalgia for childhood in Matthew’s and Jen’s reminiscences foregrounds the importance given to their earlier years as this period is posited as free from “the burdens and obligations of adulthood” (Moran, 2002, p. 170). While not directly connected to the indie pop scene, these recollections resonate with the
values pervasive in the scene and the nostalgia felt by its members for simpler times (Fonarow, 2006, p. 29; Reynolds, 2007, p. 15; Dale, 2010, p. 243). Having more time in the past was actually something which multiple participants pointed out and longed for, and this is highlighted in the following excerpts:

“In some of these Mary Chain ones, I’ve probably played like, a thousand times. You know, new records I’ll never get to that, even that, even this record which I played hundreds of times will never catch up cause, there aren’t enough years left before I’m not here anymore.” (Trev – his emphasis)

“I always sort of feel that in the last couple of years I’ve done far less, far less performing, certainly far less on the artwork side of things and sort of recording, even writing music, just because work essentially [laughing] you know, I spent the best part of my twenties as a postgraduate student. And so I had a lot of time essentially, to actually do all these things, whereas now, I find myself, you know I get home from work and I’m just like [laughing] I’m just too tired to do anything.” (Ian)

“I’d literally sit down, and listen to a record, and not do anything else, because there were less distr, I sound like a bloody old man don’t I… but you know, there’s less distractions then, you couldn’t check your phone or email or whatever. Dunno, yeah, I would literally sit, in a room, with, with music. Nowadays, no, that never happens, ever, I can’t remember the last time I did that, at all. That’s just life, I think, getting in the way, umm, got a little boy so, I can’t do it.” (Sam)

In the first excerpt, Trev recalls playing music by The Jesus and Mary Chain “a thousand times” in his youth, comparing this to nowadays when it simply would not be possible for him to find time to do that. Likewise, Ian reflects on how he used to have more time as a postgraduate student in his twenties, but now is too tired when he returns home from work to devote time to music like he used to. Sam also reflects on how responsibilities such as being a parent as well as the distractions of living in a digital age have reduced the amount of time available to immerse himself in music. As such, these excerpts echo
Matthew’s mention of the “luxury of discovery” that he feels retrospectively was possible during his childhood but no longer accessible in his adult years. I argue that, along with the changes in music formats that the long-standing members of the scene have lived through, the self-discontinuity felt by participants resulting from their transition into adulthood was also present in most participants’ recollections. This in line with the research of Goulding (2001, p. 577) and Sedikides et al. (2015, p. 59) who argue that a correlation exists between changes to oneself and nostalgic recollections.

Throughout this final section of the first findings chapter, I have highlighted participants’ recollections of their younger years in which their long-standing experience of music can be interpreted as a vehicle for other longings. For instance, some of the participants fondly remembered their childhood as a special period in which they first encountered music and felt like they belonged for the first time. As opposed to the previous two sections which focused on collective and cultural nostalgia, the examples of nostalgic longing presented in this section are predominantly personal and direct as participants shared distinctive and unique experiences (Davis, 1979, p. 123; Havlena and Holak, 1996, p. 38).

6.5 Summary

In this chapter, I have highlighted the different types and objects of participants’ nostalgia that emerged from the interviews. As such, participants collectively longed for the broader aspects of analogue music culture and the perceived “golden age” of the indie pop scene. They also yearned for personal and private times which were related to their past experiences of music. In the following chapter I outline the common characteristics of music covers and other visuals which were deemed by participants to contribute to an “authentic” DIY style.
Chapter Seven: “Authentic” DIY music covers and other visuals

7.1 Introduction

Interviews with participants, as I have already noted, centred around the examples of single/EP/album covers that participants identified as meaningful and brought with them to the interview. The analysis of their chosen examples pointed to certain qualities which participants explained contribute to a good cover, or prompted them to select a specific record sleeve. Generally, there was agreement regarding the features of the covers that participants acknowledged and appreciated, although points of contradiction have also been outlined. Their interpretation of these features, then, is indicative of how they collectively give meaning to the core values of the indie pop music scene. These features relate to the global theme of authenticity and are drawn upon by participants to authenticate the scene.

More specifically, in this chapter, I expand on the significance of the DIY style in the following section which addresses the organising theme of “Authenticity conveyed via media”. I then turn to the organising theme of “Inauthenticity conveyed via media”, which underscores the key characteristics of inauthentic media, which participants defined and positioned authentic media against. The qualities of inauthentic media shed light on what participants considered to be inauthentic music practices. The findings from this chapter suggest that there is an indie pop mode or aesthetic, recognisable to the participants who collectively establish and maintain it. This style signals the perceived core values of the indie pop music scene which participants were nostalgic for. Notably, the characteristics of the sleeves – and indeed other visuals like fanzines – that were regarded as exemplifying the indie pop mode reflected both commonly considered characteristics of authentic objects discussed in chapter four, as well as the core values of indie pop, also outlined in chapter four.

7.2 Authentic visuals organising theme 1: Authenticity conveyed via media

As I have already noted in the introduction, when asked how and why they selected their chosen single/EP/album covers, there was significant overlap in terms of participants’
answers. All fourteen interviewees discussed visual aspects of the sleeves which they associated with what they deemed to be values of the indie pop music scene. Many of these qualities have already been discussed in chapter four as the core values of the scene, and others outlined as common markers of authenticity in the same chapter. As such, multiple sub-themes emerged from the interview data: the quality of being unadulterated; the importance of stories and background; amateurishness; signalling lo-fi music; childishness and uniqueness. I present each of these sub-themes below, before turning to contradictions which were found in the data set where participants expressed views opposed to the sub-themes outlined.

7.2.1 Authentic media basic theme 1: Unadulterated

The quality of being unadulterated and true to the intent of the originator – in this case, the musicians – was emphasised in five of the interviews. First and foremost, participants made clear their preference for the music cover to reflect the original ideas of the artist and to be in line with their vision. From the standpoint of a record label owner, Trev explained that he allows the bands to come up with their own covers because he does not consider that aspect of the production as his role or responsibility, even if the result is not a cover he personally appreciates:

“I often don’t say that to the band “it’s not to my taste” cause it’s not really my job to tell them what it’s supposed to look like. Um. Some would say it is the record label’s job to do that but I’m all for A: the artist being in control and B: knowing what the music should look like.” (his emphasis)

As both a fan of indie pop music and a record label owner, Trev expresses his inclination for bands to design their own record sleeves, since he feels they are in the best position to produce artwork which is reflective of their music. Here, the design decisions for the record sleeve are unmediated and made by the creators of the music, in line with Moore’s (2002) “first person” authenticity, where a musician communicates directly with their audience. Indeed, Dolan (2010, p. 462) identifies this as an important feature of indie pop. As such, Trev prefers not to alter the original design of the sleeves so that they remain unadulterated and true to the band’s intentions.
In a similar vein, Darren and Caroline discussed the making of the music video for the single “(Here Come The) Catastrophe Machines” for their own band Girl One and the Grease Guns and released on record label Squirrel Records, explaining that it was made “as fast as possible”. They recalled how they used to film footage of horror films on DVD with their own video recorder as the base for their videos, giving it a “degraded” effect. In one instance, Darren remembered visiting the house of a friend from another band who edited the video for them:

“And we said “don’t change a frame of it, you’ve got it straight away, that’s it, that’s exactly what we wanted”.”

In this example, Darren and Caroline emphasise the spontaneous manner in which their videos were produced and make it clear that they did not aim for a polished or overly thought-out final product. As such, they were inclined to preserve the first attempt of the videographer and drew attention to it several times during their joint interview. In addition to Trev, who deliberately hands control of the cover art to the bands on his label, Darren and Caroline had a clear idea of what they wanted from the production of their music video. As Moore (2002, p. 213) describes it, these respondents seem to index an effort to reduce the “distance between [the] mental origin and [its] physical manifestation” to a minimum in visuals accompanying music. In this sense, cover art – and the visual aspects of music more broadly – are perceived as an indicator of how “true to its origin” (Jones, 2010, p. 184) the music is. I argue that the non-corruption of the sleeves by other actors in the production of music, apart from the artists themselves, is interpreted as a marker of authenticity.

7.2.2 Authentic media basic theme 2: Stories and background

Further illustrating what they saw as the importance of the creator’s intentions, participants frequently referred to stories and histories communicated via record sleeves, implying that such background unlocked a deeper level of meaning to the music. In particular, personal anecdotes about the people involved in the production of the album were discussed by participants when explaining their choices for the covers they brought with them. Illustrating this, Jen and Andy commented:
“Belize City Boil Up, and this is a great, great, great album, but I think this is really a cover that you’re gonna hold, that you’re gonna read, with histories about the musicians and stuff… and I think they kind of, really, capture the, the great album being a narrative, and telling the narrative and creating the narrative […]” (Jen – her emphasis)

“This is a K Records, and this type came from a, I think it was an airline, an airline had closed down near Olympia, and they were throwing out loads of equipment and I think Calvin had found this type press type thing and that’s where they got this typeface from. So for the whole period of K Records they had this typeface, and so it just made it kind of like uniform umm, cos like, the previous kind of K stuff had been very like that Beat Happening single and then suddenly there’s like this kind of visual umm, visual… visual uniformity.” (Andy)

Jen explicitly refers to the appeal of the stories and histories behind the musicians which were included on the sleeve of the compilation LP “Belize City Boil Up”, released on the label Numero Group. She indicates that this is a pertinent feature of the cover that she appreciates and a justification as to why she has selected this cover as particularly meaningful. Her emphasis on the overall “narrative” suggests that she sees consistency between the biographies of the musicians as described on the sleeve and the story that is told via the music. Andy’s excerpt, on the other hand, is more implicit. Recounting the story of how the Washington-based label K Records came to have a uniform typeface, he relishes the idea that the typeface used on K Records emanated from the label’s founder, Calvin Johnson, salvaging an old type press which had been discarded. Johnson is also a founding member of the band Beat Happening. This is an example of an authentic back story – and in this context, the cover art, and the font especially, prompt Andy to recall this. In other words, I argue that the stylistic features of the covers touch the participants’ nostalgic “chords” (Davis, 1979, p. 82). These two excerpts resonate with the role of biographies and stories that generate, in the eyes of these music fans, a sense of intimacy with “the inner world” of the originator (Weisethaunet and Lindberg, 2010, p. 471).

Echoing this, Miguel also discussed an example of the artwork on the 1984 single “Heaven Knows I’m Miserable Now” by British band the Smiths. The sleeve is a black
and white photograph of a blonde woman, with a resigned expression on her face, standing in an empty residential street. When asked what he liked about the sleeve, Miguel responded:

“I like the whole, the fonts, the picture, the, black and white, and umm, well, I think it’s the meaning of it, this woman apparently, well I didn’t know her, and I don’t know if you do. Apparently, she was very famous in the UK in the sixties… Viv Nicholson… she won the lottery or something like that, and she spent all the money very quickly. She was very rich, and that’s err when she’s going back to her council house after she has spent all the money. So, it’s a really, really sad picture and the title is just perfect, so I think it’s just a really great picture.” (his emphasis)

Here, the story portrayed by the sleeve is not about the artist but about a popular culture figure, Viv Nicholson, who “hit the headlines in the 60s for winning – and quickly spending – the football pools” (Barton, 2015, para. 1). Explaining that he was unfamiliar with her and her story prior to seeing the cover, Miguel sought further information to try to make sense of the music on a deeper level. In tune with the appeal of (auto)biographical music which is generally considered a marker of authenticity (Frith, 1996, p. 171; Fine, 2003, p. 175) Miguel appreciates Viv Nicholson’s biography as conveyed through the cover art and music. Miguel’s appreciation of this Smiths’ single cover also emphasises his appreciation for a deeper and more profound experience of music.

7.2.3 Authentic media basic theme 3: Amateur

As I have already noted in literature review chapter four, professionalism is often considered a marker of inauthenticity in DIY scenes, while amateur qualities are regarded as a salient characteristic of authenticity both in general terms, and more specifically in relation to the values of indie pop music. As such, the perceived amateur nature of music was commented upon by nine participants and hailed as a quality and marker of superiority of the sleeves they had selected. For instance, Jen explained:

“[…] but Archers of Loaf, I mean, these guys, they’re beasts, I love them so much, umm, but yeah, they’ve something, again that I’ve really appreciated
about these albums is that, even though the bands took themselves seriously there was something so accessible about them. And it was this very visual reminder that you can do this and you are part of this”.

