A Mirror of Recognition: How the Empathetic Relationship Between Dusty Springfield and Her Not-Straight Fans Facilitates their Identity Development

Nancy J. Young
Lesley University

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A MIRROR OF RECOGNITION:
How the Empathetic Relationship Between Dusty Springfield and Her Not-Straight Fans
Facilitates Their Identity Development

Submitted By
Nancy J. Young

A Dissertation
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

This multi-case qualitative study explores the phenomenon of identity development of not-straight (more traditionally labeled as gay, lesbian, bisexual, and/or queer) fans through their attachment to British popular singer Dusty Springfield as a fan-object. A purposefully selected sample of four fans, aged 21-45, two male and two female, from the United Kingdom and the United States, were interviewed. The interdisciplinary conceptual framework of the study combines the fields of identity development, fan studies, and psychological theories related to projection.

The themes that emerge from the data suggest that Dusty Springfield’s emotional music draws the listener into fandom and that the relationship the fan feels with Dusty is based upon the fan’s identification with and interpretation of the fan-object’s life, music, and image. Dusty mirrors the fans’ not-straight sexual identities and emotional vulnerabilities, as well as mirroring one participant’s self-definition as a racial outsider and another’s sense of victimization as a survivor of domestic abuse. Dusty’s function as fan-object also parallels many of the traits identified with affirmative therapy for gays and lesbians and highlights not-straight fans’ creative appropriation of icons for their identity work. Whether they view her as a role model, friend, or otherwise, their relationship with Dusty, and their fandom more broadly, alters their sense of themselves, their relationships with others, and their sense of where they belong in the world.
Dedication

This work is dedicated to Mary Isobel Catherine Bernadette O’Brien
aka

There’s something in my soul that will always lead me back to you.
Acknowledgements

I am grateful to many people for their guidance, teaching, generosity, and support in my journey of pursuing a doctorate and writing a dissertation.

My parents always believed even a girl should get a good education. I am grateful for their support through the years.

Julia Halevy served as my Senior Advisor, when no one else would take on that role. She led me to refocus my study from Dusty Springfield to how she changes the lives of her fans.

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Stephan Cohen served enthusiastically on my committee, and shared his knowledge and resources about Kegan’s constructive-developmental theory.

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Preface

We’d chosen the Catherine Wheel Inn because it was right down the road. We turned left out of the lobby and onto Hart Street in the direction of the square medieval tower of the Anglican Church of St. Mary the Virgin. Past the Café Rouge where Brits sipped their Pims at wrought iron sidewalk tables, past the White Garden flower shop, past boutique windows filled with billowy matrons’ dresses and hats—pink, purple, and over the top, just like Dusty’s might have been. It was a June afternoon in 2004, and the next day we would fly home to America.

My first trip to England, and I’d fallen in love with the posh accents, the taking of tea and scones in the afternoon, the lush gardens, the country churchyards. I had dropped rose petals on Jane Austen’s tomb at Winchester Cathedral, walked the path to the River Ouse where Virginia Woolf had filled her pockets with stones, and wandered through Christchurch in search of Mary Shelley’s grave. This was a trip where I would honor the dead. To all of these places my dear Allison gladly went with me. But to get to Henley on Thames, where Dusty was buried, I’d had to negotiate. She didn’t find feeding my obsession with a dead pop star a particularly appealing way to end a vacation.

It was a five minute walk to St. Mary the Virgin, and there lay the little churchyard next to it, abutting the street. Two weeks in this green and pleasant land had not prepared me for the quaint and understated picture before me. A pavement path cut diagonally through the grounds, and was used as a shortcut to Hart Street. Small, unassuming markers stood between lush tufts of grass, a posy of flowers lay here and there, but there were no grand monuments or displays to the dead. Charity row houses lined two sides of the graveyard. These tiny white stucco dwellings with cobalt wooden
doors framed the scene with an intimate reminder of the living among the dead. How strange it seemed that the parish would house its poor in a graveyard. Yet the quaint structures looked perfectly at home there.

I walked into the churchyard with Allison. “I wonder where she is?” I whispered, and at that moment barely missed stepping upon the grave of Dusty Springfield.

I stopped, stood still, and stared. I felt Allison’s hand on my shoulder. Without realizing, I had stopped breathing. God, is this it? A grey stone marker, in need of a good scrubbing. No angel, no lamb, no ornamentation at all, just the words

Dusty Springfield

O B E

1939-1999

OBE. Order of the British Empire. An honor bestowed by the Queen. Dusty had been awarded the title shortly before her death, but had been too ill to receive it at The Palace of St. James.

It was near to the Summer Solstice, the late afternoon still holding the light. We had seen little rain in England, and today was no exception. I looked around to be sure no one was watching me, and knelt before the grave. She’s gone. She’s gone.

As Allison had driven us into Henley, we had passed the sign for the Black Boy’s Pub, which I knew marked the road to the house where Dusty had lived. She sold the royalties to her hit records to rent a beautiful country house in which to die. On the other side of the road a field of yellow wildflowers opened up as far as my eyes could see. An image of Dusty appeared before me. Frail and tired, she lay dying on her couch, looking
out her window at spring’s gorgeous promise of renewal. How tender the moment must have been for her, seeing Nature carry on like that, while feeling herself slip away.

Now, as I knelt beside her grave, I fingered the objects left there: a weather-worn laminated black and white photo of young Dusty in the recording studio looking like a contemplative Marilyn Monroe, a framed photo of Dusty looking at herself in a mirror, a tiny bottle of holy water, a bunch of tired, pastel, plastic flowers, a rose bush in a bucket, and a large spring bouquet in a vase.

When I could no longer concentrate on this display, I began to take photographs. My hands felt large and conspicuous. I needed to do something with my hands. I needed a lens between me and what I was seeing. My whole body was taking up too much room. I walked a dozen steps behind Dusty’s grave and sat on the bench in front of a charity house.

“Are you all right?” Allison asked with a sigh, as she sat down beside me.

Tears grabbed me by the throat and I could not speak. I shook my head no. Why hadn’t I brought Kleenex with me! Idiot! I took the faded mustard colored bandana from my little knapsack, patted my eyes, and blew my nose. She’s dead—and this is all there is! Doesn’t she deserve a better gravestone? Where are the long stemmed roses, the people paying their respects? How can the town’s citizens and visitors walk by as if no one important were buried here?

I thought of all of London that had only one lousy, blue “Dusty Springfield lived here” plaque. Where was the statue? The respect for the icon, the legend, the British Elvis, for Chrissake? I feared somehow this lack of recognition might be hurting Dusty.
She had wanted her hearse drawn by four horses, but there had only been two. I stood up and looked back toward Hart Street. The fans knew what Britain and the world had lost. They had tied daisies upon the iron fence railings, and lined the road to say goodbye. I wished that I had been there, to stand with them that cold and rainy second day of March, 1999.

“Are you all right?” Allison asked me again. I shook my head no again, and kept crying. My face felt hot. Words rebuking myself rang inside my head: Idiot! Shut up, you look like a fool!

She asked me if I wanted to be alone, and I said yes, though I really wanted her to stay. “Come back in half an hour,” I shrugged.

In the photograph taken of me that day, I have one arm draped across the top of the bench, as if behind an invisible companion. The afternoon shadows have grown long.

I took out some hotel stationery from my backpack and began to write Dusty a letter. I have not forgotten you, I said. I have traveled a long way to honor you and remember you. Thank you for all you have given me. Please, now, wherever you are, know that you are loved. Rest in peace, dear Dusty. No one can hurt you now. “Dusty” I wrote on the front, and underlined it once. When I was able to stand, I lay it on her grave.

Allison would return soon, and we would walk along the Thames where the regatta took place every summer. Dusty had never seen the race nor walked along the river that flowed to London. She lay dying on her couch, watching the yellow sea of flowers rise and fall in the wind.
In the morning I returned to the churchyard with a pot of purple mums. I’d spent a long time at the market making my selection. “I’m sure she’ll like whatever you choose,” Allison had said.

“Hurry up,” she said now. “We have to get to the airport. We’re going home.”

My letter was still on Dusty’s grave. It had been opened.
Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Overview

This study of Dusty Springfield fans, of whom (you now know) I am one, seeks to explore the phenomenon of identity development of not-straight fans through their attachments to a fan-object. The purpose of this multi-case study is to explore post-adolescent not-straight fans’ perceptions of how their fandom has changed their sense of who they are and where they belong in the world. I hope that the knowledge generated from this inquiry will afford new insights and inform theory, research, and practice in education and counseling. Four qualitative case studies of Dusty Springfield fans illustrate the phenomenon of identity development of the not-straight fan attachment to a fan-object. I included a purposefully selected sample of four not-straight Dusty fans, aged 21-45, two male and two female, three from the United Kingdom and one from the United States.

1.2 Background

I was a Dusty Springfield fan from the moment I heard her voice on The Springfields’ “Silver Threads and Golden Needles” in 1962, but I lost track of her when I stopped hearing her music on the radio or seeing her records in stores at the close of the decade. Thirty years later, I found my way back to her, first with a greatest hits CD, and then Dusty in Memphis, which I’d heard about for so many years. Her death from breast cancer in 1999 jolted me back to my adolescence when I first heard that glorious voice.

1 Sexual orientation is not a singular or static process (Ritter & Terndrup, 2002), as illustrated through Klein’s (1993) six variables individuals use to describe themselves in the past, in the present, and ideally: sexual attraction, sexual behavior, sexual fantasies, emotional preference, social preference, hetero/homo lifestyle, and self-identification. By not-straight fans I mean those who do not currently describe themselves as exclusively heterosexual in any of the variables above. This group includes those whose past or present self-labels of sexual identity include gay (male or female), bent (British slang for gay), queer, genderqueer (not exclusively gay, but not identifying as bisexual), gay, and lesbian, as well as those who reject any labels of sexual orientation.
For Christmas in 2002, my friends gave me a gift that would change my life: *Dancing with Demons* (Valentine & Wickham, 2002), the “authorized” (by the estate, not Dusty) biography.

Like many Americans, I knew next to nothing about Dusty, aside from her music. It turns out I didn’t know much about her music, either. That she’d had an amazing run of sixteen top twenty hits in the UK from the mid to late 1960s. That she was Britain’s “White soul queen,” and also excelled in singing ballads, standards, folk, disco, even country. It was not her massive talent to which I related; rather aspects of her personality and identity spoke to me: her confused sense of identity, her inability to trust others, her insecurity and acute sensitivity, her self-harming, her alcohol and substance abuse, the domestic abuse she endured, and her sexual orientation.

When I was interviewed about my Dusty fandom by Annie Randall (2009) for her monograph on the singer, I described the impact of my identification with Dusty’s sexuality:

> It’s not just that there are so few ‘gay role models.’ It’s that she was so talented and unique, that she had the ability to move people with her songs, that she was the greatest popular singer Britain has produced, that she was absolutely fabulous—exotic, funny, sexy, cute, and feminine. When’s the last time lesbians could lay claim to a talent and personality like that? Dusty is like a shooting star that lighted up the sky. She defied all the tired and annoying stereotypes of lesbians. (p. 118)

I became obsessed with Dusty, acquiring obscure recordings, reading and watching everything I could find on her, founding a Dusty internet forum, and attending
Dusty Day annually in London. As I met other fans, learned more about the singer, and most importantly listened to more of her music, my connection to her only deepened, literally changing my life. Again, as I described to Annie Randall (2009), in *Dusty! Queen of the Postmods*:

I think that Dusty touched some memories of my adolescence and young adulthood, of having to be in the closet, of being emotionally tormented. I’ve often thought it strange that I would relate to someone as amazingly talented as Dusty. But there was some link on the feeling level. Perhaps in having compassion for Dusty I was able to offer some for my younger (and older) self. I think I sort of grew up that part of me through caring for Dusty. The process had a lot to do with grieving what I had lost, getting in touch with the sadness of those years. Dusty allowed me to do that through feeling those things for her first.

(p. 118)

In a subsequent autoethnography I worked on as a quasi-pilot for my dissertation research, I explored this life-altering process in a more structured and formal way. Autoethnography is a methodological approach still evolving, more philosophy than method, with either ill-defined or “idealistic and abstract” guidelines for research (Wall, 2006). In whatever form it takes, autoethnography, like my qualitative approaches toward understanding human phenomena, challenges positivism’s insistence that the researcher herself is “a contaminant” to be “transcended and denied” (Wall, 2006, p. 247) by stating emphatically that the knowledge and experience of the researcher are critical for understanding a culture or phenomenon (Ellis, Adams, & Boucher, 1991). Similar to Moutaskas’ (1990) heuristic inquiry, which arose from phenomenology, autoethnography
begins with a question that genuinely vexes the researcher and is often one that requires intense personal reflection.

My experience was, as Maguire (2006) notes, that autoethnography works as a “creative, pedagogical and therapeutic resource, a textual site for re-authoring the self” (para. 7). Through my own study, I was able to articulate how my sense of identity and where I belong in the world had been affected by my intense connection to Dusty Springfield’s music and biography. This project helped me understand my own experience, before attempting to understand that of other fans. At the same time, this exploration helped me bracket (Creswell, 1998; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) my own experience along with the scholarship and common sense notions I had garnered about the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994), so that I would be better able to distinguish between what meanings were mine and what meanings belonged to my participants when I turned to the four cases presented in the research in the coming chapters.

In my autoethnography I sought to systematically reflect upon my experience, which I then categorized and thematized. Among my discoveries were my protective feelings toward Dusty—what they arose from and how they impacted me. I identified a dozen of Dusty’s recordings that most elicited my protectiveness of her and listened to each many times, often phrase by phrase. I composed memos detailing my responses, reflected on them, and analyzed and coded them into themes I discovered: identity, instability, insecurity, and longing in Dusty’s life and in my own. Within these clusters, I analyzed how various musical conventions, Dusty’s voice, elements of her biography, and my own projective psychological processes worked together to produce my emotional response to the songs that, I concluded, benefitted my personal growth.
I drew upon the areas of trauma theory (Herman, 1997; Frank-Schwebel, 2002; Turp, 2002), as well as fan studies (Wolf, 2002; Hills, 2005; Sandvoss, 2005; Hills, 2002), projective psychology (Josselson, 1992; 2007; Klee, 2000-2007; Mix. 2006; Proudfoot-Edgar, 1998; Kegan, 1994; Chodron, 2003; Marvin and Willis, 2003; Bollas, 1987; Hamilton, 1988; Winnicott, 1951; 1953; 1960; 1965; 1971; 1975; St. Clair, 2004; Fox, 2008; Eagle and Eagle, n.d; Dombeck, 2007a; 2007b; Akhtar, 2009; Love & Guthrie, 1999; Kramer-Moore, 2010; Goodwin, 2010; Warja, 1999; Daniels, 2007), and identity development (Gonsiorek & Rudolph, 1991; McAuliffe and Eriksen, 1999) that also informed my dissertation research discussed in Chapter 2.

Between my knowledge of Dusty’s biography and my own history, I constructed Dusty as a victim of trauma who was confused about her identity. As I projected my own childhood and adulthood onto her persona, like the trauma therapist, Dusty became “the simple presence of a sympathetic person” (Herman, 1997, p. 61), the witness essential for healing. And through imagining Dusty’s story, I was able to reconstruct some of my own trauma narrative, another necessary step toward consolidating my own identity.

Dusty served as a transitional object/phenomenon (Fox, 2008; Winnicott, 1951; 1953; 1971; 1975) for me, helping me develop object constancy—the ability to recognize and accept a range of behaviors in others (Mahler, Pine & Bergman, 1975), by first accepting the behaviors in my Dusty self-object (Akhtar, 2009) and then in myself. Through trying to embrace all parts of her, I came to accept more parts of myself and others as full individuals. Dusty represented the parts of me that needed protection, those that were insecure, needy, childlike, and sometimes out of control. I learned I could not
protect the “real” Dusty, who, after all, has been dead since 1999, but, as Marvin & Willis (2003) discuss as a process of healing and growth, I could integrate the Dusty parts of me in order to protect myself.

1.3 Conceptual Framework

As stated, the conceptual framework of this study combines theory and research from three areas: identity development, fan studies, and projective psychologies. Erikson’s psychosocial model of identity development (1950; 1956; 1958a; 1958b; 1963; 1965; 1968a; 1968b; 1968c; 1972; 1975) and relational models of identity development (Gilligan, Brown & Rogers, 1990; Josselson, 1996; Spencer, 2000) provided a foundational understanding of identity work as a lifelong task (Erikson 1965, 1972; Josselson, 1996; Marcia, 2002). The sense of identity as a narrative task (Giddens, 1991; McAdams, 1997; Mishler, 1999; Gabler, 2001; Cottle, 2002; Crossley, 2002; Gauntlett, 2002; Hills, Rivers, Watson & Joyce, 2007; Josselson, 2007) provided a means of analyzing fans’ stories about the fan-object as identity development.

Theories of gay and lesbian development^2^, such as Freedman’s (1999) emphasis on identity confusion and Grace (1992) and Coleman’s (1981/1982) emphasis on heterosexism and homophobia as obstacles to not-straight sexual identity development provided a lens for viewing the fans’ challenges in this area. Theory and research on the importance of role models in general (Bandura, 1968; Erikson, 1968b; Boon and Lomore, 2001; Gauntlett, 2002; Wright and Sandlin, 2009; Duffett, 2010) and for gay and lesbian youth in particular (Sanelli and Perreault, 2001; Rotheram-Borus and Langabeer, 2001; Konik & Stewart, 2004; Grossman & DiAugelli, 2004; Fisher, Hill, Geurbe, and Grubner, 2005).

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^2^ I classify this as “not straight” sexual identity, but here and elsewhere, for accuracy, I preserve the terminology of the authors cited.
2007), helped establish the importance of celebrities and stars as role models with whom the fan identifies. My understanding of identification and idealization as identity work was illuminated by Erikson (1963; 1968a; 1968b) and Josselson (1992).

I drew upon fan’s semiotic work with fan-objects discussed in Wolf (2002), Fiske (1989), Dyer (2004) and others, as well as Kegan’s (1994) emphasis on how we create meaning through projection to frame fans’ (including not-straight fans’) proclivity for appropriating icons, role models, celebrities and stars for their developmental needs (Sedgwick, 1997; Doss, 1999; Turner, 2004; Farmer, 2005; Smith, 2006; Stiffler, 2007; Wilson, 2007).

Object relations (Bollas, 1987; Klee 2000-2007; Dosamantes-Beaudry, 2002; St. Clair, 2004; Josselson, 2007), self-psychology (Kohut, 1977), and percept orientation (Proudfoot-Edgar, 1958; Mix, 2006) all provided a basis for synthesizing how the relationship between fan and fan-object brings about change in the identity of the fan. Kohut’s (1971; 1977) concept of mirroring, as interpreted by Buloff and Ostermann (1994), was helpful in dispelling the notion that fans’ attachment to icons is devoid of the potential for psychological growth (Sandvoss, 2005). Winnicott’s (1951; 1953; 1971) theories about transitional spaces, objects, and phenomena as therapeutic and Ritter and Terndrup’s (2002) description of affirmative gay and lesbian therapists demonstrated how Dusty Springfield as fan-object functioned for her fans.

1.4 Problem statement

After concluding my autoethnography, I considered how to frame the problem or question that my research would aim to answer. Fans’ protective stance toward Dusty

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3 I would classify this as “not straight” therapy, but I am preserving the terminology used by the authors cited.
felt important, but I wanted to broaden my scope to examine other forms of relatedness that fans felt toward Dusty. I remained interested in the effect of Dusty’s music on her fans, but had an interest in exploring additional fan activities that could shed light on their identity development. While I now understood better the basis for my identifications with Dusty, I wondered how other fans would describe their connections to Dusty.

The problems that gave rise to my study are various. While fandom is often recognized as important in adolescent identity development, it has been under-appreciated, and sometimes pathologized, as a task of young adulthood and adulthood--often viewed as a narcissistic endeavor without potential for personal growth. Most studies of fans focus on heterosexuals, and theories about not-straight fans are often limited to queer and gay male fandom (see, for example, Dyer, 2004; Smith, 1999; Jenkins, 2003; Farmer, 2003; 2005). Nor has fan studies explored how the same icon can appeal to male and female not-straight fans beyond adolescence. Furthermore, traditional theories of identity development are heterocentric; yet gay, lesbian, and bisexual identity development theory is too strictly defined as purely that of sexual identity (Lev, 2005). Most fan-objects who have been studied are heterosexual, as well (see, for example, Cavicchi, 1998; Doss, 1999). The overall problem this study seeks to redress is that the importance of the not-straight fan’s attachment to the fan-object in facilitating identity development has not been sufficiently researched or understood.

1.5 Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study, then, is to explore not-straight fans’ perception of how their attachment to the fan-object of Dusty Springfield has facilitated and continues to facilitate their identity development. The research questions that guided me were: How
do fans feel connected to Dusty? How do they characterize the relationship/s they felt/feel with Dusty? In what ways do they identify with Dusty? And, what do they describe as the role Dusty has had in their lives and in changing their lives?

1.6 Research Approach (Summary of Methodology)

My research design combined the methods of empathetic phenomenology and collective case study to give in-depth attention to understanding the meaning of individuals’ lives (Riessman, 2005). I used purposive samples (Berg, 2007), interviewing (not-straight) male and female fans from the U.K. and U.S. who had compelling stories to tell (Creswell, 1998; Glesne, 2006). I analyzed the transcripts thematically, using holistic coding (Dey, 1993) in an iterative process in which I re-examined the coding scheme of previous interviews as I completed each new one.

1.7 Conclusion

I hope that my work will contribute to use of interdisciplinary approaches to research by demonstrating how the combination of perspectives offers perhaps a fuller and more complex view of the phenomenon. It may also provide a testament to the relationship between fan and fan-object as a basis for not-straight identity development, inspiring applications and further research in education, curriculum development, and counseling.
Chapter 2  Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I review Erikson’s psychosocial theory and relational theories of identity development as well as theories of gay, lesbian and bisexual identity development. I discuss developmental challenges for gay and lesbian youth and their need for role models. Following this, I cover late modern/postmodern interrogations of identity, including queer identity, identity and narrative, and identity and consumerism.

In the area of fan studies I first give a historical overview of audience studies, with some focus on audiences and gender. Next I discuss observational learning and fan-objects as role models. After defining “fans,” I discuss fans and consumerism, semiotic productivity, and fandom and narrative. Whether fan attachments are pathological or transformational is the following topic, and fandom across the life course, including how Erikson’s theory of development applies, is next. My final discussion is of marginalized audiences and fans, with an emphasis on not-straight fans’ creative use of icons, including a discussion of fan-objects serving as affirmative gay and lesbian therapy.

In order to understand how not-straight development is furthered through fan-objects and fan-texts, I apply insight from the area I have labeled projective psychology. I define projection, and then discuss relevant aspects of object relations, focusing on Winnicott’s concepts of the good enough mother, and the transitional object/transitional space. I next discuss the salient features of self psychology, especially mirroring, as well as the Weirs’ (Mix, 2006; Eagle and Eagle, n.d.) work on percept orientation. I conclude by returning to identity development, relating Kegan’s (1994) constructive-
developmental theory back to some of the concepts of projective psychology and fan studies discussed earlier.

2.2 Identity Development

Identity is the ultimate act of creativity—it is what we make of ourselves. In forming and sustaining our identity, we build a bridge between who we feel ourselves to be internally and who we are recognized as being by our social world. When we have a secure sense of our identity, we take ourselves for granted as being who we are. We feel at home in ourselves and in our world, and have an inner experience of coherence and purpose. (Josselson, 1996, p. 27)

a. Erikson’s psychosocial identity formation.

Erik Erikson’s (1950; 1956; 1958a; 1958b; 1963; 1965; 1968a; 1968b; 1968c; 1972; 1975) work constitutes one of the foundational theories in identity development. Erikson formulated a series of stages through which each individual struggles to achieve maturity. Each stage corresponds to a psychoanalytic developmental stage, and presents the child, adolescent, or adult with a challenge between two conflicting directions. The goal in adolescence, for instance, is to determine who one is and where one fits into the world. The conflict is between identity and identity confusion.

Erikson (1950; 1956; 1958; 1965; 1968; 1975) defined identity as a largely unconscious process that brings together both our past and present, as well as how we see ourselves and how important others view us. It provides us with a coherent, predictable, grounded, and reliable core self. If we are in a state of what Erikson terms “identity diffusion,” however, we can no longer take our identity for granted; we may feel subject to the demands of different parts of ourselves without a center to fall back upon.
Erikson (1968c) explains that the adolescent’s identity crisis ensues when “persistent (but sometimes mutually contradictory) infantile identifications are brought in line with urgent (and yet often tentative) new self-definitions and irreversible (and yet often unclear) role choices” (p. 676). For some youth, the identity crisis can be smooth; other times it marks a rebirth (Erikson, 1968c). From identity achievement comes what he terms “fidelity,” an inner strength—“the opportunity to fulfill personal potentialities (including erotic vitality or its sublimation) in a context which permits the young person to be true to himself and true to significant others” (Erikson, 1968, p. 605).

Western societies such as ours typically grant a moratorium to the adolescent so she can play with identities and experiment with roles; at the end of this time she is expected to commit to an identity. During childhood our selves are structured through identification: we want to be like those we admire and adopt their values—at least in part. Identity formation comes about when we can choose between which of these identifications we want to carry forth and synthesize into our own unique identities (Erikson, 1968b). Josselson (1992) expresses it well:

After existing for a time in this world of Others, we begin to notice that some are bigger, stronger, and more able to do things than we are ourselves. When we idealize and identify with others, we reach up for them, try to climb through the distance that separates us; we try to be where they are as a way of expanding ourselves. Idealization and identification are ways of linking to powerful others and striving to become like them. (p. 7)

According to James Marcia (1966) (as cited in Adams-Price & Greene, 1990), when an adolescent tries on a number of roles and identities in the quest for identity
consolidation, it can lead to temporary over-identification with objects of adulation. Adolescents’ over-identification with popular peers is an effort to keep at bay their own confusion, and sets the stage for romantic attachment (p. 189). But, as Erikson (1963) explains, “to a considerable extent adolescent love is an attempt to arrive at a definition of one’s identity by projecting one’s diffused ego image onto another and by seeing it thus reflected and clarified” (p. 262). Erikson (1968a) later stated that the object of the adolescent’s attraction might be an “idealized as well as eroticized other” (p. 606).

In this process of “identity v. role confusion,” the adolescent struggles to form not only an individual identity, but also a social identity: the sense of belonging to a social group (Gardiner & Kosmitzki, 2005). Kelman (as cited in Brown, Bocarnea, Reynolds, Woods & Baker, 2007) explains that when we achieve a sense of individual identity, we gain both support and identity from our affiliations with the groups to which we define ourselves as belonging. Struggling through this developmental stage, youths interrogate all of their previously held beliefs as they try to bring together how they appear to others with their own sense of themselves (Freedman, 1999). Teens are worried about whether they measure up to external standards of appearance and behavior and where they will fit into the world at large (Erikson, 1968b). Looking to society for guidance in forming their identity, teens can become susceptible to ideologies, with their trappings of rituals and loyalty oaths. Adolescents can also often become cliquish and harshly exclude others whom they perceive as different (Erikson, 1963).

Marcia (1966) operationalized Erikson’s fifth stage of identity development: identity v. role confusion. In his study of college males, he tested and measured four options for identity development: “diffusion,” “foreclosure,” “moratorium,” and
“achievement”. Identity moratorium refers to when one questions, but does not commit, to an identity; in diffusion one neither questions nor commits. In both foreclosure and achievement one commits, but in foreclosure it is done without questioning one’s identity, and with achievement questioning precedes achievement (Konik & Stewart, 2004). Diffusion and foreclosure are “characterized by a deficit of exploration,” whereas moratorium and identity achievement are seen as “adaptive approaches” (Ellis, 2000, p. 148). Based upon the work of Erikson and Marcia, Josselson (1996) discusses the four tracks late adolescents may take in identity development: “Guardians,” who rely upon how they were brought up or have always felt to form their identity; “Pathmakers,” who go through a crisis or otherwise explore before deciding upon what identity best fits them; “Searchers,” who are actively engaged in exploring their identity; and “Drifters,” who have made no commitments.

In the development of character, Blos’s (1967) term for identity formation, the adolescent faces the challenges of sexual identity, ego continuity, working through childhood trauma, and a second individuation process. Individuation, which Josselson (1980) argues is similar to Erikson’s identity, means the adolescent becomes more and more responsible for his own actions, instead of delegating that responsibility to parents and mentors (Blos, 1967). The second individuation process depends upon acquiring strong boundaries between self and object; the adolescent is able to lessen the strength of the internalized parent. This, however, cannot be accomplished without a necessary adolescent regression into behaviors including the “idolization of pop stars and famous characters (reminiscent of the young child’s idealization of parents)” (Kroger, 1989).
Erikson (as cited in Hoare, 2002), wrote that identity is one’s “‘Motiv des Forschens—what makes you move’” (p. 31). We revise our sense of who we are throughout our lives. Identity is both the foundation and the door to adult development (Hoare). Once the adolescent engages the task, it remains an issue in the crises of adulthood (Erikson, 1965). Josselson (1996) argues that as we mature, we may still confront an identity crisis in which we interrogate our assumptions of “having always been like this,” by asking if “perhaps [we] could still be otherwise” (Josselson, p. 27). These crises can be triggered by either internal or external motivators (Josselson, 1996). Sometimes, as with old friends, when we recognize in them some potential untapped in ourselves, we may be inspired to achieve that which we previously feared (Josselson, 1996). Furthermore, Erikson (1972) argues that much of a real crisis is semi-deliberate . . . . You must feel it in your bones that in the middle of a seemingly undeserved crisis there is no better remedy than to make it more critical, by forcing things to come to a head and to reveal their—and your—true nature.” (p. 704)

Marcia (2002) describes how identity changes as one moves through the stages of Erikson’s life cycle. If a person attains identity achievement in adolescence, disequilibrating events will arise in the following stages, requiring her to re-form her identity. During such periods, an individual may regress, becoming confused or impulsive, and “look for support in inappropriate places,” all of which are required for a new structure of identity to form (p. 15). A midlife crisis, for example, can be an important identity development achievement. By incorporating additional life experiences, one’s identity becomes “deeper and richer,” “broader and more inclusive”;
“the individual becomes more and more who she or he truly is as previously undeveloped elements of the personality become realized and new ones added” (p. 17). Furthermore, the life stage itself determines the nature of the identity crisis: in young adulthood it evolves from intimacy issues; in middle age from generativity; in older age from integrity.

Erikson’s model of psychosocial identity development and its interpretation by Marcia, Blos, and Josselson, had value for my work not as much for their focus on adolescence as for their recognition that identity work is a lifetime task. Over-identification and idealization of others, including stars, recognized as a characteristic of adolescent identity struggle, may re-emerge in later identity exploration through the use of fan-objects. As in adolescence, it may be a time of developmental moratorium in which fans experiment with different identities to arrive at a sense of who they are and what their purpose is in the world.

b. Relational models of identity development.

While Erikson’s psychosocial identity development theory is foundational, critics believe it does not take into sufficient account the importance of our connections to others. Relational theories of development are based upon the conclusion that we are born with the need for relationships (Spencer, 2000) and that “supportive relationships provide psychological protection” (Spencer, 2000, p. 16). Gilligan, Brown, and Rogers (1990) have concluded that development is not a solitary procession of stages, but “a process through which the psyche unfolds and expands in and through relationships with others” (Spencer, 2000, p. 7). As such it challenges the stage theories like Erikson’s that establish separation as the ultimate developmental goal and replaces it with a relational
model, a model applicable to males as well as females (Gilligan, 1996; Miller & Stiver, 1997).

Those who theorize about relational models of development are careful to outline the nature of healthy relationships. The goal is to be in healthy connection to others, which can only occur if one has sufficiently individuated from others. Josselson (1992), who draws upon both British object relations theorists and the work of Erik Erikson, reconciles this seeming paradox in a way that helped me analyze my own identity development in my autoethnography: “Relatedness and separation are recursive processes. Separation from others firms the self, makes boundaries palpable, and allows for greater differentiation of self from others. And these factors produce greater responsiveness in relationships” (p. 19). In relational terms, the striving for identity can be understood as the growing capacity to understand others as separate from our own needs and projections and thus appreciate their identities and our own as distinct. My discussion of projective psychologies and Kegan’s constructive-developmental theory later in this chapter further explores this point and explains its usefulness for my approach to understanding fans’ identity development.

Mahler’s separation-individuation theory also forms a basis for understanding identity (Mahler, Pine, & Bergman, 1975). In infancy the child perceives herself as one with her mother. In the “hatching phase” the baby vaguely begins to distinguish between herself and the object (the mother/the other). As her mobility increases, the infant explores more, but still fears returning to a state of enmeshment with the caretaker. At one-and-a-half years, the infant enters the “rapprochement” phase in which she tries to reconcile her need for distance from the mother with her need for closeness to her. She
walks away from the mother but returns to her to touch base. The child comes to experience the isolation that comes with freedom. In this period of rapprochement, which continues until approximately age three, the child forms critical internalizations that will become the basis for her future development. What is outside herself she makes part of herself. Through the process of introjection, in which she makes an aspect of the parent part of herself, she can feel less dependent. She learns to walk away from the mother by internalizing a sense of being held and soothed (Josselson, 1992). Through identification the child feels less vulnerable because she has internalized some sense of parental omnipotence and the child may also begin to form a superego by internalizing the demands of her parents. At the end of rapprochement, these internalizations allow the child to separate (Mahler, Pine, & Bergman, 1975).

When it comes to adolescence, however, one may be unable to again individuate if he or she feels incapable of meeting her parents’ expectations. Such youth “remain externally dissatisfied with themselves, endlessly trying to please or refusing to please their internalized parents, from whom they are unable to emancipate themselves” (Josselson, 1987, p. 20). As Josselson (1980) explains, rapprochement is also evident in the second individuation process of adolescence, for example when a young woman measures new elements of her identity against her parents’ values. She internally debates with her parents’ reactions to the elements of self she is trying on. While maintaining a relationship with her parents, the teenaged daughter is challenged to individuate. Likewise, she learns to carry out duties her elders previously took care of, e.g., managing money and transportation. Eventually, as she works free from elements of self that were represented as internal parental objects, they come available for other uses. “How these
new investments are organized and rewarded becomes the cornerstone of adult identity” (Josselson, 1987, p. 22).

Research by Tronick (1989; 1998) and Tronick and Weinberg (1997) has established that relationships are more than the setting where development occurs. Relationships are the means through which we experience psychological growth, and the patterns of infant-mother relationships establish the patterns of our future relational encounters (Spencer, 2000). From our experiences with significant others, we develop “relational images” inside ourselves that reflect the patterns of anxieties and expectations we have formed about relationships (Miller & Stiver, 1995, p. 2). These internal images “become the framework by which we determine who we are, what we can do, and how worthwhile we are” (Miller & Stiver, 1995, p. 2). We form these relational images as infants and continue to reform them through the lifespan, as I discuss in the later section on object relations. The relational model of identity development also helped me understand how/if a fan’s attachment to the fan-object can pave the way for individuation.

Miller and Stiver (1997) are also concerned with the patriarchal structure of our society that privileges some while disadvantaging others, and view the patriarchal power-over structure of relationships as the root of psychological problems. Gilligan (1990) concluded that such problem are manifested in “psychological resistance,” which she defines as “a reluctance to know what one knows and a fear that such knowledge, if spoken, will endanger relationships and threaten survival” (p. 502). Similarly, Josselson (1992) argues that psychological problems develop from “distortions in relatedness, from being haunted by inner representations of past painful interactions with others,” “from
failures of the effort to have one’s needs met,” and from feeling “overwhelmed by another’s insatiable or inappropriate needs” from being “inadequately responded to by important others” (p. 18). Conversely, authentic relationships in which all members can express the breadth and depth of their life experience, are the basis of psychological health (Gilligan, 1982; 1990, 1996; Gilligan, Rogers & Tolman, 1991). Gilligan (1993) believes one’s authentic voice develops when it can be heard by those to whom she feels connected. At its core, one’s mental well-being arises from “staying in relationship with oneself, with others, and with the world” (Gilligan, 1991, p. 23).

c. Theories of gay, lesbian and bisexual identity development.

Whether Erikson’s classical theory of identity development applies to non-straight individuals was explored by gay writer Andrew Holleran (2008). When taking Erikson’s Life Cycle course at Harvard in the mid-1960s, he determined he could not resolve the Eriksonian developmental crisis of “intimacy v. isolation” because it required romantic attachment to the opposite sex: “I concluded my life was permanently stalled—what people used to, and may still, call arrested development: homosexuality as a sort of eternal and terminal adolescence” (p. 295). By the time, thirty years later, that he returned to campus to speak to the Harvard Gay and Lesbian Caucus, Holleran had concluded that the Eriksonian concept of “negative identity” more accurately described gay identity in American culture. Erikson (1975) defined negative identity as identifying with the opposite of what institutions require us to: “Every person and every group harbors a negative identity as the sum of all those identifications and identity fragments which the individual had to submerge in himself as undesirable or irreconcilable or which his group has taught him to perceive as the mark of fatal ‘difference’ in sex role or race, in class or
religion” (p. 20). As Holleran explained, “homosexuality as a negative identity was a message I’d received all my life. It was, quite clearly, the complete opposite of the pattern urged on us by family, community, custom, church, school, and law” (p. 295). In other words, what non-straight individuals experience as identity is characterized by their differences from their family and society rather than by their place in it. As Erikson (1968b) reasons, it is easier for one “to derive a sense of identity out of a total identification with that which he is least supposed to be than to struggle for a feeling of reality in acceptable roles which are unattainable with his inner means” (p. 176), as marriage and family were for Holleran.

On the whole, “GLBTQ [gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer] identity development has not yet been fully integrated into the mainstream theories of psychological development, nor have other GLBTQ developmental issues been studied from a developmental perspective” (Lev, 2005, p. 1) Traditional models of development have ignored GLBTQ experience or labeled it pathological. As Holleran’s analysis illustrates, in Erikson’s classical scheme of identity development, there appear to be no positive healthy outcomes for GLBTQ individuals. As Deutsch (1995) notes, in psychoanalytic terms, homosexuality is the expression of failed heterosexuality. Their supposedly arrested development or regression to an earlier psychosexual stage results in the gay male who is labeled narcissistic and the lesbian as borderline and sadomasochistic.

Non-pathologizing affirmative models of GLBTQ development did not arise until the late 1970s. The first was Cass’s (1979) six-stage model in which one moves through “confusion,” “comparison,” “tolerance,” “acceptance,” “pride,” and “synthesis,” although
Degges-White, Rice, and Myers (2000) concluded that the theory is too simplistic and outdated to apply to lesbians today. Coleman’s (1981/1982) model of gay male development consists of five stages: “pre-coming out,” “coming out,” “exploration,” “first relationships,” and “identity integration.” Troiden’s (1988) model of GLB development outlines a trajectory from “sensitization” to “identity confusion” to “identity assumption” to “commitment.” As Tyrell (2004) notes, these theories are modeled after earlier theories of racial and ethnic minority identity formation which share with gay and lesbian identity development a struggle to separate from the oppression of the dominant majority (Rotherman-Borus & Langabeer, 2001).

Therapist David Barnett (2003) offers a useful summary of Troiden’s stages of gay and lesbian identity development, two of which I focus upon here. Following the first stage of sensitization comes the second stage of identity confusion, which typically surfaces in the teen years as a youth start to see him or herself as doing and feeling things that others would identify as gay or lesbian. A conflict may arise between his or her childhood identity and the demands of adolescence. The youth may not be able to identify a distinct category “for inclusion in the world” (Barnett, Stage 2, para. 1), causing a problem in the development of his or her social identity (Gardiner & Kosmitski, 2005). The adolescent’s central strategies for dealing with identity confusion are denial, avoidance, repair (an effort to become heterosexual), or acceptance. As Barnett (2003) states, “The adolescent at this stage may experience conflicts between his or her former identity (either a false identity or one focused on positive, nonsexual attributes of the earlier period), and newly emerging sexual impulses which are known to be socially denigrated” (Stage 2, para. 3). On top of this, the youth must deal with every
adolescent’s challenge of developing both identity and intimacy. Freedman (1999) calls identity confusion a “double whammy” for these young people who must “reconcile the myriad pressures they feel, just to adjust to this new body and emerging consciousness, much less to “work through the maze of sexual feelings that do not conform to what everyone else seems to be thinking, feeling, and worse, expecting of the sexually unsure person” (p. 8).

One of the problems comes with peer relationships that are so critical for teens. The cliquishness Erickson (1963) warns of can lead to the cruel exclusion of GLB (gay, lesbian, bisexual) youth from their peers. Anhalt and Morris (1998) refer to a study that revealed the stresses of young people identifying as GLB: 27% said the fear of losing friends silenced them. This fear was apparently well-founded, as 43% of the males and 54% of the females reported losing one or more friends after coming out to them. Because peer relationships play such a critical role in adolescent development, their loss may have a more severe impact than in earlier or later developmental stages. Similarly, many GLB teens must cope with rejection by their immediate families. Research on children at risk has shown how a supportive bond with a least one parent or caregiver can increase resiliency (Spencer, 2000). Yet, Anhalt and Morris report that in one sample, two-thirds of GLB youth were troubled even at the thought of coming out to their families. Sadly, such fears too are well founded: 36% of the GLB youth in the study reported verbal insults by a member of their immediate family, and 10% had experienced physical harm from a family member, all as a consequence of revealing their sexual identity. Furthermore, without a supportive family to rely upon, these youth may struggle
with separating from their families and come out in situations that are unsafe (Barnett, 2003).

Overt cruelty toward GLB students, and even assault in schools, is too often another hurdle in GLB adolescent development. In the UK an estimated 30-50% of gay and lesbian secondary school students experience homophobic bullying. Over 50% of gay and lesbian adults reported they considered self-harm as a result of such bullying, while 40% had attempted to harm themselves or commit suicide (Warwick, Chase, Aggleton, & Sanders, 2004).

The 2005 study by GLSEN, the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (2006), found that because of their sexual orientation, 37.8% of students were physically harassed at school and 17.6% were physically assaulted. Citing a number of studies, GLSEN (2006) reported that few youth feel that staff members were available for help. Again, this is with good reason. GLSEN referred to a study that showed that “80% of prospective teachers report negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian people and 52% of prospective teachers reported that they would feel uncomfortable working with an openly lesbian or gay colleague”; furthermore “two-thirds of guidance counselors harbor negative feelings toward gay and lesbian people, and less than 20% of them have received any training on serving gay and lesbian students.”

Similarly, Sanelli and Perreault’s (2001) study revealed problems and fears identified by homosexual youth which can impede or complicate their individual and social identity development and even their health and safety: feelings of isolation because of the lack of role models, bullying by peers (both straight and closeted), fear of being
“outed,” abuse of drugs and alcohol, discrimination by school personnel, blackmail due to their sexual orientation, and death by hate crimes.

In Troiden’s Stage 3: Identity Assumption, the goal is to manage the social stigma of being gay or lesbian. Troiden identifies three techniques that could be characterized as internally homophobic, that is, being fearful of one’s own sexual identity and a self-hating that leads to a less-than-authentic existence:

1) Capitualization: [The] individual capitulates to a negative view of homosexuality but acknowledges his or her membership in this group.

2) Minstralization: The person adopts stereotypic and often exaggerated homosexual mannerisms and behavior.

3) Passing: One selectively conceals his/her homosexuality while acknowledging his/her sexual orientation, at least inwardly, to a limited group of associates.

(as cited in Barnett, 2003, Stage 3, para. 2)

Each of these survival strategies can contribute to the development of what Winnicott (1960) termed the “false self,” as discussed later in this chapter.

In Coleman’s (1981/1982) five-stage model not every individual enters the process at the same stage nor does everyone go through every phase of identity formation. His stages are: “Pre-Coming Out,” “Coming Out,” “Exploration,” “First Relationships,” and “Integration.” Some gay males or lesbians face the challenge of more than one stage simultaneously, and the first four stages must be mastered before integration is possible. This achievement is not possible for all, however, as some become stuck in a particular developmental stage.
Grace’s (1992) competence-based model examines lesbian and gay identity development from the perspective of “major life tasks and common developmental obstacles that retard or arrest positive stage movement” (p. 33). These impediments arise from heterosexism or homophobia in both active and passive forms, in both personal and institutional realms. Multiple studies support the conclusion that not-straight populations suffer from chronic stress as a result of living in a homophobic society (Bux, 1996; Cochran & Mays, 1994; Gillow & Davis, 1987; Greene, 1994; Meyer, 1995; Savin-Williams, 1994). Coleman developed the stages of “Emergence,” “Acknowledgement,” “Finding Community,” “First Relationships,” and “Self-Definition and Reintegration” from his clinical social work with gay men; and credited Feigal (1983) with identifying similar stages for women, with the exception of the Finding Community and First Relationships stages, which for lesbians appear in reverse order.

Both Coleman (1981/1982) and Grace (1992) explain how the context of a heterosexist society affects “developmental lag”—“significant and problematic discrepancies between chronological age and physical maturity that impede successful identification and mastery of essential psychosocial milestones” (Coleman, p. 33). This delay may come as a result of isolation from peers, family, community and role models (Coleman, as cited in Wilson, 1999) and from the “chronic sense of danger” resulting from the harassment, humiliation, threats, and fear of physical injury gays and lesbians endure as far back as early childhood (Grace, 1992, p. 33). Personality development and identity development can be adversely impacted:

Large amounts of time and energy are devoted to survival and defense rather than to intimacy and growth
A generalized view of the world as threatening and dangerous is developed.

Two selves are created: a public self that disguises and armors a private self which is alienated from the rest of the world.

A sense of shame about core identity and basic needs is fostered by isolation (Grace, as cited in Ritter and Terndrup, 2002).

Developmental lag also accounts for how gays and lesbians in therapy sometimes describe themselves as adolescents, as they experience their GLB sexual and romantic feelings for the first time, at a later age. Feeling self-conscious about age-inappropriate behavior, they may criticize themselves unfairly, as they try to condense the experience into a short period of time (Ritter and Terndrup, 2002).

Erikson’s concept of negative identity helped me understand why some not-straight fans are attached to fan-objects. Affirmative models of gay and lesbian development were useful in analyzing not-straight fans’ sexual identity development, although they typically do not address identity formation beyond sexuality. Coleman and Grace’s models, however, were especially useful in focusing on the heterosexist and homophobic environment in which gays and lesbians come of age, and their analysis of development lag helped me illuminate the importance of role models and fan-objects for not-straight fans.

Noam (1996) might argue that such developmental delays serve as important protective mechanisms for a vulnerable psyche. Other theories and research suggest gay and lesbians have a stronger sense of identity than their heterosexual counterparts. Based upon past studies of heterosexual populations and her reading of memoirs of lesbians, Ellis (2000) speculated that on the basis of Marcia’s (1966) four modes of identity
development (diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and achievement), lesbians would score highly on identity achievement. She argued that because this population is required to go through a period of conflict and exploration, they become firmly grounded in their sexual identity. Konik and Stewart’s (2004) study of college students’ (mean age 22.3) sexual identity development found this and more to be true. Both lesbians and gay men scored higher on identity achievement than did the heterosexual group. The heterosexual group’s highest scores were on identity foreclosure (p. 827; p. 831). Furthermore, the gay and lesbian groups scored higher on global identification development, supporting Grotevant’s (1992) speculation that “identity work in one domain such as sexuality, facilitates identity development in other domains” (Konik & Stewart, p. 836). They speculate that heterosexuals are “more likely simply to adopt the ideal identities that their immediate social network has prescribed for them in other aspects of their lives” (p. 837).

In contrast, for gay, lesbian and bisexuals, sexual identity development laid the ground for psychological growth in other areas.

d. Role Models for gay and lesbian youth.

With these many additional barriers to successful transition through adolescence, it is no wonder that isolated gay and lesbian youth are in need of role models, especially of people who have embraced their identity and led healthy lives. In addition, role models are needed “for socialization as young people, dating during adolescence, and living as a couple during adulthood” (Grossman, 1997). Olympic medalist Greg Louganis (as cited in Grossman, 1997, point 5) clearly identified each of these phenomena in his life: "There was no place I could meet other gay kids like me, no place to sort out my conflicts over my sexuality, and no way to start going out on dates with
boys my age." Wilson (1999) argues that teen gay males are usually too young to go to bars where they might make beneficial connections with members of the gay community. Furthermore, some older gay men may be hesitant to serve as role models for fear of being accused of “recruiting” (p. 556). Pobo (1999) writes about how many gay and lesbian college faculty members fear losing their jobs if they declare their sexual identity and come out as role models for students. As an English professor, he explains how closeted teachers also keep hidden the sexual identity of writers such as Dickinson and Melville, doubly depriving their students of possibilities for positive identification. More broadly, as Rotheram-Borus and Langabeer (2001) explain:

There are only a handful of political figures, sports heroes, musicians, motion picture and television stars, academic leaders, and business leaders who have publicly identified themselves as gay. There is not a genre of easily accessible literature that allows youth to read about how others successfully identified and met the challenges associated with identifying as gay, bisexual, or lesbian (p. 105).

Hetrick and Martin (1987) illustrate how isolation can lead to internalized homophobia, depression, and other emotional problems in adulthood. Fisher, Hill, Geube, and Gruber (2007) further note that this isolation also comes from the lack of role models available to these teens through the media. Their exclusion contributes to keeping sexual minorities invisible and without power, a process, which Gross refers to as “symbolic annihilation” (p. 2). Gomillion and Giuliano’s (2011) study found that a lack of role models negatively affected GLB individuals in that they felt excluded from mainstream society; the absence of GLB presence in the media left them feeling unheard
and unseen in popular music and in print media. The psychological effects of this lack of mirroring for gays and lesbians is a topic I discuss later in this chapter.

Media role models may have what Fryberg and Townsend (2008) identified as “absolute” or “relative” invisibility, both of which limit GLB individuals from seeing a mirror of possibilities for their identities. Relative invisibility can also influence those who see themselves negatively reflected to “question both their individual value and their value within society” (Gomillion and Giuliano, 2011, p. 340). Negative portrayals often include the stereotypical views of gay men as “sissies” and lesbians as “dykes,” in stories with tragic endings (Russo, 1987; Gross, 2001; Capusto, 2000).

Konik and Stewart (2004) also demonstrated that GLB sexual identity development is a “more effortful and salient process” than what heterosexuals go through (p. 839). They claim their data supports the concept that “having support or modeling . . . facilitates the process of adopting a socially marginalized sexual identity” (p. 840), in line with Bandura’s (1986) finding that models are more successful if we identify with them. Lemoire and Chen (2005) likewise found that role models aid in GLB youth identity development, and in the process help them become more resilient. Role models may indeed be a “protective buffer” against difficulties that inevitably arise. And these findings are consistent with Grotevant’s (1992) theory that for identity achievement to be accomplished, one must be in an environment that permits and supports the pursuit of various identity roles.

Nicholas (1995) found that role models were one of the four factors that GLB youth identified as critical to achieving their sexual identity. Grossman and D’Augelli’s (2004) study looked at GLB role models, both everyday and celebrity, and what the youth
“admired or respected” about them (p. 85). One half of the participants had LGBT role models; 52% had celebrity role models and 65% had known role models. Known role models were friends, agency staff members, family members—especially cousins and uncles (but never parents)—and others, such as coaches, teachers, and co-workers. Gomillion and Giuliano (2011) found that when GLB individuals were unavailable as role models, the GLB participants found role models with whose outsider status they could identify—sometimes even comic book characters.

The top three qualities that GLB youth admired in role models were: openness about sexual orientation, leadership/intelligence/perseverance, and physical attractiveness (Grossman & D’Augelli, 2004). They described the ideal role model as one who is “supportive, caring or provides information or resources,” “sociable, fun, amusing, has a good sense of humor or demonstrates positive attitude,” and “brave, courageous, gutsy” (Grossman & D’Augelli, 2004, pp. 93-94). As the authors note, “It is not surprising that ‘open about sexual orientation or lives freely’ is the “one most sought after by youth who have been seeking an authentic identity for most of their lives” (p. 101). It also reinforces Bandura’s (1986) theory of the importance of model-observer similarity, which I discuss in the Observational Learning section of Fan Studies.

Remafedi (1987) and Ross (1989) reason that LBG adolescents’ views of possible selves are limited, since most of the models they see are heterosexual. Additionally, as their experiences with personal and institutionalized homophobia increase, their experiences of social isolation and humiliation increase and the prospect of positive role identifications decreases. Consequently, the assumption is that they would seek GLBT role models who would guide them through the challenges of adolescence and that these
role models would influence their psychological adjustment. (Grossman & D’Augelli, p. 97). However, there is a dearth of role models for those most in need of them. Grossman and D’Augelli (2004) found that “[o]nly half of the [GLB] youth in the study consciously thought of individuals to whom they could look to influence their life trajectories and to help them envision an adulthood that includes a positive identity” (p. 98).

In a more recent study by Gomillion and Giuliano (2011), participants reported that media role models influenced GLB identity development by providing “inspiration,” “fostering a sense of pride, bring a source of comfort, and making respondents feel more positively about their gay identities” (p. 343). Inspiration was tied to the similarity individuals felt to the role models. Feelings of comfort came from participants feeling their GLB identity was more “acceptable” by seeing it “normalized” (p. 346). They provided comfort, even if they were not positively portrayed in the media, by giving illustrations “of what GLB look and act like” (p. 344). Ellen Degeneres was an oft-cited example; for instance, one participant who said she gained “strength from seeing what she was able to do” in coming out and claiming her GLB identity (Gomillion and Giuliano, p. 343).

These studies on gay and lesbian role models underscore their obvious importance for not-straight youth. They helped me identify which characteristics of fan-objects are similar to those of gay and lesbian role models, e.g. openness about sexual orientation and courage.

e. Late modern/postmodern interrogations of identity.

The patient of today suffers most under the problem of what he should believe in and who he should—or, indeed, might—be or become; while the patient of early
psychoanalysis suffered most under inhibitions which prevented him from being what and who he thought he knew he was. (Erikson, 1950, p. 242)

Modernity evolved from Enlightenment beliefs in rationalism and science; its metanarratives about the world and our place in it were generally accepted as universal truths (Lifton, 1993). Postmodern theory is characterized by “the movement away from belief in a singular master narrative, a possible so-called ‘rational’ solution to society’s problems” (Bloch, 2011). Modernity came to be marked by existential loneliness and an absence of meaning, but while it mourns the loss of belief systems we relied upon, postmodernism celebrates it.

The essentialist concept of one lifetime identity, “the idea that we are born the way we are, that there is a ‘real me,’ that our identities are fixed and stable” (Bell, 2001, p. 114), has been interrogated by scholars in many fields. As Hall (1995) summarizes, “In essence, the argument is that the old identities which stabilized the social world for so long are in decline, giving rise to new identities and fragmenting the modern individual as a unified subject” (p. 596). Essentialist concepts of identity have been reframed by social constructionist views that conceive of identity as a process constructed by both time and place (Bell). Weeks (1995) further explains that revealing identities’ “openness and contingency” creates possibilities: if “identities are made in history and relations of power, they can also be remade” (pp. 98-99). Not all hold such an optimistic view of postmodern possibilities. Bell argues this exaggerates humans’ “potential for transformation” and credits Haddour (2000) with making the critical observation that the privilege of “such a radical view of identity is not open to everyone to make use of” (p. 115).
Robert Jay Lifton (1993) describes the complex, shape-shifting ‘protean self’ as having arisen from the confusion and contradiction of contemporary life. The traditional concept of identity as unified and stable was framed in a time when our “relationships to symbols and institutions [were] still relatively intact” (p. 4). Today we are less likely to internalize cultural symbols, creating a disparity between who we sense we are and society’s expectations of us.

Whereas in past centuries people struggled from time to time against the authority of churches, kings, and feudal lords, contemporary men and women exist in a psychological landscape void of clear authority or viable community, so that the protean self must virtually reconstitute its own society. (p. 17)

Thus, the Eriksonian model of sameness in identity no longer fits the contemporary self which as “an engine of symbolization . . . continuously receives, re-creates, and extends all that it encounters” (p. 28). In many ways the protean self is a postmodern self: It rejects the metanarratives of modernism, but Lifton, for example, disagrees with those theorists “who equate multiplicity and fluidity with disappearance of the self, with a complete absence of coherence among its various elements” (pp. 8-9). The resilient protean self balances this “multiplicity and fluidity” with its search for coherence and its grounding in some sense of identity, however partial and contested.

Stuart Hall’s (2000) argument is that the concept of identity be replaced with that of identification—“which signals process, multiplicity, construction: our identifications are made, are mobile, are multiplex” (Bell, 2001, pp. 114-115). Identity understood as identification strips it of its essentialist baggage and stresses that it is a strategy (Bell, 2011), what Weeks (1995) terms a ‘necessary fiction.’ Nonetheless, Hall (2000) also
argues that any sense of identity depends upon our sense of being different from others (p. 117).

In most cases, the application of postmodern interrogations of identity to my work on the identity development of not-straight fans felt more theoretical than practical. It did not offer a comprehensive way for me to understand the phenomenon in which I was interested. The celebration of postmodernism is the venue of some scholars, but it is not necessarily the lived experience of most of the fans I interviewed. I concur that identity is formed in historical and cultural settings and is a process that is fluid v. fixed, but also, as Haddour (2000) observed, that most everyday people are not privileged to implement the destabilizing possibilities of postmodern identity constructs.

1. Queer identities.


Klein and Coleman, and those who have conceptualized sexual identities before them, have constructed models that reflect the time, place and culture in which they live (Ritter & Terndrup, 2002). In our postmodern Western world in which binaries, such as
heterosexual and homosexual, are challenged by queer theory and politics, have labels such as gay and lesbian, become obsolete? Foucault’s (1981) claim that identities like homosexuality, madness, and criminality are social constructions is widely accepted among academics in the humanities and social sciences. Andreadis (2001), for example, explains the problem of naming female same-sex erotics in early modern England when the understanding of homosexuality and heterosexuality as discreet sexual identities, or even the modern sense of self, did not arise until the 18th century. Terminology, labels, and names “are marked by temporal, geographical, and social particulars” (Andreadis, pp. 3-4). We can no more understand an Elizabethan “rubster” as a 21st century lesbian than we can project that 22nd century same-sex erotic expression will be understood as what we signify today as homosexual, gay, or even queer.

In the liberation movements that followed the African-American Civil Rights and anti-war movements of the 1960s, the same essentialist labels (heterosexual, homosexual, gay, lesbian and bisexual) that “queers” later disavowed were embraced as identities around which people could organize socially and politically—thus the proliferation of gay (and lesbian) “pride” celebrations, and organizations advocating for equal rights, and scholarship unearthing gay and lesbian history. The queer movement in politics and theory arose in the 1980s in direct response to the identity politics of women’s and gay liberation of the 1970s. Appropriating what had previously been a slur, queers embraced the term to include all forms of sexual transgressors, including lesbians, gay men, transsexuals, and bisexuals, as well as heterosexuals who do not fit the normative values of straight society (Queer, 2002-2006).
Judith Butler (1990, 2004) argues that because binary distinctions of gender and sexual identity are constructed, they must be repeatedly performed to retain their distinction. In queer theory, identification becomes voluntary. Butler (1990) rejects the liberal narrative of progress via identity-based liberation movements because by their nature, they will always erase others at their margins. “This is typical of power’s uncanny ability to incite only those rebellions which—on a deeper level—are bound to fail because they unconsciously adopt and reenact the terms of their own construction” (Wilchins, 2004, p. 127). In sum, the debate between essentialists—who believe homosexuality to be pre-social and fixed across time and cultures—and social constructionists has been won by the latter group “at least to the extent that there is now virtual scholarly unanimity that sexual categories are always historically and culturally specific rather than universal and invariant” (Johnson, 2005, p. 3).

Despite the temporality of current U.S. and Western European constructs of gay, lesbian, and queer, however, they serve as important identity signifiers for individuals who wish to be understood as part of a particular group and not part of another (Ritter & Terndrup, 2002). Postmodernism itself is a construct with little meaning in the lived experience of many individuals. Although our society has become more “tolerant” of not-straights, the persistent bullying of gay youth and the not coincidental high suicide rates for the same population (Kitts, 2005; van Wormer & McKinney, 2003) remind us that homophobic and heterosexist responses to current sexual identity pose serious problems for actual people. As well, those of us, like myself, who came of age in less tolerant times, still carry some of the stigma associated with being queer, in the pejorative sense of the term, as well as a measure of internalized homophobia. “Identity cohorts”
define themselves differently and have different views of the threats from a heterosexist society, as well as ways to address them (Ritter & Terndrup, 2002, p. 136).

All of this was brought to bear in my difficulty in naming those who were part of my dissertation study. I asked myself: Do I refer to them as they would themselves? What terms do I use when they do not identify with any of the terms in common usage? Although I conducted case studies of only four individuals, I was not able to find one term that described them as they understand themselves individually, much less collectively. One individual considered himself beyond labels of gay, straight, bisexual, or queer; another identified herself variously as gay woman, genderqueer, and gay woman again. I also debated if I referred to these individuals by common psychological or political terms, e.g. gay, lesbian, and bisexual, whether I would be taken seriously by today’s postmodern academics? Or, would such terms—or even labels like queer—date my study in the future? Although queer is the most inclusive term, its anti-assimilationist badge of otherness was not worn by all the participants. I landed upon “not straight” as a descriptor—as it was easier to say what they are not, as a group, than what they have in common. While rejecting essentialism, this term also recognizes that today’s queer label is a social construct like those it preceded.

2. Narrating identity.

Anthony Giddens (1991) describes the quest for self-identity as particular to late modern society. Self-identity, he explains, is not a set of individual traits; rather it is how we understand ourselves in biographical terms. More important than how we act or react to others, identity is our ability to construct and revise a life story that explains who

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4 Giddens (1991) saw late twentieth century culture as the apotheosis of modernist themes while Gergen (1992) characterized it as the succeeding age of postmodernity.
we are—“the capacity to keep a particular narrative going” (p. 54). What Giddens terms “the reflexive project of the self” requires us to look deeply into our interior life where we may discover an essential truth or meaning. Our identity is akin to a product that we craft, and we are responsible for it. As with Lifton’s (1993) protean symbolizing-self, it rejects the metanarratives of modernity yet creates and recreates its own narrative and sub-narratives. “To believe in oneself and command the respect of others, we need a strong narrative which can explain everything that has happened and in which, ideally, we play a heroic role” (Gauntlett, 2002, p. 100).

“Individuals work hard at the persistent self-monitoring needed to carry off, successfully, everyday acts of self-presentation, to organize lives and to develop selves in ways which allow for coherent narratives to be sustained in changing circumstances” (Hill, Rivers, Watson, and Joyce, 2007, p. 58). Self-identity is thus “both robust and fragile,” according to Giddens (1991): Fragile in that it is only one of the many stories that we could tell about who we are; robust in that it can often persevere through many changes in our environment (p. 55). As Bell (2001) writes, “The fluid, fragmented, late-modern or postmodern self has a new capacity to make itself over, to reshape and restyle elements of identity—or at least to make choices about which aspects of its self to privilege at any point” (p. 116).

Mishler (1999) defines identity as “a collective term referring to the dynamic organization of sub-identities that might conflict or align with each other” (p. 8). He concludes that the positivist-influenced approaches to identity research that rely on the universalist assumptions about stage development across cultures and eras are unsupported by the actual diversity of human experience across the lifespan. His
research into the lives and works of craft artists argues for variability rather than universality as the common factor in identity development. He cites the qualitative research and case studies of Bateson (1989), Josselson (1996), Kotre (1984), and Vaillant (1977) as illustrating the discontinuity v. continuity in adult identity development, with changes often influenced by personal relationships and other factors outside the workplace. Further, he argues that identity construction is inter- v. intrapersonal: “Identities are defined and expressed through the way we position ourselves vis-à-vis others along the several dimensions that constitute our networks of relationships” (p. 16). Similar to Butler’s (1990) conceptualization of the performativity of gender, Mishler insists that “narratives are identity performances: We express, display, make claims for who we are—and who we would like to be—in the stories we tell and how we tell them” (p. 19). We don’t necessarily follow the plots that our culture provides for us, as we narrative our lives; we “adapt, resist, and selectively appropriate them,” as de Certeau (1984/1974) describes in The Practice of Everyday Life (p. 18).

The field of narrative psychology challenges postmodernism’s characterization of our experience as largely chaotic and meaningless and stresses how creating a narrative helps us to “impose structure on the flow of experience” (Crossley, 2002, p. 3). We relate events to each other, and only make sense of them in terms of what we remember from the past and what we expect for the future. We select, organize, and present aspects of our lives into an autobiography, and thus become responsible for ourselves (Crossley).

McAdams (1997) argues that despite the complexity and contradiction of our postmodern world, we still seek a centering sense of identity by creating coherent stories “that integrate the person into society in a productive and generative way and provide a
purposeful self-history” (p. 63). Yet one’s story is culturally determined: “different groups are given different narrative opportunities and face different narrative constraints” (p. 64). McAdams concluded from his research of hundreds of life stories that they have seven related features: A narrative tone (such as comedy, tragedy, or irony); imagery and metaphors that reveal one’s identity; a theme or central meaning; an ideological setting or moral stance for evaluating one’s life; imagoes (an idealized version of one’s self that serves as the protagonist of the narrative); an ending (a generativity script that describes how one will create a legacy to outlive oneself).

Cottle (2002) makes the case that we also discover ourselves through the narratives of others. We have a tendency to make the other persons’ story what we want it to be; thus, to turn away from another’s narrative is an attempt to preserve one’s identity in its present state. If we can be a witness to others’ narratives, if we arrive “as listener and respondent, not yet as self-knower” (p. 540) “the narrative has the potential to push us inward to those places that feel to us to be the farthest limits of our self-knowing; it feels as if we cannot go any further within ourselves to gain a better sense of ourselves” (p. 543).

Fans typically do not know the artist herself; instead, when they are moved by narrative or other forms of art, they feel connected to the self of the “Other” (Cottle, 2002). Art does not return our gaze “as much as it prompts the Self to return to its own look at itself. I am reflected in the narrative” (p. 545). Although the product cannot “take responsibility” for me, it “prompts the idea of responsibility by revealing the ideal good or sense or beauty of myself and the Other. It prompts, in other words, the felt
sense of affirmation, and with it the life force” (p. 545). Through narratives we are not only affirmed or disaffirmed, but are also reminded of endings as well as beginnings.

Theories concerning narrative and identity helped me consider questions such as: How do fans narrate their experience? Where do fans place their fan narrative in the larger narrative of their identity? Do they experience their narratives as performances or use them to impose meaning and structure on their experience? How do they relate to the narrative of the fan-object?

3. Identity and consumption.

Slater (1997) sees self-identity in terms of consumption:

First we choose a self-identity from the shop-window of the pluralized social world; actions, experiences and objects are all reflexively encountered as part of the need to construct and maintain self-identity. Secondly, identity itself can be seen as a saleable commodity. Self is not an inner sense of authenticity but rather a calculable condition of social survival and success. . . . Thirdly, the resources—both material and symbolic—through which we produce and sustain identities increasingly take the form of consumer goods and activities through which we construct appearances and organize leisure time and social encounters. . . .

Consumerism simultaneously exploits mass identity crisis by proffering its goods as solutions to the problems of identity, and in the process intensifies it by offering ever more plural values and ways of being (p. 85).

Cashmore (2006) agrees that celebrities play a critical function in our late capitalist society: they feed growing consumer demand, and function as products themselves. Celebrities carry the message “enjoy novelty, change, excitement, and every
possible stimulant that can be bought over a shop counter or an internet website” (Cashmore, p. 266), which, he argues, usurps traditional values of “restraint, prudence, and modesty” (p. 268). Theories on identity as consumption did not resonate with my phenomenological question; for further discussion, see the section on fans and consumerism.

2.3 Fan Studies

What it means to be a fan should be explored in relation to the larger question of what it means to desire, cherish, seek, long, admire, envy, celebrate, protect, ally with others. . . . Thinking well about fans and fandom can help us think more fully and respectfully about what it means today to be alive and to be human. (Jenson, 1992, p. 27)

a. Audience studies: Media effects, uses and gratifications and beyond.

One conceptual thread of fan studies originates in audience studies of the 20th century. Following World War I, in the U.S. and Europe there arose a concern about the effects of propaganda. The thesis of mass society which arose posited that “modern society was characterized by the breakdown of traditional social responsibilities and ties, leading to a mass of alienated individuals who could be led and controlled” (Brooker and Jermyn, 2003, p. 5). This view was also supported by the Frankfurt School, where under Adorno and Horkheimer, the idea of the Culture Industry was developed: Audiences were conceived as “passive and malleable” receptacles into which culture was deposited from on high (p. 6).

Brooker and Jermyn (2003) describe salient elements of this history. Merton’s 1946 study of the effects of mass persuasion in selling war bonds stressed fears of
audiences’ exploitation by advertisers. However, Merton’s research also began to challenge the media effects theory. When he described how different mothers responded to different types of appeals to purchase war bonds, he anticipated the paradigm shift to the “uses and gratifications” theory which suggested that audiences are composed of individuals who actively interpret media to satisfy their particular needs. For example, Winwick’s study of how audiences responded to Otto Preminger’s 1955 film about a heroin addict, *The Man with the Golden Arm*, revealed that addicts viewed the film not as an object lesson, but an endorsement of their life choices. Each audience group Winwick studied appropriated the film for its own needs (Brooker and Jermyn, pp. 9-10).

Stuart Hall and later David Morley of the Birmingham School, argued that the uses and gratifications theory was too general and that viewers’ various interpretations of texts are influenced by social class, political beliefs, and age (Brooker and Jermyn, pp. 91-92). Theorists such as John Fiske in *Understanding popular culture* and de Certeau in *The Practice of everyday life* in the 1980s saw audiences as “fighters in a semiotic guerrilla war, snatching interpretations and creating a space for themselves” (p. 91).

Gender is one form of cultural identification through which audience readings of texts are filtered. As Jacqueline Warwick (2007) explains, girl group music has sometimes been read as “reinforc[ing] the most repressive notions of femininity under patriarchal control, [yet] these songs also function as enactments of sisterhood embraced by many for their feminist potential” (p. xi). In her well-known work of the 1970s, Laura Mulvey (2003) argued that mainstream Hollywood films were composed to satisfy the “male gaze.” “She argued that the conventions of Hollywood narrative and its

5 Girl groups: Singing groups of young women, often but not exclusively Black, popular from the late 1950s to the mid 1960s, especially in America; for example, The Shirelles, The Supremes, The Shangri-Las. See Warwick’s *Girl Groups, Girl Culture* (2007).
voyeuristic and fetishistic approach to the female form conspired to control woman as image and to privilege the male spectator” (Brooker & Jermyn, pp.127-128). Mulvey’s textual analysis of films was criticized subsequently for not accounting for the female gaze or the queer gaze. Schlesinger et al.’s research on female viewers of the film *The Accused* showed “how any invoking of ‘the audience’ or ‘the female audience’ as a homogeneous group is destined to prove reductive in the face of differences in the interpretation and reception of the film text, wrought by the individuals’ membership of specific socio-cultural groups and indeed the historical context of its viewing” (Brooker and Jermyn, p. 129). Ang’s (2003) study, on the other hand, revealed fictional characters as “textual constructions of possible modes of femininity” and “symbolic realizations of feminine subject positions with which viewers can identify in fantasy” (162).