Referring to the album covers of the American band Archers of Loaf, Jen’s comments suggest that these sleeves are symbolic of the amateur nature of the music, signalling to her that making music is something anyone can do, in tune with the values of indie pop and DIY music more broadly (Fonarow, 2006, pp. 43-44; Dolan, 2010, pp. 464-465). At the same time, she notes that the band still “took themselves seriously”, yet managed to retain their amateur appeal. In other words, Jen sees the band as communicating their “basic creative urge” (Fine, 2003, p. 160) through their record sleeves, despite being established artists. Jen’s appreciation of the sleeve also highlights the role that the covers play in conveying inclusiveness and the “dressing down” style that are characteristic of the DIY and indie pop scenes (Fonarow, 2006, pp. 43-44).

Similarly, Pete G highlighted the DIY essence of his preferred music, which conjured up images of it being produced at home rather than in a professional studio. He offers an evocative account of “Cast Away the Clouds” by American musician and songwriter Rose Melberg. The cover shows a minimalist drawing of two branches of a tree and a red apple on a plain blue-grey background. Pete G commented:

“I love the simplicity of it. I love the homeliness of it, like I say it could be a cushion cover, it could be on curtains or something, which to me suggests the homespun nature of it, of the music and actually you know, indie pop musicians will, will, will record at home as well rather than go to a studio, would be quite happy to record music themselves at home in a back room on their computer. And I think, when I see this I think, you know, I, I imagine finishing off recording the album and then putting the kettle on and making a cup of tea, you know it’s got that homeliness feel to it.”

Pete G’s rich description of this cover draws parallels with the simplicity of indie pop music outlined in the literature review, as indicated by Fonarow (2006). Beyond this, Pete G adds another layer in his description, emphasising the “homespun” appeal of the cover. This again points to the principle of indie pop operating very differently to the mainstream
music industry (Dale 2010, p. 249). The idea of “putting the kettle on and making a cup of tea” after recording an album highlights the everyday, amateur nature of indie pop. In this sense, Pete G moves beyond the characteristics of authentic objects being “true to their origins” outlined in literature review chapter four. His remarks suggest that, even if the Rose Melberg cover does not directly feature traces of the artists (Bendix, 1997, p. 15; Green-Lewis, 2000, p. 54), its unsophisticated aesthetic leads him to associate the cover with the making of the album and the amateur ethos underpinning its production. Notably, the multiple roles that Pete G plays in the indie pop scene – as both a musician and a fan – enable him to share this insight, due to his familiarity with the production methods used in the indie pop scene.

In a slightly different vein, Matthew describes the simple aesthetic of cover art for singles on the British indie record label Creation:

“The ones that stick in my mind right now are the early Creation singles, The Pastels’ Million Tears, definitely The Jesus and Mary Chain’s first single Upside Down with its kind of Jackson Pollock style paint on a guitar. That kind of very, stark, but uhh, basic, umm, kind of aesthetic there, in your face, and only using those 3 colours as well. Like it would have been black, red and white, or it would have been blue, white and pink or it would have been white and yellow or whatever… I found out later obviously it’s to do with printing costs, but it’s just kind of like…really, not stark but just kind of like… really, elemental.”

In particular, Matthew describes the cover of The Jesus and Mary Chain’s “Upside Down” which appears to be a close-up monochromatic image of the strings of a bass guitar along with splashes of paint and the name of the band in red in the right hand corner of the sleeve. Matthew’s preference for the simple and “basic” design of these singles’ sleeves simultaneously implies his resistance to professional-looking sleeves. Indeed, in opposition to more polished covers, his inclination stems from the “elemental” aspect of the visuals, echoing the unmediated, “basic creative urge” described by Fine (2003). As Matthew notes, the limited use of colours is a consequence of “lo-fi” production (Dolan, 2010, pp. 464-465), as using more colours on a sleeve indicates that more money was
spent. I elaborate on signifiers of lo-fi production and its significance to some of the participants in the following section.

### 7.2.4 Authentic media basic theme 4: Lo-fi

Closely connected to the previous sub-theme, signifiers of “lo-fi” production signalled by cover art were discussed by all bar one participant. The following excerpts imply that the lo-fi modes of production favoured in the indie pop scene do not only apply to the music itself (Dolan, 2010). Indeed, lo-fi could also be applied to broader aspects of the music experience as the sleeves were often selected because of imperfections and features that would be unacceptable on a more “professional” sleeve. In a similar vein to Matthew’s insinuation that fewer colours used on covers are symbolic of a more DIY approach to the production of music, Trev commented:

> “Just from the one colour, black and white, or black and one colour. Some of that is, some of that’s a necessity cause it’s cheap. Now putting four colours on the sleeve, expensive. Putting two colours on the sleeve, cheap… so, it’s, it’s, some of that’s down to necessity […]”

In this excerpt, Trev implies that the limited use of colours, mentioned by participants in seven of the interviews, are indicative of the low-cost methods behind the production of the music and are symbolic of the values of simplicity of the indie scene (Fonarow, 2006, p. 192). While Trev did not directly express his appreciation of this aesthetic, he mentioned this as an important aspect of the covers which he had selected as meaningful to him. In this sense, the restricted set of colours was interpreted by most participants as a positive quality of the covers and not a limitation. Later in his interview, Trev acknowledged that some bands would transition to “full colour” sleeves once they had more available funds, further emphasising the connection between limited aesthetics and bands that have not “sold out”. I elaborate on this point later in this chapter, under the umbrella of “Inauthenticity conveyed via media”.

A “cut and paste” aesthetic was similarly noted to communicate low cost production methods:
“I think with the Sarah Records thing I liked the umm, the compilation things that they did, because they had the newspaper type of thing, so I liked that. So I suppose yeah, um, without really being aware of it, you’re, you’re absorbing er a DIY ethos […]” (Matloob)

Discussing music on Sarah Records, “the classic ‘cutie’ label” (Dale, 2010, p. 191), Matloob commented on how the DIY style was noticeable across the covers. In particular, he explained that he liked the “newspaper type” feel of the compilation record covers. One example of these is the 1988 Sarah compilation release “Shadow Factory”, which features a blue monochrome photograph in high contrast of the view of Welsh Back from Bristol Bridge in the UK. The photo appears to have been edited in high contrast so that it looks simplistic, rather like an image taken from a newspaper, as Matloob notes. Relatedly, Darren explained his preference for cover art which looks as though someone carefully designed and assembled it:

“But yeah I’d definitely be more drawn to the stuff where it looks like it’s just been put together with Pritt Stick and scissors, really lovingly put together you know, almost like a manifesto inside a record you know, rather than something that’s just, that’s bright and shiny and looks overly professional.”

Darren expresses his appreciation covers which appear to have been handmade and which represent the labour of the artist. His inclination towards this style therefore resonates with the human influence behind tangible artefacts that is commonly considered to denote authenticity (Bendix, 1997, p. 15; Green-Lewis, 2000, p. 54). This is further reinforced by his assumption that the cover was “lovingly put together”. Moreover, Darren contrasts this DIY mode of production with more professionally produced covers associated with commercial music. In the context of indie pop, manual production is heralded as superior to mass production and thus the effort that Darren sees in the cut and paste style cover may appeal to him in the sense that it is indicative of the more personal, human touch behind the music (Fonarow, 2006, p. 74). This can also be said of Matloob’s excerpt, in which he singles out the appeal of the newspaper cutting style of covers on the Sarah Records Label.
In addition to the general appreciation and preference for the simple aesthetic of their chosen meaningful covers, participants also referred to fanzines. These data pointed to other physical artefacts which they associate with analogue music and which contribute to the overall experience. For example, Pete G stated:

“Milky Wimpshake[‘s] “Bus Route to Your Heart”, typographically there’s a lot of similarities between this and The Orchids, I think it’s the same, it might even be the same font… very simple same sort of font. What we’ve, what we’ve got here is again the same sort of font, and it’s worn away, but it looks like it’s something that’s cut and pasted, so it, it, immediately references the fanzines of the early 80s, which were intrinsic to, well, punk first and then indie pop, umm, you know, which kind of created a kind of connection between people in these different geographical locations and helped… so immediately it’s taking you back to those things its sending those messages […]”

Here, Pete G points out the similarities he sees between the partially “worn away” font used for British band Milky Wimpshake’s debut album “Bus Route to Your Heart” and the typography of fanzines from the 1980s. His description of the “cut and paste” and deteriorated font resonates with the argument made by Lowenthal (2015) and Trilling (1972) who discuss tangible signs of wear and tear as triggers which “powerfully evoke the past” (Lowenthal, 2015, p. 248). As such, his musings on the cover may reflect his nostalgia for the close-knit community he wanted to be a part of (Batcho, 1995, p. 139; Brown et al., 2003b, p. 20; Wilson, 2014, p. 27).

Furthermore, DIY’s associations with a hand-drawn and home-made style was a recurrent theme throughout the interviews. For instance, commenting on the vinyl single “The 100 Club Series”13 by the British band City Yelps, Andy explained: “I just like the fact I can see where all the orange paint marks and obviously it was something that Trev put out.” (his emphasis). That Andy likes being able to see the paintbrush strokes exemplifies not only the appeal of the simple but effective DIY approach, but also the visibility of the

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13 The sleeve shows black and white photos of the band members in high contrast and coloured with coarse strokes of orange and green paint.
production of the cover. The paint strokes offer an insight into how the artwork was made, which would not ordinarily be seen in high-quality, mass produced covers, echoing Matloob, Darren and Pete G’s comments (Bendix, 1997, p. 15; Green-Lewis, 2000, p. 54; Fonarow, 2006, p. 74). In this instance, Andy’s role as an illustrator is likely to contribute to his keen awareness of the style of the cover and its association with specific record labels – in this case, Trev’s.

In contrast, the production behind releases affiliated with major labels or commercial artwork, unless deliberately trying to appear “DIY” in style, would normally be hidden from view, remastered to give a more polished appearance or smoothed over via image editing software. As Fonarow (2006, p. 42) and Wallach (2008, p. 100) state, the no-frills, straightforward approach to production is characteristic of indie music. In another example, talking about their former band, Pop Threat’s single “Ingrained”, the cover of which is a colour photograph of Caroline as a young girl wearing a light blue dress and leaning against a brick wall, Darren and Caroline recalled wanting to recreate the DIY look with “fold over record sleeves in plastic bags”, while fellow band member Mick preferred “a slightly more professional approach”. In the end, they opted for “a proper full colour sleeve, but, quite, cheap artwork”. This account of producing their first vinyl record neatly captures the key characteristics of the DIY style, with references to “fold over record sleeves in plastic bags”, “cheap artwork” and re-use of an old photograph.

Drawing on another excerpt from Darren and Caroline’s interview, Darren recounts a story about making a mixtape for a friend, which similarly captures many of the core values of indie pop highlighted in existing literature:

“I remember actually making a mixtape for a friend and I didn’t have any, I honestly did not have any paper and the cassette, it were like an old cassette that I were recording over so it had no inlay card to write on. And I just went “ummm what am I supposed to write the track list on?”. So honestly I got a piece of toilet paper and I wrote it really carefully on in biro a piece of pink toilet paper and I thought “what shall I call this?”. And I did I got the tracklist written without breaking [the paper] because you know toilet paper is so thin, and I wrote it all out… that is very DIY and I popped it in and I just thought I need a title for this and it were a 90-minute cassette. And I called it “Soft,
strong and 90 minutes long” and he thought it were fantastic… I hope he’s still got that toilet paper cassette… but that, you know, that showed dedication did that, absolutely.”

In my notes, I record that the interview with Darren and Caroline was very humorous, and this retrospective account serves to demonstrate this. While this of course offers support to the claims I have made so far regarding the basic and inexpensive methods which are emblematic of DIY music, Darren’s story also captures the light-heartedness which was evident in the indie pop scene I got to know. Darren thus demonstrates his “personal authenticity” by showing “honesty, sincerity [and] realness” (Dolan, 2010, p. 462) in his approach to making the mixtape for his friend. Using toilet paper as a substitute for a cassette inlay implies that he does not take himself too seriously. This draws parallels with Stephin Merritt’s “This little ukulele” lyrics (Dolan, 2010, p. 457), in which Stephin emphasises both the low-tech nature of his performance and the “realness” of his message. Indeed, that Darren chose to share the story and his comment “that showed dedication did that, absolutely”, suggest that he takes pride in doing so while also emphasising the effort he had to put into writing the track list. In chapter six, effort was of course shown to be a collectively shared value amongst my participants, and this is again visible in Darren’s excerpt. The punch line “Soft, strong and 90 minutes long”\textsuperscript{14} is further demonstrative of his light-hearted approach and suggests that he is content making fun of his own originality and creativity in making the mixtape.

As is evident from the examples discussed in this section, the imperfect, unpolished features of the sleeves selected by most participants were evocative of the origins of the production of the covers. The covers then functioned to connect the participants, as musicians, music fans and listeners, to the stories behind the music as well as developing an “aesthetic of memory” (Dolan, 2010, p. 464) and a “nostalgic mode” (Grainge, 2000, p. 27) in which the DIY aesthetic harks back to a glorious past – in this case, the former indie pop scene. I develop the connections between the DIY “cut and paste” aesthetic and nostalgia further in the discussion chapter (eight).

\textsuperscript{14}This is a play on the former advertisement for Andrex toilet tissue which featured the slogan “Soft, Strong and very very long” (Brook, 2004, para. 5).
7.2.5 *Authentic media basic theme 5: Childish*

An additional feature of the covers commonly discussed during the interviews was the simplicity of the artwork, which was mentioned by eight participants. This recurring theme often overlapped and complemented other characteristics of the covers described earlier. Unsurprisingly, five participants overtly connected the simplicity of the artwork to more general themes such as childishness and innocence which both have been documented as pervasive in the indie pop scene (Fonarow, 2006, p. 45; Dale, 2010, p. 231; Reynolds, 2007, p. 15). For others, this connection was more implicit. For example, Miguel stated:

“I think, one of my favourite bands altogether is The Field Mice, for artwork, err, I think they are really, really simple, very colourful.”

The record covers of the British band The Field Mice are indeed simplistic, as Miguel notes, but also rather childlike and endearing. For instance, their 7-inch single “*Emma’s House*” features orange paper chain cut-outs of two schoolchildren on a plain yellow background. Another 7-inch single, “*Sensitive/When Morning Comes to Town*”, features a plain background with blue outlines of penguins on it and a basic font which reads “The Field Mice”. These two examples highlight the participants’ preference for the simple style of the sleeves as they feature minimalist drawings and two colours, as if a child had designed them. More explicitly, Matthew, Pete B and Jen expressed their appreciation of the childlike style of some of their chosen covers:

“A naïve style, and it being very true and it being very umm, I guess you could say child-like, a child-like honesty, a child-like um, um playfulness. Thinking of all those cover[s], all those, all those, um, those, 12-inch 7-inch singles now and art, album artwork, you know, and putting prints of, fruit on there or prints of umm, you know, prints of fruit and vegetables, and it just having maybe no relevance, but it does have a relevance in its kind of like, naïvety and its colourfulness and playfulness. That is part of what they are and what they’re like and what their sensibilities are […]” (Matthew)
“It’s just very childlike and innocent, and, not thrown together, but cheap and why spend money when you don’t have to? […]” (Pete B)

“[…] there’s something, about, this album cover I love so much because, there’s something so innocently youthful about it […]” (Jen)

When discussing the covers for the British band The Pastels’ music, Matthew’s choice of adjectives underlines the association he makes between the colourful artwork and childhood, evoking values such as genuineness, fun and vibrancy. Similarly, Pete B and Jen associate this period with the “innocence” of youth when discussing covers by the American band Bunnygrunt and the Throwing Muses, respectively. These vivid descriptions emphasise the role that childhood plays in the appreciation of cover art by these indie pop music fans. In this sense, the covers are symbolic of simpler times when one was “innocent” and “naïve” and when money was not part of the equation. As such, and as exemplified in Matthew’s, Pete B’s and Jen’s excerpts, the features of the cover trigger associations with collective idealisations of childhood which are often retreated to as a means of escaping responsibilities associated with adulthood (Jacoby, 1985, p. 5; Moran, 2002, p. 170).

Furthermore, in some cases, deeper feelings appeared to underlie the participants’ inclinations for childlike aesthetics, such as the quest for “human” and “basic” qualities:

“[…] there’s a total truth to it and a total naïvety, and I love that, naïve art and you know, like L. S. Lowry and umm, primitive art, I think it’s called as well, it’s kind of umm, gained a momentum, umm, during the last century, during, beginning mid of the last century as a sort of, pull away from commercial aesthetics. And umm, and getting back to, what, a human energy is all about in being quite basic and elemental […]” (Matthew)

Matthew explained how he is particularly drawn to “naïve” and “childlike artwork”, citing the examples of the British artist L.S. Lowry and “primitive art”. During his lifetime, Lowry’s art – which famously features industrial landscapes and anonymous crowds of people – was widely regarded as childlike and simplistic (Hamilton, 2013, para. 1). Particularly, the basic matchstick figures he painted gave rise to him being labelled as
an amateur without any training, despite having been formally educated (The Lowry, 2016, para. 1). Lowry’s work later became recognised (Hamilton, 2013, para. 1) and his technique was appreciated as being “authentically primitive” (Taylor, cited in The Lowry, 2016, para. 4) rather than undeveloped. Matthew’s description reinforces the preference of many of the participants for covers which evoke their artistic creation, connecting back to the “true” and genuine self (Handler, 1986, p. 3; McLeod, 1999, p. 145).

Similarly, Pete G, continuing his description of the UK-based band Milky Wimpshake’s “Bus Route to Your Heart” album cover, explained that childhood can be interpreted as a “point of origin” (Moore, 2002, p. 216) for the indie pop scene:

“[…] so immediately it’s taking you back to those things, its sending those messages, and you’ve got this lovely, erm, sort of childlike drawing as well, of the bus, which, again has got that really sort of local feel to it. You’ve got a double decker bus in a small lane in the country and there’s just a real charm about that, um, as well. So, and you know, indie pop’s always you know, I guess, a place where you are gonna [find] goodie bags and bus routes rather than fast cars and motorbikes. It’s like, it’s always offered that err, counterpoint I guess to the like, rock clichés and, of err, the, perhaps the 70s and 80s so, yeah, I love it for those reasons […]”

Here, Pete G refers to the childish drawings on the cover which is a hand-drawn red and white image of a double-decker bus and “Bus Route to Your Heart” written in cut and paste style on the right-hand side. He sees this as having a “local feel”, suggesting a sense of homeliness which he referred to throughout his interview. Interestingly, he positions the pleasant scene of the double decker bus in the countryside against the harsher and more masculine scenes of “fast cars and motorbikes” that he associates with rock music. Pete G manages to succinctly capture the key themes in indie pop, recognising a childlike style which he sees as representing the values of the music. Specifically, he perceives this music as being opposed to the notorious masculinist clichés of rock. Moreover, Pete G explicitly mentions that the childlike drawings elicit nostalgic feelings for him as it is taking him back to younger years. While nostalgia is not always explicitly expressed in the excerpts presented, other participants also hinted at a longing for their younger years while discussing childlike features of the covers they had selected. For example, as we
have seen earlier, Matthew draws parallels between the artwork and the style that he associates with his schooling in the seventies which he refers to as “so bright and vibrant and colourful and amazing”.

7.2.6 Authentic media basic theme 6: Unique

Further to the “cut and paste” style of record covers discussed earlier in this chapter, which was described as pointing to the artists’ diligence in producing distinctive sleeves, the uniqueness of the artwork emerged from the data as a theme. Indeed, five participants commented on specific features which stood out to them as unique or different and which resulted in a preference for certain covers. For example, Matthew commented on a cover that was visually different from other releases available at the time:

“[I] loved Psychocandy obviously because it just looked different to whatever was going on at the time.”

Here, Matthew refers to the artwork on “Psychocandy”, the debut album by the Jesus and Mary Chain, explaining that his reason for liking it was that it stood apart from the mainstream popular culture of the time. Furthermore, the following excerpts depict the participants’ fondness for sleeves that had been altered by previous owners:

**Caroline:** “The Jam album I bought, was it “All Mod Cons” that I bought? And it came and someone had written on the cover of it “Mods are great”, and they had two covers in the record shop, and the man was like “are you sure you want this one cos we have a more mint one?”. And he brought out the cover, and whoever had previously owned it had written all over the inner sleeve, it was all like “Mods are great”

**Darren:** Like a mural on the inner sleeve.

**Caroline:** Yeah like this person loved the Jam so much, and the entire inner sleeve was covered in all this nonsense about mods and how terrible Rockers are...

**Darren:** And you chose that didn’t you like “no I want that one?”.
“This one err [laughing]) it looks like it’s covered in, coffee stains and stuff… when I first saw it I kind of thought “yeah I must have it”.” (Andy)

Given the choice between a newer and well preserved cover of the same record, Caroline fondly recalls how she chose the vandalised version as it was seemingly superior to her. The messages, “Mods are great” harks back to the 1960s subculture which had its roots in Britain and points to its former owner as the author of the handwritten messages. The uniqueness and marks left behind thus render this version unique in comparison to the “mint” copy also available to buy. Similarly, Andy refers to the signs of use signalled by the coffee stains on a record by the Field Mice, suggesting that this contributed to the overall appeal of the cover.

In these two excerpts, the idiosyncrasies of the sleeves stem from their visible signs of wear and tear, which authenticate the music in the eyes of Caroline and Andy. As such, the deliberate marks and the coffee stains on the sleeves hint at the events that occurred during the lifetime of these musical artefacts, encompassing interactions with their owners and the context in which they were used (Jones, 2010, p. 190). In this case, in contrast to works of art that are not true to the original creative intentions of the musician, which I discuss earlier in this chapter, the adulterations happened after the release of the record and “ripen” the artefact (Lowenthal, 2015, p. 268). As such, they are not considered detrimental to the record sleeve as they arise in an uncontrolled manner. Uniqueness here is also bound to independent music in the sense that it actively eschews standardised and mass produced records.

While participants mostly referred to cover art, other aspects of the tangible artefact were also mentioned – in particular, scratch messages which are etched onto the record itself, and bonus accessories to the music that could be found in the sleeve. For instance, Pete B explained:

“You always do this in case there’s an extra goody inside, I mean, other people might have mentioned scratch messages, I mean, you’ve come across this. So that’s another thing you did when you got the record out you looked at the scratch messages [...]”
In this excerpt, Pete B mentions the scratch messages on the centre of vinyl records which render each unique. He also refers to the “extra goodies” inside some records. These additional add-ons were mentioned in four interviews and regarded as specific to indie music. In a similar vein to the alterations visible on the sleeves treasured by Caroline, Darren and Andy, Pete B’s appreciation for “scratch messages” suggests that participants perceived these records as distinctive due to the uniqueness of the stories behind how they came to be (Jones, 2010, p. 189). As such, in the age of digital reproduction, the artefacts’ idiosyncrasies contributed to the “aura” perceived by some participants (Benjamin, 1935).

Having presented the characteristics of cover art and other visuals which were deemed authentic by participants, I now turn to the qualities that were regarded as inauthentic. These were drawn on by participants as a means to position the authentic qualities of indie pop as the “other” to that authenticity.

7.2.7 Authentic media basic theme 7: Contradictions

The examples so far have highlighted a resounding preference amongst participants for unpolished, uncomplicated designs which espouse indie pop values in tune with those outlined in literature review chapter four. However, as I have already argued, the perceived underlying qualities and accounts of any social movement or community are always subjective (Gordon, 2005, p. 164) and thus, in the context of indie pop it is unsurprising that there was some contention over the specific characteristics of the scene. This played out in the sense that there was some tension regarding the expectation that indie pop music should not show signs of high investment or effort being put in. For instance, discussing the effort and money put in to organising gigs, Vinnie explained that through making promotional material such as gig posters appear slightly more put together and polished, her and Mark opened the music up to a wider audience. Consequently, she argued that some of the people that came along to their gigs would have been less inclined to if they’d seen “the [band’s] name in felt tip pen on a poster”.

In other words, Vinnie felt that the rough and ready appeal of indie pop appreciated by the other participants was not appealing to everyone. Drawing on the example of the independent label “Elefant”, based in Madrid, Vinnie noted that in the indie pop scene in Spain, “people weren’t ashamed at all of putting quite a lot of effort into the art”. While
the previous examples have celebrated the DIY style and the apparent simplicity and straightforwardness of the designs, Vinnie’s comment is particularly interesting as it captures the idea that producing something too polished might actually be shameful to some indie pop fans – a sentiment which she explains she does not share.

In tune with Vinnie’s feelings about polished artwork, three participants reflected on what they felt was an inherent contradiction in indie pop. For instance, Andy commented:

“[…] there’s some amazing artwork, there’s clearly brilliant bands and, there are labels that have kept the scene sort of going when no one was particularly very interested. So there’s a tremendous sort of amount of passion, and desire, and creativity there, even though they’re trying to make it look like “oh yeah we’ve just put that together in 5 minutes, yeah I’ve just thrown that together” [laughing]… I think that’s sort of my whole sort of, almost that kind of DIY, I’m gonna use that word again, aesthetic, make it look effortless, but really, there’s a lot of work ethic gone into it.”