My approach to studying fans has roots in the uses and gratifications theories: my understanding that fans appropriate fan-objects for their own needs is supported by many scholars in cultural studies. I also concur with Fiske and others that our uses of fan-objects are colored by our class, age, culture, gender, etc., but as Schlesinger et al. have shown, we may have multiple identities, no single one trumping the other.

**b. Observational Learning.**

Albert Bandura’s (1986) social learning theory, especially his work in observational learning, is foundational for exploring the importance of role models and celebrities for adolescents. Bandura’s research illustrates that we learn by coding in our brain the information we gather from observing others. In fact, when we are with others,
we can sometimes acquire skills by simply observing what others do (Crain, 2005).

Models can also motivate us to repeat behaviors we have previously learned:

By exemplification one can get people to behave altruistically, to volunteer their services, to delay or seek gratification, to show affection, to select certain foods and apparel, to converse on particular topics, to be inquisitive or passive, to think creatively or conventionally, or to engage in other permissible courses of action. (Bandura, 1986, pp. 49-50)

As discussed earlier, more one identifies with a model, the more likely one will be to imitate its behavior (Bandura, 1986). Dubow, Huesmann, and Greenwood (2006) point out in their discussion of how media socialize youth, that the stronger the identification, the more likely children are to imitate behavior and adapt the perspective and beliefs suggested by the behavior they witnessed.

Another aspect of model-observer similarity is the distinction Schunk and Zimmerman (1997) make between coping and mastery models; the former type succeeds after multiple mistakes, while the latter shows superior performance from the onset. Schunk and Zimmerman’s (1997) work has suggested that the coping model may help develop self-efficacy in children more than the mastery model does.

The attractiveness of the model is also an important factor. “Models who are interesting and otherwise rewarding tend to be sought out, whereas those who lack attractive qualities are ignored or actively rejected, even though they may excel in other ways” (Bandura, 1986, p. 54). “The trappings of success, prestige, power and other winsome qualities” are ways models capture our attention (Crain, 2005, pp. 199-200). Bandura (1986) also established that we learn not only from real people, but also from
models in media, such as television, which seems to have a particularly strong effect on children’s learning. His research with Grusec and Menlove demonstrates that television models can be so effective in holding viewers’ attention that, even without incentives, they learn from the models’ behavior (Bandura, Grusec & Menlove, 1966).

Other conditions must also be present for successful modeling to occur: We must be able to retain what we learn from the model by remembering it in symbolic form, so we can later repeat what we have learned. We also need sufficient motor skills to perform the behavior. Finally, reinforcement and motivation must be in place (Crain, 2005). Through observing a model, we learn “the probable consequences of new behavior: we notice what happens when others try it,” in a process Bandura calls “vicarious reinforcement” (Crain, p. 199). Similarly, “we will actually imitate another if we are likely to gain a reward” ourselves (Crain, pp. 200-201).

Bandura (1986) maintains that we consciously choose the models and behaviors we copy. Markus and Nurius (1986) explain that through this process we are introduced to aspects of our “‘possible selves’, which “give us ideas of what we might become, what we would like to become, and what we are afraid of becoming” (Grossman & D’Augelli, 2004, p. 97). They function as incentives for future behavior, and they provide an evaluative and interpretive context for the current self” (Grossman & D’Augelli, 2004, p. 97). These possible selves are similar to those the adolescent tries on in Erikson’s model of identity development.

c. Celebrities and stars as role models; identification.

Some celebrities/stars/icons serve as role models. According to the International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, “a role model is an individual who is perceived as
exemplary or worthy of identification or imitation. It is a conscious or unconscious emotional attachment, not necessarily involving direct personal contact” (Yancey, 2007, p. 273). Bell (1970) established the various forms of identification: “perceived similarity with the role model, emulation of the role model’s behavior, and assimilation of the role model’s attitudes and beliefs” (Giuliano, Turner, Lundquist, & Knight, 2007, p. 163). Zirkel (2002) stresses that role models “also model specific aspects of desirable roles such as wealth, social respect, and intelligence, as well as psychological constructs such as the importance of striving towards one’s goals” (p. 360). For example, in their study of how the television character Cathy Gale, in the series *The Avengers*, had impacted women viewers forty years previously, Wright and Sandlin (2009) found that all of the participants explained how Gale “helped them internalize characteristics they saw in no other women at the time” (pp. 538-539). Life-changing learning included: “reject[ing] the traditional gender roles instilled by their culture, class, families and religions,” incorporating the protagonist’s strengths, and coming to understand “the value of strong, intelligent, independent feminist role models” (p. 539).

Boon and Lomore (2001) underscore the importance of these attachments in identity formation. They explain how, in Caughney’s (1984; 1985) analysis, “celebrity idols frequently serve as idealized self-images for their admirers because they possess qualities or traits admirers would like to develop—or refine—in themselves” (p. 435); as such, they “may inspire efforts at self-transformation that affect, in profound and meaningful ways, many different areas of admirers’ lives” (p. 435). Mattingly (2006) argues that popular characters and narratives from popular culture serve as a “lingua franca” for youth. In his Introduction to *Popular Culture in Counseling, Psychotherapy,*
and Play-Based Interventions, Rubin (2008) describes how young people identifying with movie heroes can play with different forms of self-expression: “cartoons and real-life heroes promote values and ideologies that may either be consistent or discrepant with their own burgeoning worldviews, thus providing the opportunity to express and resolve a developmental tension” (xxxiv-xxxv).

Gauntlett (2002) classifies six types of role models for young women: those who represent “straightforward success,” those who “triumph over difficult circumstances,” those who are “challenging stereotypes,” those who are “wholesome,” those who are “outsiders” and “the family role model” (pp. 214-215), but argues that we don’t literally model ourselves on them. Rather “as we construct our narratives of the self . . . we are able to appropriate (borrow) the positive bits of other people’s attitudes or lives that we fancy for ourselves” (p. 236). He concludes role models need not be held to standards of perfection, in light of the fans’ “selectivity” (p. 236).

Cohen (2001) distinguishes identification from reception by describing the first as a more intimate connection with media characters. As discussed earlier, identification plays an important role in identity development, especially in adolescence, allowing us to see the world through other perspectives (Erikson, 1968c). Identification with media figures “focuses on sharing the perspective of the character; feeling with the character, rather than about the character” (Cohen, p. 251). It “is marked by internalizing a point of view rather than a process of projecting one’s identity onto someone or something else” (Cohen, p. 252). Cohen found that four dimensions are central to the understanding of identification with media figures: empathy with the character, the feeling of understanding the character, internalizing and sharing the goals of the character, loss of
self-awareness in the intense and fleeting episode of identification. Cohen also
hypothesizes that the following increase the likelihood of identification: knowing the
character longer, realistic character portrayal, and similarity between the viewer and fan.

**d. Fans: Definitions.**

Fans can be understood in many different ways. Fans can be distinguished from
audiences by the greater depth of their emotional attachment and commitment to the fan-
text and/or -object. Fan-objects, e.g., media stars, singers, and celebrities, can be
distinguished from fan-texts which are the products they produce, e.g., films, songs, and
television performances, which are consumed and interpreted by fans. Fiske (1989)
pointed out the importance of secondary texts, e.g., what we hear about stars on television
or read in gossip magazines. These provide narratives about the fan-objects, which fans
likewise interpret (Bury, 2005). As I discuss further in the Fandom and Narrative
section, like the audiences discussed above, fans may share common practices, but they
are not a homogeneous group. As noted earlier, their activities cannot be studied without
accounting for nationality, location, gender, class, or sexuality (Bury, 2005, pp. 204-208).
Ethnicity and race are undoubtedly also important factors, although, as Bury (2005)
notes, the lack of theory and research “on the whiteness of fandom [and] . . . fans of color
is puzzling and disappointing” (p. 207).

Jenkins (1992) claims that the essence of fandom can be found in the relationship
between fans. I have observed among some Dusty fans, and Bury’s (2005) work
confirms, that such bonding can continue even when interest in the original fan-
objects/texts wanes (p. 209). Fandom may also be considered a form of cultural identity
with communal bonding around a common interest (Brooker and Jermyn, 2003).
e. Fandom and consumerism.

Cavicchi (1998) claims the importance of mass media is exaggerated, when it comes to fan activities. Many activities, such as taking pilgrimages and creating shrines are not media-based. More importantly, his interviews with Bruce Springsteen fans revealed that they “do not indicate that popular culture is shaping their identity but rather that they are shaping their identity with popular culture. Fans [talk] about recognizing themselves in the music, about using the music to shape a sense of themselves over time,” but see themselves as having interests and activities outside their fandom (p. 157). In all, fandom served to “anchor,” “serve,” and “enhance” their creation of self (p. 157).

Doss (1999) similarly explains that Elvis fandom is viewed as a symptom of corrupt American commercialism, and complains that such critics view popular culture as lacking “real significance because it is too full of contradictions and confusion” (p. 28).

In his study of Bruce Springsteen Fans, *Tramps Like Us*, Cavicchi (1998) questions such scholars’ emphasis on fans as primarily consumers. Although they often portray the music business as exploiting naïve fans or fans as idealists standing up to corporate control, Cavicchi argues that the musical industry is not essential in the everyday life of the fan. For Springsteen fans, the “music is not a product to be consumed but rather a performance to be experienced, not a static ‘text’ that is mass-marketed but rather a dynamic event of communication unfolding in various media in space and over time” (p. 89). What matters to these fans is their feeling of connection to the singer.

In the Marxist narrative of the commodity fetish, surplus labor embodied within an object becomes so abstracted that the conditions that brought that object into being
become alien to us (Marx, 1970). Frith (1987) describes how popular music perfectly illustrates the case: “something human is taken from us and returned in the form of a commodity. Songs and singers are fetishized, made magical, and we can only reclaim them through possession, via cash transaction in the marketplace” (p. 54). Both the labor and laborers that went into making the object disappear; the value of commodities lies in their market value, not their creation. Advertising, prestige, peer pressure, brand loyalty and so forth help supply the value of the commodity (Cohen, 2000).

In my experience, this Marxist view is the wrong lens through which to view fans’ lived experience. Yes, a fan-object such as Dusty is fetishized, but we do not “reclaim” her through cash transactions of CDs, DVDs, etc. Market transactions may help us get closer to her mystery, but all that is Dusty cannot be possessed or consumed or really understood. Her magical qualities arise from how her singularly evocative voice touches her fans, not the market’s promotion of a questionable talent. It is, in fact, her creations we cherish much more than what an autograph would fetch on eBay. The spirit is intrinsic in the object, not its price. Regarding the exploitation of labor, it should be noted that Dusty herself was often the un-credited producer of her songs, and compensated those who worked for her (Valentine & Wickham, 2002). Her 1964 refusal to play to segregated audiences in South Africa and her subsequent banishment from the country also underscores the awkwardness of applying the grand narrative of Marxism to the facts of her career. Furthermore, the whole idea of commodity fetishism doesn't account for a singer’s voice or performance style as independent from the purchased object (i.e., a CD or DVD) or even the "free" object of a televised performance. What resides in memory and the fan's thoughts about the voice and performance lie outside the
commodity fetish argument—at least for those consumers who obviously use these products in an "off-label" kind of way (A. Randall, personal communication, April 13, 2010).

My experience is that when we Dusty fans produce commodities, the result can be connection rather than alienation. By designing calendars, artwork, or t-shirts—or even making available to fellow fans rare recordings not on the market—we feel connected to our work, and to other fans who enjoy it. We also feel a connection to the fan-object, in many cases honoring her by selling products to raise money for charities Dusty supported or to purchase flowers for her grave. Our love for Dusty does not fit into the Marxist narrative of commodity fetishism. My vision of the fetish object uncovers the positive potential of the fan-object: Not only does the fan-object occupy a formative role in an individual's creative process of identity formation, but it also becomes a device for agency rather than disempowerment.

Post/neo-Marxists, such as Adorno (1991) and Baudrillard (1998) also critique the reduction of human labor to iconic and circulatable commodities of pop culture. Adorno saw commodity fetishism as a reflection of the how consumers use products to construct their identity. He believed that the forces of the marketplace invade our consciousness, cast us in inauthentic roles, and impact our development. Adorno and others in the Frankfurt School argued that while capitalism promises us individuality, it actually stunts its growth. Instead of actively creating our individual lives, we passively consume what the market offers us (Strinati, 2004). Adorno (1991) further argued that “the counterpart to the fetishism of music is the regression of listening” (p. 40): We repetitively demand the same unchallenging songs, which distract us from the hardships of everyday life and
reconcile us to our place in this world over which we have no control. Baudrillard (1998) argued that consumption rather than production drives the capitalist system; in other words, we construct our needs for what we consume rather than consuming commodities based upon any natural or inborn need for them. All of society “is organized around consumption and display of commodities through which individuals gain prestige, identity, and standing” (Kellner, 2009). In contrast, the view of fandom I develop illustrates the liberating possibilities of fans’ engagement with the fan-object (and her products).

f. Semiotic productivity.

In “The Cultural Economy of Fandom,” Fiske (1992) uses French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s cultural theories to describe three types of fan productivity: textual, enunciative, and semiotic. Textual productivity refers to fans creating products, enunciative productivity refers to fans’ declarations of allegiance to the fan object, and semiotic productivity refers to fans creating their own interior meaning about a fan object or fan text. Semiotic productivity may provide more possibilities for understanding the transformative relationship between fans and fan objects than does the concept of role models from social learning theory. In A Problem Like Maria: Gender and Sexuality in the American Musical, Wolf (2002) discusses how fans might engage in semiotic production with a performer or a role: through identification—“I like her; therefore I want to be like her” or desire—“I like her; therefore I desire her” (p. 24)⁷. In a third type of semiotic productivity, which I’ve labeled assistance or “I like her; therefore, I want her to help me” (Young, 2008b), fans see stars as iconic figures to whom they turn for

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⁷ Gomillion and Giuliano (2011) observed two types of identification GLB individuals made with media role models: “similarity” and “wishful,” which correspond to Wolf’s categories of “be like her” and “desire her.”
healing, guidance, support, or understanding, a phenomenon Hinderman (1992) has described in Elvis fans. He views fans’ fantasies about Elvis as personal liberation, even if the fans do not question dominant power structures. Based upon a 2008 survey I conducted in which 88% of the Dusty fans interviewed agreed with the statement “I feel protective toward Dusty” (Young, 2008a), I hypothesized a fourth relationship of protectiveness: “I like her; therefore, I want to help her” (Young, 2008b).

**Figure 2.1. Fans’ Semiotic Production**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identification:</th>
<th>I like her; therefore, I want to be like her.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Desire:</td>
<td>I like her; therefore, I desire her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistance:</td>
<td>I like her; therefore, I want her to help me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protectiveness:</td>
<td>I like her; therefore, I want to help her.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Young, 2008b)

Duffet (2010) notes that stars’ “vast, complex semiotic constellations” provide “hooks and objects of fan love [that] can almost be as varied as the fans themselves”; fan love may manifest as “admiration, affection, affinity, lust, appreciation or recognition of creativity” (Slide 6). Doss (1999) notes that “Elvis’s iconic flexibility accounts for his abiding popularity” (p. 17). Fraser and Brown’s 2002 study of Elvis fans similarly found that fans identified with varying aspects of Elvis, including “entertainer . . . friend, lover, husband, father, patriot and citizen” (as cited in Cashmore, 2006, p. 83). Other Elvis fans constructed him as the ideal working class hero who pulled himself up by his bootstraps but was true to his roots, and others saw him in religious terms as a saint or savoir (Doss).

Similarly, John Izod (2002) argues in his chapter “The Pop Star as Icon,” that Hollywood movies “are constructed so as to allow different members of their audiences
to project entirely contradictory meanings, opinions and beliefs on to their characters and narrative” (p. 84). Music videos follow the same postmodern pattern, by sampling sounds, images, and stories from earlier texts; these many references motivate “the consumer to find support for whatever values she or he brings to it” (p. 84).

In her edited collection *How Xena Changed Our Lives*, Stafford (2002) relates fans’ stories about the impact of the television program *Xena: Warrior Princess*. Many viewers saw the main character as a role model for self-esteem, courage, goodness, and forgiveness. The friendship between the characters of Xena and Gabrielle also inspired some viewers to be better friends, while others identified with the lesbian subtext of the relationship. Included in the collection are multiple reports of the program helping viewers get through hard times, from the loss of loved ones to overcoming a drug addiction. Many fans found their creative talents were inspired by the show. The forming of supportive and lasting friendships through *Xena* was another prominent theme of their stories.

The documentary *For the Love of Dolly* (Uhlmann, 2008, further illustrates the semiotic potential of a fan-object, in this case country music star Dolly Parton. Listening to her music helped a gay man work through grief over the death of his wife from whom he had separated; meeting Dolly brought purpose and focus to the life of a developmentally disabled youth; fantasizing phone conversations with Dolly provided maternal comfort for a young woman with a history of sexual abuse. As Stever (2009) summarizes, “People use media relationships to relieve boredom, fight loneliness, or give focus and direction to their lives” and often find “romance, understanding, inspiration, communion, and identity” in the process (p. 5).
g. Fandom and narrative.

Identification with the stories of celebrities can contribute to one’s development in adolescence and across the lifespan, as noted by Turner (2004). Kramer-Moore (2010) suggests that we enjoy stories because we project ourselves onto a narrative’s protagonist. In either case, we use their narratives of identity to inform our own. Neal Gabler (2001), Senior Fellow at the Norman Lear Center at the University of Southern California, points out that although the celebrity is often dismissed as someone simply famous for being famous, he or she is usually someone who has accomplished something. More importantly, his or her life has a strong narrative which can “reinforce fears and dreams, instruct and guide us, transport us from daily routine, reassure us that we are not alone in what we think and feel, [and] impose order on experience” (p. 12). Traditional narratives, such as the hero’s journey, are also likely inspirations for our self-narratives. McKee (1997) argues that stories attract us because “of the profound human need to grasp the patterns of living, not merely as an intellectual exercise, but within a very personal, emotional experience” (p. 12).

The lives of some fan-objects or celebrities appear particularly suited for projection. Although Neil Tennant of the Pet Shop Boys, who facilitated Dusty Springfield’s comeback in the 1980s, asserts that the singer’s life was not a tragedy (Cross, 1999), Valentine and Wickham’s (2002) biographic treatment, Dancing with Demons, uses a dark melodramatic storyline. Whether the “grand narrative” of a showbiz diva, as Mitchell (2006, p. 89) characterizes Valentine and Wickham’s treatment or “the stereotype of the ‘tragic lesbian,’ doomed to abject sadness and social isolation,” as Randall (2009, p. 138) describes it, these narratives confine Dusty’s story to a predictable
path whose familiarity may comfort some fans. On the other hand, in my observation, other fans appropriate only the aspects of her story that resonate with them, and others interpret her narrative in vastly different ways, such as Randall’s (2009) characterization of Dusty as “Queen of the Postmods.”

When I visited Kensington Palace in September 2007, soon after the 10th anniversary of Diana’s death, I saw some of these narratives posted on the palace gates. A common story, as the photographs in Figure 2.2. illustrate, was of the innocent princess who had been rejected by her faithless husband and displaced by the evil Camilla Parker-Bowles. Such a simple summary of their complicated lives may have served as a balm to other rejected and displaced wives and lovers.

Figure 2.2 Photographs from Kensington Palace Gates, September 2007
h. Fan attachment: Pathological v. transformative

The term “parasocial interaction” was coined by Horton and Wohl (1956) to describe television viewers’ “intimacy at a distance” with celebrities or fictional characters (p. 215). In these unidirectional relationships, viewers form attachments with media figures—relationships fans experience both as real and as essential as other relationships (Cashmore, 2006). Both Erickson and Freud felt that “the absence of reciprocity or even proximity is a fundamental aspect of the object’s phenomenological appeal” (as cited in Adams-Price and Greene, 1990, p. 188).

In much of the social psychology and media studies literature, parasocial relationships have been harshly judged. Jolli Jenson (1992) notes that such critics describe fans’ efforts to attach to stars as “a chronic attempt to compensate for a
perceived personal lack of autonomy, absence of community, incomplete identity, [and] lack of power and lack of recognition” (p. 17). Because such relationships are mediated through television and film, such critics assume they are inauthentic. However, because of repeated exposure to the fan-object, the fan feels as if she or he is engaged in an actual relationship with the celebrity or character, often feeling empathy or identification (Hill and Helmers, 2004).

Parasocial attachment is a concept that comes from social psychology. Adams-Price and Greene (1990) broaden the concept considerably when they suggest that “adolescent crushes [on celebrities] are best conceptualized as ‘secondary attachments’” (p. 188). This term originated in attachment theory signifying any important relationship a child develops with someone other than the primary caregiver. The same idea could be expanded to conceptualize adult obsessions with stars.

In Tramps Like Us: Music and Meaning among Springsteen Fans, Cavicchi (1998) articulates the very real connection fans feel toward fan-objects, which resonates with my own fan experience:

To characterize Springsteen fans’ relationships with Springsteen as ‘false,’ ‘unreal,’ or ‘artificial’ is, I think, to mistake their very nature. Such adjectives instead of descriptively characterizing the connection fans feel in their own terms, prescriptively assign the connection a negative value by comparing it with a supposedly more real, more genuine, ‘face-to-face’ interaction. It is like calling parents with adopted children a ‘pseudo family’ or an ‘artificial family’ because their relationships are not based on blood.” (p. 55)
Stever (2011) hypothesizes that fans’ attachment to media figures is formed in part by their exposure to images of the fan-object. A common activity of fan-bases she studied was the sharing of photographs, especially close-ups, of the fan-object. She draws on Bowlby’s (1969) finding of our predisposition to attach to familiar objects and Restak’s (1991) suggestion that the brain cannot always distinguish between what we experience in the media and in real life to conclude that our attachment to images can be as strong as to those people we know in real life.

The study by McCutcheon, Hournan, and Maltby (2003) produced a cognitive profile of celebrity worshipers that implied there is no clear distinction between pathological and normal fans. Cashmore (2006) argues similarly that fans who stalk or even murder take part of the same spectrum of fan activity (p. 96). He equates everyday fan activity with an entry drug like marijuana: “None of the obsessive fans . . . just woke up one morning as predators. They all in some way progressed, often via circuitous routes, to a recognition that what they were doing was insufficient” (p. 97). Cashmore concludes that these fans feel they need to do more to feel more power, “whether this is understood as an addictive craving for satiation or an attempt to neutralize feelings of helplessness” (p. 97). However, his conclusion is not supported by any evidence other than the fact that the behavior of some mentally unbalanced fans escalated over time. He appears to assume it is the process of being a fan rather than the violent tendencies of individuals who happen to be fans that predisposes a small minority to such acts.

On the other hand, Stever’s (2011) research revealed many instances of how a fan’s preoccupation with a celebrity provided a temporary safe space for attachment where the fan could disconnect from repeated dysfunctional relationships in real life.
Fans make the choice to be connected to fan-objects to meet typical developmental needs, which should come as no surprise in a world inundated by the mass media (Stever, 2011). In Jenson’s (1992) “Fandom as Pathology: The Consequences of Characterization,” which provides a rationale for the scholarly study of fans, she astutely notes that although historically fans have been viewed as twisted and pathetic, they are no more pathological than academics obsessed with their own narrow scholarly interests.

Whether fans’ engagement with fan-objects or fan-texts is purely and/or harmfully narcissistic is a subject Sandvoss (2005) debates at length in *Fans: The Mirror of Consumption*. He begins by distinguishing between polysemic and neutrosemic texts. A polysemic text is one onto which someone can project many meanings; in other words, different fans can interpret a star’s performance in different ways. However, he argues, a text can become neutrosemic, having so many meanings that it “come[s] to function as a blank screen onto which fans’ self-image is reflected” (p. 126). Such a text “allows for so many divergent readings that, intersubjectively, it does not have any meaning at all” (p. 126). He argues that the fan text “does not invite a reflexive dialogue with different norms and horizons” (p. 148), and that audience research has revealed that the “intense emotional investment and pleasures in fandom result specifically from confirmations of horizons of expectations” (p. 144). In other words, fan-texts and fan-objects typically mirror fans’ needs, without challenging their view of the world—or themselves. In my view, it is Sandvoss’ view of mirroring that narrows horizons. Mirroring is a critical developmental need, a step toward expanding our horizons, as I discuss later in this chapter.
Hills (2007) criticizes Sandvoss for foreclosing the rich concept of neutrosemy. First, he clarifies that neutrosemy does not mean a text can have any meaning whatsoever; rather it signifies that “the bounded ‘text’ may no longer exist” (p. 153): fans choose which texts and portions of texts they interact with. Thus neutrosemy challenges fan research that focuses solely on “‘primary’ text-audience interactions, assuming a traditional and objective textual boundary” (p. 153). Furthermore, the reflection these neutrosemic texts provide is not a “hall of mirrors” entrapping fans, but instead a potential space for a “wholesale reconstruction of the self” (Hills, personal communication, June 25, 2010):

[With Sandvoss] there is a sense of fans being constrained within their hermetically sealed symbolic worlds of self and text, unable to break out into new or more challenging forms of self-understanding. . . . (Hills, 2007, p. 150).

Sandvoss’s focus on fans’ allegedly ‘narcissistic’ readings of their favored texts seems to lack the powerfully and vitally self-transformative dimension which frequently accompanies ‘becoming a fan,’ and where people feel, for the first time, that a particular text speaks to them, moves them, provokes them in some new way, perhaps unlocking a previously unheard part of their creative potential. (Hills, 2007, p. 151)

Many fans, including myself, can identify with Hills’ (2007) testament to this “self-transformative dimension”:

It is not hard to find empirical support for the argument that media fandom really does change peoples’ lives in a variety of ways, emotionally and intellectually . . . . I strongly doubt that I would have become a Doctor of Philosophy were it
not for my childhood love of the BBC TV series *Doctor Who*. . . . And this is not to suggest that I am trapped in some stultifying or regressive loop of self-interpretation and textual interpretation (though I suppose I may be!) Rather, media fandom can potentially act as one motor of subjective/hermeneutic and social transformation. (p. 151)

Cavicchi describes the importance of a fan’s “conversion” experience to fandom as a “lasting and profound transition from an ‘old’ viewpoint, dominated by ignorance and disenchantment, to a ‘new’ one, filled with energy and insight” (p. 59).

i. Fandom across the lifespan and life course.8

Stever (2011) discusses the importance of fans’ connections to fan objects at different phases of Erikson’s life cycle. During the adolescent crisis of identity v. role confusion, they provide a vast array of role models; during the young adulthood crisis of intimacy v. isolation, attachment to a celebrity can provide intimacy, when a real relationship is missing. The distanced relationship can be positive when it replaces one that is dysfunctional or dangerous. During the middle age crisis of generativity v. self-absorption, such relationships may help fans recapture youthful feelings, and reach beyond themselves to become active in charity fundraising through fan communities. At middle age, also, celebrity attachments occur more commonly in a time of crisis, in particular loss through death or divorce. As Harrington and Bielby (2011) note, generativity is also evident in these fans’ mentoring of younger fans. The later life crisis

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8 “Psychologists tend to use a terminology of ‘lifespan’ whereas sociologists refer to the ‘life course.’ Lifespan refers to the entire span of an individual’s life (e.g., human development models). Life course refers to the age-structured sequence of roles, opportunities and experiences that an individual moves in and out of, and that are influenced by macro-structural forces as well as human agency. Both psychologists and sociologists are interested in understanding the processes through which lives transform over time” (Harrington and Bielby, 2011, p. 446).
of integrity v. despair is represented by fans’ reflection and contemplation of the role of fandom in their lives (Harrington and Bielby, 2011).

Hills (1994) has argued that the image of a fan as immature and obsessed is a stereotype arising from teenaged female fandom; thus, aging adults’ fan activities have often been viewed as age-inappropriate or signs of arrested development (Calcutt, 1998), and post-adolescent fans may feel pressured to downplay or closet their fandom. Harrington and Bielby (2011), however, stress the transformational nature of becoming a fan; for many “it re-directs the life course, gives new meaning, structure, and purpose to specific life stages, and marks periods of one’s personal past—hallmarks of a major turning point, according to life course scholars” (p. 438). The fan-object can also provide an anchor in an unstable world, and serve as a point of reference for making our way through middle and late adulthood (Harrington and Bielby, 2011).

Cavicchi (1998) concluded from his research that being a fan helps one maintain self-continuity by providing “a map or overlap with which to mark the passage of time and organize one’s perception of oneself in it” (p. 150), particularly through fans activities such as collecting souvenirs and listening to music. For example, music helped map out for fans how they had changed through the years, at times serving to keep alive “their sense of who they used to be” (p. 154). This purpose of fandom aligns with Duffey’s (2008) study of how music enables patients near death to create productive life-review narratives. Cavicchi further explains that William James’ concept of the self relates directly to theories of the importance of narrative in self-identity, as I discuss below.
Jenkins (2006) explains that fandom is “all about having control and mastery over art by pulling it close and integrating it into your sense of self” (p. 15). Cavicchi’s (1998) study of Bruce Springsteen fans is useful in understanding how being a fan shapes one’s sense of self-identity. He uses James’ theory that the self is created primarily through “shaping self-awareness—that is, seeing oneself as an object, from the outside looking in” and secondly through “a process of creating self-continuity . . . selecting and connecting present and past selves as a rancher might brand cattle” (p. 136). The shaping of self-awareness is evident in both “becoming-a-fan stories” as well as in fans’ accumulation of objects that serve as fetishes or souvenirs. Listening to their fan-object’s music was another avenue to fans’ self-awareness—not so much that they felt they were like Springsteen, but that they felt he was like them. Other fans identified with characters in Springsteen’s songs. This sort of identification does not involve pathologically internalizing the fan-object’s identity; rather, it is “the way in which people hold ‘ideal’ or ‘potential’ selves in their minds as a way to guide their actions and steady their sense of who they are” (p. 140). Springsteen fans tend view this sort of identification as universal—open to anyone who can relate emotionally to his music, although for some, factors such as race, gender, and class intercede.

j. Marginalized Audiences and Fans.

Fan, audience, and celebrity studies are all fields of cultural studies, which “chooses to go to the margins of society for its scholarly practice . . . to demonstrate the larger social significance of those margins and to consider those who are otherwise unacknowledged” (White and Schwoch, 2006, pp. 13-14).
In her discussion of female audience members’ responses to Spillberg’s film *The Color Purple*, Bobo (2003) summarizes Parkin’s conceptualization of three approaches audiences can bring to a text: dominant, negotiated or oppositional:

A dominant (or preferred) reading of a text accepts the content of the cultural product without question. A negotiated reading questions part of the content of the text but does not question the dominant ideology that underlines the production of the text. An oppositional response to a cultural product is one in which the recipient of the text understands that the system that produced the text is one with which she/he is fundamentally at odds. (p. 309)

In other words, viewers do not abandon their gender, class, race, sexuality, and so on when they view a film. Audiences from marginalized groups, she argues, are situated to have oppositional readings of mainstream texts because they know that historically they have not been accurately portrayed in media texts. And, “out of habit . . . readers of mainstream texts . . . have learned to ferret out the beneficial and put up blinders against the rest” (p. 309). Many Black women found positive meaning from *The Color Purple* because they identified with the female characters. Bobo (2003) describes Pecheux’s concept of the “interdiscursive space” as where a viewer’s “cultural competency” can be seen: that “repertoire of discursive strategies [and] the range of knowledge, that a viewer brings to the act of . . . creating meaning from a work” (p. 312).

Jackie Stacey’s (2003) study of female cinema-viewers of classic Hollywood movies of the 1940s and 1950s describes the audience’s two types of memories of their experience. The first, what she terms “iconic memories,” refer to “a particular ‘frozen moment,’ taken out of its temporal context and captured as ‘pure image’: be it Bette
Davis’ flashing and rebellious eyes, Doris Day’s fun outfits or Rita Hayworth’s flowing hair” (p. 154). The same can be said of the female viewers’ memories of themselves, such as the one cinema-goer’s recollection of watching herself in the mirror as she combed her hair in the style of Bette Davis: “thus her own reflection in the mirror . . . replaced the image of the star on the screen and became the subject of this iconic memory” (p. 154). With “narrative memory,” the female viewers create stories in which they play heroines interacting with heroines from the past. Not only did the spectators in this study recall the stories of the films of their favorite stars, “their relationships to the stars [were] often recreated through narrative form of memory,” for example through a romantic narrative in which they related their story in terms of ideals they had previously formulated. Stacey argues that “this history of spectatorship is thus constructed through forms of private story-telling given public recognition in the research process” (p. 155). She advocates that researchers not let women’s stories speak for themselves, but that they analyze audience’s narratives about media in addition to the texts they view.

Turner (2004) argues that the relationship between fan and celebrity be taken seriously because of its importance in the process of personal and cultural identification. He builds his argument primarily around fans’ responses to the death of Princess Diana in 1997. Turner cites Johnson’s (1999) view that Diana was available “as a mechanism of recognition for others who were marginalized or displaced within the society” (p. 100); the princess had an:

ability to acknowledge something of the reality of other people’s lives, especially those suffering from major oppressions and ill-fortune. This endeared her to large numbers of people, especially those who had endured formative experiences of
grief and subordination of their own lives. . . . Eventually in her death, Diana bequeathed to others the opportunity to grieve for ungrieved bereavements of their own. (Johnson, p. 37)

Davies (1998) explains that not only did people construct Diana as ordinary—like them—she was also a celebrity and part of The Royal Family. “Though high she became low, and all within a frame of suffering” (p. 174). Davies claims this transformation offers a testament to our creative powers in imagining relationships and the reality that “human identity is intrinsically relational” (p. 174).

1. Not-straight fans’ creative use of icons.

In his study of Judy Garland fan-sites, Steven Cohan (2005) found that in the process of wanting to feel a personal connection to her, fans reduced her identity to something finite and lacking contradiction—decidedly not queer, despite all the evidence to the contrary. He compared the fans to the MGM production workers when Garland was employed at the studio, with their job being to “corset the problematic sexuality and spirited independence of her persona” (p. 134). Not surprisingly, GLBTQ fans view/use fan-objects differently. As Gross (2001) has noted, heterocentric media stories are often reinterpreted by not-straight audiences for their own purposes.

Going beyond the concept of oppositional readings of texts, Henry Jenkins (1992; 2003) drew upon de Certeau’s (1984/1974) work in his description of “textual poachers” whose acts of resistance include staking out homosexual themes in the heterosexual story lines of Star Trek. De Certeau’s use of the concept of “bricolage,” the resister’s creative in piecing together and filling in the blanks from dominant culture, is evident also in the earlier work of Richard Dyer (2004), who offered gay interpretations of mainstream
Hollywood films. Bricolage “is a process widely evidenced in queer subcultures, where GLBTQ people regularly appropriate texts and objects from mainstream culture—films, songs, celebrities, fashion—and imbue them with new queer meanings and values” (Farmer, 2004, p. 2). Similarly, cultural studies recognizes GLBTQ fan activities as important and sophisticated “symbolic creativity”—Paul Willis’s term for “reworking media commodities to accommodate the fans’ own social needs and desires” (Farmer, 2004, p. 2). In the following discussion, I outline some of the important theories about gay and lesbian (or even GLBTQ) audiences that were fruitful in my study of not-straight fans’ identity development.