Here, Andy looks upon the time and effort put into indie pop music very positively, commenting on the “passion”, “desire” and “creativity” as well as some of the “amazing artwork” which can be found in the scene. While he does not suggest there is anything wrong with this, he emphasises the way it is hidden from view in the name of making indie pop appear accessible. Moreover, he also notes that while original DIY labels such as K Records and Sarah Records kept their approach very simple and visually in keeping with the DIY ethos, this was not the case with Factory Records, despite it still being a DIY label. He referred to the label as “very kind of high end high spec in terms of the design” and stated that they would “bankrupt themselves just to put out a really good sleeve”. Supporting his observation is the famous example of the original cover art of New Order’s “Blue Monday” single, which sold at a loss per unit due to the intricacies of the design which made it very expensive to produce (Perrone, 1999, para. 15).

Moreover, both Sam and Ian expressed their frustrations over DIY music and related visual material which has been produced using more advanced technology only to appear handmade and hand-drawn. With the rise of image editing software, now it is possible for anyone to edit images and create a professional looking image. Ian argued that “it’s hard
to say you know you’ve got this DIY scene, everything is going to be, how shall we say, slightly, amateurish if you like, because that’s clearly not [the case]”. Citing the example of the British band Comet Gain, Ian notes that they are “ostensibly part of DIY independent pop rock”, yet some of their releases are professionally produced. Taken together these comments demonstrate the apparent tension between the core values of indie pop music.

In the following section I discuss how inauthenticity was expressed via participants, teasing out the common tropes which were drawn upon to position authentic media and experiences of music against.

### 7.3 Authentic visuals organising theme 2: Inauthenticity conveyed via media

As I explain in chapter four, defining authenticity necessitates establishing its other or antonym: inauthenticity (Bendix, 1997, p. 9). As such, during the discussions with my respondents, covers that were deemed inauthentic were often mentioned in opposition to the meaningful sleeves selected. This section therefore provides an insight into the theme of inauthenticity as it was conveyed through the covers and interpreted by participants. These have been organised into the following three sub-themes: “Selling out”, “The problem with retro music” and “‘Fake’ DIY”. I discuss each of these in turn below.

#### 7.3.1 Inauthentic media basic theme 1: Selling out

Alongside its importance in expressing how the band or musicians define themselves and their music – ergo the significance of the cover as an interpretative tool for the listener – cover art was also discussed in terms of offering an insight into where the band or musicians are heading. One manifestation of this which was cited by nine participants was when cover art signals a turning point at which bands or musicians have relinquished control over the artwork, or in indie vernacular “sold out”. The following excerpts illustrate this:

“This was, their attempt at a commercial album, which I love, um this is much later in their career, when I think Vaughan Oliver was doing their artwork.
You can kind of, tell when the artwork got taken out of their hands, or they let it go rather…” (Jen)

“There’s the worst album cover in the world by the Rolling Stones… It’s mid-80s, they’re well past their best and someone just said “let’s dress you in some fluorescent sh-, rubbish”, and it’s a truly awful record and look at that sleeve, you would know, no one cares, they don’t want to be there. And the record sounds like no one wants to be there. That’s not DIY, that’s a record just telling me “Don’t buy me, no one gives a shit”.” (Trev)

“I absolutely adored The Undertones and when they had a, it was a compilation in the 80s they released, and I thought well that’s got 7-inch singles on, I might as well buy double vinyl. So I went into the shops to pick the CD up and it’s a woman in cellophane, with sausages all… and, you know, even now, I thought, you know, whoever has designed that, that’s obviously the record company. Somebody’s said “let’s have this on the sleeve”. I can’t imagine the band would have had any say in it […]” (Pete B)

In the first excerpt, Jen refers to the cover of an album by the Throwing Muses, explaining that the artwork was handed over to the British designer Vaughan Oliver rather than the band maintaining control, as she felt they were in their previous releases. She indicates that she enjoys the music and, unlike the following two excerpts, does not position the cover as inauthentic but simply acknowledges it, demonstrating that she is conscious of it. In the next excerpt, Trev takes a more negative tone, emphasising his dislike of a Rolling Stones album cover and the music itself. This record was released, in his opinion, when the band had already had its heyday. Trev interprets the way the band are styled on the cover as an indication that they were not interested in playing music any more, suggesting that they had sold out to commerce.

Expressing his thoughts on cover art in his interview, Pete B commented: “hopefully you’d think, the band had had some sort of input into [cover art] … because it should tell you more about the band, or you’d hope it would be what the band wants in terms of how they present themselves.” (his emphasis). Moreover, Pete B considers the level of autonomy the musicians or band have had over the artwork, seeing the cover as a visual
insight into the matter. In the selected excerpt, Pete recalls his reaction to the cover art of the Northern Irish punk rock band The Undertones’ 1983 compilation album “All Wrapped Up”. The cover is a photograph of a woman wearing a dress made from raw meat wrapped in cling film and a necklace made of sausages. According to Pete B, this particular cover is out of sync with those of the band’s two previous albums, which he spoke positively about before recalling this more recent example. Tellingly, the main reason for his dislike of the cover was that the band themselves seemed to have had little or no input into the decision: “whoever has designed that, that’s obviously the record company. Somebody’s said “let’s have this on the sleeve”. I can’t imagine the band would have had any say”. As a fan of The Undertones, Pete B suggested that the cover was “just so out of context with the band” – implying that he is familiar with their music and that this cover signalled a departure from the band’s former identity.

For these indie pop fans, then, the record sleeve may function as an indicator of unwanted commercial influence on the music. The interview excerpts depict covers that “fail to make the world their own” (Baugh, 1988, p. 483) and do not present features consistent with those of previous releases which, for them, defined the identity of the artists. In this sense, these examples of covers perceived as inauthentic are a long way from being unadulterated, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter.

7.3.2 Inauthentic media basic theme 2: “Fake” DIY

In addition to the previous section in which participants built a picture of what they deemed to be inauthentic covers, several also expressed a dislike for a “fake” DIY aesthetic. Indeed, through the following excerpts, three participants also reinforced that the DIY appearance of the artwork should genuinely reflect the constraints of the context in which it was produced. For instance, the cut and paste aesthetic was discussed by Sam during his interview:

“[…] there’s also this sort of fake cut and paste thing going on at the minute, which, it’s fine when all you could do was cut and paste with a photocopier, but when that’s all done on a computer, I don’t, I don't really get that. I just, I dunno, I’m not an artist and I don’t really know anything about art, umm, but, I just think there’s a sort of, veneer, of sort of, inverse snobbery in a way,
For Sam, the “cut and paste” DIY aesthetic of albums covers reflects the limitations of past modes of production, as exemplified in the earlier section, “Lo-fi”. As such, covers produced more recently, at a time when digital reproduction is possible, and which imitate cover art designed more than thirty years ago, are considered inauthentic by Sam. In other words, his inclination towards such a DIY aesthetic is inextricably bound to a period from the past which did not offer as much freedom regarding production compared to the present.

Similarly, Darren and Caroline discuss the visual design of American singer Taylor Swift’s album “1989”, a cropped polaroid photo of the artist on which her initials and the name of the album have been handwritten with a black marker:

**Darren:** “It needs to appeal to the masses although that said, of all things, you know I noticed quite recently that, an artist that I’d never listened to but like, Taylor Swift, like her latest album, I think it’s her latest album it’s just a polaroid picture with a marker pen, what’s it called? It’s like the year she was born or whatever.

**Caroline:** Yeah it kind of looks DIY and it came with all these inserts that kind of looked like polaroids. So I think major labels are realising that the way to sell stuff now that we don’t have physical copies is that it’s got to be physically, visually appealing because you can download anything, can’t you? But it’s just a file.”

In this example, Darren and Caroline suggest that indie values have been appropriated by mainstream record labels which use old media and a DIY aesthetic to sell records. In this excerpt, the DIY aesthetic is positioned against the “major” record labels that adopt a seemingly DIY style for the covers of the physical and digital versions of their records.
In this sense, even though Darren and Caroline are fans and producers of DIY covers, they do not sympathise with the idea that more mainstream labels follow the production practices that are idiosyncratic of their scene. This echoes the dichotomy between “serious” and “commercial” art that Trilling describes to differentiate real art from art created for profit only (Trilling, 1972, p. 67).

7.3.3 Inauthentic media basic theme 3: The problem with retro music

As I have already noted in the previous findings chapter, most participants either overtly or implicitly also compared analogue music with digital music. Moreover, nostalgia for the physicality of the analogue medium and the effort associated with the broader listening experience was also a prevalent topic in the interviews. Beyond this, five participants referred to the vinyl revival, described in the introduction to this thesis, as well as retro styles – both of which were looked down upon:

“[…] all this nonsense about a vinyl resurgence… they’re just digital files on a bit of plastic” (Pete B)

“[…] I think some of them, typography gets, screams a bit too self-consciously retro, about love and things like that, it’s possibly trying a bit too hard […]” (Pete G)

In the first excerpt, Pete B, after explaining the technical differences between the “pure” analogue signal and “sampled” digital sounds, distinguishes between analogue music that was produced before the era of digitisation and digital music that is produced on modern vinyl records. The former he deems to be authentic because it was of its time, whereas the latter renders the vinyl record itself merely a plastic prop. In other words, Pete B does not immediately associate vinyl records with authentic modes of production. He later explains that “remastering” is required to produce modern vinyl on which the “digital files sound good”, further emphasising his disapproval for sound that has been extensively tampered with. In the second excerpt, Pete G, discussing the style of record sleeves, refers to the font on the EP “Lazy Line Painter Jane” by the British band Belle and Sebastian. For him, the font used for the title of the record and the name of the band
reflects a “retro” style, again implying that the band’s choice was not original as they were striving to mimic an aesthetic from the past.

These two excerpts highlight the issues that some participants had with “retro” designs which “[borrow] from the past” (Grainge, 2000, p. 29) and have become a marketable style in the era of digitisation (Havlena and Holak, 1991, p. 325; Grainge, 2000, p. 29). It was therefore looked upon as disingenuous and superficial to produce DIY-looking sleeves and vinyl records without the same constraints associated with analogue music and its cover art. This new music must, in the eyes of these participants, be true to the modern context in which it was produced, and the technology and finances available (Baugh, 1988, p. 483).

7.4 Summary

The findings from this chapter highlight a shared preference for a visible and authentic DIY aesthetic, illustrated via an appreciation of certain features of single/EP/album covers. Taken together with the findings from chapter six, these features were associated with an idealisation of the scene which participants showed signs of yearning for, pointing to nostalgia in their interpretations and recollections. Specifically, the origins of the cover art were deemed significant, as participants sought a connection to the maker – in this case the musician(s) – via consistency between the music and the sleeve. When this was disrupted, often due to unwanted commercial influence, participants interpreted this as the first signs of inauthenticity. The stories and background to the covers were seen to add depth to the tangible music format, contributing to the “aura” (Benjamin, 1935) of the music and heightening the experience. The lo-fi aesthetic characteristics of the covers that participants brought along to their interviews was associated with craftsmanship which carried all the way through from the production of the music itself to the cover. This also reinforced a sense of accessibility – the idea that anyone can do it – another core value of the indie pop music scene and DIY music more broadly. Each of these features which reflected the core values of indie pop were contrasted with what participants deemed were inauthentic sleeves. Still, while these values were shared by most participants, this was not unanimous, and some preferred polished sleeves rather than pure DIY covers, offering their own interpretation of the scene.
8.1 Introduction

In the previous two findings chapters I presented and interpreted the key global, organising, basic and sub-themes which emerged from thematic data analysis of twelve interviews with fourteen long-standing members of the UK indie pop music scene. In this chapter, I expand on how the themes interrelate, shedding light on the ways in which nostalgia and authenticity interweave in participants’ accounts of their experiences of music and the indie pop music scene. In doing so, I frame the main contributions which this thesis makes to the existing research I reviewed in the three literature review chapters. To interpret and elucidate these contributions, I draw upon the conceptual framework described in chapter four and re-stated here:

![Conceptual framework diagram]

**Figure 4 - Conceptual framework (as presented at the end of chapter four)**

In other words, I highlight new insights relating to nostalgia, media nostalgia and the role that music covers, perceived as authentic by the participants interviewed, play in
participants’ recollections. To my knowledge, these have not previously been outlined in published research. This chapter is therefore organised into three main sections which reflect what my respondents expressed nostalgia for: analogue music culture, the “golden age” of indie pop and personal memories bound to music. In each section I make connections across themes from both findings chapters, synthesising the findings more broadly with existing research. I close with a summary of the chapter.