Symbolic creativity can be seen in the queering of film texts—GLBTQ “appropriating film to their own frames of reference and imbuing it with a specifically queer effect” (Farmer, 2003, p.1), of which The Wizard of Oz is an apt example. “Queer spectators have interpreted a mytho-epic journey from heteronormative mundanity into queer difference and have reconstructed the film as an empowering ur-text of queer survivalism and community” (p. 1). In other instances the plots of films are not valued as much as are the “symbolic gestures of social and sexual defiance,” e.g., Norma Desmond descending the staircase, Marlene Dietrich in a tuxedo kissing a female audience member (p. 2), or Mommie Dearest screaming “Tina! Bring me the axe!” In short “GLBTQ people have always shown great resourcefulness in making their own cultural meanings and spaces, often out of the very material of dominant culture that would seek to exclude them” (p. 2).

Stiffler (2007) claims that with Judy Garland and Marilyn Monroe “gay men [have] taken their suffering and turned it into a form of empowerment” (p. 2). Cultural
critic Daniel Harris similarly argues that in the late 1960s “since homosexual males had no other gay-positive images, many projected themselves onto the tragic but resilient Judy Garland or the invincible personas portrayed by the likes of Joan Crawford and Bette Davis” and, in doing so, “recycled the refuse of popular culture and reconstituted it into an energizing force” (quoted in Finnegan, 2009, p. 22).

Richard Dyer’s (2004) oft-cited essay is the foundational analysis of Garland’s gay male fandom. Among Garland’s (and her characters’) attributes that Dyer argues establish her as a gay icon are:

- embodies both neurosis and hysteria
- represents resilience in the face of oppression
- has intense authentic feelings
- represents both strength and suffering
- has a hurt in her voice other singers don't have
- embodies both vulnerability and strength
- possesses both a sense of inadequacy and inferiority
- is not naturally glamorous
- embodies camp
- has a histrionic/overly dramatic style
- projects a dramatic loss of innocence
- uses disguise and impersonation
- is an androgynous figure
- comes from a normal background but not turning out normal.

Dyer clarifies, however, that the gay reading of Garland is not essentialist; rather:
it a product of the way homosexuality is socially constructed, without and within
the gay subculture itself. It does not tell us what gay men are inevitably and
naturally drawn to from some in-built disposition granted by their sexuality, but it
does tell us of the way that a social-sexual identity has been understood and felt in
a certain period of time. (p. 194)

In the past few decades, as gays have become more assimilated into mainstream
culture, divas such as Garland have lost their valence as a gay icon. As Harris notes, “the
oppressive social and political environments of disenfranchisement and alienation that
once made [gay diva worship] a vital practice of utopian escapism for gay men have
ceded to a new liberal era of acceptance and assimilation” (cited in Farmer, 2005, p. 172).
Mary Wilson’s (2007) “The Queer(y)ing of Judy Garland” describes how gay men have
historically related to Garland’s life, whereas lesbians relate more to her film roles.
Wilson also argued that Dyer could only appreciate Garland’s beauty in heteronormative
terms. For example, he sees her as an unglamorous tramp in Easter Parade, while
Wilson reads Garland in this scene as having the sexual confidence to be between roles.
Wilson concluded that today Garland may work better as a dykon—lesbian icon. Dusty
Springfield, on the other hand, holds singular diva status as an icon for gay men and
lesbians (Mitchell, 2006; Smith, 1999; Patrick, 2001).

Farmer (2005) argues that Harris’s claim that divas are passé flies in the face of
the reality of their persistence. He theorizes that her power is more than an emotional
expression of gay suffering; the diva’s “operative value” “is precisely the transcendence
of those oppressive deformations, the social exclusions and impossibilities, that occasion
queer pathos in the first place” (Farmer, 2005, p. 173). Using the example of Tom
Hanks’ character’s enrapture with a Maria Callas aria in the film *Philadelphia*, in which melodramatic excess plays a crucial role in connecting the fan to the fan-object, he reasons:

the diva is nothing if not a consummate figure of self-authorization, a magisterial image of triumphant identificatory production. Blazing her way across the cultural landscape in defiant disregard of orthodox conventions of social discipline and patriarchal injunctions against feminine potency, the diva offers a lesson . . . in the resistant production of aberrant subjectivity. (Farmer, p. 189)

The process of worshipping the diva object is what Sedgwick (1997) would call “restorative,” in an object relational sense—the attempt through love to repair the subject’s broken world.

As Patricia Juliana Smith (2006) notes:

gay and lesbian audiences, given their all-too-frequent rejection by society, are drawn to divas because these extraordinary . . . figures perform a cathartic function by embodying, whether in their performances or in their own lives, all the heartache, grief, humiliation, and suffering that almost inevitably play a large role in queer life” (p. 2).

This catharsis is most sublimely felt when delivered through the singing voice of a diva—Maria Callas is a classic example. However, Randall (2009) makes the case that the appeal of Dusty Springfield’s melodramatic ballads was reinforced by “Dusty’s self-invention as the tortured heroine” (p. 73). We project onto the diva what we cannot bear alone: “The diva releases what we are constrained to suppress; she gives vent to our nameless furies; in her, our madness reigns. We sin, she suffers” (Randall, 2009, p. 75).
Wolf (2002) argues that the mid-century American stage musical “offer[s] connections to its spectators, especially socially marginalized spectators, who often interpret performances in surprising, unconventional ways” (p. viii). Scholarship has traditionally affirmed the musical as the domain of the gay male (Clum 1999), but Wolf (2002) aims to “model feminist and lesbian readings of musicals” through seeing and hearing in nonconventional ways. In consciously accounting for the importance of spectators’ identifications and desires; in not taking for granted heterosexual narratives; in seeing the lesbian in the straight character; in recontextualizing, replacing, re-viewing how straight performances of stage musicals may be read as lesbian. (p. 8)

Some of the ways Wolf (2002) describes lesbian readings of performers such as Ethel Merman and Julie Andrews include:

When she sings about a man, she's really singing about a woman
The heterosexual lyrics are a cover for her true feelings
The focus is on her when she sings: she owns the song
She expresses some qualities traditionally associated with men
Her voice is distinctive—immediately recognizable
She has some stereotypically masculine qualities about her
She is not a passive love object
Her music can be interpreted as challenging the status quo
She is powerful and charming
She can sing in many different styles
Listening to her, one can hear sounds not heard before
Her music expresses connections to women

Her music and performance can be interpreted very differently now compared to how it was in earlier decades.

The survey of Dusty Springfield fans I conducted (Young, 2007) suggested that lesbian participants read Dusty in a way in which they can identify with her sexual identity, fantasize about a romantic or sexual relationship with her, and imagine she feels a connection to them as women, just as they do to her. The “overtly lesbian” survey items (adapted from Wolf, 2002) that read “Her music expresses connections to women,” “When she sings about a man, she's really singing about a woman,” and “The heterosexual lyrics are a cover for her true feelings,” elicited much stronger agreement from self-identified lesbians than they did from self-identified gay men, heterosexuals, and bisexuals, as illustrated in Figure 2.3. below.

Likewise, my study (Young, 2008b) suggested that other populations resist interpretations that complicate or interfere with their own identities, fantasies, and connections. Perhaps “listeners’ endless capacity to ‘hear what they wanted to hear’” (Adam, 2008, p. 15) in her music allows Dusty to be visible to her gay and lesbian followers without alienating her more traditional or mainstream fan base. In this sense, Springfield embodies the perfect fan-object—ever poised to embrace the projections of her diverse fan base. Whatever matters most to them, she will manifest.
Figure 2.3  Dusty Springfield Fans Survey, Wolf Items

Overtly Lesbian Items

G: Gay                           L: Lesbian
H: Heterosexual                 B: Bisexual

Numbers expressed in percentages (Young, 2008b)

2. Fan-Objects as affirmative therapy for gay men and lesbians.

One may also consider how fan-objects serve a therapeutic role for not-straight fans. The following list of attributes of affirmative lesbian and gay therapists was derived from Kathleen Ritter and Anthony Terndrup’s (2002) handbook on the subject:

- understands my pain in being "different"
- has helped me heal from painful experiences
- helps me feel good about myself
- is empathetic toward my troubles
has helped me find a community of people like myself
helps give me the courage to be who I am
supports and validates my inner experience
helps me replace negative thoughts about myself with positive ones
helps me understand why I behave the way I do
embodies my hopes and nightmares
helps dispel myths and stereotypes about gays, lesbians, and bisexuals
preferable to someone more "perfect"
has inspired me to transform my life in profound and meaningful ways.

In my survey of Dusty fans (2008a), 100% of the gay men agreed with the statement: “I prefer Dusty to a singer with a more ‘perfect’ voice and life” and 65% with the statement “Dusty has helped me grieve what I have lost.” Lesbians also preferred Dusty to a singer with a more “perfect” voice and life (86.9%), but their other highest ranking items connected the personal to the political: More than two-thirds said “Dusty has helped me find a community of people like myself;” seven out of ten agreed that “Dusty helps dispel myths and stereotypes about gays, lesbians, and bisexuals;” and almost three out of four concurred that “Dusty helps give me the courage to be who I am.” (See Figures 2.3. and 2.4.) A fan’s display honoring Dusty as a “Homo Hero” at Manchester, England Pride also illustrates these findings. (See Figure 2.5.)
Figure 2.4  Dusty Springfield Fans Survey, Ritter and Terndrup Items: Dispels Myths

Dusty helps dispel myths and stereotypes about gays, lesbians, and bisexuals.

![Bar chart showing the percentage of Dusty Springfield fans in different sexual orientation categories.]

Young (2008b)

Figure 2.5  Dusty Springfield Fans Survey, Ritter and Terndrup Items: Gives Me Courage

Dusty helps give me the courage to be who I am.

![Bar chart showing the percentage of Dusty Springfield fans in different sexual orientation categories.]

(Young, 2008b)
These are all important tasks in gay and lesbian sexual identity development, and Dusty seemed to play a more important role here for lesbians than gay men in the sample surveyed (Young, 2008b). Many of the attributes of affirmative psychotherapy can be also found in the role Dolly Parton plays in the lives of gay male fans. In the documentary For the Love of Dusty (Uhlmann, 2008), Harrell and Patric describe how their fandom brings “common ground” to their relationship. For Harrell, Dolly “represents self-respect” because “she preaches be yourself; be who you are, and be happy with who you are.”

In the same survey, I explored the relationships of not-straight fans with Dusty. Gay/lesbian/ bisexual/queer fans saw themselves more in a protective role with Dusty than in other kinds of connections, e.g., sisterly, parental, friendship. Perhaps these fans’ knowledge of Dusty’s sexual orientation and emotional difficulties made them less likely
to seek her protection and instead offer her some of their own. However, protectiveness was the most common type of relationship all groups of fans surveyed felt toward Dusty, so her quality of vulnerability appears to have universal appeal.

Figure 2.7 Dusty Fan Survey: Protectiveness Toward Dusty

2.4 Projective Psychology

We all walk about in a metaphysical concrescence of our private idioms, our culture, society, and language, and our era in history. Moving through our object world, whether by choice, obligation, or invitational surprise, evokes self-states sponsored by the specific objects we encounter. In a very particular sense, we live our life in our own private dreaming. (Bollas, 1987, p. 19)

a. Projection.

Classical psychoanalysis identifies defense mechanisms as the means the ego uses to ward off anxiety. Defense mechanisms are perfectly normal, but can create problems

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9 Freud identified three types of anxiety: Reality anxiety, as its name implies, comes from a realistic fear, such as a hurricane. Typically one reacts to this form of anxiety by leaving the dangerous
if they are overused, used in the extreme, or used in an age-inappropriate manner (Cramer, 2006).

Esquivel, Oades-Sese, and Olitzsky (2008) state that the hypothesis behind projection is “that individuals will project their own perceptions, attitudes, feelings, and needs in assigning meaning to relatively ambiguous stimuli” (p. 358). Projection occurs when someone claims that his or her own unacceptable impulse is actually someone else’s. Because the feeling, thought, or wish is unacceptable to her, anxiety arises, and so the ego—often unconsciously—acts in a protective way by casting the impulse aside; at the same time the projection is used to explain the behavior of the other. For example, rather than A owning her feelings of hatred toward B, A may project those feelings onto B and claim that B hates her. In addition to projecting affect, we can also project instinctual aims or internal objects (Ahktar, 2009). For example, our desire to ignore another is projected as “He is ignoring me” or our identification with an overbearing mother is projected as “You’re my overbearing mother.” In these defensive positions, we recognize neither or own feelings and motivations nor those of others (Kramer-Moore, 2010). We cannot distinguish between the other person and what we have projected onto him or her.

Marvin and Willis (2003) describe how projection works in relationships: one person is the projector and the other is the screen. A significant other may have a trait that we frame as a projection, but what we see in our partner is also a part of us because of how we have learned to see things since our childhood.

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situation. Neurotic anxiety “arises from an unconscious fear that the libidinal impulses of the id will take control at an inopportune time. This type of anxiety is driven by a fear of punishment that will result from expressing the id’s desires without proper sublimation.” Moral anxiety “results from fear of violating moral or societal codes, moral anxiety appears as guilt or shame.” (VerWys). Retrieved from: http://www.rpi.edu/~verwyc/defmech.htm

10 Although Marvin and Willis are writing about lesbian relationships, the same principles can be adapted to other kinds of couples and non-romantic relationships.
For example, if you experience your inattentive partner as an abandoner, then you can be sure that deep within you there is an abandoned child and also (unacknowledged) an inner abandoner (a remnant that you have taken inside of the parent who abandoned you). It is that inner abandoner that you are ready to project onto your partner’s inattention. This projected abandoner is a part of you that you must recognize and ‘bring back to yourself’ in order to be whole. When you bring these projected parts back inside yourself, you often discover a gift that you would not have encountered otherwise. Usually that gift is a surprising increase in inner strength and confidence! You no longer feel weakened by the loss of energy that the projection and its accompanying feelings of victimization required! (p. 52)

In Klein’s (1946) concept of projective identification, we project split-off parts of ourselves onto an external object. We manipulate the target of our projection so she acts out the disowned aspects of ourselves. Thus, it is more interpersonal than projection, but both defenses have dual roles: to protect us from “aggressive self-representations,” and to permit “endangered good aspects . . . [to] be deposited onto others for safe-keeping” (Akhtar, 2009, p. 224).

b. Object relations.

While Freud theorized that we are driven to fulfill our instinctual needs for aggression and pleasure, modern object relations theorists believe that we are driven by our need to relate to others (St. Clair, 2004). Our sense of relationship begins in infancy when we are in a symbiotic state with our caretaker. We cannot distinguish between ourselves (the self) and the caretaker (the object) in this boundary-less self-state
(Hamilton, 1988). Our developmental task is to slowly and safely differentiate our self from the object, a task the object facilitates. In this process we form internal objects, mental representations of the object/s that may have little correspondence to the person in reality (Du Gay, Evans, and Redman, 2000; St. Clair, 2004).

In object relations theory, an “object” can be the other person in a relationship or an object, place, or thing in which we invest considerable emotional energy—the child’s teddy bear or the adult’s alcohol, for example (Hamilton, 1988; Klee, 2000-2007). An external object refers to such a person, place or thing, while “an internal object is an idea, fantasy, or memory” of the external object (Hamilton, p.7).

As Hills (2005) describes it, object relations theorist Bollas (1987) “emphasizes the ways in which we can use a variety of externally existing, cultural, aesthetic objects to process, experience, and sustain aspects of our self” (p. 807). Bollas identified how various types of projective objects stimulate the projection of differing aspects of the self (Akhtar, 2009). For example, a fan may watch a performance of Dusty singing “If You Go Away” to process his or her unacknowledged sense of loss.

Melanie Klein (1948; 1952) theorized how through introjection and projection, good internal objects can aid our self-esteem and bad ones can lead to feelings of guilt and shame. These internalized objects can argue with each other, and with parts of the self, and affect our behavior. Object relations theorists see identity not in Eriksonian terms, but as a dialogue between our internalizations (Daniels, 2007). We lack a sense of identity in our youngest years, but in relating to others around us we incorporate parts of them as internal objects through which we eventually build a our personality:

The impact of early relationships is significant:
The blueprint of a self-structure is formed early in life out of our relationships with the objects (significant others, and parts of significant others) around us. Once formed, the blueprint can be modified, but our basic tendency is to seek out others (friends, spouses) who will reaffirm these early self-object relationships. It is as if in early childhood we create a script for a drama and then spend the rest of our lives seeking out others to play the parts. (Klee, 2000-2007, p. 1)

Caroline Marvin (personal communication, February 2, 2010) explained the concept in terms of couples’ therapy. She compared witnessing partners in conflict to simultaneously watching the two different films each had created and was focused upon. As individuals, we perceive and experience things differently because of our early object relations have imbedded in us stories with roles for ourselves and others. The residue of past relationships impacts our present ones: “in important relationships of grown-up life, people ‘find’ others who psychologically resemble their parents of childhood and treat them in the same ways” (Josselson, 2007, p.16).

1. Winnicott’s good enough mother.

Winnicott (1951) is well known for his concept of the “good-enough mother,” whose imperfect yet adequate responses facilitate the infant’s move toward accepting reality. She initially adapts almost totally to her infant’s needs. From this, the infant forms the illusion that she has created external reality (Winnicott, 1951). The infant believes that she is magically creating the breast that is presented to her for nourishment. The mother’s adaptation lessens as the baby learns to “account for failure of adaptation and to tolerate the results of frustration” (p. 156).

As St. Clair (2004) summarizes the process, the good enough mother:
adapts and changes according to the changing needs of her child, and the growing child’s dependence gradually decreases. . . . The mother successfully meets the infant’s spontaneous gestures. . . . This fosters the infant’s omnipotence, and the infant begins to believe in an external reality that appears as if by magic and behaves as if under his control. (pp. 70-71)

The baby then learns to “conjure up what is actually available,” fostered by the mother’s attunement to her, and then there is a “gradual letting go of omnipotence and the gradual disillusioning of the infant when she comes to recognize the illusory element and establishes contact with reality” (p. 71). This sense of omnipotence also gives the baby the “fantasy of self-care” (Turp, 2002, p. 19).

Winnicott (1960) believed the good enough mother’s holding or facilitating environment was the essential determinate of the infant’s psychological health. By the same token, a “mother’s inability to hold the child physically and psychologically, or to adapt to its needs, is, in Winnicott’s view, the mainspring of the child’s later difficulties in relating to and using those around him or her in a satisfactory and creative way” (Bass, 1992, p. 164). This can result in a traumatic effect, not from a single incident, but from “the piercing effect of a thousand small pinpricks”—“minor impingements”—“that break through the individual’s capacity to negotiate and make sense of what is happening” (Turp, 2002, p. 16). This kind of insufficient caretaking can lead to the overdevelopment of what Winnicott termed “the false self,” characterized by relationship difficulties and “feelings of emptiness, falseness, low self-esteem, depression and deep loneliness” (Frank-Schwebel, 2002, p. 194). The false self develops when the infant’s spontaneous (true) gestures are not met with good enough responses—when the caretaker cannot
mirror the child as he or she really is, the false self comes in to protect the true self and responds to way he or she imagines the caretaker expects (Warja, 1999; Winnicott, 1960). As I discuss later in this chapter, such lack of mirroring from both caretakers and society at large has serious consequences for gay and lesbian development, and may also help account for the importance of fan-objects for these populations.

Fox (2008) explains that self-holding, which the infant develops from good-enough mothering, is a developmental achievement; without it the individual always needs something or someone to hold him or herself—psychotic fantasies, a bizarre religion, or a person. The same holds true for mirroring: if we are provided with enough mirroring from our caretaker, we can learn to mirror ourselves and regulate our own self-esteem, but we cannot provide ourselves with esteem unless we first are esteemed by others (Fox, 2008).

D.W. Winnicott believed aggression is “the basis for healthy human development” (Cohen, 2005, p. 53), and helps achieve object constancy. Mahler, Pine and Bergman (1975) explain that object constancy includes both the capacity to appreciate that an object has a purpose other than meeting our needs, as well as “the capacity to recognize and tolerate loving and hostile feelings toward the same object” (Daniels, 2007, p. 2), as discussed above. This comes from the child internalizing a sense of the caretaker to calm herself when the mother is away (Daniels, p. 6). The infant needs to be able to physically rage against her caretaker without the mother abandoning the child or striking back physically or emotionally. “Being at liberty to exercise one’s own aggression in the fullest, and seeing the world survives it” allows a baby to feel a deeper sense of being loved (Cohen, 2005, p. 53). Good enough mothers let their children
know “the world would bear us in all our fiery spirit and vigor” (Cohen, 2005, p. 53). Thus, anything or anyone that can hold all of ourselves can be a good enough space in which to advance our self-growth.

In her phenomenological study, Josselson (1992) identified eight dimensions of relatedness, one of which is “holding”—a concept originating from Winnicott’s (1951; 1965; 1975) description of the good enough mother who provides a secure environment for the child’s growth and exploration without allowing it to overwhelm the child. It also calls forth Bion’s concept of the mother serving as a” container”—a place where the child can safely express its full range of feelings, and where its destructiveness can be managed (Akhtar, 2009). Marvin and Willis (2003) draw upon the container metaphor in their work with lesbian couples: The container metaphorically represents the relationship as a safe space where conflicts can be held and “alchemically” transformed. The holding environment may also be provided by groups of people or places, as we mature. Therapists can serve the same function of providing a safe space for clients to explore frightening material, and in this case holding provides hope for change (Josselson, 1992). Holding is just one example of the relational dimensions Josselson describes that proved useful in my understanding of fandom.

2. Winnicott’s transitional space; transitional object.

What Winnicott (1953; 1971) variously termed “potential space,” “transitional space,” “third area,” or “intermediate area” of experience is made available to the infant through the good enough mother’s holding environment. It is an area of the child’s mind in which reality and illusion coexist; she experiences both connectedness to and separateness from the caretaker as she develops the capacity to discover and adapt to
reality. Imagination, paradox, creativity, and play emerge from potential space, and our larger cultural experiences are located here as well.

Winnicott (1951) refers to those things arising from transitional space which can help the infant achieve autonomy and object constancy as transitional objects, such as a favorite blanket; “transitional phenomena . . . behaviors—repetitive actions like rocking, or fantasies, . . . serve the same function” (Daniels, 2007, p. 5). Winnicott explains, “It is not the object, of course, that is transitional. The object represents the infant’s transition from a state of being merged with the mother to a state of being in relation to the mother as something outside and separate” (p. 159). Winnicott thus distinguishes between the internal object, as conceived by Klein, and the transitional object. The internal object is a “mental concept” whereas the transitional object is a “possession”—but not an external object (Winnicott, p. 155).

Fox (2008) explains the two types of transitional object. Earlier in development it can be a sound, or a visual, or a mental image or concept that brings about a feeling that helps the baby stay in contact with the mother. A blanket representing the mother is a common transitional object, as it soothes the child’s anxiety and helps her to sleep. As the child projects mommy onto the blanket, it gives the child a sense of agency she does not otherwise experience; she learns she can take the blanket or leave it behind. The child can yell at the blanket, but it still holds her. A later and more relational type of transitional object is the teddy bear. The child plays the role of mommy and projects herself onto the teddy bear. This identification with the caretaker is a developmental achievement, an affective leap in the use of the imagination.
We use transitional objects and phenomena all our lives. Therapy, where the client and therapist’s worlds overlap, can serve as a transitional space in which we learn to become more ourselves and to be alone. The client learns from the “good enough therapist” that she can destroy the therapist, yet he is still not destroyed. The therapist thus shows the client that he can tolerate her to be more of herself (Fox, 2008). Kramer (1995) explains that classical “music acts like what psychoanalysis calls a transitional object, an object, that, charged with charisma, temporarily crosses, blurs, and may even dissolve the listeners’ ego boundaries” (p. 55). Similarly, Warja (1999) argues that “the ability of music to hold, shape, and structure inner experiences” is similar to the role of the good enough mother (p. 172). Music that we connect with in a deep way “is an expression of the true self” (p. 173).

As Hills (2002) notes, such “emotional attachments within culture, or ‘little madesses,’ continue throughout our lives as a way of maintaining mental/psychical health” (p. 112). Winnicott (1971) describes the transitional space where we create these “little madesses” as being located between internal and external, between me and not me (p. 41). Winnicott (1951) assumes that “the task of reality-acceptance is never completed, that no human being is free from the strain of relating inner and outer reality, and that relief from this strain is provided by an intermediate area of experience which is not challenged (arts, religion, etc.)” (p. 158).

The application of this theory to fan-objects is illustrated in Dosamantes-Beaudry’s (2002) analysis of Frida Kahlo:

Cultural icons . . . have the capacity to serve as repositories for the admirers’ projections while simultaneously retaining their separate and independent identity
as objects. A cultural icon is at once a symbol created by the believer and an object that possesses its own separate, concrete, immutable, enigmatic integrity. A cultural icon possesses vivid sensory and kinetic qualities. During times of conflict it serves to comfort and soothe the believer. (p. 9)

Cultural icons as transitional objects . . . possess certain unique characteristics, including the capacity to soothe our existential anxiety when facing critical life transitions . . . . Though in adulthood the illusory objects we create may assume more complex forms [than in childhood], they are shaped by the idealizations, identifications, an ideational principles we construct and internalize while interacting with valued others. (p. 11)

Another illustration of transitional experience is playing—as children or adults—“a realm in which we can pretend in a real way” (Josselson, 2007, p. 9). Josselson (2007) describes “this place of illusion—[as] the capacity to invest physical objects or other people with qualities that derive from our inner world” (p. 8). “We create illusions by interpreting other people’s behavior, putting a gloss of meaning on what they do by how we frame it to ourselves. We construct stories about the other, making sense of their behavior along the lines that we need to see them” (Josselson, 2007, p. 13). Fans playing with fan-objects operate on the same principle. As I discovered in conducting my autoethnography, we can make the fan-object the cool person we want to be or just can’t see in ourselves; we can have her give voice to what was silenced within us; we can make her similar to us to bring us closer together; we can have her bear the pain we cannot tolerate. As Cashmore (2006) notes, we even enhance our mediated knowledge of celebrities:
We decide on how to interpret what is, after all, limited information about celebrities rather as we might choose how to watch a DVD of a film: we can change the sequence of scenes, view one part repeatedly, slow down or freeze passages, explore how the special fx [effects] were achieved, or just watch outtakes. In other words, celebrities aren’t just there; we create them. (pp. 80-81)


Bollas (1987) describes the holding environment in which the good enough mother facilitates the infant’s growing ability to negotiate the external world as “a process that is identified with cumulative internal and external transformations” (p. 14). He identifies the mother as the transformational object we continue to seek in our adult quest for transformation. Through cultural encounters with religion, art, advertising, and so on, we “remember not cognitively but existentially—through intense affective experience—a relationship which was identified with cumulative transformational experiences of the self” (p. 17). Whether through viewing a painting, reading a poem, listening to a sonata, or admiring a sunset, we experience oneness with the object that unconsciously reminds us of our relationship with our first object—the mother. Based upon Bollas’s and Winnicott’s ideas, Goodwin (2010) argues that “literature, and poetry in particular, can function as a linguistic holding environment that encourages in a reader a more creative response to an issue than one might be able to achieve in other modes of discourse” which “might open up a potential space between text and reader within which questions of intimacy can be productively explored” (p. 34). The same may hold true of music for music fans.
c. Self psychology; mirroring.

The branch of object relations called self psychology, developed by Heinz Kohut, labels the result of not good enough mothering narcissism. Kohut (1977) believed narcissism became pathological as a result of care-takers not providing an “empathic response to the child’s needs to be mirrored and to find a target for idealization. . . . The chronic nonresponsiveness . . . keeps the child from building up the psychic structures capable of dealing with anxiety [and] that regulate tension and tame affects” (p. 187). The child with insufficient bonding to the caretaker can begin a lifelong pattern of seeking it elsewhere. The immature object relationship means narcissists often lack object constancy; they are unable to trust that others “are benign, reliable, helpful, constant, predictable, and trustworthy” (Vaknin, 1997-2008, p. 2). Thus, because she cannot relate to actual people, “the narcissist invents and molds substitute-objects or surrogate-objects [referred to in previous discussion as internal objects]. These are mental representations . . . [that] have little or nothing to do with reality. . . . They respond to the narcissist’s needs and fears and do not correspond to the person they purport to stand for” (Vaknin, 1997-2008, p. 2).

The process we use to attain the goal of adult autonomy is called separation-individuation. However, “if the infant fails to achieve object constancy and ‘identity formation’ (a blueprint for an identity or personality)” (Klee, 2000-2007, p. 1), trauma can delay emotional development, leaving the child mired in identity diffusion lacking the ego strength needed for authentic relationships (Klee, 2000-2007, p. 1).

Kohut’s analysis may be what Sandvoss (2005) drew upon to describe how fan-objects serve as a mirror for fans’ needs. Sandvoss describes this narcissistic mirroring
as devoid of the potential for psychological growth. However, if we allow that fans’ relationships with fan-objects can grow into a therapeutic one, Kohut’s model reveals how this narcissism is not necessarily an end game. The relationship may function similarly to psychotherapy whose goal is to provide what Winnicott termed a holding environment within which the patient is able to resolve these destructive developmental impasses and move away from their dependence needs toward autonomy and full functioning adulthood” (Klee, 2000-2007, p. 2). Kohut’s revisioning of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy required what he described as an “empathically attuned” therapist attending to the client’s developmental needs, such as “idealizing, mirroring, and twinship (or ‘alter ego’) needs” to replace unhealthy narcissism with healthy narcissism

(Klee, 2000-2007, p. 2).

As I discussed earlier, the lack of media role models for gay and lesbian youth results in a symbolic annihilation of their sexual identity. This theory is examined on a psychological basis by Buloff and Osterman (1995) who argue that Kohut’s concept of mirroring is central to understanding lesbian development. The lesbian does not see herself reflected in society; rather, she is faced with pathological distortions, such as “perverse, sinful, immoral, infantile, arrested, inadequate”—or even no reflection at all, which leads her to feel invisible (p. 95). Even with a good enough mother and empathically attuned mirroring mother, a lesbian faces “the powerful challenges of self-

11 “Healthy narcissism is the appearance of a strong, vital, cohesive self striving with ambition and ideals toward the full realization of a person's skills and talents. Healthy drives for growth possess a greater sense of urgency and strength than unhealthy drives to repeat the past. . . . [Unhealthy] narcissism is the appearance of a weak, vulnerable self attempting to maintain self-cohesion and bolster self-esteem, through passive aggressive styles that often focus more on tearing down others than on building up the self.” Retrieved from: http://www.candleinthedark.com/kohut.html
acceptance in a world devoid of optimally responsive selfobject experiences”\textsuperscript{12} (p. 97). Similarly Gonsiorek and Rudolph (1991) argue that because of the lack of mirroring available for most gay and lesbian youth, their sexual identity itself becomes a narcissistic wound: “The self is prone to fragmentation, enfeeblement and disharmony,” only healed by coming out to “restore integrity and functioning to the damaged self” (p. 71).

Buloff and Osterman (1995) argue that the challenges of growing up not-straight are unique: “Although all minorities experience oppression, are stigmatized, and are bereft of societal mirrors, gay and lesbian people are unique in that they cannot look at their families and see themselves reflected back” (Buloff & Osterman, 1995, p. 97). Lesbians, whose feelings of same-sex attraction were not mirrored by caretakers or society, learn as children that it is unsafe to think and feel in ways that are viewed as aberrant; as adults they often silence themselves rather than risk misunderstanding or rejection. In therapy, what is sometimes labeled as immature behavior or repression is the lesbian client’s efforts “to address and master critical developmental processes that had not been supported at the phase-appropriate time” (p. 99), as noted earlier in the discussion of how heterosexism and homophobia can lead to developmental lag or delay (Grace, 1992). Substance abuse in gay men and lesbians who seek counseling, may serve to mimics the dissociation they developed in childhood to compensate for the lack of parental mirroring (Cabaj, 1995). What may be understood in Winicottian terms as the lesbian or gay client’s false self serves as an adaptive attempt to survive without empathy and mirroring. To repair their sense of self, they seek these developmental goals in the

\textsuperscript{12} A caregiver’s contribution to “a stable, positively toned self of self” (Kohut, 1977, p. 166) is critical to affective experience needed to organize self-experience (Stolorow, Brandchaft, & Atwood, 1987).
self-object of the therapist (Buloff & Osterman; Gonsiorek & Rudolph, 1991). The same possibilities for empathic mirroring for not-straight fans are available through the fan-object.

d. Percept orientation.

Percept orientation, developed by John and Joyce Weir, is also useful in describing the projective processes fans use. It shares “self-differentiation” (Mix, 2006, p. 276) as a goal with object relations, although it arose not from the psychoanalytic tradition but from the humanistic psychology movement of Maslow and Rogers. Percept orientation also owes a debt to Gestalt perception theory\(^{13}\) and the concept of transference\(^{14}\) in psychoanalysis. Based upon these theories, the Weirs developed their “radically innovative” percept training in the second half of the twentieth century. John Weir formulated the percept orientation theory of individual development, “an epistemology that challenges individuals to accept maximum responsibility for how they experience themselves in the world” (Mix, 2006, p. 278). Similar to object relations, percept orientation is based on the idea that we are not really interacting with a world "out there," but rather, with our inner world of perceptions, which we project and call "reality" (Eagle and Eagle, n.d.).

According to Jake and Hannah Eagle (n.d.) of the Percept Institute:

The Percept Orientation is a philosophy for living based on the idea that we are not really interacting with a world "out there," but rather, with our inner world of perceptions, which we project and call "reality." In this system, feelings follow

\(^{13}\) Gestalt perception theory stresses that we perceive patterns rather than separate parts.

\(^{14}\) In therapy, transference is the projection of childhood feelings about a parent onto the therapist. The client will see in the therapist what she needs to see, rather than who the person actually is.
Percepts. Therefore, any attempt to change feelings and behaviors is working at the level of effect, not cause. In Percept we don’t emphasize the goal of change as much as the process of integration. We think that an agenda of change stems from self-alienation and judgment. Implicit in this stance is the idea that we are not okay the way we are.

Percept offers people a way to step out of the original structure in which they create their problems. If we accept that we are the only ones that make meaning for ourselves, then we give up power struggles, defending ourselves, attacking others, manipulating, and trying to get others to make us whole. We recognize that each of these responses is a reaction to thinking that someone else is trying to impose meaning on us. If we step outside of that illusory idea, we no longer will be reactive. By moving into Percept, we take responsibility for how we create meaning. This requires moving more deeply into ourselves, exploring and integrating what we find.

Joyce and John Weir together were responsible for developing the percept language that helped put the theory into practice. With percept language, personal responsibility is expressed, for example, as “I bore me” instead of “I am bored” or “I delight me with this” rather than “This is really delightful.” In percept language “projections, interpretations, and assumptions regarding others are my mirror of me. . . .” Instead of saying ‘When you came in I knew you were sad,’ in percept language one would say ‘When you came in, I had the you-in-me be sad’” (Proudfoot-Edgar, 1998, p. 3) or “I’m having you be the sad part of me.” Being responsible as the authors of our lives “requires we pay attention, not project, interpret, judge, or make assumptions about
each other” (Proudfoot-Edgar, p. 4). Through witnessing ourselves and others we can “be seen and heard as our unique selves” (Proudfoot-Edgar, p. 4).

**Figure 2.8 Perceiving Dusty**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional Language</th>
<th>Percept Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dusty’s life frightens me.</td>
<td>I frighten myself with Dusty’s life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dusty needs protection.</td>
<td>The Dusty part of me needs protection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I heard Dusty’s song, I knew she was sad.</td>
<td>When I heard Dusty’s song, I knew the Dusty-in-me was sad.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Young (2010)

Figure 2.8. illustrates my use of percept language to express my feelings as a fan feeling protective toward Dusty as my fan-object. As Figure 2.8. suggests, of fans we can ask, “Who are you having the fan-object be? What unrecognized or un-owned parts of yourself is the fan-object representing? And how can this help you to differentiate yourself from the fan object and accept and integrate those parts of yourself?”