8.2 Contribution 1: Analogue music culture

The first organising theme presented in chapter six, “Collective nostalgia for analogue music”, highlighted participants’ shared yearning for physical analogue music media as well as the record shop rituals and effort which they saw as contributing to the holistic experience of analogue music. These findings support existing literature which sees media as common objects of nostalgic longing (Davis, 1979, p. 123; Pickering and Keightley, 2006; Niemeyer, 2014). However, this nostalgia for analogue media notably extends beyond vinyl records, cassettes and CDs, to encapsulate the broader culture surrounding analogue media. While Menke (2017, p. 630) suggests that one can be nostalgic for “media culture, technology, or content”, my findings offer empirical support to his claim in the context of a music scene which is committed to analogue music. Specifically, I argue that the physicality of the medium is only one aspect of participants’ nostalgia for the broader analogue music culture. This encompasses the rituals associated with the record shop, as outlined in the first findings chapter. The experience often started with the build-up to record release days and was swiftly followed by a trip to the physical record shop to seek out the eagerly awaited music. Alternatively, record shops were also places where the respondents leafed through the record stacks, searching for obscure music or hoping to stumble serendipitously upon something worth their investment. Whatever the motivation behind the trip to the record shop, the journey home was also one of excitement, this time for the unboxing of the packaged music and the anticipation of handling and listening to it for the first time.

As Havlena and Holak (1996, p. 38) state, cultural nostalgia is experienced first-hand amongst members of the same culture, which encompasses any group of people who are bound together by shared values and norms. These findings thus pointed to the cultural
nostalgia embedded in participants’ recollections, as their accounts stemmed from personal and direct experiences, grounded in shared understandings (Baker and Kennedy, 1994; Havlena and Holak, 1996). This is exemplified via their collective longing for the medium and wider aspects of the experience. As such, this research underlines the role of analogue music culture as an object of cultural nostalgic yearning amongst these long-standing members of the indie pop music scene. Moreover, Bolin (2015) researched generational nostalgia amongst Swedish and Estonian media users, highlighting the shared passion for media within generations. However, as I discussed in the methodology chapter, participants of my research transcended more than one generation. My findings thus shed light on the role of cultural rather than generational nostalgia for analogue music culture in the indie pop music scene.

Moreover, participants deemed music covers a memorable feature of analogue music formats. This is evidenced via their recollections in both findings chapters, and the emphasis they placed on the meaningfulness of some cover art. This further extends the body of research into media nostalgia (e.g. Pickering and Keightley, 2006; Niemeyer, 2014; Menke, 2017) by highlighting cover art as a pertinent aspect of analogue music media. As such, my findings demonstrate the significance of covers, as they serve as visual connections between participants and the wider aspects of analogue music culture. Specifically, cover art was a striking aspect of the analogue music media longed for by participants. At the same time, the covers also featured in their recollections of visiting record shops, sometimes encouraging participants to “take a chance” on a piece of music. Cover art was of course the starting point for this research and therefore discussions of it did not naturally emerge in the interviews, since I directly asked participants to discuss it. In this sense, I do not imply that the visual aspects of music were superior to other sensory aspects of the experience of analogue music, but simply that this research exposed the deeper meanings that the covers held for participants.

Furthermore, the literature on analogue nostalgia and “technostalgia” emphasises that the physicality, labour investment and imperfections are all qualities which are regarded as superior in comparison to modern forms of media (Pinch and Reinecke, 2009; Campopiano, 2013; Bolin, 2015). The findings from my research support this, as demonstrated via the themes in findings chapter six in the sections on “The medium”, which exemplified the superiority – according to participants – of tangible music media,
and “Effort”, which encompassed the work which was considered necessary to fully appreciate and engage with music meaningfully. However, my research also extends the media nostalgia literature, as I argue that the effort and commitment associated with analogue formats were commonly regarded as part and parcel of the wider experience of analogue music culture which they yearned for. Specifically, participants conceived of music as a profound experience, which involved deep listening and dedication to attempting to like it, even if it was initially unappealing. This was interpreted as making a commitment to the music, which was deemed important due to the monetary investment made upon purchasing it. Finally, the lead up to buying music was fondly remembered; this either took the form of buying music based on the strength of the sleeve, or actively searching for a specific release.

Additionally, the qualities of appealing cover art appearing “amateur”, reflecting the DIY nature of the music, and “lo-fi”, pointing to low-tech methods of production, in the second findings chapter (seven), offer further support to the argument that imperfection contributes to the perceived superiority of analogue media. However, in addition to this, other qualities of the music covers were deemed by participants to signal superiority. These included the cover appearing unadulterated; having some form of authentic story or background; featuring “childish” and simplistic artwork; and being unique, symbolising the handcrafted rather than mass produced nature of the music. These characteristics correspond to those outlined in chapter four, of authentic objects from the past. Indeed, for an object to be adulterated or sophisticated is claimed to compromise the sincerity of an object (Trilling, 1972, p 13). In the context of this research, participants sought connections with the makers behind the cover art, via the simple and direct messages conveyed (Handler, 1986, p. 2; Moore, 2002, p. 213; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998, cited in Fine, 2003, p. 155).

Furthermore, stories or background information about the musician(s), the music or how the cover art came to be created were drawn upon by some participants to authenticate the music covers, offering further flesh to the line of reasoning proposed by Frith (1996, p. 171), Fine (2003, p. 175), Peterson (2005, p. 1088) and Weisethaunet and Lindberg (2010, p. 471). The childlike elements of covers were often interpreted as signalling innocence and simplicity, in line with the basic definition of authenticity (Bendix, 1997, p. 15). The uniqueness of the music interpreted from the music covers similarly mirrors
the core tenets underlying the concept of authenticity (Benjamin, 1935; Baugh, 1988; Belk, 1990; Baudrillard, 1994; Orvell, cited in Fine, 2003, p. 163; Peterson, 2005, p. 1094; Jones, 2010, p. 189). Read through the lens of nostalgia, these past experiences with analogue music are thus regarded as superior and, crucially, more authentic than experiences of digital music. This offers insight into the relationship between nostalgia and authenticity – specifically, how “authentic” objects which represent seemingly superior phenomena associated with one’s past contribute to experiences of nostalgia. In the context of this research, the music covers were the “authentic” objects at the heart of participants’ longing and I argue that they served to reconcile the tension between the DIY ethos of the scene and the mass production and “cold sterility” of digital music (Katz, 2015, p. 276).

Findings also revealed that the participants’ current music experiences are deemed deficient for two main reasons: firstly, the rite of passage into adulthood, where participants have less time and feel less intensely about music. This is supported by the literature which suggests that nostalgia for music increases with age (Batcho, 1995, p. 138) and that inclinations towards music encountered when one was growing up are likely to remain stable throughout one’s lifetime (Holbrook and Schindler, 1989, p. 119). It also resonates with the claim that individuals may feel powerfully connected to songs because of the personal associations with objects of yearning from their youth (Holbrook and Schindler, 2003, p. 119; Barrett et al., 2010, p. 401). Secondly, the format change of music from analogue to digital, where the aspects of analogue music which participants deemed to be superior are lost, is supported by Davis (1979, p. 103), who posits that changes in society can heighten nostalgia. Taken together, the findings across these sections paint a vivid picture of participants’ reminiscences of their experiences of music, from the physical aspects of analogue media, including the cover art, to wider aspects of the experience such as the record shop rituals in the lead up to, during and after purchasing music, the anticipation of record releases and the effort that they deemed necessary to fully appreciate and engage with music in a profound manner.
8.3 Contribution 2: The “golden age” and idealised values of indie pop

The interview excerpts also illustrated that certain features of the covers participants chose to bring with them were symbolic of the perceived values of the indie pop music scene, representing the community beyond the music encased in the sleeve. In this sense, further to being a significant element of the object of nostalgia – in this case, physical media – the covers also functioned as triggers of nostalgia. Existing research has suggested that sensory inputs, including music, can elicit nostalgia (Kaplan, 1987; Holbrook and Schindler, 1989; Drake, 2003; Schindler and Holbrook, 2003; Barrett et al., 2010), as well as objects and images (Belk, 1990; Stewart, 1993; Havlena and Holak, 1996). Based on the findings from this research, rather than the sound of music, material music media and cover art were the physical and visual triggers of nostalgia. While Batcho et al. (2008, p. 237) note the power of song lyrics in eliciting nostalgia, research into other aspects of music in this respect has not, to my knowledge, been carried out. This thesis therefore addresses this gap by contributing insights into the role of the physical and visual aspects of analogue music in eliciting nostalgia.

As conveyed in the title of the second organising theme presented in findings chapter six, “Nostalgia for a “golden age” of indie pop”, the 1980s were collectively conceptualised as the golden era of the scene studied (Belk, 1990, p. 670; Havlena and Holak, 1991, p. 325; Wilson, 2014, p. 27). This parallels the nostalgia which interviewees featured in the BBC documentary “Music for Misfits: The Story of Indie” felt for the DIY movement and their conceptualisation of the late 1980s and early 1990s as a golden era of indie (Hesmondhalgh, 1999, p. 35). As I argued in my literature review, any notion of a “golden age” of a social movement or community is subjective (Gordon, 2005, p. 164). Regardless, my findings also demonstrate that the 1980s are collectively conceptualised by these long-standing members of the indie pop music scene as the ultimate era of indie pop, maintained by shared nostalgia for this period and interwoven with their more personal recollections.

In tune with Gabriel’s (1993, p. 125) assertion, this period was deemed superior to the scene at the time when my interviews were conducted, and the golden years were drawn upon as a comparator to music production in a digital age. My findings therefore support
the notion that the recent move away from analogue towards digital music is fertile
ground for nostalgia (Shuker, 2010, p. 66; Reynolds, 2011, p. 74; Katz, 2015) which has
been read as “a socio-cultural response to forms of discontinuity, claiming a vision of
stability and authenticity in some conceptual “golden age”” (Grainge, 2000, p. 28). While
Batcho (1995, p. 141) and Sedikides et al. (2004, p. 209) do not support the notion that
discontent or worries over the future heighten nostalgia, my findings suggest that in an
increasingly digital age, participants were nostalgic for their former experiences of music
and the indie pop music scene. I argue that the transition from analogue to digital
music is perceived as discontinuity and triggers a return to a more stable, familiar period of
analogue music and the culture surrounding it.

Given that I interviewed participants of a range of ages for this research, most had
experienced this period of indie pop directly, except Miguel and Ian. Miguel instead
referred to the “golden age” of the 1980s and noted that his understanding of it was
influenced by older members and friends who had had direct experience of the scene at
that time. This is therefore an example of interpersonal/intergenerational nostalgia (Davis,
argue that the construction of a “golden age” of indie pop music is passed on from older
members with direct experience of it, to younger members who joined following the
“decline” of the scene.

Further to this, later periods were also conceived of as mini-revivals, although never
coming close to the “golden age” when indie pop first emerged from post-punk as a subset
of indie music more broadly. The “golden years” of the scene then, were characterised by
greater enthusiasm for music and a “natural” energy which was difficult to pin down and
which echoes the “basic creative urge” distinguishing self-taught artists, as described by
Fine (2003, p. 160). Although only mentioned by two participants, reasons for the decline
of indie pop after the revival were the downturn in use of social networking website
Myspace, formerly used to promote music, as against other platforms like Facebook and
the acquisition of independents by larger record labels.

Beyond the explicit yearning for the scene which was illustrated via the organising theme
of “Nostalgia for a “golden age” of indie pop”, findings chapter seven revealed more
about the connections that participants made to the scene and how they made sense of
and interpreted it. In this sense, the specific features of the meaningful covers which participants brought along to their interviews triggered nostalgia for what they identified as the core values of indie pop, embedded in idealisations of the scene during its “prime” era. This echoes Gabriel’s (1993, p. 130) claim that physical objects become objects of longing and symbols of the yearned for qualities of a perceived “golden age”. In the context of this research, given that the cover art represented an idealised vision of indie pop to participants, I suggest that the covers functioned more as vehicles of nostalgia rather than solely objects of longing, capturing the deeper, underlying meanings behind them as physical vessels.