**2.5 Kegan’s Constructive-Developmental Theory**

The great glory within my own field in the last twenty-five years has been the recognition that there are these qualitatively more complex psychological, mental, and spiritual landscapes that await us and that we are called to after the first twenty years of life. (Kegan, interviewed by Debold, 2002, p. 1)

Robert Kegan (1994) identifies his theory of growth or transformation as constructive-developmental, recognizing both that we construct our own reality and that
we “evolve through qualitatively different eras of increasing complexity according to regular principles of stability and change” (pp. 198-199). As constructive agents, we have the capacity to make meaning, but we are not always cognizant of the fact that we have created our world. For example, not taking responsibility for how our cultural lenses influence our construction of identity results in ethnocentrism: Like the “Ugly American,” “what is real to him is what is familiar to him” (p. 207). Kegan believes that challenges to our constructed reality—Freud’s reality principle and Piaget’s accommodative activity—represent our best opportunity for change.

In Kegan’s theory, identity comes from epistemological knowing. The root of meaning-making is the subject-object relationship. As we mature to a new stage of identity development and social development, we become able to interrogate the premises upon which our prior stage of identity was based. What was previously embedded as part of our identity (or “subject”) we can now see as “object”—something apart from us, and therefore something we can safely analyze and criticize (Dombeck, 2007a). What is object “we can reflect on, handle, look at, be responsible for, relate to each other, take control of, internalize, assimilate, or otherwise operate on” (Kegan, 1994, p. 32). I have outlined Kegan’s five primary stages in Figure 2.9: Kegan’s Stages of Development: Subject Becomes Object.

In the initial (“Incorporative”) stage (not illustrated), we do not sense ourselves as individuals. We are governed by our hungers or impulses. In the “Impulsive Stage,” we have become aware of our impulses and identify ourselves as the gratification of our needs. The next stage is dubbed “Imperial” because when we are here we think like egocentric kings or queens; while our sense of identity comes from their own needs, we
have not developed the understanding that others have needs that should also be considered. In the “Interpersonal Stage,” as the name suggests, we now understand that others also have needs, so we are capable of acting out of mutuality, and identify ourselves in terms of our relationships. In the “Institutional Stage” we are able to think more abstractly and consider not just mutual interests but also the larger principle of the common good. (Dombeck, 2007a). In Kegan’s (1994) later work he describes an additional “Inter-individual stage” in which we develop “a self that is able to appreciate multiple and conflicting value systems without being crushed by their incompatible demands; a self that decides on its own what values it will venerate and which it will disregard rather than capitulate to those values it happens to have been raised with” (Dombeck, 2007a).

| Figure 2.9  Kegan’s Stages of Development: Subject Becomes Object |
|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Subject           | Object            |
| Stage 1: Impulsive| I am my impulses  | -------           |
| Stage 2: Imperial | I am my needs     | I have my impulses|
| Stage 3: Interpersonal | I am responsible to others | I have my needs |
| Stage 4: Self- Authoring | I am what I create | I have my responsibilities to others |
| Stage 5: Inter-individual | I am movement through | I have my creation of authorship different value systems identity and ideology |

Young (2010)
I must provide two caveats before discussing Kegan’s stages further. First, how we organize our experience, not the content of our experience, distinguishes one stage from another (Love & Guthrie, 1999, p. 67). For example, if the way the subject presents himself illustrates he is looking for approval from others, that is the important data as opposed to any statement he makes about his own self-sufficiency (Lahey, Souvaine, Kegan, Goodman, & Felix, 1988). Secondly Kegan’s stages are constructions and do not describe how any particular individual makes meaning of her life (Eriksen, 2008). McAuliffe and Eriksen (1999) explain that much of meaning-making depends upon context and that stages describe a tendency to construct meaning in particular situations.

As with object relations theories and percept orientation, maturation in Kegan’s constructive-developmental theory is “the process of becoming progressively less subjective” (Dombeck, 2007b). Turning subject to object, we can “‘have’ . . . rather than ‘be had’ by” what we were enmeshed with before (Kegan, 1994, p. 34). As we become reflexive about our subjectivity—as each progressive subject becomes object—we are less entrapped by it. Less entrapment means less unconscious projection of our traits onto others. Our progressive differentiation need not mean distancing ourselves from human connection. Just the opposite; as Kegan (1994) argues: “the capacity to take a more differentiated position can permit us to move closer to another” (p. 222). He compares this to Virginia Woolf’s metaphor of killing “the Angel in the House”—the accommodating person she had been—in order to stake her claim to write.

The move from one stage to another is a complicated process. When parents want their teenagers to act differently, for example, they really want them to feel differently, which means they must know differently. They really want the adolescent to change the
way he thinks—to make different meaning of his experience—to construct it in a different way (Kegan, 1994). To move from one way of constructing our experience to another, the teenager—indeed anyone—requires both challenge and support. Kegan (1994) argues that in education in particular, we are expert at challenging youth, but weak at supporting them; in our culture there is “a shameful lack of the sympathetic coaching appropriate to the gradual outgrowing of a way of knowing the world” (p. 43). Here Kegan’s theory draws upon concepts from Winnicott’s object relations work. This support and coaching provides a provisional or holding environment to meet the learner where he is. Peers with whom the adolescent identifies can serve as transitional objects—with elements of his old way of constructing reality and his new (Kegan, 1994).

One natural source of this facilitation [holding environment] normally is a new kind of peer whom most youth find in adolescence. Whether these are Sullivan’s ‘chum relationships’ or involve a more unilateral fascination with someone deemed especially admirable, such relationships, by virtue of the individual’s identification with the other, are facilitators of a kind of trick nature plays on the second order of consciousness, for it must seem to one at first as if no view separate from one’s own has ‘really’ gotten inside. But the other-who-is-just-like-the-self is a ‘transitional object,’ both part of the old way of knowing and part of the new. (Kegan, 1994, pp. 43-44)

These stages are not age-dependent. Although many adolescents struggle moving from Stage 2 to Stage 3, and adults from Stage 3 to Stage 4, a significant number of adults remain at Stage 3, and even Stage 2 (Kegan, 1994). However, because the demands of our pluralistic society compete for our loyalty and attention, even a Stage 3
orientation of “being shaped by our surroundings is actually insufficient to handle modern life. Rather, we are called on to . . . become the writer of a reality that we then are faithful to” (Kegan, interviewed by Debold, 2002, p. 2). In Kegan’s terms, Stage 4 is self-authorship and “incorporates the ideas of self-regulation, identity, autonomy, and individuation, as opposed to relying on others to frame the problems or determine whether things are going acceptably well” (Love & Guthrie, 1999). Here the individual can have a “relationship to the relationship” (Kegan, 1994, p. 92). For example, if $X$ were to understand that his fear of $Y$ was the source of dissatisfaction, $X$ could take responsibility for that fear—explore ways to understand and work through that fear—rather than deciding to leave the relationship with $Y$. In stage 4, $X$ would be capable of utilizing the Weirs’ percept language discussed earlier to gain insight into his projective processes. In the example above, to explore his fearfulness, $X$ could ask himself what part of himself was he having $Y$ be, when he felt afraid of $Y$.

Identity development of fans over the lifespan may be described in part by the movement from one stage to another. For example, the fan–object may move from a position of subject to object in the fan’s meaning-making system. Fan-object as subject might help explain fans’ uncritical view of their idols, and fan-object as subject would allow the fan to be less sensitive about her idol. This process could also allow the fan to differentiate and be less sensitive about her own issues.

Just as peers are important elements in the holding environment (Love & Guthrie, 1999), icons/celebrities/stars can serve this function also—welcoming one way of thinking while laying the groundwork for its undoing. In other words, they can establish a rapport at the most basic level of understanding—meeting the individual where he is
As development continues across the lifespan, for some adults, icons/celebrities/stars serve a similar function: as transitional objects in a holding environment, helping us prepare to grow from one stage to another. Kegan (1994) argues that in order to move from one stage to another, a bridge must be secured to each side. We need to be challenged to mature, but we must be met with understanding where we are. The mirroring that an icon can provide for her fans can hold them compassionately and give them courage to separate when they are ready.

2.6 Conclusion

Projective psychologies, as I have defined them—the defense mechanism of projection, aspects of object relations theories, and percept orientation—offer a clear pathway to analyzing fans’ relationships to fan-objects and their use of fan-texts. If identity is appreciated as lifelong work, fan-objects can be crucial to how we make sense of ourselves from adolescence through adulthood. If identity work is meaning-making, whereby we become less subjective, projective processes with fan-objects can serve as an important avenue for growth.

Fans’ propensity for appropriating what they need from fan-objects is illustrated in the research and theory of identity development, fan studies, and projective psychology. For not-straight fans, who have historically lacked role models and support, their creative use of bricolage and their attachment to a fan-object can play a special and crucial role in identity development—their sense of who they are and where they belong in the world. They may find in their divas and icons narratives that convey their suffering and their aspirations. Fan-objects may function as models, mothers, or mirrors, and play different roles for different fans at different times of their lives. Relational
theories of development, Kegan’s constructive-developmental theory, object relations, and self-psychology all teach that we cannot individuate without first forming a sufficient connection, yet we cannot form healthy adult relationships without individuation. For some, the fan-object may help provide the connection needed to consolidate an individual’s identity that in turn allows her to connect authentically with others. Although the experience of each fan is unique, there is potential aplenty, with the ideal fan-object match, for the fan’s life to be transformed both in terms of how she understands and cares for herself and how she relates to others.
Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Topic and Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate the role (value/meaning/function) of popular singer Dusty Springfield and her music in the identity development of her not-straight fans. My unexpected journey with a dead pop star was instrumental in healing wounds of trauma and isolation that I experienced as a lesbian and as an emotionally vulnerable person virtually my entire life. As an educational researcher interested in the over-looked ways in which people form and sustain their identities, I was led to question how such a profound experience actually occurred for me and whether it occurs for others: how does attachment to a singer’s life and songs further one’s personal growth? What does it mean and how does it mean what it means? My initial interest in pursuing this topic also led me to survey other Dusty Springfield fans who reported that their fandom was a life-altering experience (Young, 2008a; Young 2008b). These findings motivated me to seek to understand yet more about the phenomenon of this life alteration, specifically, if and how fandom can facilitate the development of who we are and how we understand our place in the world, thereby enhancing our self-esteem and our relationships.

Dusty Springfield also makes an interesting “fan-object” for study because so little research has been done into the appeal of not-straight icons to both male and female not-straight fans. Randall (2009) relates both cases of a gay and lesbian fans of Dusty Springfield, along with cases of straight fans. Dusty’s backing singer Simon Bell acknowledges the lure of Dusty’s ballads for “a certain kind of gay man—or woman”

15 The object of a fan’s devotion. This and other relevant terms are explained in the Key Terms Defined section.
(Cross, 1999). However, more commonly, analysis of Dusty and other gay and lesbian icons focuses on the distinct conventions of gay, lesbian, or queer fandom (Dyer, 2004; Smith, 1999; Jenkins, 2003; Farmer, 2003; 2005).

3.2 Anticipated Contribution to the Field of Educational Studies

I hope my work will inspire further research into the importance of the relationships between fan-objects and not-straight identity development, as well as practical applications in rethinking curriculum development in fields such as music and social sciences, as well as support services, such as counseling for students from adolescence to adulthood. In this manner, I hope and believe that marginalized not-straight people, who seldom see ourselves mirrored in popular culture, can enlighten educators and counselors to the value in our “relationships” with fan-objects, which otherwise may be seen as exercises in immature narcissism. Presenting the stories of everyday people whose sexual and fan identities do not fit into hegemonic narratives of how we develop and find meaning in our lives is critical to better understanding this population. As Langellier (2001) explains, the individual stories of “the ordinary, the marginalized, and the muted” help them “make sense of experience, claim identities, and ‘get a life’ by telling and writing their stories” (p. 700). With the potential to enlighten those who read and listen, they also hold great value.

Considering educational studies as an interdisciplinary field, I hope my study will contribute to how theories from fan studies, identity development, and projective psychologies can be integrated to advance an understanding of how fan/fan-object attachment functions. Furthermore, it will add to the current debate in fan studies concerning whether the highly personalized self-reflective experience of fandom is a
“mirror of consumption” (Sandvoss, 2005) or, as Hills (2007) states, and as my data suggests, fandom has a “powerfully and vitally self-transformative dimension . . . where people feel, for the first time, that a particular text speaks to them, moves them, provokes them in some new way, perhaps unlocking a previously unheard part of their creative potential” (Hills, 2007, p. 151).

3.3 Key Terms Defined

Sexual orientation is not a singular or fixed process (Ritter & Terndrup, 2002), as illustrated through Klein’s (1993) six variables individuals use to describe themselves in the past, in the present, and ideally: sexual attraction, sexual behavior, sexual fantasies, emotional preference, social preference, hetero/homo lifestyle, and self-identification.

By not-straight fans, I mean those who do not currently describe themselves as exclusively heterosexual in any of the variables above. This group includes those whose past or present self-labels of sexual identity include gay (male or female), bent (British slang for gay), queer, genderqueer (not exclusively gay, but not identifying as bisexual), gay, and lesbian, as well as those who reject any labels of sexual orientation. As Dusty said of her own sexual identity: “It's other people who want you to be something or other—this or that. I'm none of the above” (Hoerburger, 1995).

By fans, I mean those who describe themselves as Dusty fans for a period of at least two years and who have made a significant investment of time in Dusty fan activities, e.g. engaging in fan-texts (especially her music), participating in an online Dusty community, engaging in creative projects related to Dusty, participating in fan celebrations, and purchasing/collecting items related to Dusty and her music. By fan-object, I mean the object of a fan’s devotion.
Josselson’s (1996) definition of identity provides a good summary of how I use the term:

Identity is the ultimate act of creativity—it is what we make of ourselves. In forming and sustaining our identity, we build a bridge between who we feel ourselves to be internally and who we are recognized as being by our social world. When we have a secure sense of our identity, we take ourselves for granted as being who we are. We feel at home in ourselves and in our world, and have an inner experience of coherence and purpose. (p. 27)

Identity development can be defined in various ways: Erikson’s psychosocial model, relational models of identity development, postmodern or queer identity development (Foucault, 1981; Butler, 1990), sexual identity development, late modern and postmodern identity sensibilities (Lifton, 1993; Hall, 1995) narratives of identity, and the meaning-making process whereby we become less subjective and therefore obtain a clearer sense of ourselves and others (Kegan, 1994). I drew upon a variety of these constructs in interpreting my data.

3.4 Methodological approaches

Because of my involvement in an international Dusty Springfield fan community and the relationships I formed with others there, I considered conducting a culture-focused ethnographic study16. In the end, I realized that my interest was not in the broader customs and practices of the group, but in the meaning of the Dusty experience for individual fans. I also considered using only phenomenology or case study as my methodology, but concluded a combination of phenomenology and collective case study

16 The study of a cultural system, with fieldwork as the primary method of gathering data (Whitehead, 2004).
would be best suited for my research. While purists believe researchers should follow only one of the established methodologies, it has become more common to combine approaches—both old and new—to best suit the purpose of a research project (Meadows, Verdi, and Crabtree, 2003). As Quinn (2010) asserts, methodological traditions should not be viewed as canon, but as a “repertoire” from which students can “adapt and invent methods” suitable for their particular research projects (p. 255).

The methodologies I chose represent the “narrative turn” from post-positivism, by giving in-depth attention to understanding the meaning of individuals’ lives (Riessman, 2005). These multi-method qualitative approaches are also postmodern, in that they do not privilege a single way of knowing (Wall, 2006). They do not seek to produce an abstract universal truth, which, as Stivers (1993) notes, is actually a fantasy of dominating others.

Phenomenology’s underlying principle is that for the purposes of understanding meaning, reality’s importance is primarily in how individuals perceive it (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). In searching for the meaning of participants’ experience, it examines how they demonstrate it and how they live it (Delamont, 2002). In phenomenological methodology, primarily interview-based, the researcher pays close attention to interviewees’ significant statements and meaning-making processes in order to compose a description of the essence of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Douglass and Moustakas (1985) argue that traditional phenomenology objectifies individuals by describing them in analytical terms, but what Willis (2004) terms “empathetic phenomenology” seeks to understand the phenomenon’s significance for individuals. Further, empathetic phenomenology’s concern with the subjective meaning
of the experience of the participants and its emphasis on bringing attention to those cultures which have not been appreciated by more powerful groups in society (Willis) have both been major foci of my research. Phenomenological research also requires “reduction” or “bracketing,” in which the researcher sets aside “common sense and scientific foreknowledge” relative to the phenomena while he conducts research to reveal its essence (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 37).

Moustakas (1990) advocates that researchers seek out cases to expand upon the individual perspective they gain from heuristic research. Thus, the case study became my second primary methodology. It is characterized by what Geertz (1973) refers to as “thick description”—detailed depictions of the individual cases—and an analysis of the data for patterns, issues, or themes (Wolcott, 1995). In the study, the researcher’s goal is to unearth the more subtle and latent aspects of the phenomenon that might not be explored as fully via other research methodologies, as well as to investigate the ways important aspects of a phenomenon interact with each other (Berg, 2007). I chose to conduct case studies because they best explore how individuals make sense of the phenomenon; that is, how people understand the world around them, how they interpret these stimuli, as well as their own acts, and how they interface with others and resolve issues (Berg, 2007). I included four case studies, because multiple cases afford the opportunity for deeper understanding (Berg, 2007).

My use of empathetic phenomenology (Willis, 2004) and case studies is similar to the emerging methodology of interpretative phenomenological analysis or IPA (Gibbs, 2010). This form of research draws upon three theoretical traditions: phenomenology, hermeneutics (interpretation), and symbolic-interactionism—which maintain the
centrality of individually derived meaning subject to interpretation via social interaction (Gibbs, 2010). However, because of its exclusive use in the discipline of psychology, IPA is framed as a response to other methodologies in that field (Reid, Flowers, and Larkin, 2005), and thus did not seem appropriate as the single methodology for educational studies.

3.5 Data Collection

a. Field entry.

Negotiating entry into my field was one of the easier tasks in my research, as I am a Dusty fan myself and co-founder of the Dusty website and fan forum “Let’s Talk Dusty!” Because of my standing in the Dusty fan community and identity as a Dusty fan researcher, I was not required to negotiate questions of credibility as a fan, but this did not necessarily establish my credibility as a researcher. I had to negotiate my distance with fans who were known to me (and I to them), so that it was neither falsely artificial nor inappropriately intimate. I had no fear of “going native” (Glesne, 2006), as I already was “native.” I discuss these issues in more depth in Ethical Considerations.

b. Methods of data collection:

1. Sampling.

I used “purposive samples” (Berg, 2007, p. 42) to gather data. I relied upon my insider knowledge as an active Dusty fan and forum moderator to identify potential cases. I selected fans from the forum who appeared to possess an intense attachment to Dusty—fans who, in fact, stated that Dusty had changed their lives. In order to do this, I sought out fans who had compelling stories to tell (Cresswell, 1998; Glesne, 2006), and whose stories were different in important ways from each other’s and from my own.
Because Dusty’s primary fan-base is in the United Kingdom, I wanted to include British as well as American fans. And because I wanted to explore identity as an ongoing developmental task, I selected fans of different ages. Considering male and female fans accomplished my goal of including a variety of not-straight fans. While the predominance of middle and upper-middle class White Dusty fans in the “convenience sample” available for my study meant that my sample would not be as diverse in race and class as I wished, I was able to locate one mixed-race fan who grew up in poverty.

Delamont (2002) notes that phenomenological researchers generally interview from a half dozen to two dozen people. In collective case studies, fewer people are interviewed. I conducted interviews of two-three hours each with four not-straight fans from the US and UK, two males and two females, between the ages of 20 and 60. (These included my pilot study interviews and follow-up interviews of two of these fans.) Interviews of the two additional fans, and further interviews of the pilot study fans, were conducted in person when possible and otherwise via e-mail and instant messaging.

2. Interviews.

Interviews are a primary source of data gathering for case studies (Creswell, 1998). They were also an important basis for my research, as the most traditional way of collecting data for studies that aim to understand meaning and experience (Creswell, 1998). As Quinn (2010) describes it, Linde (1993) argues that interviews are valid data because in them people reveal themselves as naturally as they do elsewhere. In all, they offer “unique” and “privileged access” to participants’ lived experience (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p. 29). “Interviews are not the mythical, neutral tools envisioned by survey research” (Fontana and Fray, 2001, p. 663). They are interactions where meaning
is negotiated (Fontana and Fray). Gubrium and Holstein (1998) consider interviews as narratives created by participants to achieve coherence in their stories. I conducted the interviews in depth, for as Moustakas (1994) explains regarding phenomenology, to understand phenomenon, I needed to speak to those who experience it, encouraging them “to express, explore, and explicate” what that experience means (p. 26). To do this, I was careful to establish a milieu of frankness and trust to encourage the interviewees to freely disclose their experience and perceptions.

Because I knew each fan in my study, I was able to capitalize on the dyadic connection between interviewer and interviewee (Quinn, 2010). Keeping in mind that their stories were more than factual expressions of their fandom, but also constructions and rationales for their identity and because I too am a fan, I was well-situated to listen to their stories with sensitivity. Another advantage of being a fellow not-straight Dusty fan was that we could take for granted some shared knowledge, i.e. “the contextual nature of specific referents” (Fontana and Fray, 2001, p. 660).

I began with what Patton (1982) calls the “general interview guide” approach in which general questions and issues to explore are predetermined; but within these guidelines, I had the freedom to pursue those questions that I anticipated would shed light on the topic. I settled upon a semi-structured or semi-standardized interview technique (Berg, 2007) that allowed me to decide upon a number of essential questions, yet adapt the order and wording of the questions to the individual being interviewed. I added different probes in different interviews to pursue their individual lines of thinking.
i. Interview questions.

Before interviewing each participant, I explained the purpose of the research and their right to privacy; then each participant read and signed the informed consent form. After I set forth the time parameters of the interview, I clarified that my role was not be so much that of a friend or fellow Dusty fan sharing experiences, as that of a researcher keen to learn about their own fandom by listening and asking questions. I noted that there would be no right or wrong answers, and that whatever they had to tell me about being a not-straight Dusty fan would be of interest to me as I explored this phenomenon. I stressed that I wanted them to explain how they interpreted their own experience (Patton, 1982), and that there were no restrictions about the content or method of their responding. I reminded them that they could end the interview at any time.

Whenever possible in asking follow-up questions, I used the interviewees’ own distinctive wording, to increase the likelihood that they would feel understood (Patton, 1982, p. 170), and probed for specific, nuanced descriptions rather than generalizations (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). I also used “echoing” (Berg, 2007, p. 128) to let the interviewees know I was listening carefully. I did my best to adapt my timing to the participants’ style of speaking, to maximize the space wherein they could tell their stories.

I asked all interviewees the following questions. Below each question I explain its rationale.

1. How did you become a Dusty fan?

   This question seeks to elicit a narrative from the participants. It also solicits a before-and-after response, in suggesting that they describe
themselves in pre-Dusty-fandom, which might reveal a need, or receptivity they had to becoming a Dusty fan. It also invites them to address if/how being a fan has altered them.

2. What about Dusty—her music, her performances, her life, her persona—draws you in? Appeals to you? What makes her special to you?

This question acknowledges that there are specific aspects of Dusty that draw in fans: her music, her performances, her life, her persona. My purpose was to provide as many avenues for comment as possible, so I could begin to understand their attachment to the fan-object. By asking the same question three different ways—what draws you in, what appeals to you, what makes her special to you—I was reiterating my knowledge and acceptance of the importance of Dusty in their lives. By offering different potential descriptions of their attachment, I hoped that one or another would resonate with them and encourage them to be candid.

3. How would you compare Dusty to other gay icons/dycons? What is different about Dusty?

With this question I sought to refine my understanding by way of comparison. Would they reveal similarities between Dusty and other gay icons/dycons, in which case the influence on identity development might be generalizable? But in asking what is different, I was seeking out particular qualities of Dusty-as-icon, to try to further understand how she appealed to both male and female not-straight fans.
4. What would your life be like without Dusty in it? Or if she had never come into it? What would be different, internally or externally, in your relationships, in what you do with your time?

This question asks the participants to describe themselves both before and after becoming a fan. I was obliquely asking about identity by seeking how their sense of themselves (“internally”) and their place in the world (“externally” and “in your relationships) had changed.

5. How would you explain your Dusty fandom to someone who might not get it?

Here, again, I try to understand their experience of being a fan. By phrasing the question as I did, I was challenging them to be more descriptive than they might ordinarily be to another fan (me).

6. Has your Dusty fandom evolved over time? If so, how?

In soliciting their narrative of the progress of their Dusty fandom, I am again looking for them to describe the before experience that may illustrate a change in what the experience meant to them, including to their identity development.

7. What fan activities have been most significant to you?

This question restates and follows-up on Question 1. Understanding fans’ activities, I believe, gives another window to understanding their meaning-making. The interviewees could reveal ways they identify with or otherwise relate to Dusty as well as where they see their place among peers.
8. Do you identify with or relate to Dusty in any way?
   From this question I wanted to hear what similarities or connections they
   felt with Dusty, a key concern of many theories of fandom and identity
   development.

9. What do you think Dusty might understand about you personally?
   This is a follow-up question to the preceding one, but instead of asking
   “How are you like Dusty,” I asked “How is Dusty like you?” I was trying
   to get at who they understand Dusty to be, which may tie back to how they
   identify with her.

10. Can you describe some of your fantasies about Dusty?

11. Tell me a story about you and Dusty, if you were to have met her—then?
    (in the past)

12. What would you like to tell Dusty if you could meet her now?

   Questions 10-12 directly solicit fantasy narratives to cast as wide a net as
   possible into the meaning of their connections to Dusty.

13. What are some of your favorite Dusty songs and why?

   This question follows up on Question 2 by asking the fans to explicitly
   describe the appeal of particular songs. This invited them to describe the
   meaning of their connection, as well as their own fears, hopes, and desires.

After the interviews were transcribed, participants read through them to make
corrections of fact. I used follow-up interviews to ask them to clarify and expand upon
responses I wanted to understand in more depth. I considered asking the respondents:
Has Dusty altered your experience and understanding of yourself, other people,
relationships, and the world; and if so, how? In addition, I considered summarizing for them some conceptions of identity development and then asking them if their Dusty fandom has played a role in it, and if so, how. I concluded that such questions would be too leading, and had the danger of influencing me to match my findings to theory rather than focusing on what the findings revealed. I did, however, utilize member checking: participants read through my findings and analysis of their cases, for their sense of whether I revealed their story of identity accurately, and making clarification, corrections, and additions.

I took field notes before and during the interview, converting them to more formal memos afterwards. These included the basics of the physical setting where the interviews were conducted, as well as “sensory impressions”—how I perceived the interviewee and the setting through my five senses (Chiseri-Strater and Sustein, 2001) and “subjective reflections”—my thoughts on the themes emerging from the interview (Berg, 2007).

c. Other methods of collecting information.

Qualitative studies, such as case studies, can include the researcher’s examination of artifacts in an attempt to find meaning (Cresswell, 1998). Reinharz (1992) argues that gathering various types of data increases the likelihood that the researcher will understand the subjects and in turn be able to clearly communicate their sense of meaning to readers. Moustakas (1990) suggests that creative products such as poetry and paintings, along with personal journals and other reflections, help the researcher flesh out a portrait of the subject. Berg (2007) notes the importance of records and documents in developing case studies. Especially when their inclusion clarifies data gathered from the interviews, I used artifacts produced independently of the interviews, for example: a fan’s
essay, a short recorded interview with a fan at “Dusty Day,” images of fan activities, and postings on the Let’s Talk Dusty! fan forum.

3.6 Ethical Considerations; Reflexivity

My ethical concerns in the research primarily involved the negotiation of boundaries between the participants and me. The participants, to a greater or lesser degree, were/are also my friends. This required reflexivity, which, in general, demands paying close attention not only to what one’s research uncovers, but how one’s research is conducted (Glesne, 2006). Friendship with participants complicates research by affecting both parties, leaving some to question the researcher’s objectivity (Glesne, 2006). I asked myself, “Am I taking sides? Am I overlooking other worthwhile participants by choosing friends?” I concluded that I chose those I assessed to be ideal subjects for my research because of what I sensed to be their passion about their stories, as well as their eagerness to share them.

So as to not influence them with my reaction, I strived to maintain rapport, yet a measure of neutrality, with the interviewees, in regard to the content of their responses, as Patton (1982) recommends. I put my “researcher” jacket over my “friend” garments, not to hide them, but as another explicit layer, and visible on the surface.

I could not strictly bracket my experience when interviewing others, as Creswell (1998) prescribes—my Dusty fandom is too much a part of my own identity to file away. However, I was careful not to assume that their experiences were similar to mine (Delamont, 2002), nor that they should be (Reinharz, 1992), nor to presume that these individuals were whom I theorize them to be (Lutrell, 2010). My analysis of my own projective processes helped me remain aware of this tendency both in interviews and
during data analysis. This perspective has roots in Winnicott’s concept of the good enough mother, which Luttrell (2000) draws upon to explain the reality of conducting research:

It is possible to be a ‘good enough’ researcher—that is, a person who is aware that she or he has personal stakes and investments in research relationships; who does not shy away from frustrations, anxieties, and disappointments that are part of any relationships; and who seeks to understand (and is able to appreciate) the difference between one’s self and another. (p. 515)

Establishing a rapport with the interviewees, seeing the world through their eyes (Fontana and Frey, 2001), at first blush, appeared an easy task. To bracket my preconceived theoretical orientations (Fontana and Frey) did not seem difficult, as I am much more comfortable in my role and identity as a fellow fan than as a font of theoretical knowledge for others. Nonetheless, I had to ground myself regularly in my awareness that I was a researcher and not just a fellow fan and friend. I could not tidily put aside intervening thoughts about our relationship—in such instances I recognized the interruptions—as one does in meditation—and tried to let them lift, reminding myself of why I was there.

Sometimes our fan-friendship presented others challenges. My friendship with Loretta was instrumental in my own identity development through Dusty fandom, and, I believe, vice versa. As a mentor and parental figure to her, I witnessed in her interview (as I have seen in other situations) that she seemed to be trying to “do it right,” answering every question as she imagined she should. I found myself wanting her to seem less anxious and more relaxed.
I interviewed Nathan on the train on our way to Henley to visit Dusty’s grave and on the return trip to London. Did this overlay our time with too much emotion? We went into the church where I began to cry: Did he feel too responsible for me to express his own grief there or in the interview that followed? These are the kind of questions I asked myself. Such unequal power relationships and role confusion are always present in research, but should be noted and acknowledged (Luttrell, 2000). Luttrell and Glesne (2006) both caution researchers to be aware of emotional triggers, as they can signal increased subjectivity and also lead to insight. I recognized in the examples cited above how framing my relationship with the interviewees in terms of protector and protected echoes the stance I took with Dusty in my autoethnography.

If I had known the participants less intimately I may not have had these concerns, or at least to the degree I did. Their interview responses may have been different. I may have been credited with being a more objective researcher (Glesne, 2006). In my philosophy, however, there is no objectivity: perspectives always come into play. Even in reporting a factual event, each of us foregrounds details that others submerge. In the end, I embraced my intimacy with the participants. It gave me eloquent and passionate fans I could not hope to find otherwise. Our mutual trust took me on a journey through their psyches that an outside researcher likely could not have reached in so short a time.

3.7 Analysis of data

I had the interviews transcribed by someone I trusted to understand both British accents and the context of Dusty fandom, and reviewed them to ascertain questions for follow-up interviews (Meadows, Verdi and Crabtree, 2003). I supplied each interviewee with a transcript for review and made corrections and obtained clarifications, as needed.
In most cases I conducted follow-up interviews to probe themes more deeply and to gather descriptive details of experiences and ideas they had discussed more generally. In one case I conducted a follow-up interview to account for the individual’s evolving sense of sexual orientation.

Rather than prematurely impose a coding structure on my work, I allowed my approach to emerge from the data. I did my best to set aside my expectations and preconceptions and “let the interview breathe and speak for itself” (Seidman, 1998, p. 100). I outlined a plan for reviewing the data collected, adapted in part from Moustakas’s (1994) guidelines for analysis in a heuristic study. I began with the longest interview transcript, immersing myself in the data by reading and re-reading it, highlighting significant passages and making notes in the margin. I reduced the data into that which was most important in relation to my overall research question, paying special attention to ideas that the interviewee repeated, those that elicited strong emotions, and those that appeared to address questions of identity. I developed a tentative list of codes to describe the themes and patterns that “cut through the data” (Merriam, 1998, p. 11), and used colored flags to mark the codes in the interviews.

My thematic analysis focused on the content and structure of their interviews, rather than interactive or performative analysis (Riessman, 2005). I used holistic coding or identifying the themes as a whole, rather than a line-by-line approach, a useful method in a study with various forms of data (Dey, 1993). This form of coding works well with vignettes or stories such as an interviewee’s narrative with a beginning, middle and end (Dey, 1993), and the interview material of my cases often featured such content. I sought to depict each case as a story of fandom, from their early days of discovery to later
reflections upon its lasting impact as this felt the most appropriate way for the readers to understand each participant’s experience. I used a preponderance of quotations in order to accurately represent my findings, while at the same time giving the reader a flavor of the each interviewee’s distinct manner of expression.

As I categorized and indexed chunks of the data, I composed “internal dialogue” memos (Strauss, 1987) that included detailed descriptions of the codes as well as my thoughts regarding their importance and relation to other ideas (Gibbs and Taylor, 2005). I summarized the data of the case and outlined how I would arrange the coded themes to coherently present the fan’s story. After coding the first case, I drafted that individual’s story. As I repeated the process for the additional cases, I worked from the initial list of codes I’d developed, adding subcategories and new categories when they emerged. When necessary, I combined or eliminated categories. The coding process was more iterative than this summary suggests. As I read each subsequent interview, I re-examined the previous interviews to refine my codes. Table 5.1 in Chapter 5 outlines my final coding scheme.


Chapter 4  Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents, in narrative form, the stories of each of the Dusty fans who participated in this study: Loretta, Isobel, Malcolm, and Nathan. Based upon their interviews (and in Malcolm’s case, also upon an essay), as well as upon my field notes, these fans provide compelling examples of the role fandom has played in their lives. Hearing their stories was a privilege, and I hope in relating them I have captured a good measure of their frankness, humor, passion, and authenticity.

The stories are arranged in order of the participants’ ages, beginning with the youngest fan and ending with the oldest. Their names have been changed to ones of their choosing in order to protect their anonymity. The words in quotation marks you read here are those of the fans. I have edited their responses to eliminate off-topic remarks and to condense repetitious passages. At times I adjusted the chronology of their remarks to enhance the coherence of the narrative. The use of brackets indicates my insertion of words to clarify meaning.

4.2 Loretta’s Story

At the time of her first interview, Loretta was a 22-year-old gay woman, living with her parents and younger brother in their middle class home in Harpenden, a posh town in Hertfordshire, north of London. She had been a Dusty fan for over seven years. Elfin in appearance, with a peaches and cream complexion and prominent features—lips, nose, and large blue eyes often accented with eyeliner, Loretta has a slender build on her 5’3” frame. She held a bachelor’s degree in health and human services and planned to obtain a post-graduate certificate in social sciences to become a secondary school teacher.
I had met Loretta four years earlier online in a Dusty fan community, and she had become almost a surrogate daughter to my partner and me, visiting us in Boston each summer. I chose to interview her as one of the case studies because I knew from our many conversations over the years how important a role Dusty had played in her development.

The interview took place in a London flat next door to Lambeth North tube station, just south of the Thames. My partner and I and another couple had rented the apartment for ten days, a time period that overlapped with the annual Dusty Day celebration and fundraiser in the suburb of Ealing, and Loretta stayed with us there for several days.

Loretta’s story illustrates the importance of Dusty fandom in the development of her sexual identity and political consciousness, and in exposing her to the larger world. Here, for instance, she describes how labeling her sexual identity required her to maneuver through the baggage others have with terms like “dyke,” “gay,” and “lesbian.”

“Would you describe yourself as gay, bent, lesbian, dyke?” I asked her as we settled into the living room, where Loretta leaned back on a sleek black leather recliner. “If someone asked you, how would you describe your sexuality or sexual orientation?”

Loretta began to speak, and then pulled herself upright on the edge of the chair. She continued:

I’d describe myself as all of those things but in different situations. Not so much “dyke,” because in England, a dyke often represents someone that’s a bit butch. “Bent” I use in terms in more of a jokey, jovial term. “Lesbian” I use more formally—I’ve had to use if I was to fill out a form for job applications; a gay tick
in the box would mean you’re a gay man. If I was to come out to someone . . . 75% of the time, I’d say “I’m gay.” I know people say . . . gay means mostly boys, but girls use it. . . . It’s more universal. For some reason if you say lesbian, then a lot of people . . . find the word off-putting.

“Why do you think that is?” I asked. I had a sense of what she might say, but didn’t want to presume that her thinking on this subject hadn’t changed.

“I don’t know, they just find it creepy, the word ‘lesbian,’” she continued.

Maybe it’s because in these cheesy stories that the media produce . . . that make the lesbian predatory, that try and turn ‘the straight girl.’ Not to mention they associate it with the island of ‘Lesbos.’ So, sometimes people really laugh at that term. So, mostly I use the term gay, and then I say stuff like, ‘I’m as bent as a ten bob note’ as a jokey term.

Wanting to be sure I understand her, I inquired, “Do I have this right, you are not personally uncomfortable with the word ‘lesbian’?”

Loretta replied with a single word: “No,” and then elaborated:

I don’t have a problem with saying the word lesbian, and I don’t have a problem with other people saying ‘you’re a lesbian.’ If they’re nonchalant about it, then fine. If they’re squeamish about it, then there’s not a lot you can do. You just have to sort of dumb it down for them.

Loretta became a fan of Dusty Springfield’s music after she heard a cover of her 60’s hit “I Just Don’t Know What to Do with Myself” by the White Stripes, and her gay school friend Paulo told her about Dusty: “He said she was the woman who was a lesbian who had beehive hair and black panda eye makeup and she was a 1960s singer, and I was
like, ‘Oh! I’ll have to check it out.’” From there, she “just wanted to find out everything” about Dusty and listened to her music “again and again.”

When I asked Loretta “What drew you in, what fascinated you?” about Dusty, she initially emphasized her over-the-top fashion sense, her attractiveness and charisma, her quirky personality, even her seductive speaking voice, rather than her singing. She seems to see Dusty in ways Dusty constructed herself as a 60’s icon—mod and mysterious. Loretta’s description of Dusty’s appeal for her personally is similar to how Annie Randall, in Dusty! Queen of the Postmods (2009), describes how teen-aged boys and girls responded to Dusty in the 1960s, but she also layers onto her interpretation information about Dusty that may not have been so obvious to the fans Randall describes, such as Dusty’s shyness and vulnerability. I asked her to “tell me more” about the “X factor” she claimed Dusty possessed.

The easiest things to explain are the physical aspects of her. She had a really unique quirky little way about her. She wore these cute little outfits, she had hairstyles that would have looked awful on other people but suited her to a ‘T.’ She had these really lovely huge green eyes that matched the pastel pink lipstick and the long eyelashes and the black eye shadow so well, and it was like, ‘wow’! She was small and petite yet quite powerful on stage, and that’s what I liked as well.

“She was small and petite yet quite powerful on stage, and that’s what I liked as well.

“Her facial expressions are very convincing as well,” Loretta continued without my prodding. “Also I liked how she delivered herself in interviews. She could be quite an enigma to people; she could share a lot, but she didn’t share everything.”

“And you like that?” I asked, hoping she would elaborate.
“Yeah, she contained a mystery about her,” Loretta responded.

She was always very charismatic to people and very open in that way, but she wasn’t full on, and she was, deep down, a very shy person, very insecure . . . because you could see that she didn’t want to be put on a pedestal. At the end of the day, she was just human. She had her problems like everybody else, but that added to her charm.

“You talked about her appearances and her style. Are there other things in the X factor?” I continued. I really wanted to understand this construct of Dusty’s possessing something indescribable but essential to her allure. Fans and even associates of Dusty’s had described the singer as having a “hint of mystery” and being “un-get-at-able” (Cross, 1999): was this viewpoint tied to diva worship or some other theories of Wolf (2002) or Dyer (2004) I had read about?

Loretta replied with a deep smile. “Oh the voice, definitely, yeah, singing obviously. When she was talking, it was just amazing. It sounds so sultry, you just get lost in it. It’s so soft . . . just nice and low, but she’s so well spoken and it just melts.”

She stretched out on the recliner again, and I got up to pour us both a glass of water.

As our conversation continued, Loretta soon let me know that Dusty was most important to her at this time, when she was in her teens, “in the very early stages of coming out.” As Loretta describes it, she identified with Dusty as a lesbian in a heterosexist world. She thinks Dusty would have understood what it’s like for her, Loretta, to be gay. When Loretta told me this, I felt it was time to ask her one of the key questions I had formulated for the interviewees: “If Dusty knew you, what do you think she might personally understand about you, if anything?”
Loretta was quiet for a moment, and then said, “Probably my insecurities.”

“Really?” I asked.

“Yes,” Loretta said, looking straight at me.

“Could you tell me a bit more about that, and why you think she’d understand?”

This kind of understanding had come out strongly in my own autoethnography, a kind of pilot study for my dissertation. I cautioned myself against in any way inserting this idea into my interviews, but here Loretta gave me the opportunity to hear what that experience had been for her.

“Well, like me, she does crave attention, you know, like compliments,” she said looking down slightly. “Not that we’re both egotistical or anything,” she went on, “but probably . . . being extremely flattered if someone was to come onto us, male or female, but then shunning it.”

“Can you elaborate on that?” I asked.

“Like for example, if a man comes onto me, obviously I’m going to turn him down, but my insecurities say, ‘Well they give you attention, must mean you’re attractive.’ But then the other side of me feels misunderstood, because I feel, well, do they think I’m interested?”

As she paused, I felt there was something more she wanted to say.

“Also it’s like being misunderstood by other people, and feeling that you’re no good for anyone,” she volunteered.

“You think Dusty would understand that?” I queried, hoping she would return to the comparison she had begun.

“Yeah, because I know how she felt, that she wasn’t any good sometimes,” she
responded, again looking down slightly.

She offered no other comment on that statement, but when I asked “Are there any other ways you think she would have understood you?” Loretta returned to the topic of sexuality.

I think she would have understood the turmoils in knowing who to tell. You don’t just come out once. You’re always coming out your whole life. If you don’t, if it’s not blindingly obvious that you’re gay or whatever, people are always going to assume that . . . you’re straight, unless they are overly politically aware. . . .

For example, if they work for human rights, and they know the implications of assuming. I mean I’m not offended by assuming, but sometimes it can be a bit of a pain in the arse because . . . it’s exhausting having to . . . explain and think, well, should I come out or shan’t I?

“Why do you think Dusty would have understood that?” I asked, waiting again for her to make the comparison she envisioned more explicit.

“Because she had to do it all of her life,” she stated emphatically.

She had to create a false persona about who she was because people always labeled Dusty as ‘Our Dust,’ especially the older generation, and they probably would have been very disappointed had she had come out to be the person they thought she wasn’t.

I knew from before that Loretta has always admired Dusty as someone with courage, particularly the stand she took against apartheid in South Africa, with her contract stating that she would only play to mixed audiences. The summer before, we’d watched together the newsreel footage of Dusty at Heathrow Airport after the authorities
forced her to leave Cape Town. In a pale suit, spike heels, and a towering beehive, she stated demurely, “I don’t know the first thing about politics.” Yet she went on to explain, in her posh suburban London accent, “I think in the case of most British artists, they have played maybe one or two segregated concerts, and I didn’t particularly want to do that.”

When we revisited this topic during the interview, Loretta explained how Dusty’s stand had helped enlighten her about her own White privilege.

I was really impressed and amazed at how courageous she was when she did stick up for the Black people in the ‘60s in South Africa. . . . She put her foot down, and I’m glad that she was stubborn . . . and didn’t play for segregated audiences. And I [thought] that, you know, some people back then had . . . beliefs that everyone should be equal.

When I was a lot younger, I never really appreciated the fact that . . . [I was] living as a . . . White middle class female. People aren’t going to look at me a certain way that they would a Muslim man, or a Black man, [who is] seen as more threatening because even though sexuality is threatening at times, it’s hidden.

Loretta related this to stereotypes about lesbians, which brought to my mind Dusty’s famous 1970 comment, “I couldn’t stand to be thought of as a big butch lady. But I know that I’m as perfectly capable of being swayed by a girl as by a boy.”

I mean obviously, you can tell some people who are lesbian by—if they fill in that stereotype, by short spiky hair with the tattoos. I don’t fulfill that stereotype, and

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many people have mislabeled me as being straight. They’ve assumed that I’ve got a boyfriend and that I’m straight—I’ve had to correct them.

I wanted to pursue how she might relate to Dusty’s sexuality, so I asked, “What do you make of Dusty coming out [as bisexual] in 1972?” She paused thoughtfully; then she began. “I think she . . . skirted around the issue. She made it pretty clear that she was attracted to women, but also made it clear that she wasn’t going to allow people to attach labels onto her and pigeon hole her.”

Before I could ask her if she had more to say, Loretta continued:

People to this day will argue that she’s bisexual, and that’s their prerogative, but at the end of the day, all of her long term relationships were with women, you know; she was attracted to women. A lot of this stuff she said about ‘a few men’--I think she did it to put people off the scent, and to be honest I don’t blame her because many of the press were on her case about it, and they were just after information, you know to make money out of it. So I don’t really blame her for being coy about the whole issue.

Then she drew overt comparisons between herself and Dusty. In a similar situation, “I would have felt pretty hounded,” she said, “and I probably would have given some responses that I wouldn’t wanted to have given.” Loretta then related an anecdote about Dusty at a party in posh Henley a year or two before she died in 1999. When another guest aired a racist comment, Dusty had quipped, “Well my first lover was Black” but thought the crowd was not ready to hear “that she was also female.”

“[People] didn’t have any gay awareness back then.” She continued, “Homosexuality is hidden still,” and she went on to characterize gays as “the remaining
group of people who are allowed to be discriminated against.” This discrimination she described as “inadvertent,” “because you can’t tell who is who . . . people always assume you’re straight, [and] say some throw away comments and hurt people.”

Unconsciously I slipped into my friend mode, as we had a laugh imagining the snobby Henley matrons dropping their teacups had Dusty told the whole truth. Then I righted the ship, and asked if she had more to say about Dusty’ sexuality, hoping she would elaborate on the controversial subject among some fans: Was the singer lesbian or bisexual? “I don’t doubt that Dusty did have . . . male encounters, but they weren’t, as such, lovers,” she reasoned. “They were more people that she turned to when she felt . . . insecure and inadequate. She felt that they gave her . . . attention and made her feel, not loved, but the closest thing to it.”

Loretta then related an anecdote about Dusty that a mutual friend had shared with us some years before. “She asked a man to come to bed with her, yet she demanded that they sleep in their clothes, under the sheets,” implying Dusty wasn’t sexually attracted to men. Without prompting, she continued, “I don’t think she sexually loved them, but I can certainly see why she would, because they’re easier to come by than women,” particularly decades earlier.

Dusty’s “problem with drink and drugs,” Loretta felt was also a factor in her having “one night stands” with men. She went on to distinguish her opinion from what she had heard others say: “Many people say she had a lot; I don’t think it was a lot at all. I think it was probably just a few.”

“Why do you think ‘it was probably just a few’?” I wanted to know.
“I think that was her insecurities. I know lesbians to this day that have done that before. . . It’s because they don’t know themselves,” she volunteered.

I then thought to ask Loretta what she thought about Annie Randall’s theory that Dusty never identified herself as “lesbian” because that label signified the type of woman she called “a big butch lady.”

Loretta laughed in agreement. “I know that many people in the ‘60s did perceive women to be that—you know the Sister George image.” Once again she drew a parallel between Dusty’s struggle and her own. “Even to this day, people sometimes think, ‘Well if you’re a lesbian . . . you can’t be pretty, you can’t be feminine. You have to be this big raving bull-dyke; like with short hair, piercings, tattoos.’” She conceded, “A minority does fit that stereotype, and . . . [if] that’s what they’re comfy with, then good for them,” but then stressed, “not everyone’s like that.”

A year later, when for some months Loretta was dating a man and identified as “gender queer,” I asked her if that relationship changed anything about how she felt about Dusty and her music, and “if so, how.”

She explained: “The only difference is that I now have a more open mind and better understanding that she may have perhaps genuinely fallen for a man or two because they may have possessed qualities that she might have adored. Whereas before,” she explained, “I would have denied that because I had never experienced it myself, and wanted to relate to her so much.”

After we took a break for some crackers and cheese, the subject turned to how Loretta would compare Dusty to other lesbian singers. Those she found “a bit manufactured” and “one level.” In comparison, she stressed, “Dusty she can give you
comedy, and she can give you like an upbeat tempo, she can give you a heart breaking love story, she can give you melody,” and she can sing “ballads,” “soul,” and “rock,” even “that thing with the Pet Shop Boys . . . ‘What Have I Done To Deserve This’—that was really good!”

“Was that in 1986?” she asked, and then exclaimed, “The year I was born!”

Loretta said that when she hears Dusty sing, she sees a story in her mind, like a sepia movie. Dusty is always a character in the film. In her vision of Dusty’s song “All I See Is You,” she pictures Dusty “walking everywhere, like along London Bridge and seeing the face of her ex in the mirror, the sky, the water, in a song, etc.” In “I Just Don’t Know What to Do With Myself,” Dusty is “rattling around at home, not getting anything done and procrastinating over everything. Not even going to see friends or going out to a party.”

As we scrolled through Dusty’s back catalogue, Loretta described some of her songs as an expression of Dusty’s “vulnerable yet seductive” side, for example, “The Look of Love” and “Breakfast in Bed.” As she described it, “she seduces, but at the same time doesn’t seem in full control, as she’s begging the other to stay.”

In the earlier years of her fandom, Loretta said, she would sometimes imagine herself in the role of the person Dusty is seducing in the song. In her analysis of “Breakfast in Bed” she makes a strong case for the song being about two women rather than a man and a woman. (The lyrics follow at the end of Loretta’s story and the song is available on youtube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8rOSDanAoHs)

“The way she sings it, the way that she paints the imagery, it’s so difficult to not imagine two women” with the level of “sensitivity” Dusty brings to the song. Loretta
said. This is in contrast to “other singers,” in whose songs “you don’t automatically think of two women, regardless if [the singers] are lesbian or straight.”

“I know some people would argue” about whether or not the song is about two women, she went on to say. “For God’s sakes, someone even misrepresented the words ‘Hey child’ with ‘Hey Charlie’” she exclaimed, and then laughed it off as “some straight man’s wishful thinking.”

When I asked her to elaborate, Loretta explained that “You’ll often find that people from a certain group are more likely to label her songs” in ways that “relate to them specifically.” Even in songs like “Wishin’ and Hopin’,” which Loretta described as “overtly heterosexual,” can have an alternate reading: “It’s tongue in cheek, pointing fun at the dynamics . . . of the woman emotionally waiting hand and foot on the man,” she offered. (The lyrics appear at the end of this story and the song is available on youtube: http://youtu.be/14Dgw_LSJ5w).

I thought back to Dusty’s 1979 description in a charity performance at the Albert Hall of “Wishin’ and Hopin’” as a “joke song,” and caught myself in a reverie. “Going back to ‘Breakfast in Bed,’ I began to ask, “What about that song?” Once again, Loretta interrupted my question.

I know this is going to be really stereotypical, and I know . . . girlfriends do make [men] cry, but when [Dusty] says ‘you’ve been crying/ your face is a mess,’ you don’t say that to a bloke, do you? It’s like you’d say that to a woman, because [her] make-up has all run: ‘Look at your mascara, look at you, you’re all puffy.’ Loretta continued to make her case.
Besides if a man . . . [were] having an argument with his wife or his girlfriend or whatever, and then decided to see his . . . respective lover, . . . on the side, . . . he wouldn’t go around bawling his eyes out, not in the ‘60s. If it was a romantic movie, he’d pull himself together, probably go to the local pub, get himself a shot of whisky, and then go round there and have some fun with her.

If the song were a 1960s movie, Loretta imagines a woman in the role of Dusty’s lover: “You could just imagine a girlfriend that’s come out of an abusive situation . . . running to [Dusty] for a bit of sanctuary.” All excellent observations, I thought to myself, and wondered why they’d never occurred to me.

Loretta turned to other aspects of the lyrics to conclude her analysis. Although Dusty wants to “please” the love object in the song, “at the same time she wants to be in control.” Loretta saw the line “please don’t eat and run” from the song “Breakfast in Bed” as a “double entendre” referring to “female oral sex.” In her interpretation, Dusty using the word “child” to refer to the person “in an emotional mess” who she “wants to take care of” is “quite a female-to-female thing to do.” As she further explained, “You don’t really call a bloke ‘child’ do you?”

The hour was getting late and the housemates would be back soon. Loretta was also getting restless. Asking her about a “fantasy” or “daydream” about Dusty would help us both refocus. “There’s one that springs to mind,” she began. “Don’t you just love it, when in that video, and she’s singing, and there’s people dancing around her, including all the girls, and then there’s a circle around her?” I immediately knew the clip from the 1960s television series Ready! Steady! Go! that Loretta referred to. In her fantasy, they would be in a “similar setting,” maybe even The Gateways, a lesbian bar in
London that Dusty frequented. “Some really good song would come on” and Loretta would be “dancing with her in a fun way,” but also with “some togetherness about it.”

4.1 Fan photos taken of the television performance Loretta refers to.

I followed this by asking Loretta “if you could meet Dusty, what would you tell her?”

“When I was 17 and I first got into her . . . my first question to her would be ‘Would you go out with me?’ she said, laughing. “No, not really, but I probably would
have flirted with her like crazy.” She paused. “This would be if she was in the sixties though, so, I’m kind of picking and choosing how I feel—catering for my own needs.”

“Yeah, well, this is about you, so that’s what you get to do in this interview,” I assured her.

“Oh, okay, cool,” she replied. “Well, I probably would have been like ‘Wow your music’s really amazing. I relate to it so much. I love it. You’re just so talented.’ And now, in today’s world,” she continued, “I still would have complimented her on her good looks because she was pretty, well, beautiful, although she didn’t think so—poor lady.”

She went on to focus on Dusty’s musical and political achievements. “I love how her music . . . can just touch the lives of so many people no matter what background they’re from. I admire her . . . fighting opposition to get what she wanted.” She appreciated Dusty’s “feminist approach to music” because in such a “male-dominated business back then” “the producers needed that.”

Dusty was a pioneer, in Loretta’s view: “She paved the way for many female singers, and she also paved the way for many other minority groups. You know, gay and lesbian, Black people, people from other countries, as well.” That Dusty “brought Motown into this country” was one example she cited.

Returning to what she would have said had she met Dusty, Loretta concluded, self-mockingly, “I basically would have been a total sucker upper. I just would have been kissing her feet, and telling her how great she is.” Her tone turned more serious as she described how she would have told Dusty “how I admired . . . her courageousness in the music world . . . and how I’m sad that she died at such an early age really, because you know, 59 is no age to go.”
As she grew into her twenties, Loretta’s attitude and feeling of relationship toward Dusty changed. She became less “obsessed.” When Loretta listens to Dusty’s songs now, she doesn’t see herself as Dusty’s love object, but as “the outsider looking in.”

Reality is more apparent for me, as I always used to be stuck in a daydream when I was younger. Also Dusty was ‘safe.’ She isn’t around anymore. . . . She never was when I knew her. She was a nice thought which couldn’t hurt me, because I was vulnerable. . . . I had come out not long ago.

I then asked Loretta to reflect back on ways Dusty may have influenced her. She smiled broadly as she described what the singer “changed” for her.

She really gave me the confidence to say, ‘Yes I’m gay,’ because before, I was a bit stupid and indecisive. . . . After I split up from my first girlfriend [in secondary school], I kept saying, ‘Well, what if I do like guys as well?’ . . . I just didn’t have the confidence to be 100% [gay]. But [now] . . . I know there are people . . . who are like me out there.

I wondered if she felt there should be more such role models for young not-straight youth. In response she said that “although managers often say to singers, ‘Don’t come out; it won’t do favors for your sales,’” she finds this “a shame, really, because I think . . . it would be easier for that generation who are struggling . . . to come out and be happier with themselves.” In addition, “Other people would be more accepting.”

She took a sip of her drink. “Whether . . . in films/movies, or people in music careers,” stars coming out “would help people a hell of a lot” because “it would produce more role models, idols.” Then Loretta looked at me with a frown. “Everywhere that
young gay people turn, they are . . . bombarded with heterosexual norms and values. . . . Rarely do you get a film that’s about gay lovers. . . . It can be very confusing to those growing up . . . not understanding how to feel,” she said with a sigh. “I know what it’s like: I didn’t know how to understand my own feelings when I was little.”

When I asked if she thought Dusty would have more young gay women fans if they were exposed more to her music, Loretta agreed.

Yeah, I mean I’ve spoken to quite a few people. They don’t know the name but they’ve heard some of the songs. . . . People play one song . . . and I’m like ‘that’s Dusty Springfield, I run a [web]site on her,’ and they’re like, ‘Oh really?’ and I play some of the other stuff and they really like it.

Loretta expressed protective feelings toward Dusty’s reputation. “She’s just not well advertised anymore; she’s just another singer in an easy listening music chart in an old record shop. She doesn’t get as much recognition as, say, Elvis.” This she found to be “really a shame because . . . she helped people who were less fortunate.”

When I inquired if she felt that Dusty “didn’t get her due” as a singer, she said, “No,” and wondered if “it could be because she’s a woman.” She returned to the Elvis comparison: “Everywhere where you go in market places you see Elvis Presley bag, T-shirts whatever,” but Dusty produced “about four decades of music. . . . She did a hell of a lot of recordings and she was a perfectionist, so I don’t know why she didn’t get the recognition she should have.” She then pondered whether “people would write her off as being a pain in the arse in the studio, because they didn’t give her the right sound that she wanted. She could be quite emotionally volatile at times.” Then came her final theory
for why Dusty hasn’t gotten the respect she deserves as an artist: “People did cotton on when she was a lesbian.”

In addition to her sexual identity development, Dusty influenced Loretta’s life in other ways, such as Loretta’s re-discovering music that may have “soothed” her as a child: “My taste in music is pretty eclectic. I think listening to Dusty when I was 17 kind of helped me to re-discover soul music I once listened to. Because I liked her so much, and noticed she had many styles. I began to appreciate them more.” She continued: “When I was probably preschool up to the age of probably eight or nine . . . my parents made me [recordings] . . . of Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye, those types of [Motown] artists. I used to play the tape until it wore out.” For about a year, at ages five to six, Loretta said, “I had quite a lot of trouble with my hearing.” She speculated that her parents “thought that the voices would soothe me or calm me down in some way, because I wasn’t very happy back then.”

Wrapping up the interview, I asked her, “What do you think your life would have been like without Dusty in it?”

“If I had never had become a Dusty fan, I wouldn’t have had half as much fun!” she said, perhaps anticipating the weekend festivities of Dusty Day and the warm-up party the night before.” Her Dusty fandom was also about making friends. Without Dusty, she said, “I wouldn’t have been able to go to America to see you and Allison and the rest of you guys.” A half dozen times she’s come over already, I thought, and how many more will there be to come.

I asked if she might not have had similar experiences “had she met people in other ways.”
“The problem with uni[versity] and school was that it was too sheltered--many of my friends had the same experiences” Through meeting other Dusty fans on Internet forums, Loretta “met . . . people of different ages, gender, sexuality, and from different countries,” including some who are “disabled,” all of which has “been interesting.”

She continued describing how Dusty impacted her connections to others. “I wouldn’t have formed the close friendships that I have today if it hadn’t had been for discovering Dusty and the site. I even got my second . . . long term girlfriend from one of the sites.” She smirked, as if thinking of the unhappy ending to that youthful affair.

“Well, for better or for worse, it’s still an experience, you know.” Being a Dusty fan also gave her “insight” into distinguishing between “a flitting friendship” and “who lasts forever,” and “who I can trust.”

We looked at each other a moment in silence, and then Loretta turned toward the patio doors to gaze out at the sun setting on the London Eye. “I wouldn’t be the person I am today,” she said somewhat wistfully. “It’s something to look back on, you know.”
Breakfast In Bed

Donnie Fritts and Eddie Hinton

You've been cryin', your face is a mess
Come in, baby, you can dry the tears on my dress
She's hurt you again, I can tell
Oh, I know that look so well

Don't be shy
You've been here before
Pull your shoes off, lie down
And I will lock the door

And no one has to know
You've come here again
Darling, it will be like it's always been before
Come on over here

Breakfast in bed and a kiss or three
You don't have to say you love me
Breakfast in bed, nothing need be said
Ain't no need

What's your hurry? Please don't eat and run
You can let her wait, my darling, it's been so long
Since I've had you here, you will come again
Darling it will be like it's always been before, hey child

Breakfast in bed and a kiss or three
You don't have to say you love me
Breakfast in bed, nothing need be said

Breakfast in bed and a kiss or three
You don't have to say you love me
Breakfast in bed, nothing need be said, yeah
You don't have to
Wishin' and Hopin’

Hal David and Burt Bacharach

Wishin' and hopin' and thinkin' and prayin'
Plannin' and dreamin' each night of his charms
That won't get you into his arms

So if you're lookin' to find love you can share
All you gotta do is
Hold him and kiss him and love him
And show him that you care

Show him that you care just for him
And do the things he likes to do
Wear your hair just for him, 'cause
You won't get him
Thinkin' and a-prayin'
Wishin' and a-hopin'

Just wishin' and hopin' and thinkin' and prayin'
Plannin' and dreamin' his kisses will start
That won't get you into his heart

So if you're thinkin' how great
True love is
All you gotta do is
Hold him and kiss him and squeeze him and love him
Yeah, just do it and after you do, you will be his

(You gotta)
Show him that you care just for him
Do the things he likes to do
Wear your hair just for him, 'cause
You won't get him
Thinkin' and a-prayin'
Wishin' and a-hopin'

Just wishin' and hopin' and thinkin' and prayin'
Plannin' and dreamin' his kisses will start
That won't get you into his heart

So if you're thinkin' how great
True love is
All you gotta do is
Hold him and kiss him and squeeze him and love him
Yeah, just do it and after you do, you will be his
You will be his
You will be his
4.3 Isobel’s Story

At the time of her interview, Isobel was in her early thirties. We met in the common room of yet another house a group of us Dusty fans had rented for our “Dusty Week,” this one the prior residence of French poets Verlaine and Rimbaud in London. The second floor room had dark beige paneled walls and a fireplace, two purple velvet bed chairs—one in which Isobel sat—and a matching loveseat where I perched myself. On the opposite side of the room from where Isobel sat, were two large windows framed in floral curtains and looking out onto Royal College Street in Camden. Our meeting occurred on a bank holiday Monday afternoon in early May, the day after Dusty Day.

Isobel sported a navy French sailor shirt with white stripes, jeans, and loafers with socks. Her brunette tresses reached past her shoulders, and her bangs framed her intelligent, attractive face. Her light bright brown eyes contained a hint of mischief and a large measure of intensity of conviction. Although she was now a secondary teacher, she still held her body like the dancer she used to be.

I had met Isobel online on the Let’s Talk Dusty! (LTD) fan forum a couple of years previously, and when she’d heard of my dissertation research, she’d asked to be interviewed. Knowing something of her “case,” I agreed it would be a good idea; she said Dusty had everything to do with her identity development. Although she only “started to become a Dusty super fan . . . about two years ago,” Isobel insisted, “it really has changed my life.”

We began by discussing her early fandom. She had been “lurking” on the LTD forum for a month or two “discovering all these obscure Dusty albums.” There she had
met Melinda, who had sent her copies of hard-to-find Dusty albums and asked, “Can you review them for me? I love your writing.” Thus began their “little appointments on the site,” each of them reading what the other had written, with some of the posts “thousands of words long.”

Isobel readily admitted, “I was . . . fascinated by [Melinda] . . . [and] how she illuminated my understanding and appreciation of Dusty’s music by saying very sensitive . . . very considered . . . intelligent things.” “I’d go to work,” she said, “and I’d be thinking I need to go home so I can get on LTD so I can talk to Melinda. I just began to think ‘this is weird. I’m very interested in her.’” At the same time, she reflected, “I was thinking, yes, I’m straight, and I’ve got a boyfriend.”

Isobel continued answering my original question, “How did you become a Dusty fan?” by insisting, “I can’t talk about this without talking about Melinda. . . . It’s all happened because of her.” She leaned forward. “I was listening to Dusty’s music all of the time,” which was “exciting”—hearing “things for the first time.” Absorbing the album Longing, “on headphones late at night” was “intoxicating and intense,”” adding to her desire to meet Melinda because, she said, “We got on so well.”

As I listened to her story, my mind went back to two years before. I recalled what appeared to be Melinda and Isobel’s intense attraction to each other on the forum. They replied to each other’s posts frequently and at length, with gushing enthusiasm. Other moderators and I wondered what was going on between them, as Isobel had posted photos of her boyfriend a few months before, and the women were at least fifteen years apart in age. Now I was learning what had actually happened.
Isobel said she took the first step toward Melinda, and proposed in an email that they meet for cocktails in London. As Isobel reported Melinda’s reply of “‘Yes, absolutely,’” she gasped deeply, mimicking her fear of Melinda declining her offer.

“So you’d never met her?” I asked.

“No,” she confirmed, and gave me the day of the week and exact date of their first meet-up for lunch at “a fantastic Turkish restaurant.” “It was . . . this hot, hot summer weather, and I couldn’t eat very much because I was very nervous.” But, she said, “I just thought fuck it, you know? Yes, I’ll have another bottle of wine, yes we’ll have a cocktail, yes we’ll go to the bar now and have something else.” They both got “very drunk,” Isobel reported, and “had a great time” as “just friends.”

Their online contact escalated to “seven or eight long emails a night.” By this time, Isobel was inwardly “acknowledging” “I love her,” even though she thought to herself, “I don’t know what it means . . . for me and my identity.” She repeated her theme of obsession with Melinda, with an insistent tone: “It was just absolutely blowing my fricking mind . . . because I just thought about her all the time, and I was desperate to see her again, and I kept thinking, how can listening to some pop music do this?”

We were interrupted by a knock on the door. A fellow Dusty fan had brought us a pot of tea, rightly suspecting that our energy might be lagging after the long Dusty Day. Without me posing another question, Isobel continued. Although she “knew roughly . . . there was a twenty year old age gap” between herself and Melinda, she said she “did not bloody give a shit.” Continuing in an animated tone and with her face full of expression she revealed her dawning realization that she’d “been in love with her since very soon
after I joined the site.” She’d “never had a connection like this . . . ever,” and asked Melinda if they could meet again.

Isobel took the train to London where they “stayed up all night playing records and drinking wine ‘til about five in the morning.” Still, “nothing happened at all.” Isobel had “slept on the sofa,” even though Melinda later told her “that she half expected [her] to come in and just say ‘can I come and sleep here?’” She paused and added a critical bit of information: “I’d broken up with Chris at this time, in this . . . like ‘yep, whatever’ kind of way.”

The next day, a Sunday, they went to a pub in Leicester Square. At the time Isobel thought to herself, “I have to say what I’m feeling.” As she explained to me, “There was this . . . gigantic love between us . . . and Melinda was never going to say it because she didn’t think that I was gay or that I was in love with her.” She smiled broadly and continued. “Over the course of those four or five pints I told her what was going on,” and here Isobel waved her hand in a zig-zag pattern through the air, indicating her narrative on that fateful day had not been straight forward. “I was saying things that I’d always suspected . . . but . . . never articulated to myself, unfortunately.”

I poured us some tea as Isobel returned to her story of that day in Leicester Square. “I said, ‘You know what? I’m screwed because I think I fancy men, but I’ve fallen in love with a woman.’” When Melinda replied quietly “‘That’s a revelation,’” as Isobel described it, for her “the world just stopped, and everything else in the pub just fell away.” Then they “had this general discussion about sexuality, and about how it develops” when Isobel began checking her watch “thinking . . . I have to get the last train.” Melinda must have also felt the pressure of time because “then she said . . . ‘these
little connections that we have . . . it’s all a bit like soul mate stuff. Maybe we shouldn’t talk about that now—maybe we should talk about something else.” But Isobel confessed: “Well I do love you. I don’t know what it means, but I do love you.”

I took a sip of tea and noticed how the afternoon sun fell on Isobel’s untouched cup as she continued her story. Melinda took her to Paddington station, “just to see me on the train,” Isobel said, “and . . . that’s when she first kissed me. Then the train started to move!”

“This is like a movie!” I exclaimed, and we shared a laugh.

“I wish this were wine,” Isobel declared, as she fingered the handle of the teacup. “Melinda came to Reading by mistake,” she continued, “a good forty minutes outside London . . . and had to get off the train . . . and back to London.” For the rest of the journey “I didn’t read a book, I didn’t listen to music I just sat in my seat like this,” she said, sitting erect and staring wide-eyed in disbelief. Thus her romance with Melinda began. “She came to Bristol the next weekend and the weekend after that, and then I started coming to London every weekend,” Isobel explained.

At last she took a sip of what was surely by now tepid tea. When I asked her to “tell me a little bit” about her background, Isobel described its conventionality, and the role that Dusty played in helping her to distinguish herself from that. Without any prompting, she moved toward the research questions I was so interested in.

I grew up in Salisbury in South Wiltshire, 40,000 population, which has been a safe Tory seat since the beginning of time, and will continue to be until the end of the world. A cathedral city, but culturally and intellectually bereft, just very safe . . . a [medieval] museum preserved in aspic. . . . I went to all girls’ schools.
Earlier that week the marriage of Prince William and Kate Middleton had taken place. London was awash with celebrants and, before I’d arrived, the other Dusty fans in the house had held their own “high tea” while watching the pageantry on television. The Royal Wedding had put Isobel in a different frame of mind, however:

I couldn’t quite celebrate the royal wedding in the same way as everybody else did, because this is about reminding all of us who are outside the mainstream, that the institutions which comprise the mainstream are still more powerful than anything else. Isobel explained her perspective: “It’s about patriarchy, it’s about the church, it’s about polarized gender roles, it’s about the White middle class, it’s the White upper class” where “there is not any room for anything to deviate from this quite rigid notion of what it is . . . to be acceptable.” Returning to her personal history, Isobel exclaimed, “I didn’t know anybody who wasn’t White, growing up!” And then, “I didn’t know anybody who wasn’t heterosexual, or at least apparently so, either,” gesturing broadly.