As such, I argue that the sleeves discussed by the participants interviewed for this study represent an indie pop nostalgic “mode” (Davis, 1979, p. 73; Grainge, 2000, p. 27). The aesthetic features of the covers thus often triggered nostalgic recollections of the “golden age” of the indie pop scene as they captured and mirrored the most striking values of the scene “back then”. Contrary to Davis (1979, p. 82), Grainge (2000, p. 29) and Stewart (1993, pp. 22-23) who suggest that the nostalgic “mode” is often based on the idealised and indirectly experienced past, these long-standing members’ appreciation of the lo-fi, cut-and-paste and childish record sleeve style was grounded for all but two members in “real” and “true” nostalgia (Nawas and Platt, 1965, p. 51; Baker and Kennedy, 1994, p. 171). As such, I argue that the cover art is a visual reminder of the idealised values of indie pop embedded in participants’ collective construction of the “golden age”. Moreover, drawing on these stylistic features contributes to maintaining the idealised vision of the scene more than thirty years after it was considered to have reached its peak.

Furthermore, the quality of being unadulterated, which participants discussed via the covers, maps Strachan’s (2007, p. 247) basic definition of micro-independent DIY labels in the UK in the sense that individuals take on all or most aspects of the production of their music, including the design of covers and how they are packaged. This also reflects the notion that indie music is “self-made” and the creative efforts of the individuals involved being protected from outsider influence, as they maintain control over the entire creative process (Fonarow, 2006, p. 188). Further, the perceived amateurishness of music covers was seen by participants to reflect the DIY nature of this music scene, supporting Fonarow’s (2006, p. 30) assertion that indie performers seek to emphasise the amateur nature of the music rather than professionalism. Bound to this, being lo-tech in production
was also considered to contrast with more polished, modern mainstream music (Hesmondhalgh, 1999; Gordon, 2005; Fonarow, 2006, p. 74; Strachan, 2007; Chivers Yochim and Biddinger, 2008, p. 193; Luvaas, 2013, p. 96).

I have already noted the pertinence of the childlike qualities of these covers which map to common characteristics of authentic objects in the previous section, “Analogue music culture”. However, as noted in literature review chapter four, nostalgia for childhood is evident in indie pop music and, at the heart of this, lies an idealised and pure image of childhood (Reynolds, 2007, pp. 15-16). This is indicative of the deeper meaning beneath nostalgia, which reacquaints participants with senses of belonging, love or security which they associate with their youth. Childishness also translates into the amateurishness of the music (Dale, 2010, p. 68) as well as its simplistic nature (Luvaas, 2013, p. 95). Uniqueness is another quality of both authentic objects and indie pop. Indeed, this relates to its origins in opposition to the mainstream music industry (Fonarow, 2006, p. 188), thus capturing the “indie” in “indie pop”.

The organising theme “Inauthenticity conveyed via media” then reinforced the former organising theme, demonstrating what indie pop is not about: selling out to commerce (Hesmondhalgh, 1999, p. 35; Hibbett, 2005, p. 62; Fonarow, 2006, p. 26; Strachan, 2007, pp. 250-251; Dale, 2010, p. 251; Kruse, 2003, cited in Dolan, 2010, p. 460; Luvaas, 2013, p. 96). In addition to this, what emerged from my findings was a resistance towards imitations of DIY and retro music. As such, beyond conforming to mainstream rather than indie ideals, participants disliked covers which they regarded as superficial imitations of the indie pop mode and which they saw as having no real substance beneath the surface. This can be explained by the idea that the “retro” style “borrows from the past” (Grainge, 2000, p. 29) and thus, according to the participants interviewed, does not acknowledge the actual production methods of modern music covers. This further emphasises the interconnection between the DIY style and the “golden age” of the scene, since such aesthetics were often associated with past times, when means of producing sleeves were very limited.

These findings speak to the literature on media nostalgia as well as research which distinguishes between authentic objects from the past and inauthentic objects which attempt to recreate the past in a modern setting. In line with the notion that imitation
pieces are regarded as inauthentic (Baugh, 1998, p. 483), covers which participants deemed as “fake” were seen to appropriate the visual qualities of “authentic” indie sleeves, without subscribing to the indie value system. The instantly recognisable cut-and-paste style is a pertinent example of this, as it was stressed that previously, producers of music covers were bound to the constraints of the time and had to utilise techniques such as photocopying or using limited colours. Indeed, the concept of “retro” was referred to both directly and indirectly and a distaste for it articulated. I therefore argue that the indie pop mode is temporally bound to the pre-digital music era, in the sense that the same style of cover art in an age of digital reproduction is perceived by participants as inauthentic.

8.4 Contribution 3: Personal memories bound to music

In chapter six, I also highlighted the more personal, private memories which participants narrated in their interviews. Music again functioned as a vehicle of nostalgia, although participants’ recollections were not always directly triggered by their analysis of their chosen covers, but rather arose from the context of the interview and our general discussions surrounding music. Personal memories were interwoven with participants’ collective recollections of analogue music culture and the indie pop music scene. This is in line with Davis’ (1979, p. 194) assertion that emblems of shared phenomena may trigger private nostalgia for the personal memories tied to an individual’s idiosyncratic experience associated with such phenomena. In other words, the findings from this research foreground music as a “collectively oriented symbol” (Davis, 1979, p. 194) which elicits private as well as collective nostalgia. Moreover, findings support Schindler and Holbrook’s (2003, p. 279) concept of a “period of intense affective consumption”, as participants emphasised the intensity and meaningfulness of music they recalled experiencing in their youth. Holbrook and Schindler (1989, p. 119) note that this usually peaks in the mid-twenties and, while not all participants disclosed their age, from those that did and what could be inferred from the interviews, three referred specifically to primary school age (between five and eleven years old), three to their teen years, and one to his twenties, during which he was a postgraduate student.
With regards to a “period of intense affective consumption” (Schindler and Holbrook, 2003, p. 279), these findings specifically highlight the salience of participants’ first engagements with music and the role that tangible artefacts occupy in their memories. For instance, the front cover of the first piece of music participants owned was at times vividly recalled. Moreover, the prospect of younger consumers engaging with digital rather than physical music was looked upon negatively, as less authentic than they envisaged their own early engagements with music. This contributes to the literature on the importance of materiality and being true to origins in judgements of authenticity. Like photographs, tangible music formats function as fixed markers of events (Sturken, 1997, p. 21) and their simplicity and tangibility are considered by these long-standing members of the indie pop scene to be more genuine than digital formats (Moran, 2002, p. 162).

Beyond recollections of their first music purchase, participants generally contrasted this period of perceived intensity and maximum impact of music with experiences of listening to digital music, whether they were listeners to digital music themselves and referring to their own experiences, or speculating about how younger consumers nowadays consume music. Additionally, participants reminisced about their youth and adolescence, contrasting this with their current situation, beyond their passage into adulthood. Specifically, participants stated they had less freedom and time in comparison to their youth, offering further flesh to Holbrook and Schindler’s (2003, p. 117) observation that we may associate objects with more secure times and a feeling of “freedom”. Furthermore, participants reminisced about the lack of responsibility – such as being a parent or going to work – in their youth. As Batcho’s (1995) research suggests, the degree of responsibility an individual has impacts upon how likely they are to experience nostalgia.

While this research did not set out to explore the impact of the level of responsibility or life stage on nostalgia, participants contrasted their current responsibilities with what they deemed to be simpler times in their youth and adolescent years. This is also in tune with the observation that, as time has progressed, life has become increasingly faster paced, competitive and thus more stressful, naturally culminating in a collective desire to return to a slower, more relaxed period (Brown et al., 2003a, p. 135). The absence of these qualities therefore contributes to the apparent deficiency of the present moment, which triggers a desire to return to the past (Gabriel, 1993, p. 121). Moreover, that participants
were nostalgic for their youth and adolescence is further reinforced by the childishness ingrained in indie pop music (Dale, 2010, p. 231; Reynolds, 2007, p. 15) as discussed in the previous section “The “golden age” and idealised values of indie pop”. That participants reflected on the transition from childhood to adulthood echoes Batcho’s (1995) “developmental” approach which sees transitions to new life stages as the reason for one’s nostalgia. In the context of this study, this is in addition to the nostalgia considered as a “mood” which was induced by discussing music covers.

Underlying participants’ personal and collective nostalgia was a deeper sense of belonging to the indie pop scene. Their former experiences of music thus reinforce a sense of social connectedness in the present (Wilson, 2014, p. 86), in line with the abstract concept described in the conceptual framework which underlie common objects of nostalgia. This supports the literature which highlights the function of nostalgia, to connect someone back to their sense of intimacy with the world (Boym, 2001, p. 25). Belongingness was the most prominent of these concepts and explicitly referred to by participants. Other aspects such as love and security may also ground their longings, but were not mentioned directly in the interviews. Indeed, the findings suggest a yearning amongst participants to fit in with communities which espouse shared values of music. This could reflect the underlying premise of indie being music for “misfits”, people who do not conform to mainstream cultures. Participants commented on how they discovered for the first time that there were groups of people challenging the mainstream, which they reportedly found enticing. Indeed, loved ones also featured in participants’ reflections, from parents and other family members to other indie music fans (Sedikides et al., 2008, p. 307).

8.5 Summary

The three sections of this chapter, “Analogue music culture”, “The “golden age” and idealised values of indie pop” and “Personal memories bound to music”, foreground the common objects of participants’ yearning as expressed via their interviews. The aim of each section was to synthesise the findings from this research with existing literature on nostalgia, as well as authenticity and objects, explaining how these two concepts overlap and interweave. That analogue music was regarded by most participants as inherently
superior to digital music for being physical supports the assertion that material artefacts are considered innately authentic (Handler, 1986, p. 3; Jones, 2010; Wilson, 2014; Lowenthal, 2015). Moreover, participants’ strong preference for tangible music formats in an age of digital music offers support to Moran’s (2002, p. 162) claim, that in a digital age, “more primitive technologies of previous eras” may be considered more genuine and authentic than digital technologies.

As well as functioning as a trigger of nostalgia, physical music media were also at the centre of the collective yearning as the object longed for. Thus, through the participants’ reflections on the evolution of their music listening habits, cover art represented an important facet of nostalgia for analogue music that has not been explored in depth prior to this thesis. Beyond this, the broader context in which tangible analogue music was also fondly remembered by participants. This includes the rituals surrounding the record shop and the effort and commitment associated with physical music media. This demonstrates that nostalgia for media can transcend the boundaries of the physical vessel to encompass the wider culture surrounding such artefacts.

Given the focus of this research on cover art, which guided the data collection process, findings have also demonstrated the importance of some of the qualities of the record sleeves which were generally perceived as more authentic than modern aspects of digital music. As such, I argue that the lo-fi, amateur and childish qualities of the covers discussed by these long-standing members of the indie pop scene constitute a specific aesthetic mode that represents the values of the “golden age” of the scene. Finally, private nostalgia for personal experiences associated with participants’ childhood also highlighted the role of tangible music artefacts in their first engagements with music. As such, the physicality of the medium can be regarded as a vehicle of meaning, which is drawn upon by participants to feel a sense of belongingness.
Chapter Nine: Conclusion

9.1 Introduction

This thesis has explored how, in an age of digital music, long-standing members of the UK indie pop music scene reflect on their experiences of music within the scene. Further to this, the purpose was also to explore the role that “meaningful” covers selected by participants played in their conceptualisations of their experiences of music and the scene. The inductive nature of this research revealed the significance of nostalgia and authenticity in participants’ accounts of their experiences of music and the scene, leading to the construction of a conceptual framework grounded in the existing literature on nostalgia and authenticity. This chapter sets out to answer my research questions and to outline the main conceptual contributions, practical implications and limitations and recommendations for future research.

9.2 Answers to the research questions and conceptual contributions

My research questions were formulated as follows:

1. How do long-standing members of the indie pop music scene:
   - reflect on their experiences of music?
   - make sense of the scene?

2. How do their chosen covers contribute to their conceptualisations?

9.2.1 RQ1) How do long-standing members of the indie pop music scene reflect on their experiences of music and make sense of the scene?