Without any nudging from me, Isobel dived into the heart of the topic of my research. “I think Dusty was kind of someone to hang my identity on, because . . . in this country if you’re White and you’re from the south and you’re middle class, you haven’t got anything,” she declared. Without “a history of being repressed . . . you are the norm.” “I used to think I want to be Irish or Black or something, so I’d have . . . something to . . . cry about in pubs.” Then she clapped her hands together in exclamation. Discovering she was “actually . . . a member of a minority group,” Isobel affirmed, “has given me an identity that I never had before. Massively. Absolutely.” She made the direct connection to her Dusty fandom: “I now understand that my fascination . . . and my infatuation with
her, and the fact that I heard her music in a way that I didn’t hear any other music—“and she paused then. “I hate the expression ‘it spoke to me,’” she said; it “sounds very trite.” Nonetheless, for Isobel, it was true.

Isobel offered examples of how her parents’ attitude toward “otherness” added to her struggle in coming out to them. “It took me nine months to tell them,” she said. “From my early teens, they would say these little things that let me know that they didn’t think homosexuality was okay.” She recalled when, “there was a [media] image of these two gay women in white dresses, and my mum would go, ‘urgh, women, urgh’.” When she was 17 or 18, she recalled, “I was trying to watch ‘Queer As Folk,’” a “fantastic” television show which “everyone at school watched,” when her dad told her to change the channel. Another incident that stuck in her mind was that when “somebody [who] did quite well in the first series of Big Brother . . . was a lesbian,” her father commented, “Oh it’s a waste, it’s a waste!”

“Hmmm,” I reflected sympathetically.

There were “lots” of other such instances which Isobel “interpreted . . . as meaning they’ve got suspicions about me . . . because they can’t actually talk about it, they’re letting me know . . . I’d better not be that way.” And the fact that “it was fifteen years ago, and she could still “remember so clearly,” she said, confirms that her parents’ comments “had a profound effect” upon her.

This led directly to Isobel’s discussing the role of singing stars and groups in helping people to come out; “My interest in [Dusty] has come at the end of a childhood and adolescence in which I had very intense connections with female artists and with lesbian artists in particular. I completely was astonished by k. d. lang when I was very
young, about 12 or 13.” She went on, “I understand now that this connection that I’ve had with her [and] that I’ve had with a couple of other artists in my lifetime is because . . . in terms of kind of sexuality, they are not mainstream,” and subconsciously she knew she wasn’t either. The feeling “that, if somebody else is [gay], then that’s okay,” helped her get over the “huge hurdle” represented by her “background.”

Isobel related a specific example with the popular girl group Eternal, “who were very big in this country in the mid ‘90s,” and with whom she was “very obsessed.” She liked the band, in part, because “They didn’t project, this . . . sexualized or stereotypically feminine image,” she recalled. “They wore caterpillar boots, and . . . big jeans, and . . . hoodies.”

I sat back and listened to her story. “I used to come to London, and see them on their TV shows” and other appearances, she explained, “for a period of a couple of years, with a group of about eight or ten other girls who I met through going to one of their concerts.” That “little hard core” group of fans was well known to Eternal. “I’ve got . . . handwritten letters from members of the band to me, I’ve been in their houses, I’ve been invited in for drinks,” she reminisced. She recently found all of her fellow Eternal fans online. Her eyes widened and she looked right at me: “Every single one of us is a lesbian!”

“Wow!” I responded.

Isobel elaborated. “None of us knew it at the time. We all had these pretend crushes on . . . whoever the David Cassidy of the day was” and “went away, went about our adult lives, made a few mistakes with men and . . . messed things up and worked things out.”
She found it “funny” that she loved Judy Garland, as well, “from the age of about seven,” reading it as one of “the signs [that] have been there for so long,” but that she “didn’t get it until . . . two years ago.” Isobel summarized: “You know I always had some kind of thing about a female celebrity and . . . I was both subconsciously when I was a teenager, and much more consciously as an adult, a way of making . . . feelings for another woman seem okay . . . easier to handle.”

There was a knock on the door. My housemates gave us a menu for Chinese food to be delivered. After examining the choices, we returned to the interview. I directed her to one of my formal questions. “What about Dusty draws you in? What appeals to you?”

“When I was first interested,” it “definitely” had “something to do with” Dusty being “gay,” even though that was “under the surface.” Isobel added another aspect of Dusty that appealed to her. “Because of my background . . . I have a certain instinct for something that’s a little bit rebellious,” she said, and the spark in her eyes burned a little hotter. Although Dusty has “been considered . . . quite safe and mainstream by some people . . . I think she is completely out there, and subversive,” she claimed. To “realize it . . . you have to know quite a bit about her.” For example, “she did produce all those early records, [and] she . . . wasn’t given credit for it, because she was a woman.” Isobel continued hastily, as if not wanting to lose the momentum of the narrative. “And what she did in bringing Motown to this country, what she did in South Africa . . . speaking out about the Apartheid,” she added. She imitated Dusty’s soft-spoken declaration, “‘I don’t know the first thing about politics,’” and then insisted, “but she did!” We both laughed in agreement. “She was quite Bolshie and quite stroppy . . . speaking out at a time that was
not at all acceptable . . . for girl singers to be doing those kind of things,” Isobel concluded.

That she “could access a bit of the ‘not mainstream’ by [listening to Dusty’s] music . . . from quite a young age” appealed to Isobel’s “instinct” to “push against this . . . agenda, which is White heterosexual middle class” and defined as “normal.” As further evidence, Isobel said she was “absolutely certain that if [Dusty] had done what some people thought she might have done, married Burt Bacharach, have a couple of kids,” that as a fan she “wouldn’t have this . . . very intense interest.” “As it is for all of us,” Isobel said, referring to all the fans under the same roof, Dusty fandom is “a very significant thing in my life, and look . . . what it’s brought me. It’s astonishing that pop music can do that.”

“Is there anything else about Dusty, her music, her performances, her life, her persona—whatever—that draws you in, appeals to you?” I asked.

Isobel nodded and continued. She referred to Dusty! Queen of the Postmods, a newer book about Dusty in which the author Annie Randall describes “something intangible in Dusty’s voice that nobody can quite define that affects you profoundly . . . emotionally and spiritually.” Isobel drew an analogy between Dusty and another famous singer:

It’s like . . . you know, every thing that happened to Billie Holiday . . . just this tragic horrible life, and you can hear it in every single song that she sings . . . Dusty is like that as well. Something . . . in her voice was profound and intangible. . . . It’s to do with the vulnerability, and it’s to do with the ache and it’s to do with the longing.
She sighed deeply. “There are no words Nancy; I can’t quite get it.”

As I leaned forward, she continued to try to explain, again by way of comparison. She has something that more technically accomplished singers do not have. Ella Fitzgerald has a voice that is like a musical instrument—she can do absolutely anything she asks it to do, she can reach any note . . . can hold a note for any length of time, she can have this tremendous flexibility around her phrasing, this scatting, but it’s lacking emotion, it’s very clinical.

Isobel explained that although Dusty could do many technical things with her voice “extremely well,” she could “compensate for her slight lack of technique . . . with this just tremendous emotion which is not forced in any way.” Isobel said Dusty has “this ability to just . . . make you cry, and to make you a wreck, and to make you think about things deeply, to be completely just lost in a song.” She continued, “She has all the emotion, and other great singers in history do not have that. For example, she said, at the very end of ‘It’s Over’ when [Dusty’s voice] goes up three times . . . that . . . makes me tingle and it makes my heart go a bit faster. It makes me catch my breath.” As I looked up, I thought I saw a blush rising on her face.

When I switched gears to inquire, “What are some of your favorite Dusty ‘songs and why?’” Isobel focused on Dusty’s recording of “Beautiful Soul” which she listened to at the time she was "scared shitless” about coming out to her family and friends. “I know there’s an argument which Paul Howes\textsuperscript{18} has that it’s a lonely person speaking to [herself],” she acknowledged; “[but] I don’t read that [song] in any other way than as being a love song about another woman.” Isobel, a secondary teacher soon to pursue a Master’s degree, then spoke to me as one academic to another: “I’m sure . . . being in the

\textsuperscript{12} Author of \textit{The Complete Dusty Springfield} and acknowledged expert on her recordings.
field that you’re in, you know this idea that meaning . . . doesn’t reside . . . in the song; it’s in you as the consumer of that thing. So, to me, that song is a woman singing a love song to another woman, and saying, ‘Look, I’m here. Can I help you? Look, what’s wrong? This is okay.’”

“Could you describe to me more about your feelings of being ‘scared shitless?’” I asked.

Isobel explained that her fear was that My relationship with my family’s not going to be the same anymore, and all these close friends of mine who’ve seen me go through these things with men, and who thought I was trying to find the husband and have a family . . . what are they going to think?

She said she experienced “some dark moments,” thinking “I can’t tell anybody . . . they’re not going to see me in the same way.” Isobel then adjusted herself in the purple chair.

It’s very hard to . . . convey the seriousness of this now. Supposedly a decade or more, after my sexuality has supposedly developed, I’ve got to now tell everyone that I know this . . . momentous news, I’ve got the double whammy of gender and age gap to contend with, okay? At that time, ‘Beautiful Soul’ was a very meaningful song for me . . . because it a woman singing to another woman that she was in love with. . . . It’s just a tremendously powerful song [with] those lyrics, ‘and your beautiful soul is weeping.’

(The lyrics to “Beautiful Soul” follow Isobel’s story and the song can be heard on youtube http://youtu.be/HOW3m-iLp5U).
“Dusty has always been a comfort at times like that,” she added.

I asked if she were saying that she put herself in “the subject position”—as the person Dusty was singing to—in “Beautiful Soul.”

“Yes,” she replied, and reiterated that “meaning” resides “in the consumer.” “She is saying, ‘You can’t cope with the fact that you love another a woman, and that you’re gay, and it’s okay, it’s alright, I’m trying to help you.’”

At the same time, Isobel described herself as relating to Dusty herself. “I perceive her . . . as a woman who felt she had to hide her sexuality to some people . . . and that she had . . . a battle with that. I went through a period of hiding it from everyone, which was horrible, and that’s when my identification with [Dusty] was strongest.”

It was getting close to time for dinner, and I wanted to be sure I asked her more of my key questions, so I followed up with, “What do you think Dusty might understand about you personally?”

Isobel paused before answering. “She would understand . . . that I’m somebody who really wants to sing and perform, and I’m kind of putting a bit of a lid on that at the moment and trying to not think about it,” she said. Secondly, “she would understand . . . wanting to love . . . women in this open and very normal kind of way, and you actually can’t, even now.”

“Why do you say that?” I asked.

“Because of the horrible image that some people have voiced [about lesbians], like dungarees, and anchor tattoos and crew cuts . . . People have much more of a problem with the idea of two women together.” In contrast, she argued, “Gay male culture is more about feather boas and sequins and that’s . . . less threatening.” Isobel
then returned to my original question. “So, I think [Dusty] would understand that—being part of a minority group about which a lot of people feel quite hostile. I can’t imagine what it must have been like back then” in the 1960s and 1970s.

“Let’s return to her music,” I suggested. I was hoping to understand what feelings Dusty’s songs elicited in Isobel. “What touches you and how does she do that?” I asked.

Isobel sighed. “Very often it’s because . . . I’m sad about her. I get . . . emotional over the songs that were . . . about her life, and that is completely . . . unique in terms of how I feel about famous people.” She again alluded to the other fans in the house. “People . . . downstairs have said they . . . feel this kind of connection to her that is more than fan and star. They feel kind of protective of her. Even though she’s not here anymore . . . they want to look after her.”

I nodded, hoping she would continue.

“She was this tremendous icon, and she’s left this indelible mark,” but “she didn’t have a really happy life” and “she was young when she died,” Isobel went on to explain.

‘Yesterday When I was Young’ . . . I find very hard to listen to because even though she was only . . . [in her] early thirties when she sung it, . . . you can now read it as . . . somebody who knows what happened in the years after that song. It’s a lament; it’s about . . . that she had a very, very short time . . . of being in the spotlight of doing very well, of that image, of Dusty. . . . Even from ‘67 it was going downhill, and that’s really . . . sad!

When Isobel began describing her curiosities about Dusty, it led her to further explain her feeling of sadness and protectiveness toward the icon.
I’d love to know . . . the horrible stuff—what exactly happened [to Dusty] in America . . . all about these terrible inappropriate girlfriends. . . . You think, ‘if you’d chosen someone normal and stable, you might have been okay! You might still be here!’ But she just destroyed herself extremely quickly. You could see . . . that in the very few photos that exist. In about 1973 and ‘74, she’s okay, and then she comes back in 1979, or ‘78, when It Begins Again [was released], and she looks . . . a bit middle aged, and . . . [at] 38, 39, you should still look like a reasonably young person. You could see that there was a short period when she just damaged herself . . . and destroyed her voice. It’s absolutely heart breaking, because . . . you see not only that her contemporaries are still alive, but that they are looking fantastic, and they sounding fantastic.

“Are there any other things that you feel sad about?” I asked quietly.

I’m sad about the fact that she was this . . . hugely talented, hugely important artist, and that nobody really got that, apart from people who were really close to her. And if a wider circle of people had understood that, she would have been given the right production team, or the right writers, or the right managers, or the right support . . . who would have known exactly what to do with her, and she’d have made successful album.

I’m sad about—just what happened to her. You watch performances from the mid ‘60s, when she’s at her peak, [and] you know what happened afterwards, so there’s always a little edge of sadness, even when you’re watching her in her full glory, in . . . her . . . gown regalia on her BBC TV show, doing ‘Nowhere To Run.’
When I think about the fact that she spent a lot of years being unhappy, and drinking too much and taking drugs [and] . . . think about the kind of people she must have been meeting in the ‘70s—‘oh my god!’ I just have this image of her being isolated . . . lonely, and being afraid, and knowing that her career was in the toilet and instinctively . . . reaching out to . . . who was just physically ‘there’ at the time—those people were the wrong people, and they damaged her.

I’m not a doctor, I don’t know anything about how cancer starts or how it works, but you know she just did herself in . . . with what she put into her body. But what happened to her emotionally—she just—burned out and faded away and she shouldn’t have done.

In addition, Isobel said, “I’d like to know how much truth there is in what Pat Rhodes\(^\text{19}\) says very emphatically about her being bisexual. . . . Is she saying that to kind of . . . protect her?” She explained her reasoning. “From what I can see . . . [Dusty’s] great love affairs were with women. Having an occasional attraction to a man, or sleeping with a man . . . if everything else, is about women, does that make you bisexual?” She continued with a shrug. “But again that label is so redundant and useless anyway, isn’t it? It’s just a kind of category that doesn’t mean anything.”

Isobel said she would also “love to know all the details between Dusty and Madeline Bell\(^\text{20}\)

because they were both at the height of being young and discovering music, and working together. . . . Was it a great big love? Or was it just . . . this fiery fling that burned out? What was she like? Oh I shouldn’t say this cause it’s going on

\(^{19}\) Dusty’s secretary of many years, often interviewed in documentaries about Dusty.

\(^{20}\) America-born African-American singer and backing vocalist for Dusty in the 1960s; widely assumed to be Dusty’s first lover.
record, but you know, I can’t help it: When I was talking to Madeline yesterday [at Dusty Day], when we saw her at Ronnie Scott’s [a London nightclub], I was thinking ‘You slept with Dusty Springfield!’

“How about you tell me some of your fantasies about Dusty?” I asked with a smile.

“Here’s one,” she began:

I had a little daydream in my head when I was on the way here, and I was feeling a bit tired and a bit hung-over. There’s a Dusty Day, in which Dusty is a bit old, a bit doddery, but she’s alive, and then she makes a special appearance at the end. Simon Bell says, ‘she’s very reclusive, and she’s very tired and she doesn’t like to come out and see people, but . . . just this year she’s agreed to see us,’ and then she just comes out on stage and the place just goes completely [crazy]—you know, [fans] crying and fainting, and being hospitalized.

I am amazed at the image she has painted, and even a bit envious that I’d never imagined it myself. “Are there other fantasies you would like to share?”

She continued, nodding with enthusiasm.

[Another] one is that I have a time machine, and I go back to 1966, and I have tickets in the audience to her BBC thing, or . . . the NME concert, or something.” She paused to reflect in amazement.

It seems incredible to me; it’s . . . like Princess Diana, in that I can’t believe that she was ever a real person, who . . . lived and breathed, and walked around. And I go to Aubrey Walk [where Dusty lived for several years in London] . . . and think, she walked up and down these streets.
Dusty’s life seemed “so long ago” to Isobel, so she found “the idea of meeting her and seeing her in the flesh [to be] completely mind-blowing.” The black and white film “footage of that time makes people look not real because it’s such poor quality. They look like . . . screen creations or kind of mirages.”

“If you could go back in time, and . . . meet her, tell me a story about that,” I encouraged her.

Isobel took a moment to compose her answer.

I have an autograph . . . of this big color picture, and it just says ‘Best Wishes, Love Dusty Springfield. I would like to go back to . . . either late ‘65 or early ‘66. She was absolutely crazy that year. Yet she stopped for two minutes and signed this autograph for this 16 year-old girl.

“And what if you were to meet Dusty now . . . in any scenario . . . what would you want to tell her?”

I would probably . . . just talk about Melinda. I would just say that it’s because of you that I have this great love in my life, and thank you very much. . . . Although in reality Nancy, I wouldn’t just say anything, I’d just be like crying and gibbering and looking like an idiot.

I laughed knowingly and then asked one of my last and most important questions: “What would your life be like without Dusty in it or if she had never come into it?”

Blimey! Well that’s a really simple . . . and perfect question as well because my life would be completely different, I would not be sitting in this room talking to you, I would never have met Melinda. Because of [Dusty], I met the love of my
life, because of her, I looked for a job in London, rather than elsewhere. My life is how it is because of Dusty.

When I asked her to elaborate, she returned to the topic of her sexuality.

I don’t know if I’d be aware of my sexuality. . . . [Being a Dusty fan] helped me to get to a realization about myself about where I should have got to, ten years ago. . . It’s just been a massive relief. . . . Thank god, you know, I don’t have to sit across a table from a man in a restaurant and think, ‘Why doesn’t this feel right?’ or be in bed with a man, and think, ‘Why doesn’t this feel right? I don’t get it.’ I don’t have to do that anymore! Thank god! So she’s had a profound and immeasurable impact on my life.

To . . . sum up, [Dusty] will always have that really important feeling of being protective towards her and looking after her . . . because it was against the backdrop of discovering her and discovering her music that I also . . . discovered myself, Nancy.

Isobel then whispered to me, “That sounds horrible!”

“Can I ask why you think that sounds horrible?” I asked with surprise.

“It’s a bit sentimental; you know, the Brits aren’t sentimental, Nancy, are we? We’re not supposed to be on the surface, are we? But in discovering her, I’ve discovered myself. There you are.”

Just as we were called down to dinner, I asked Isobel if there was anything else she wanted to add before we stopped. “Yes, I’ve been thinking about this,” she said, and shared “an analogy . . . to describe what Dusty has meant” for her. “Melinda’s got me into proper Hi-Fi and retro Hi-Fi,” she explained.
You have a record deck or a CD player—that’s me. And you have an amplifier and that’s acknowledging my sexuality . . . or discovering it. If you go straight from the CD deck to the amplifier . . . it’s too powerful and it’ll blow the amp, okay? So you need to have a pre-amp, which conducts all of this energy, which shrinks it down to a manageable size . . . so it can go through the amp safely.

So there I was thinking shiiit, there’s this big thing [my sexuality], and she was a conduit or filter for it. Dusty was my pre-amp!

We laughed again, and made our way downstairs to meet the others.
Beautiful Soul

Lyrics and Music by Margie Adam

I wonder where you are, lovable lady
I wonder what you're thinking, beautiful woman
It seems like fog is settling in within your eyes
And the weight of something is pulling your shoulders down

Could it be you ask too much, lovable lady?
From a world that's out of touch, beautiful woman
So you're hammering at a door that will not open
And your beautiful soul is weeping

Better learn the way it goes
Oh, better share the pain that shows
You wanna transcend it in order to end it
But your loneliness grows

Ah, ha, do you hate yourself, lovable lady?
Can I be of help, beautiful woman?
Your silence is a wall between the two of us
And my beautiful soul is weeping

Oooooooooooh
4.4 Malcolm’s Story

I interviewed Malcolm at my house one mid-summer evening. After dinner, we settled into my living room, with him on one side of the long blue sofa and me on the other. I had known Malcolm for a couple of years through the Let’s Talk Dusty! fan forum and in the past year he had become one of our LTD forum moderators. Periodically we had gotten together with other Boston-area Dusty fans, but I’d only heard snippets of his “Dusty story.” I was anxious to hear him narrate it more fully.

An attractive man of medium height and build, with close-cropped hair, fair complexion, and almond-shaped brown eyes, Malcolm was wearing a yellow pin-striped oxford shirt, a beige vest, and khaki trousers. He began his Dusty story by telling me that he was 34, and was born in New Bedford, Massachusetts where he had lived most of his life. He also “spent a few years down South,” in North Carolina, and had lived in New York. I had met his “boyfriend” Calvin, but found myself surprised when Malcolm reminded me that he had once been married to a woman. As he took a drag off his electronic cigarette, I suggested we formally begin the interview. “So, how would you describe your sexuality?” I asked. He replied at length.

If the label ‘gay’ is put upon me, I don’t shun it. . . . I’m completely accepting and welcoming of the fact that I have been and am in a relationship with another man. But I don’t appreciate the tag. . . . I don’t like the confinement because for me it’s not an all-consuming thing.

“So you’re not really comfortable with the label ‘gay?’” I wondered aloud. “Yet I wasn’t sure if you were comfortable with being called ‘bisexual,’” I said. Then I smiled and posed my question somewhat differently: “How would you identify yourself if you had to describe yourself to someone?”
Malcolm still didn’t have a pat answer.

I don’t know, to be honest. With Dusty that was one of the things that appealed to me. Based on what we know, there is no doubt that her predominant interest was women . . . but for whatever reasons . . . her career, her own insecurities, Catholic upbringing, whatever—she was kind of hesitant to put that kind of label on herself.

He shifted his posture on the sofa and took a sip of his wine. My small rescue mutts gathered around his feet as if they too were interested in his story.

In the last ten years, where I have been involved in relationships with other men, there still have been sporadic relationships with women; I can’t dismiss that. There is a comfort there, there is an attraction, something that is appealing. . . . I feel if I was to acknowledge one part [of my sexuality] and not the other, I’m just denying a part of myself.

As not-straight identity was a central characteristic of the fans in my study, I wanted to be sure I understood his perspective, so I probed further. “Yet it doesn’t sound like bisexual is a term that fits either; is that right?” I asked.

He replied, “I suppose in the strictest sense of the meaning, then yes . . . it would apply . . . but I hate to try and put tags on things. I think the world needs a little ambiguity.” Without my realizing it at the time, in this statement, Malcolm had just introduced one of the important themes of his fandom, a journey that was a lifetime in its making.

I continued, “Okay then, let’s move on to some of the questions about your fandom. How did you get turned on to Dusty?”
“Even when I was a little kid . . . I was always listening to old Motown and Stax . . . the stuff that Dusty loved. My mother had those records and, even as a little kid, black culture just fascinated me.”

“Oh, me too!” I blurted out, forgetting my interviewer role for a moment. “But what was it that ‘fascinated’ you?” I asked, making little quotation marks with my fingers.

Malcolm tapped his hand on the coffee table for emphasis.

It seemed—to be completely honest—cool! They had a handle on the music and authority and there was this feeling. My father had corny old pop records. They were so prim and proper. My mother . . . would put on Mary Wells or Martha and the Vandellas . . . or Rufus and Carla Thomas—that was music to me. Aretha, that was music. The other stuff, even to a five or six-year-old kid . . . just struck me as false.

Malcolm went on to describe how Dusty continued to pique his interest as he grew older:

My mother would listen to the oldies station . . . [and] I knew some of [Dusty’s] songs—‘Wishin’ and Hopin,’” ‘You Don’t Have to Say You Love Me.’ And then ‘What Have I Done to Deserve This’ was a big hit [but] I didn’t make the connection that this was the same person. Even a few years later [at age 17 or 18] I saw ‘The Sounds of Motown.’ the Ready Steady Go! special, on The Disney Channel . . . but I wasn’t able to connect the dots.

“What was your breakthrough as a fan, then?” I inquired.
What really got it for me . . . was a few years later [at age 22]; I was in a car and ‘Son of a Preacher Man’ came on the radio, and my friend, who was actually kind of this urban tough, guy, went, ‘Oh man, turn this up! I like this song!’ I [had] never really listened to it before . . . and thought, Wow! This is really, really cool!

When I asked him “Where did you go from there?” he told me that within a few months he had bought a Dusty’s greatest hits collection and at that point became a fan. Still, he confided, “As much as I loved her voice, the thing that really threw me for a loop was that she was White!” He said that reality had not sunken in previously, despite having seen television clips of her performing.

Another seminal moment in his Dusty fandom that Malcolm described to me was witnessing the reaction of his straight male Black friends, upon hearing of Dusty’s death in 1999. It struck him as “surreal.”

“Tell me about it,” I said. He took a sip of Pinot Grigio and leaned forward.

I was at a restaurant outside of D.C. and we were having dinner. On the radio . . . the announcer said that he had very sad news, that Dusty Springfield had passed away and the people I was with . . . got into this conversation, without any encouragement from me. I . . . sat back in amazement. I was the only person that wasn’t Black; they were all talking about her. It was just crazy, like ‘Oh my god, she died’!

As I asked Malcolm if he could flesh out for me exactly what was “surreal” to him, I made quotation marks with my fingers again.
“They were . . . talking about ‘Son of a Preacher Man,’” he said, “saying things like ‘Oh you know she was bad! She . . . had that sexy little voice.’ It shocked me!”

I prodded him again: “But what was it that was—“

He mirrored my quotation marks gesture. “Shocking?” he asked, and we both laughed. That Dusty was “one of the [few] White artists that elicits that kind of reaction from a Black audience” is “what impressed me the most,” he said.

This idea that Dusty’s audience appeal cut across racial lines was a theme Malcolm would also return to, but at this point I asked him to continue telling me about the growth of his fandom. Two CDs and a documentary played a vital role, he said. First, in 2001, when he had moved to North Carolina, he purchased Dusty in Memphis “and that album just stayed in my car for weeks.” “Even at that point,” he said, “I was just smitten with her, her voice, the style. I still didn’t know anything about her personally.”

That changed after he moved to New York.

“One night . . . the Definitely Dusty documentary came on TV and [until then] I had no idea that Dusty was gay. I had never really seen her perform live . . . and I sat there just transfixed. . . . I taped it, and I just played and played it.” Although, he said, “this was a voice I had become acquainted with several years before,” now, with “the visual aspect,” Dusty became “so endearing—the hand gestures . . . were such a big part of her persona . . . the panda eyes, and the blonde beehives. I was just utterly fascinated and . . . I began to discover that she was a kindred spirit,” he explained.

Another “turning point” occurred in 2009 when by chance he heard “Don’t Call It Love” from White Heat. “After that I wanted to hear everything. . . . I came to
appreciate her in a whole new light,” he said. At this point, he said “I started lurking on LTD [because] I wanted to talk to people about this album” and “discovered that there were people who loved Dusty as much as I did and wanted to talk about her as well.”

My dogs inexplicably began jumping up on Malcolm, so we took a short break so that he could give them a proper cuddle. When we returned to the interview, I asked him if there were other aspects of Dusty besides her music per se, that drew him in.

In response Malcolm expressed admiration for Dusty’s courage on tour and in the studio. He was “fascinated” by “what went on in South Africa, when she wouldn’t perform in front of segregated audiences . . . [and] ended up getting the boot out of the country,” describing the whole episode as “unreal.” He winked, anticipating my next question, and then elaborated.

If they do end up making a movie about her, I really hope that they dwell on that.

It was very important, especially when you look back in South African history at that point in the ‘60s, when things were changing tremendously here in this country—the US—in South Africa, it was the opposite: it was stagnant, it was closed.

Another act of Dusty’s bravery he stressed also had a racial connection. “The fact that she had the chutzpah, the ‘balls’ per se,’ to go down to Memphis to sign with Atlantic, and to cut this album [Dusty in Memphis].”

This reminded me of what Malcolm had written in an essay about Dusty that he had shared on the Let’s Talk Dusty! forum:

The stories of her behavior in the studio are the stuff of legend. She toyed with board knobs, rallied unsuspecting British musicians to recreate the sounds she
fell in love with in America, and slipped into the ladies room with a microphone to obtain the acoustics she desired. She was labeled ‘difficult.’ She should have been labeled ‘trailblazer.’

When I asked him to tell me more about how Dusty “drew him in,” Malcolm described the versatility, expressiveness, and uniqueness of her voice. It had what he described as “an other worldly quality . . . something we as mere mortals can’t be in possession of.” As he explained, “I’ve heard someone who sounds like Judy Garland, even Billy Holiday, even Karen Carpenter. . . . I’ve yet to hear anyone who sounded anything like Dusty Springfield.” As if on cue, he expanded on his statement.

I think it was Madeline Bell who once said that [Dusty’s] voice really has no color. It’s not a Black voice, but it’s not a White voice—it’s just this kind of entity that can take on whatever it needs to. It could be fragile and it could be tender, it could be this robust heavy soulful instrument, but it had this shading . . . and this emotional ache to it. Not just an unusual voice, but a special voice.

In describing one of Dusty’s most lauded albums, Dusty in Memphis, in his essay, Malcolm stressed the singer’s soul and vulnerability:

This is the moment where the accessibility of pop and the emotional depth of ‘soul’ meet up and create a perfect home. . . . [In] ‘Son of a Preacher Man,’ like any great soul singer, she takes her time. She coos and calmly explains her joyous predicament. She very well could be Black, but by the end of the track that issue becomes moot. . . . She stretches and lays her voice around the arrangement like a frontier person laying claim to some land. Most importantly . . . there’s a
remarkable conviction in her vocal that illuminates the song and drives it. It’s the first of many instances where Dusty truly appears emotionally bare.

Malcolm’s essay continued with a precise description of this vulnerability:

I’d liken it to walking in, for the first time, on the person you love getting dressed. You witness every part, every piece that’s utterly perfect, every inch that may be brilliantly flawed. And you realize in this moment of vulnerability they are more beautiful than you could’ve possibly imagined.

“What do you think Dusty understands about you?” I asked, switching gears a bit.

In reply, Malcolm gave a number of examples of how her music expressed the feelings he himself had experienced. The songs that were “revelations” for him often conveyed “solitude” or the sadness or even panic at the end of a relationship.

‘Summer is Over’ is . . . bleak and unsettling. I've always had an aversion to the beginning of fall since I was a kid, since my birthday is at the end of August.

Hearing Dusty describe the signals I grew up recognizing and despising—'the leaves that were green, are no longer so green’—I get to wallow in it a bit.

“Can you think about another example, Malcolm?” I queried.

That’s easy—there’s so many I identify with. On her BBC show Dusty does a folk song . . . that’s very poignant for me because I've traveled a lot. My mother likes her kids close by, and I moved far away for several years. My mother always calls me her ‘free spirit’ or her gypsy, [but] hearing Dusty sing ‘Poor Wayfaring Stranger’ brings back all of those memories of long road trips [going home], driving through the night, passing through strange places. And Dusty sounds just as uncertain and anxious as I felt.
Malcolm also brought up a song from *Dusty in Memphis*, ‘Just One Smile,’ which he said “always gets to me because of the desperation in it.” It reminded him of “one of the lowest periods” of his life when he had “dropped out of high school . . . [and] developed a coke habit.” Then “when I stopped, and everything fell apart, and I ended up in the hospital, and after that I was trapped at my mother’s for a couple of months. I didn’t have a job, I didn’t have an education.” At times like these he began to wonder “is it worth continuing? Can I turn things around?”

“So tie it back to the song for me,” I coaxed him.

The opening words ‘can I cry a little bit? There's nobody to notice it.’ . . . When it feels like the world is falling apart around you . . . what a line to say to yourself! It gives me chills acknowledging that! It’s the guise of . . . putting on a strong front when inside you are . . . falling apart . . . and you come to the point where you need to acknowledge it . . . . There’s this nakedness to it.

(The lyrics to “Just One Smile” follow Malcolm’s story and the song can be heard on youtube http://youtu.be/qeFgLPLzlJc)

I pursued this fruitful line of questioning a bit longer. “Are there other songs you want to discuss that you especially relate to,” I asked, “where Dusty expresses feelings or situations you’ve been in?”

“Who Gets Your Love” has a “kind of nervousness about it that rattles me,” he confessed. “It's lush and beautifully produced with strings and keyboards all over the place, but in the middle of it all, you have Dusty sounding like she's trying to keep an extremely unpleasant situation under control.”

“And that situation is?” I asked.
“Something I can relate to.” He explained with a rhetorical question: “How do you acclimate to a predicament where you're out of the life of the one you love, yet so close to it?”

I nodded in agreement.

“Dusty wonders who's fulfilling all the duties she once strived to fulfill. . . . She’s obsessing about ‘who picks your tie,’”—and here he began to sing: “‘Will she rub your head and take your pain away?’”

When he described “the emotional desperation . . . the emotional nakedness . . . in this mini drama,” I asked Malcolm, “What is it about the nakedness that appeals to you?”

“In Dusty [it’s] that emotional vulnerability, that exposed part of herself that came out in that crazy voice. . . . She carries that for me,” he explained. “‘She’s my food, my sleep, my shoulder to cry on,’” he said, quoting a Joan Crawford fan’s sentiments about the object of his affection. Dusty is “doing all that suffering for me.”

I thought about how much Malcolm’s words were reminding me of my own fan experience, but I didn’t want to mention it. His revelations about the importance of Dusty in his life brought back to mind his written description of Randy Newman’s “I Think It’s Gonna Rain Today,” from Dusty’s 1968 album Dusty . . . Definitely, in which Malcolm stressed how the singer’s artistic expression impacts the listener.

In a couple of mournful minutes, Dusty shows us what it’s really all about. What the vocal stylist does—they don’t just sing. They don’t just tell the story. They live it, in all its glory and shame. They share a bit of their own soul . . . [and] they provide us with a cathartic mirror. They live the lyrics, and when those words
take up residence with the voice, we may just discover something previously unearthed about ourselves.

I paused in reverie, and then asked him to tell me more about “What other sorts of feelings you get from Dusty’s music?” Malcolm went on to give examples of “affirming” or “reassuring” songs, such as the “calming, confident affirmation” of “Getting it Right” and then “Closet Man.”

It's an obvious nod to her gay connection, so the very forward-thinking lyric about the release of one's shame is a very sweet, reassuring sound. ‘Why, it's older than religion and quite honestly more fun,’ she sings. Thank you Dusty! I'd never compare the two, but thank you for making me feel like it's not such a bad or alien thing to feel what I feel.

I wanted to know more about the ways he identified with Dusty, so I asked him what Dusty might understand about him if she knew him personally.

Malcolm paused and took a sip of wine. “I would like to think that with me she would find the same [as herself], someone who has had to buck conventional things . . . who didn’t come up as the typical when it came to sexual things, and racial things and religious things.” He underlined these three primary ways he identified with Dusty by referring to a passage in the biography published after her death.

The quote from Dancing with Demons was from Dusty’s lover Norma Tanega, where she said there were three things Dusty wanted to be, and that was . . . straight, Black and a good Catholic, and she felt she had gotten the reverse of all three. When I read that I underlined [it] . . . because I was able to relate to that so much. I felt all three of those at one time. I wanted to be straight so much.
I was intrigued, not knowing much about his religious background, and wondering what the racial connection might be. I brushed aside the pup trying to crawl onto my lap, so I could focus on his words. “Can you tell me more?”

A lot of people like me must have wrestled with those thoughts [of ‘not being straight.’] but I shut them down. . . . I was raised Catholic—awful people . . .