The answer to the first research question presents the most salient theme which emerged from the analysis of the interviews. Specifically, nostalgia, the bittersweet longing for the past, was prevalent in all twelve interviews as participants yearned for times which were related to their experiences of music and the indie pop scene in its perceived heyday. As such, three distinct types of nostalgia emerged from their recollections.
First, participants collectively longed for a broad range of aspects of analogue music culture, contrasting these to the perceived inferiority of consuming digital music. This nostalgia can be said to be cultural (Baker and Kennedy, 1994; Havlena and Holak, 1996) as it stems from personal and direct experience, grounded in shared understanding of what constitutes analogue music culture. Their reminiscences included the tangibility of analogue media – in line with existing literature on technostalgia and analogue nostalgia (Marks, 2002, p. 152; Pinch and Reinecke, 2009; Schrey, 2014, p. 28; Lepa and Tritakis, 2016) – and the visual aspects of the music covers. Since the object of nostalgia felt by participants encompasses aspects of the holistic environment in which analogue music was consumed (i.e. record release day, the commitment to an entire album, the search for a record), I argue that this nostalgia for analogue music culture cannot be “cured”, unlike Hofer’s original definition, which was based on the notion that soldiers could return home as a remedy for their nostalgia (Anspach, 1934). In other words, participants cannot fully re-immerses themselves in a bygone pre-digital era in the same way that one can simply revisit old records (Bolin, 2015, p. 261) or become “engrossed” in their sleeves.

Second, these long-standing members were nostalgic for a “golden age” of the indie pop scene. There was consensus among participants that this superior period occurred in the 1980s, when activity in the scene was at its peak, and often coincided with when they first entered the scene. As they described it, this era was characterised by the inclusiveness of the scene, the ease of organising gigs, the enthusiasm of the performers and its members as well as the lack of concern for commercial success. Like the nostalgia felt for analogue music culture, the nostalgia for the “golden age” of the scene was very much cultural. I argue that it was drawn upon as a “reservoir” of pleasant recollections (Sedikides et al., 2004, p. 206; Wildschut et al., 2006, p. 986) and a means of coping with times of discontinuity provoked by an increasingly digital music culture. I also argue that the collectively established “golden age” of indie pop fostered a sense of social connectedness between members of the scene. Notably, two participants did not actually experience this “golden age” themselves but still yearned for the period, suggesting the role of interpersonal and intergenerational nostalgia (Davis, 1979, p. 62; Havlena and Holak, 1991; Havlena and Holak, 1996; Stubbings, 2003) in maintaining the idea of this period on the scene.
Third, interwoven with the other two types of nostalgia, participants were also nostalgic for personal and private aspects of their early experiences of analogue media. These recollections included their first engagements and purchase of music. I argue that deeper values lie at the heart of this longing. Specifically, a sense of belongingness underlies their recollections of their early experiences of music as they recall how music allowed them to feel connected to other music fans. Furthermore, childhood was often referred to by participants as the period in which they had the “luxury” of time and discovery as opposed to their responsibilities and time constraints as adults. As such, participants’ current listening habits were deemed deficient not only because music now is mostly digital and lacks physicality, but also because they cannot engage with music in the same way that they could as teenagers.

9.2.2 RQ2) How do their chosen covers contribute to their conceptualisations (of their experiences of music and the scene)?

Cover art was the starting point of this inductive research as I aimed to uncover the role of visual aspects in participants’ experiences of music. In light of the unanticipated findings and the salience of nostalgia and authenticity in these long-standing members’ reflections on their music experiences within the indie pop scene, this thesis highlights two distinct functions of cover art.

First, music covers were an object of participants’ longing. Large record sleeves were, for example, fondly remembered as they represented an important aspect of the physicality of the medium and augmented the past experience of listening to music. Furthermore, the covers were at the centre of recollections of the wider aspects of the analogue music culture. As such, participants remembered flicking though the sleeves in the record shop, engaging with the record packaging post-purchase, “taking a chance” on a record based on the strength of the artwork and the dedication associated with searching for a specific release. The features of the cover of the very first single/EP/album that participants bought were also at the heart of their recollections of their first meaningful engagements with music. Furthermore, the imperfections of these covers, as represented by their “amateur” and “lo-fi” style, were often cited as markers of authenticity by participants.
Second, the covers also triggered recollections of analogue music culture and the “golden age” of the indie pop scene. The DIY features of the covers that were deemed meaningful to the participants, such as cut-and-paste, amateurishness, “lo-fi” and childishness, represented the authentic values of the scene that the participants longed for. As such, I argue that the covers discussed in this research represent an indie pop nostalgic “mode” (Davis, 1979, p. 73; Grainge, 2000, p. 27), grounded in (all but two) participants’ involvement in the scene in its perceived heyday. Moreover, the uniqueness and unadulterated character of the covers, as well as the stories communicated via the sleeves, also contributed to the authentic qualities attributed by participants to these covers. Finally, participants suggested that the recent popularity of “retro” and seemingly similar DIY styles were not authentic. As the mainstream music labels have access to modern production techniques, these covers did not trigger nostalgia for the “golden age” of the scene. The DIY covers discussed in this thesis can therefore be considered vehicles of nostalgia for the authentic values of the scene that these long-standing members have strived to preserve.

9.2.3 Summary of conceptual contributions

This thesis makes several conceptual contributions. First, it provides in-depth insights into the role of nostalgia in fostering a sense of belongingness within the UK indie pop music scene. Second, the original setting chosen allowed for deeper exploration of the interplay between collective and cultural nostalgia – for the scene and analogue music culture – and personal nostalgia felt by participants for early engagements with music and their youth. Third, this research foregrounds the role of authenticity in participants’ nostalgic recollections, as I have already noted that existing academic literature on these two concepts only study their relationship superficially. As such, my findings demonstrate the role of music covers as “authentic” vehicles for nostalgic longings, as their features both mirror and are considered tangible evidence of the perceived “golden age” of the indie scene. Fourth, the recollections presented in this thesis have underlined the salience of the broader aspects of the analogue music culture, extending the definition of “technostalgia” and analogue nostalgia that primarily focus on the aspects of the tangible medium longed for. As I will describe in the following section, the findings from this thesis could also fuel further exploration of the role of visual – and multi-sensorial more generally – aspects of music in academic as well as more popular fields of study.
9.3 Practical implications

In this section, I consider the practical implications of my research in an age where the digitisation of music has re-contextualised and spurred some consumers to reconsider the place of analogue formats in their experiences of music (Chivers Yochim and Biddinger, 2008; Magaudda, 2011; Bartmanski and Woodward, 2015; Bennett and Rogers, 2015; Novak, 2015). The UK indie pop music scene offers insight into less visible music practices which exist outside of the mainstream, while interviewing long-standing members captured the motivations behind their commitment to analogue music and fondness for the culture surrounding it, as remembered by them. Indeed, the broader aspects of the analogue media culture which were yearned for by participants – beyond the materiality of the medium – unveil the network of rituals associated with the consumption of analogue music. This furthers an understanding of why the materiality of music “bites back”, to borrow Magaudda’s (2011) words, since the consumption of digital music does not entail the same richness of experience.

Foregrounding the role of music covers in experiences of music also highlights the multiple functions of covers beyond being objects of nostalgic longing; that they also function as vehicles of meaning and connect participants to a complex web of memories and feelings. In an age where cover art has shrunk from 12”x12” tangible sleeves to often only appear digitally on listeners’ smartphone screens and where it generally plays a less prevalent role in the consumption of music, this research has foregrounded an aspect of music that often appears secondary to the listening experience.

All aspects of the analogue music culture reconstructed by participants were contrasted with what they deemed to be the deficient ways of consuming music in a digital age. Looking back should not simply be considered as a pleasant way to linger on the ruins of music habits of the past, but should also help us reconsider and question how digital music is consumed and how listeners of all ages cope with increasingly intangible and cloud-based music formats.

Moreover, I argue that life transitions experienced by music listeners are especially important in their current experiences of music. As such, analogue music formats are not longed for just because they were first consumed during youth and adolescence.
(Plasketes, 1992, p. 114; Bennett and Rogers, 2015, p. 39; Bolin, 2015, p. 258; Lepa and Tritakis, 2016, p. 19). This is also because these tangible formats represent, through their aesthetics and the ways they were consumed, values of spontaneity, the innocence of discovery and the luxury of time with which our younger years are often associated. I argue that the analogue music culture and childhood yearned for by the participants is a facet of their current experiences of music rather than simply a window to past analogue music culture.

With regards to marketing music, two implications may be drawn from my findings. First, I propose that music marketers should not only focus on the auditory dimension of music but also consider its visuals aspects – and the multi-sensory experience more generally – as this research has highlighted that music covers, discussed in isolation, can trigger rich recollections and deeper underlying feelings. Second, I suggest that marketers should look further than reviving music sounds and artefacts from the past and consider analogue culture holistically in their offerings.

9.4 Limitations and recommendations for future research

Having presented answers to my research questions and the associated conceptual contributions, I now turn to the limitations of my research and offer recommendations for future pathways. While I did not set out to generalise my findings, I note in my methodology that most participants were friends and/or worked with each other in the indie pop scene, or had done previously. This is due to my method of sampling, which was part purposive, part convenience, given that I initially approached people attending gigs and who I had seen or spoken to prior to asking them to participate in my research. The sample later snowballed, mainly with the help of two participants, who put me in touch with other people they knew who they thought would offer interesting insights into the role and meaning of cover art.

I acknowledge the advantages of the way the data collection unfolded in my methodology; namely, that interviewing people who were known to each other promoted shared content and overlapping references across the interviews, which helped to deepen my knowledge and get to know the participants better. Of course, there is also a trade-off,
in that I may have chosen to interview people from different social circles with perhaps different viewpoints instead. In other words, the combination of convenience, purposive and snowball sampling arguably resulted in a relatively homogeneous sample of participants (Lee, 1993, p. 67). This is especially important given that research on indie music suggests that the values associated with this kind of music differ depending on the person and their background, social class and age (Hibbett, 2005, p. 59; Fonarow, 2006, p. 41; Dale, 2010).

Moreover, the final version of the findings chapters (six and seven) was not sent to participants for “member checking” (Creswell and Miller, 2000, p. 127) due to time constraints. Instead, the first iteration of the data analysis which did not focus on nostalgia or authenticity was sent to all participants, and less than half responded affirmatively or suggested minor adjustments. Asking whether the participants accept the final iteration of the interview data and how I have framed this within the wider body of the thesis would have strengthened the credibility of the research (Guba and Lincoln, 1982, p. 246).

My first recommendation for future research concerns the size of the study. I argue that it would be fruitful to conduct similar research on a larger scale. Given that my focus was on the UK indie pop music scene, I suggest that research conducted in other areas of the world where indie pop is thriving might reveal different insights into analogue music culture and possibly the “golden age(s)” in different cultural contexts. Specifically, the US, Spain and Denmark would all be excellent sites to extend this research. This is based on recommendations from the participants in this study as well as my own observations during my immersion in the scene, where I noted where bands came from and what gigs and events were going on outside of the UK.

Moreover, I chose indie pop as a specific genre of independent music for the reasons outlined in the introduction (chapter one) and the methodology (chapter five). I suggest extending this research to other music scenes – independent or not – to compare results. In other independent music scenes, it would likewise be interesting to investigate to what extent nostalgia threads through participants’ accounts, given that nostalgia is an inherent part of the indie pop music scene, as suggested by Dolan (2010, p. 464) and Fonarow (2006, p. 29) and exemplified throughout my findings. For example, it would be fruitful to ask: Given the prevalence of the “golden age” for the indie pop community, do other
music scenes also long for seemingly superior times and what role(s) does this play in their experiences? Additionally, regarding the role of “authentic” music covers for the participants interviewed: What meanings and values do (music) artefacts represent for other DIY scenes?

With regards to more popular, mainstream music styles, physical formats of music may be less widely used, and so this research would lend itself well to an exploration of how other groups of consumers engage with digital music and whether the role of visuals is as meaningful in the overall experience. Furthermore, those I interviewed were all above the age of thirty and so interviewing younger consumers would shed light on people’s experiences of music when they have grown up with predominantly digital rather than physical music formats.

The aim of this chapter was to reinforce the purpose of this thesis, and to present the answers to the research questions I set out to explore over this five-year period. While I have highlighted some of the inevitable trade-offs of this research, I have emphasised the multiple contributions it has made as well as the many potential future pathways that could be taken to enrich our understanding of how music is experienced.
Appendix 1.

Informed consent form

My name is Sophie Whitehouse and I am a PhD student in the School of Management at the University of Leicester. My supervisors are Jo Brewis (j.brewis@le.ac.uk) and Mike Saren (majs1@le.ac.uk).

My research aims to highlight the importance of visual aspects of music to fans and/or producers, and to better understand how and why people use these visuals when listening to and experiencing music. For this research, the visual aspects of music that I am specifically interested in are single/EP/album artwork.

I have decided to approach you as a potential participant in this study because you identify as a fan and/or producer and/or promoter of DIY music.

I am therefore asking for your permission to record an interview with you, of roughly one hour. This can be in a setting of your choice and, if necessary, via Skype or conference call. However, face-to-face interviews are preferable wherever possible.

Once complete, I will transcribe this for potential use and/or direct quotation in my final PhD thesis. There is also a possibility that this might be used in the future in publications, for example, in an academic journal article.

If you would prefer not to be recorded, but agree to be interviewed, I would opt to take notes during the interview, which may then be used in my final PhD thesis/future publications.

Once I have analysed the interview data and written it up in good draft form, I will send all participants a copy, including all of the data extracts and my analysis, to ensure that you are happy with what I have included. If you have any issues with direct quotations or my interpretation of the data, I can then make changes accordingly.

The data from this study will be stored in compliance with the Data Protection Act, the University of Leicester’s Research Code of Conduct and its Code of Practice for Data Protection. Participation in all aspects of this study is entirely voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any point without giving reason. You may also refrain from answering any questions that you do not feel comfortable responding to.

If you are willing to be identified in my research, I will proceed to identify you by first name throughout, including my thesis and any ensuing publications. However, if you would prefer to remain anonymous, please indicate below, along with your choice of pseudonym, if you would prefer to choose your own. If you agree to the above conditions I kindly ask that you provide your signature on the following page.
Name (Please print):

________________________________________________________

Signature:

_________________________________________________________________

Date:

_________________________________________________________________

Email:

____________________________________

Please tick this box if you do not want to be identified in this research ☐

If you chose not to be identified, please choose a pseudonym (optional):

____________________________________________________________________

If you have any further questions regarding this research, please do not hesitate to contact me at: slw48@le.ac.uk

Or, if you would like to speak to someone other than myself about the project and how it being conducted, please feel free to contact the School of Management Ethics Officer, Andrea Davies at: a.davies@le.ac.uk
Appendix 2.

Researching the visual aspects of music consumption in the digital age: Interview guide

Taking as its focus independent music within the “Do It Yourself” (DIY) genre of music, my research aims to highlight the importance of visual aspects of music to consumers, and to shed light on how and why people use them when consuming music. To address these questions I propose undertaking a study of a DIY ‘scene’, initially based in the East Midlands of England, involving in-depth, semi-structured interviews with “prosumers” about the visual aspects of music.

My broader research questions are as follows:

1. How is artwork used by consumers in the consumption of DIY/independent music?

2. To what extent are new forms of artwork evident within the DIY/independent music scene given the changes brought about by digitization? How do consumers use them? If new forms are not evident, disregard.

Interview questions have been designed to directly address the above questions, but in an open way, allowing respondents the freedom to communicate their experiences and feelings.

There is also a visual element to this study; as such, participants will be asked ahead of the interview to bring along or be prepared to show some examples of the visual aspects of music (for example: single/EP/album artwork) that are particularly meaningful to them. This could be for any reason, positive or negative. Specific guidelines should not be given on how to choose such artefacts so as not to force responses towards a certain outcome. However, respondents should know upfront that they will be asked to discuss their choices at some stage in the interview. To make this more comfortable, I will also be sharing my own experiences and bringing along some props to discuss.
Interview Structure

Part One: Information and Consent

Where possible, participants should be sent an electronic copy of the Informed Consent Form (Appendix 1) prior to the interview. This form offers background information about my research and seeks to obtain their informed consent to participate in the study. This way, participants are given the opportunity to fully digest the information at their leisure and ask any questions they may have beforehand. Where it is not possible to issue participants with a copy beforehand, the Informed Consent Form will be presented to them upon meeting.

In addition to this, my research should be explained verbally, as well as the structure of the interview. Participants should be given as much time as they need to take in the information and to discuss any reservations they may have about the research. Once both parties are satisfied that the information has been understood, written consent should be obtained from the participant before proceeding to part two.

Part Two: Interview

Warm up questions

These are designed to ease participants into the interview and to obtain some useful background information about their involvement in the DIY scene and what roles they undertake.

1. How long have you been involved in [scene]?
   - How intense is their involvement? (i.e. high involvement or not?)

2. How did you hear about it/become involved?
   - Where does their interest stem from?

3. What do you do in [scene]?
   - i.e. Fan/producer/musician/promoter/label owner/fanzine writer?

4. What do you like about it?
   - What motivates them to be a part of this community?

Visual props

5. Before the interview I asked if you would bring along or be prepared to show some examples of visual aspects of music that mean something to you. Did you manage to do this? If so, how did you get on?
   - If participants did not get chance to prepare these in advance, allow some time for them to think of some examples/show me on the iPad.
   - How easy was it for participants to think of/find examples?
- Were there a lot of examples they had to choose from, or did they have to spend some time thinking of some?

6. Can you tell me why you have chosen [prop 1]?
   - If participant appears confident, ask them to answer this straight away. If not, share an example of my own first in an attempt to make them feel more comfortable.
   - Did they choose it specifically for positive/negative reasons?
   - Is it something nostalgic?

7. What does or doesn’t appeal to you about it?
   - E.g. the form, the colours, the style?

8. How does the visual you have chosen work with the sound/scene (or not)?
   - Is there a correlation between them? Do they work together and complement each other?
   - Do they like the sound of the music and/or the artwork?

9. Can you talk me through your experiences of listening to music?
   - So for example, with the music associated with prop 1, what do you do when you listen to it? What associations come to mind?
   - Can you tell me about your general experiences of listening to music? (May include associations, activities, what is happening with the other senses and how they are working together).

10. Why did you choose to buy this? (In cases where participants own the artefacts. Otherwise, why did they choose to save it?)
    - Were they motivated by the visuals alone, both the visuals and the music, or not at all?

11. What’s your interpretation of the visual material?
    - Why do you think the artist created this piece in connection with the sound/scene?
    - What does it conjure up for you?
    - Mention the text – talk about the font and size of the text.

12. Do you think visuals are an important part of the overall music? (Both in this specific case and in general)
    - When you listen to the music, do the visuals come to mind?
    - Do visuals enhance or detract from your experience of the music?

Questions to be repeated for each prop.

Rounding up

Participants should be thanked for taking part in the study and reminded that they can contact me/my supervisors/the Ethics Officer if they have any queries or concerns. They should also be reminded that I will be contacting them at a later stage requesting them to review my write-up and analysis as it stands in draft form to ensure that they are satisfied with what I have included and how they have been represented.
Part Three: Respondent validation

Once a full draft of my data analysis chapter has been completed, all participants should be sent a copy. Mays and Pope (2000, p. 51) term this ‘member checking’. This is to present participants with my overall analysis and “check” that they are happy with the final product. If not, amendments should be made accordingly.

Make it clear that I want to use data in the final thesis.

Ask for feedback.
Appendix 3.

Researching the visual aspects of music consumption in a digital age: E-mail questionnaire

Aim

Taking as its focus independent music within the “Do It Yourself” (DIY) genre of music, my research aims to highlight the importance of visual aspects of music to “consumers”, and to shed light on how and why people use them when “consuming” music.

Structure

This questionnaire has three parts. Part one is the informed consent form, which I need you to sign to confirm that you understand what the study is about and that you are happy for me to use your answers. Further information about my study is provided there, but if you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or another contact listed.

Part two contains some “warm up” questions to find out more about your background in the DIY scene and how you became interested in it.

Part three is where I ask you to discuss single/EP/album artwork. This is where the visual element comes into play, as I will ask you to write about and show examples of artwork that are particularly meaningful to you (positive/negative/neutral examples are all fine).

Please…

Feel free to write as much or as little as you feel appropriate, and answer however you feel most comfortable. I am very interested to know your thoughts and opinions and open to different ways of responding!

Do include images of album covers where possible, as it is much better if I can see what you are writing about.

Do include tangential thoughts or add in your own responses to any questions you feel I may have missed – this is really just a guide to get you started.
Part one: Informed consent form

My name is Sophie Whitehouse and I am a PhD student in the School of Management at the University of Leicester. My supervisors are Jo Brewis (j.brewis@le.ac.uk) and Mike Saren (majs1@le.ac.uk).

My research aims to highlight the importance of visual aspects of music to fans and/or producers, and to better understand how and why people use these visuals when listening to and experiencing music. For this research, the visual aspects of music that I am specifically interested in are single/EP/album artwork.

I have decided to approach you as a potential participant in this study because you identify as a fan and/or producer and/or promoter of DIY music.

I am mostly conducting face-to-face interviews with participants, but where this is not possible, I am also issuing questionnaires for respondents to fill out in their own time via e-mail. I am therefore asking for your permission to use the information you provide in the following questionnaire for potential use and/or direct quotation in my final PhD thesis. There is also a possibility that this might be used in the future in publications, for example, in an academic journal article.

Once I have analysed the interview and e-mail questionnaire data and written it up in good draft form, I will send all participants a copy, including all of the data extracts and my analysis, to ensure that you are happy with what I have included. If you have any issues with direct quotations or my interpretation of the data, I can then make changes accordingly.

The data from this study will be stored in compliance with the Data Protection Act, the University of Leicester’s Research Code of Conduct and its Code of Practice for Data Protection. Participation in all aspects of this study is entirely voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any point without giving reason. You may also refrain from answering any questions that you do not feel comfortable responding to.

If you are willing to be identified in my research, I will proceed to identify you by first name throughout, including my thesis and any ensuing publications. However, if you would prefer to remain anonymous, please indicate below, along with your choice of pseudonym, if you would prefer to choose your own. If you agree to the above conditions I kindly ask that you provide your signature on the following page.
Name (Please print):

_________________________________________________________

Signature:

_________________________________________________________________

Date:

____________________________________________________________________

Email:

____________________________________________________________________

Please tick this box if you do not want to be identified in this research ☐

If you chose not to be identified, please choose a pseudonym (optional):

____________________________________________________________________

If you have any further questions regarding this research, please do not hesitate to contact me at: slw48@le.ac.uk

Or, if you would like to speak to someone other than myself about the project and how it being conducted, please feel free to contact the School of Management Ethics Officer, Andrea Davies at: a.davies@le.ac.uk
Part two: Warm up questions

These are designed to obtain some useful background information about your involvement in the DIY scene and what role(s) you undertake. I have included prompts underneath some questions in case you get stuck/to clarify what I mean.

1. How long have you been involved in the DIY scene?

2. How intense is your involvement?
   - How much time do you spend per week/month on activities related to DIY music?
   - How often do you attend DIY gigs/help out with the organisation/production of DIY events?

3. How did you hear about the DIY scene/become involved?
   - Where does your interest stem from?

4. What do you do in the DIY scene?
   - Are you a fan/producer/designer/musician/promoter/label owner/fanzine writer?

5. What do you like about it?
   - What motivates you to be a part of this community?
Part three: Visual props

In this final part, I ask you to discuss examples of single/EP/album artwork that are particularly significant to you. For each example, please answer the highlighted questions and also include an image, where possible, so I can see what you are talking about. Questions that are not highlighted are more general and do not require an answer for each example.

6. When I mentioned thinking of some examples of visual aspects of music that mean something to you, how did you feel?
   - How easy was it for you to think of/find examples?
   - Were there a lot of examples you had to choose from, or did you have to spend time thinking of them?

7. Can you talk me through your experiences of listening to music more generally?
   - So for example, with the music associated with prop 1, what do you do when you listen to it? What associations come to mind?
   - Can you tell me about your general experiences of listening to music? (May include associations, activities, what is happening with the other senses and how they are working together).

8. Can you tell me why you have chosen [example number 1]?
   - Was it chosen for positive/negative/neutral reasons?
   - Why is it significant?
   - What does it mean to you?

9. What does or doesn’t appeal to you about it?
   - E.g. the form, the colours, the style?

10. How does the visual you have chosen work with the sound/scene (or not)?
    - Is there a correlation between them? Do they work together and complement each other?
    - Do you like the sound of the music and/or the artwork?

11. Why did you choose to buy [example number 1]? (Or, if you don’t own it, why did you choose to save it or why does it stand out in your mind as an example of album artwork you remember?)
    - In the case of where you have bought it, were you motivated by the visuals alone, both the visuals and the music, or were the visuals not important in your purchasing decision?
12. What’s your interpretation of this visual material?
- Why do you think the artist created this piece in connection with the sound/scene?
- What does it conjure up for you?
- Does the text come into play – e.g. the font size and style?

13. Do you think visuals are an important part of the overall music? (Both in the specific case of your examples, and in general)?
- When you listen to the music, do the visuals come to mind?
- Do visuals enhance or detract from your experience of the music?

You’re done! Thank you so much for giving your time to participate in my study – I look forward to reading your responses.
References


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