[but] religion was very important to me as a little kid. I wanted so much to be a good boy; I wanted so much to abide by everything. Of course being gay . . . you can’t reconcile the two. You’re taught . . . that with homosexuality comes eternal hell fire and damnation.

“Please go on”, I insisted, and leaned forward to listen.

Malcolm said he admired Dusty’s courage in dealing with the conflict between her religion and sexuality, and identified with her struggle when he “found out that Mary O’ Brien was this Catholic girl and . . . that conflict went with her forever.”

But ultimately she had to come to a point where she was like, ‘You know what, I’ve got to live this life!’ She could have stayed at a convent, she could have stayed in a little town in England, she could have just adhered her life to whatever her local priest and . . . the nuns, the rectory, told her . . . would be fitting. But she didn’t, and . . . even though that may have continued to have caused her . . . feelings of guilt, she decided to pursue her own path and find her own way. That let her outside of that teaching and I think that caused her to acknowledge feelings that she couldn’t hide. Just like it took me a while to come to terms with myself and feelings I couldn’t hide.

Malcolm topped off his Pinot, and continued to describe how Dusty’s music had
affirmed his sexuality.

I got so tired of hating myself. . . . It’s been honestly within the last ten years, where I’ve started to . . . feel comfortable in my skin . . . and Dusty really was a big part of that because she went out there, and even later on . . . for her to sing the song ‘Born This Way’ late in her career, that’s such an affirmation. That’s her kind of just stepping back and saying, ‘You know what? To hell with all of this!’

I listen to that song now and it’s like, I feel so much better. Where she says ‘it’s time to search your heart . . . and to learn to love yourself, and to respect yourself’—I get a little choked up . . . to hear her say that. . . . It’s almost like her telling me on a one-on-one level ‘that’s just the way you are; that’s just the way I am.’ That has a big impact on me.

(The lyrics to “Born This Way” follow Malcolm’s story and it can be viewed on youtube: http://youtu.be/7M4aTcMKC5Y)

It was getting late, and I realized I needed to follow-up on an earlier comment. “I’m curious about the third ‘thing’—the racial identification, Malcolm. What can you tell me about that?”

“I’m racially mixed,” he began. “My mother is Cape Verdean, and my father is White, he’s from Canada.” Growing up with that heritage, he said, “especially being very fair-skinned” “caused a bunch of confusion and insecurity. Not knowing where I wanted to be or where I . . . belonged, that troubled me.”

I wasn’t making the connection I thought he was trying to get at, so I decided to approach the question from another angle: “What specifically was it about Black culture that you think Dusty identified with?”
Malcolm answered quickly, as if confident in his response.

She recognized, I think, something raw and something real—[with] no type of pretension to it. That’s what I saw as well, even as a little kid, long before I knew who Dusty was . . . this emotional center that I didn’t hear in other music. I think Dusty recognized that as well, with her sexuality, with her insecurity. Maybe she found some type of common ground [with Blacks and their music.] In the ‘60s, these were people who were fighting for a voice, right?

“What’s your opinion of Dusty’s covers of Black American music, then?” I asked.

“She ‘glorified’ it, as Martha Reeves said!” he exclaimed and continued.

I can listen to this White British girl and not say ‘Oh God she’s just trying to imitate them, she’s just White girl trying to sound Black’; it’s not like that. . . . She’s found her own little niche, she’s found her own place . . . and I can appreciate that. . . . The way that she pursued it, I admired that. There was no other White artist in that period, who [did that]. Dusty went down to Memphis and worked with the Memphis Cats, and Jerry Wexler and Arif Mardin and Tom Dowd—Aretha’s team. . . . And who did she want to work with next? She went to Philly and she worked with Kenny Gamble and Leon Huff . . . the Sound of Philadelphia! That’s just Black music to me and real soul.

I felt I still didn’t fully understand the racial connection he had with Dusty, so I pushed forward. “Well, how do you relate or identify with Dusty in terms of race, otherwise?”

I was very confused. I didn’t know where I fit because we were Cape Verdean, we weren’t traditional American Black, but my father was White [and] I wasn’t
White. . . . I went down to North Carolina [in my early 20s], and didn’t belong anywhere. [At work] the Whites kept to themselves, the Blacks kept to themselves and the Hispanics kept to themselves; there were a couple of Asian girls who kept to themselves too, but it was the Black people who, a couple of weeks later, started inviting me to their table and took me in . . . and that just made a big impression on me. Down South I felt a kinship with Dusty in that respect . . . the identification with Black culture. . . . When I got there, I was on cloud nine. . . . I was amongst the Black folk.

I nodded, encouraging him to continue.

Years later when I read about Dusty in that situation, it just endeared her to me more. . . . She tried to find her own way. She knew ultimately she would always be on the outside looking in. She was actually never going to be a part of the—and I’m the same, I would never actually be a part of it. I’m not Black, I’m not Southern . . . but to find your own way, and find your place in it—that appealed to me. And even if Dusty wasn’t able to actually do it, her endeavor to . . . had an impact on me.

Knowing our time together was ending, I asked Malcolm to share a fantasy about Dusty, in which she “recognized” something in him.

When she was promoting her last album I only lived a few hours away. She flew to New York, and, poor thing, she wanted to get on David Letterman’s show. They didn’t have space for her, so, you know, Columbia ended up throwing a little party for her. David Letterman ended up sending Paul Schaffer as, I guess, a consolation prize, the shame. But I had a dream, after I read about all of that . . .
where . . . I was able to be there that night, and I actually met Dusty and she was totally enamored with me.

He laughed and continued.

Let’s say I had been there. . . . If she would have seen this 18 year-old kid, and she would’ve been able to recognize that . . . this was one of her own. That this was somebody outside of the mainstream, one of those underdogs that she had been and that she had championed and that she would be able to relate to, like maybe she . . . she’d be nice to me.

“Before we end, can you reiterate or summarize how Dusty has changed your life? How would your life be different had Dusty not been a part of it?” I asked. His revelations were so fascinating, I didn’t want to conclude the interview, but we both had to go to work the next day.

Malcolm stretched out his legs, and then sat up straight. He held his chin in contemplation, and then offered his final thoughts.

She struggled for me in a way, ‘cause she had to go through that difficult period. I gain some form of strength in looking at her life and what she went through, in a time when it was much harder. I can look back and see her life in review . . . and appreciate the distance that was traveled, and towards the end she was able to come to some sort of peace. She’s helped me to become more comfortable in my skin, to be more comfortable with who I am and what I am, and what I’m not. I would be a bit stunted . . . less inspired and thoughtful and contemplative if . . . I didn’t have her as a part of my life.
Just One Smile

Music and Lyrics by Randy Newman

Can't I cry a little bit?
There's nobody to notice it
Can't I cry if I want to?
No-one cares

Why can't I pretend
That you'll love me again?
All I had has been taken from me
Now I cry tears that never become me

Just one smile, the pain's forgiven
Just one kiss, the hurt's all gone
Just one smile to make my life worth living
A little dream to build my world upon

How I wish I could say
All the things I want to say
If some way you could see what's in my heart
Oh, baby

I don't ask for much
A look, a smile, a touch
Try to forget
Lord knows, I'm trying
It's so hard to forget
When your whole world you know is dying

Just one smile, the pain's forgiven
Just one kiss, the hurt's all gone
Just one smile to make my life worth living
A little dream to build my world upon

Just one smile, the pain's forgiven
Just one kiss, hurt's all gone
Just one smile to make my life worth living
A little dream to build my world upon
Just one smile
Born This Way

Geoffrey Williams and Simon Stirling

Some people know what they wanna be
Some people see what they wanna see
Everyday needs some kind of dream
But the complexities of
life escape to an ideal scene, yeah

People try to tell you how
to live your life
Let the blind lead the blind
Well, that's all right
So make up your mind
The fool or the wise
There are things in this life
Which you can't compromise

Break away
And take the time to know your mind
And leave it all behind you
And say
That's the way I am

Yeah - I was born this way
Can't you see it in my eyes
Yeah, heah, heah
Oh, I was born this way
Can't you feel it in your heart
Yeah, heah, heah, oh

It's not always easy to disagree
Don't make excuses for what you see
There's one thing in life
I have no doubt
You're on the way up
On the way out, baby, oh

Some people see what's gonna be
But they hide in a corner
From reality
Sometimes you're up
And sometimes you're down
You can't spend your whole life
   Just fooling around

Break away
And take the time to break the ties
And leave it all behind you and say
   That's the way I am

Yeah - I was born this way
Can't you see it in my eyes
   Yeah, heah, heah
Oh, I was born this way
Can't you feel it in
   your heart and say
Yeah, heah, heah, oh

In this world
There's a love that's unspoken
   Letting go
Reaching out
Then it's time to search your heart
   And stop, it's you
Learn to love yourself
   Respect yourself
Say - that's the way I am

Say, I was born this way
   Yeah, yeah, yeah
Yeah - I was born this way
Can't you see it in my eyes?
   Yeah, heah, heah
Oh, I was born this way
Can't you feel it in
   your hearts and say
Yeah, heah, heah, oh
The fool or the wise
   So open your eyes
And say yeah, heah, heah
Yeah - say it loud and clear
And say yeah, heah, heah
I was born this way, oh, oh, oh
Say yeah, heah, heah
I was born this way
   Born this way
So say, so say, yeah
   I said yeah
4.5 Nathan’s Story

I interviewed Nathan on round-trip train journey to Henley-on-Thames, where we traveled with a group of fans to visit Dusty’s grave. A slightly-built Welshman with expressive light blue eyes, Nathan sported a shaved head rather than his severely receding hairline. The scar on his forehead suggested a traumatic past that his mischievous smile belied. Nathan was dressed in jeans, a polo shirt, and a jacket to stave off the chilly English spring weather. As we settled into our seats, he appeared both anxious and happy that his interview was about to begin.

When I asked him about the origins of his Dusty fandom, he said there was “nothing in particular” about the day in 2009 that changed his life. That day was “just the monotonous routine of the supermarket”: he had some extra time, so instead of the usual busy “white knuckle ride,” he browsed the music department. “I’ve always been aware of Dusty in the background” he said, “but up until that point, I’d never heard any of her killer songs and I saw her CD” and “chucked it in the trolley.” I laughed as he continued: “From then on it just became the biggest and most important and most thrilling part of my life and the biggest discovery”

When he first played the CD, he said, “I didn’t get any more housework done” and asked himself, “Why is it that I suddenly feel like this?” When he heard the song “How Can I Be Sure,” “the tears started to come”: “It was . . . a kind of epiphany, like some kind of religious experience. It was the first step of the journey . . . that came in one hundred miles per hour.”

This launched Nathan’s “obsession” with the singer and her life:
I kind of fell in love with her. I went a bit mad. I had to know everything about her straight away, binging on the Internet. She became part of my daily life . . . because she was always in my head, always every day.

“What was it about Dusty that drew you in?” I asked. “And speak up, so I can hear you over the train engine!”

Nathan insisted, not surprisingly, that “initially” it was “the voice.” “I felt every word she sung with her because she was making me feel it. I didn’t have a choice.” What really hooked Nathan, he said, was the “emotion” in Dusty’s voice as she expressed feelings he had himself.

“Tell me more about what kind of feelings came up for you, then,” I probed.

He answered swiftly. “Empathy.”

“Because?”

“Because I’ve had a lot of tragedy in my life, a lot of experiences that have wrung me out. . . . I could feel the notes go through me, even though I wasn’t singing them.”

“But why empathy?” I insisted.

“Because of the situations of unrequited love, not being able to deal with being alone, the pain and the anguish which was in her voice.” He paused and his blue eyes peered into mine, as if he were sure I would understand. “It was almost as if I’d had one thousand buttons, and she pressed the right one straightaway and carried on doing so.”

I nodded my head. “Can you tell me more about what you experience when Dusty sings?” I asked.

He answered in a matter of fact tone. “It feels like love, especially in the bigger ballads—the troughs, and the huge soaring vocals that just give me the shivers. I wait for
the bits in certain songs,” he admitted. “I build myself up for them. When that piece of
that song is about to arrive . . .” His voice trailed off as he shuddered with goose
bumps. “It’s doing it now because I’m talking about it! It makes me feel like I’m
soaring as well.”

I asked him to go back to Dusty’s cover of Bachrach and David’s song that was
the first one to push his emotional button. “Tell me about your first hearing of that
song.”

“How can I be sure?” I’m too fragile to take another risk. Am I emotionally
strong enough? . . . Kind of a lost insecure feeling that I always have and have always
had.” At that point, he explained, he and [his partner] Jason “were in our first six to nine
months of that relationship, and I was very uncertain . . . about whether I could take this
other risk, having had tragedy beforehand.”

(The lyrics to “How Can I Be Sure” appear at the end of Nathan’s story, and the
song can be found on youtube: http://youtu.be/jEiKHZ02R6eU)

“How did it effect you when you learned that Dusty was gay, then?” I inquired.

“It cemented things.” I felt, “Of course,” and this too elicited “empathy.”

“Describe that empathy for me, Nathan.”

He leaned in closer to the recorder to speak:

The empathy [I felt] . . . with her when she sang . . . took on more . . . because I
was able to understand . . . more of the emotions. The songs that she was singing
related to men and . . . I remember thinking to myself how difficult must that
have been for her to sing. I try and picture myself singing to a woman. . . . I
couldn’t do it, but Dusty did. She never showed it in the song, but I knew she must have been feeling that conflict.

Nathan surprised me with what he said next:

But then, that was that. Yes she was gay, and all gay people have sexuality issues [but] . . . that is not greatly and wholly important to me because I’m not a lesbian, because lesbians are not the same as gay men. We’re as different species as I am to a rhino. Nonetheless, the emotional wrenches that she went through were in a way similar to mine.

“How so?” I asked as the train lurched forward.

“I felt sorry for her that she couldn’t be who she wanted to be, like we have that ability now. . . . The bravery that it must have taken [for Dusty] to deal with that on a daily basis!”

“Thinking back on where you were as a young person struggling to fit in, how do you identify with Dusty? Are their particular songs . . .” and before I could finish my question, he had begun to answer it.

The perfect song for me here is ‘Love Me by Name.’ . . . I can remember always feeling that there was some kind of rulebook that everybody else had . . . except me. I floundered around, desperate for that connection that others found so easy to make. Falling in love with such an intensity that I was unable to control, with all the wrong people, who couldn’t, or didn’t reciprocate that love, if it was, in fact, love, or just a desperation . . . to fit in with the rest of the world.

I sat back and listened as he related the familiar lyrics.
‘Rolling out of someone's bed/ Into the sunshine /But the sun, oh, coming up
/Doesn't always bring the light, oh /And somehow, somehow I feel, oh /It's just not right /No, not for me.’ Those words say so much, having been in that exact situation so many times, going out onto the gay scene as a young man and believing I had found my way.

(The full lyrics to “Love Me By Name” appear after Nathan’s story, and the song is on youtube: http://youtu.be/GXCayJWvHHY)

Nathan’s eyes glistened as he continued.

Somebody showing an interest in me in a cloud of alcohol was something that I latched onto so readily. . . . It wasn’t about the sexual encounter, it was about the fact somebody liked me . . . yet as in ‘Love Me by Name,’ waking and realizing that . . . for the other person . . . it was just a sexual encounter. Yet to me those fleeting hours had meant that I was just like everybody else, and the reminder that I wasn’t always hurt me to the core.

“So bring this back to Dusty for me, Dusty the person,” I encouraged him softly. And he continued:

She was dealing with her sexuality at a time when it all had to be so secret, which must have made things so much more difficult. Was she looking for love or was she trying to belong? I imagine Dusty to have been searching for the same rulebook that I did, one that we were never going to receive.

“Low self esteem” was a major theme that arose frequently in Nathan’s description of how he related to Dusty. He returned to explain it when I asked about what he felt he and Dusty had in common.
“When I was younger I didn’t have any. . . . Any kind of attention is worth it when you’ve got none.” The problem persists to this day, he related. “I’ve always had difficulty in accepting the fact that Jason liked me, just for me. I still feel that some good-looking charmer can take him just like that, after nine years.”

“And you think a lot of this kind of thing is true of Dusty as well?” I queried, catching a glimpse out the window at the green countryside that I had been ignoring.

“Yeah, I do. . . . When I hear the pain in her voice, it evokes the pain that I used to feel. Only I couldn’t sing it out, the way Dusty could.”

Nathan told me he found Dusty’s emotional vulnerability, arising from low self-esteem, particularly moving in a television performance she gave in a comeback attempt in the late 1970s.

When she sings ‘I’m Coming Home Again’ on Pebble Mill [television show] . . . that performance is absolutely breathtaking. . . . The vulnerability that comes through . . . is unbelievable, because she can’t even accept the applause. . . . She was thinking . . . I can’t believe that people are going to love me again.

Emotional frailty, “vulnerability,” even “emotional illness” emerged from the interview as primary ways Nathan identified with Dusty. Early in our conversation he had alluded to his issues in an off-hand comment about why he makes his own Dusty CD compilations. “I don’t have an iPod because I can’t handle earphones in my head—there’s enough voices, thank you very much. I don’t need any more!” he’d said with a laugh. He was more serious now in describing the “empathy” between himself and Dusty. When I asked what he thought Dusty might understand about him, he shifted in his seat to face me more directly.
She may have seen . . . herself in me, as I see . . . myself in her. . . . I think she would have wanted to try and help me. . . . We get to strip Dusty down . . . we can get to her soul, and I think she would have wanted to do that for me.

“What do you see when you see her soul?” I wanted to know.

“Emotional pain . . . and a huge longing [for] completion as a person. Even though . . . I’ve got a long term, loving . . . relationship, there’s still a part inside . . . that longs, and I’m not sure what . . . for,” he said with a sigh.

“Go ahead, tell me more,” I encouraged him.

“Before I came out, I longed to be like everyone else, and come out and for everyone else to accept it.”

“And for Dusty?”

“There’s a longing [for] maybe a love she’d never found with the right person, because, she actually did quite a lot of work in her relationships, emotionally, to get by didn’t she?” At this point Nathan drifted off into describing how Dusty embodied the songs she sang:

She had to have a full understanding of emotions . . . for her to be able to sing the way she did. It’s not just musical technique, because when she closes her eyes in a song . . . she is that lyric, she is that emotion, she is what she’s describing.

Nathan paused a moment and continued. “I’m a bit like that as well. There’s an intensity to it . . . combined with the vulnerability. I . . . want to say [to Dusty] ‘It’s all right! I’m going to look after you.’”

“Tell me more about what you would say to Dusty, if you could have met her.”
If I got the chance to sit down and talk with her, I’d try and explain to her what she meant to me—how her music made me feel, and I’d . . . try and convince her that she was supremely talented . . . because she didn’t know. . . . But then I could see her saying, ‘I don’t believe you.’

“Describe a scene for me, Nathan,” I asked.

His eyes lit up. “I’d ask her if she wanted a joint,” he laughed. “I’d say do you want another glass of wine? Should I open another bottle? Let’s get trashed and throw a few plates!” and we both chuckled at the reference to Dusty’s propensity for smashing crockery to let off steam. He continued:

I’d ask her if there was anything I could help her with. . . . I’d make a great fuss of Nicholas [Dusty’s cat in the last years of her life]; I’d get him a nice lovely present, such as a diamond choker. I’d tell her how sorry I felt for the way people cheated her, and for the sad times that she went through . . . and for the lost years. And I’d say ‘Would you be my friend? And can I move into your spare room?’

We had a good chortle as the train pulled into Twyford where we got off to change for the connection to Henley. When we settled into the new car, I asked him to relay more of his fantasies about Dusty. He told me about a recurrent dream he had.

It’s 3:00 in the morning, and she calls me. It’s dark and she’s crying and she’s depressed; she’s alone, and she’s off her trolley, like she needs somebody, and I go to her, and we talk ‘til the early hours, and we drink tea or coffee. . . . And then it’s a sunny morning, and she feels better, and I go back home and she rings me that night. I’m there for her when she needs me. I cry with her. I’m never in the audience in those dreams; I stand at the side [of the stage] and I watch her
singing . . . because I suppose that subconsciously gives me that friendship connection that I wish we had.

Suddenly his voice choked. “Are you okay?” I asked.

He expressed regrets about not having been around to be a Dusty fan during her heyday of the 1960s, when he would have been able to meet her in person:

Oh, Nancy, I do feel that I’ve missed out hugely on what I should have had in my life. I should have been there in the ‘60s, I should have been her friend. I should have run after her, when she was in the taxi, like Simon Bell had.

This is why I have a great fondness for [friend and fellow fan] Catherine G. . . . I would have been similar to Catherine in the way that she loved Dusty, and had the opportunity and took the chances and the risks of taking trains to places and not even knowing whether she was going to get back, on the off chance that she might get to see Dusty. . . That’s not in my normal nature, but I would have done that.

“That would have been so amazing,” I agreed. Then after a moment I asked Nathan to elaborate on his wish of having been Dusty’s “friend”:

I know that we would have got on because we are so similar. I’m hysterical in ways and can throw things and have tantrums and feel better. I can be stupid, I can take risks, I can get lost in my own misery and my own thoughts. I remember [reading about] Dusty’s anxiety problems when she would literally be curled up in the corner. I have been there so many times with that that I just know she would have liked me.
Although, Nathan said, he knows that he “couldn’t have helped her,” he felt there would have been a “connection” and a “bond.” “I’d have gone with her on the paths she went really. I’m not that strong emotionally; I am a victim type of personality, and I think Dusty was. She’d have cried on my shoulder, and I’d have cried on hers.”

In addition to his feelings of friendship, Nathan also shared with me his protective feelings toward Dusty, something the other fans had also spoken about:

I definitely see myself as vulnerable, as in ‘Go Easy on Me,’ [a song from Dusty’s last album], and I think that is what drives me to be protective towards her. And this is why I know that Dusty and I would have been friends had we ever met. I would have defended her against them all.

“I wonder if there are other examples of your protective feelings you might share.” Nathan paused before answering, and then furrowed his brow as he spoke:

After one Dusty Day, a musician became very personal and critical of Dusty, saying things like she had ‘pig eyes’ without her makeup and that she had ‘no vocal technique.’ It took everything I had not to smash his face in!

As Nathan made that dramatic statement, the train pulled into Henley station. We disembarked with the other fans for our walk to the churchyard of St. Mary the Virgin church. There we met up with other friends who had driven in to the town.
When we placed our flowers on her grave, we noticed a bouquet that had been sent by a physically abusive ex-lover of Dusty’s—“Toni”—a woman who had knocked out several of her teeth, permanently disfiguring her face. An attached card contained her sentimental message about still loving Dusty. We fans began making sarcastic remarks about the note, and our anger rose as well, and then Tad, a quiet retired gentleman who had joined our group, ceremoniously picked up the note, flashed Churchill’s V for Victory, and deposited it in a nearby trashcan. We had a good laugh about “cleaning up the churchyard,” as another fan, Catherine G., re-enacted the event for the camera. However, a fan new to the scene, Betsey, protested that Toni had as much right to show
her respects to Dusty as anyone, and questioned whether Dusty’s loyalties might not be with her ex instead of with us.

Later that afternoon, on the train ride back to London, as we resumed our interview, Nathan narrated the event as only he could. “We had a controversial moment today, which was, for most of us, extremely amusing. It was cathartic, therapeutic,” he began. “We arrived to see flowers from Toni, with her great big card . . . saying ‘Dear Dusty . . . bollocks, bullocks, bollocks,’\(^2\) of which I don’t believe a word. . . . I didn’t want those flowers to touch ours!”

“So what kind of things was she saying that makes you say it was ‘bollocks’?” I asked.

[That] things with us were never closed off, Dusty, we never finished properly, we never spoke properly . . . that’s what she’d written, and I thought, well, you did speak: you spoke with a frying pan!\(^2\) You did sort out what you wanted to sort out.

We all thought we don’t want that there, one of us, and the lovely Tad had the foresight, and a little bit of courage and the abject humor to remove the card from the flowers, and then place it in the bin . . . very ceremoniously. For two seconds it shocked me, but then I found it utterly hilarious . . . because . . . he didn’t do it with rage. He just very carefully lifted it between his two fingers, lifted the lid of the bin, and then dropped it in. It was a moment I won’t forget in a long time. . . . It lightened the day.

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\(^2\) English profanity, literally meaning testicles, but figuratively, such as here, meaning nonsense, rubbish, or lies. The American equivalent in this usage might be “bullshit.”

I mentioned to Nathan that Toni had “offered to various people at different times her side of the story, her explanation, justification, of what happened” and asked, “Are you familiar with those, or do you have any thoughts about that?” Nathan shook his head “No” to my first question, and continued:

Most abusers . . . have a justification: It’s the victim’s fault and not the person wielding the weapon . . . So, I have deliberately not read much about [Toni] . . . I know it happened to [Dusty] but I . . . don’t want to know how she suffered, and I don’t want reminding how I did.

“Do you mind talking about your experience with your ex?” I asked, concerned that I was touching upon too emotional of a topic.

“No, it’s okay,” he reassured me, tapping my leg with his hand.

David . . . was very, very abusive to me, for a long time, and I was the victim. I played the role perfectly well and forgave every time, and listened to the excuses, and believed and hoped that things would change.

“Are you talking about physical abuse then?”

“Physically, yeah. [He] put me in hospital on several occasions.” Nathan pointed to the scar on his crown.

I have a skull fracture across my head that was done with a branding poker from the fire, and I was lucky not to lose my eye . . . and I went back to him, because he very cleverly made me feel that he needed me to help him, which is what these abusers do: they turn the whole thing around . . . [Abusers] justify it to themselves psychologically, by saying, ‘Well you made me hit you.’
“How do you relate this to Toni? What is it you’re trying to say about her?” I asked.

“Don’t try justify it by saying you were provoked, because you’re making it worse, put your hand up. . . . That responsibility is yours and yours alone,” he stated emphatically.

“What do you make of what some have reported, that Toni wasn’t the only one who physically abused Dusty?” I asked.

“Oh I wouldn’t be surprised at all,” Nathan responded.

“Why so?”

“I know she was attracted to the more dangerous, risky people, which in hindsight I kind of was when I was younger,” he explained.

“Hmmm, can you help me understand how you felt in that relationship and how you think Dusty might have felt?” I inquired.

Nathan had a lot to say in response to this query. “I know what abuse is: I could write the book!” he began.

When your head is in a mess, as Dusty’s was, sometimes it’s easier to believe that everything’s going to be okay, than actually having to sit and confront the reality that maybe this is over now: I’m going to be alone, I’ve got finances to consider, my living arrangements to think about. You become very skilled at blocking out what’s happened. You become very skilled at looking to the future. You lie to yourself, basically.

“So you found it difficult to break away, then?” I asked.
I remember . . . it would be . . . that’s it! I’ve got to leave now. David was arrested several times and each time when it got to the point of pressing charges, I would drop the case, because it had been 36 hours and I would get a phone call from his mum, saying ‘He didn’t mean it, he does love you, and he’s said he’s sorry.’ On the final occasion, the police officer said to me, ‘next time we’re not going to come out, so make sure if you are dropping these charges now.’

“And yet you stayed?”

“It just seems easier to hope that it’s not going to happen again and hope that they mean what they say. And then further down the line, it does happen.”

“But how is it ‘easier?’” I prodded him. I really wanted to understand the dynamic.

It’s that repetition. Your brain gets used to this kind of repetitive behavior . . . and it seems almost a normal way of life, even though your friends don’t call anymore. People look at you with pity or sympathy . . . because they know what you’re living through, and they don’t understand why you’re not walking away from it, and the reason you’re not walking away is because you’re caught up in this repetitive cycle of violence, making up, violence, making up.

That’s what I think Dusty was trapped in, a cycle. And because she was using drugs and alcohol, she was never able to separate herself, and sit down and think like a rational, normal human being would. And she had anxiety problems, which we all know can ruin your life.

“Yet I’ve heard Toni claims that Dusty provoked her,” I reminded him.
Whatever [Dusty] did she was in torment, she was mentally ill. . . . I’d have had every empathy with her. . . . I’d have a bag full of medicines for half the problems that she had. What did she have? Vodka? Whisky? Cannabis? Uppers, downers all going on, her brain chemistry going everywhere! How can you make a decision about your future and your relationship? You can’t, when you’re in that state of mind. And that’s why it goes on.

“Do you think there’s anything in an individual’s personality or upbringing that might make them more vulnerable to being abused?”

In response, Nathan again compared himself to Dusty, and again spoke confidently.

I want everybody to be pleased . . . and I will do so at my own cost, occasionally. I think there was a lot of that in Dusty. She wanted peace and for everything to be nice, and I think that was the vulnerability that the abuser honed in on, and that was the same with me. David knew he could manipulate me.

And if you [the victim] then forgive, they can talk you round and they’ve got you. They’ve got control of your personality there, because they see what they think is a weakness inside you. I see it as just a gentle side to your sensitive personality. I want people to be happy, I don’t want people to be upset and [abusers] can hone in on that.

Again, I would try plotting about how I was going to get away when David put his skills into use. . . . He was very, very good at it and abusers usually are. Everything will be around what’s going to happen to them if you split up, not about the fact that you’re bleeding all over your face. You know ‘You made me
do it’, ‘What am I going to do without you,’ ‘What if they arrest me, I’ll go to prison,’ and ‘I’ll get on top of this,’ and ‘I promise I will, it won’t happen again.’ And it’ll gradually chip away at you. Like I say, it’s easier to believe them, than it is to face the facts and actually up sticks, and get the hell out.

As I was forming another question, Nathan continued:

The only reason I did get away was because of the arson—he set fire to our house.

Because I was still . . . blocking all that [abuse] out. You block that this is about the eighth time it’s happened; it’s almost as if it’s the first time. You can’t carry on for the rest of your life . . . staring truth in the face; you put the truth away, whatever way you can.

I felt somewhat relieved when our train reached Twyford. I needed a break from the intensity of his tale, and I wondered if Nathan might as well. When we boarded the connection back to London, he agreed to tell me about the role Dusty’s music plays in his everyday life.

It’s virtual bi-polar in this head with my mood changes. One day I’ll feel wonderful and have a fabulous day, the next I’ll feel devastated, distraught, and then I’ll start playing certain Dusty songs. Once she opens that emotional valve in me, I can cry it all out. . . . When I come straight home from work I can be distraught. Then by 7 o’clock in the evening it’s time for dinner. I’ll put on Ev’rything’s Comin’ up Dusty [an early, upbeat, Dusty album].

“So she really has a therapeutic value for you?” I wondered aloud, and realized I my question was too leading.
Very much so, yes. Cathartic, that’s a good word. When I’m having a flee or stay kind of thing . . . when I’m having a panic attack which is quite often . . . my first thought is, I need to get out of here and my second thought is, I need to listen to Dusty. It’s my first port of call, and if I have to get a taxi that costs me £35 to get home faster than would a bus or a train, then I’ll do that in a panic. The first thing when I get home is play a Dusty track [and] I’ll find her voice soothing and calming in those situations.

I looked at my notes before I spoke. “So here’s an important question, I want to be sure you have time to answer: What would your life had been like, if Dusty had not come in to it?”

Nathan’s response was emphatic:

Oh my goodness me! Empty. I would probably have thirty cats, because I’d have to have somewhere to put all that love and affection. I can’t give it all to my partner. There’s loads in me and Dusty uses that up. I don’t know where it would have gone, whether it would have bottled up inside me, and I’d have never gotten rid of it—I would have been a frustrated human being.

[Dusty] does everything. She soothes, she calms, she destroys me. Emotionally, she wakes me up from fits of depression. I just can’t imagine life without her; well, I wouldn’t have any focus. I wouldn’t have things to buy, friends to meet, a forum to be part of. My life would have been a bit boring, because of everything that’s come along with Dusty—the friendships, the experiences, the traveling, the Dusty Day.
I wouldn’t feel the things I feel every day, if I hadn’t found her. . . . I couldn’t feel, this much. I couldn’t feel as deeply. You know when I just said if I hadn’t found her I wouldn’t have had anywhere to put that love? I don’t think I’d have ever found an outlet for the grief either, that I feel, or have felt.

“So, if you think of sort of your day-to-day life and since then . . . are you saying you feel more real, you feel more stable now? I asked.

Happier that she’s in my life, definitely happier, and I do get a feeling of security from her as well because I know she’s there for me whenever I want. . . . I can get to her, I can see her, I can feel her emotions, I can think about her, I can read about her, I can watch her perform, I can interact with people.

[Dusty’s] given me more texture to my life; she’s filled my life. She’s filled a hole that needed to be filled, and daily, my life is so much more enjoyable.

I do sometimes feel that I’ve got a secret that nobody else has got, that I’ve got something special that they haven’t got, you know, and I feel it’s their loss, if they don’t, you know.

I do have some friends that try and take the Mickey a lot: they’ll say, ‘Oh my god, not that again, get over it,’ and they don’t understand, and I just think, ‘Well, who do you love? Who’s in your life? Who fills your head with thoughts and feelings, and emotions, and who takes you on journeys everyday? Nobody, you know?’ You sit and watch some inane bland bullshitty crap on the television, and then you go to bed and you get up and you do it all again.

“Well, my friend, we’ll be at Paddington soon. Anything else you want to say about today, about your fandom?
I mean this is my fourth visit to the grave, but my second Dusty Day, so the experience was very similar to last year. A lot of the same people were there, which was great. I love that! That’s the community feeling, you know, and the way that the new people [become] part of the big family—within an hour! Which I think shows the spirit of most of Dusty’s friends, because we are a really generous bunch of people. We all have a similar trait running through us, which is kindness, a niceness, those I’ve met anyway.

“Before we end, would you like to share any more fantasies you have about Dusty?”

“How about something lighter?” he said.

“Whatever you want,” I agreed.

Ok then, we go on holiday! Somewhere hot and sunny. There’d be you and me, and there’d be Loretta, and there’d be Catherine G. and there would be all of LTD. We’d have a huge, big, enormous house in Cape Cod and we’d do all the art things, where we’d go to galleries and antique shops. We’d have parties and lunches and dinners, and we’d go swimming. [We’d] listen to Dusty singing, and she’d pick up a guitar in the evening and play acoustic to us and sing in Portuguese.

She’d sing ‘El Baion’ for me. You need a microphone; the room wouldn’t be small enough and it’d have a staircase, cause there would be a high ceiling, and of course the sound would have reverberated. And then we’d have pictures of her friends all over the walls, and pictures of us, in smiley happy poses, like you do with friends, you know.
And when we came home, she would be posting on the LTD, and then she’d ask us not to let Toni on the forum.

Nathan smiled in a way that was both impish and reflective. “That actually reminds me of what Betsy asked earlier [at the grave in Henley] when Ted put that piece of rubbish in the bin: ‘Who do you think Dusty would have stood with if she were here, Toni, or us?’

As the train pulled into the station he confided to me with a smile: “I’d like to think it would be us.”
How Can I Be Sure?

Felix Cavaliere and Edward Brigati, Jr.

How can I be sure?
In a world that's constantly changing
How can I be sure?
Where I stand with you

Whenever I
Whenever I am away from you
I wanna die
'Cause you know I wanna stay with you

How do I know?
Maybe you're trying to use me
Flying too high can confuse me
Touch me, but don't take me down

Whenever I
Whenever I am away from you
My alibi is telling people
I don't care for you

Maybe I'm just hanging round
With my head up, upside down
It's a pity for you
I can't seem to find somebody new that's as Wonderful baby as you

How can I be sure?
I really, really, really, wanna know
Really, really, wanna know, yeah

How's the weather?
Whether or not we're together
Together will seem that much better
I love you, I love you forever
You know where I can be found

How can I be sure?
In a world that's constantly changing
How can I be sure
I'll be sure with you?
Love Me By Name

Music by Lesley Gore and Lyrics by Ellen Weston

I tried so hard to be carefree
Rolling out of someone’s bed
Into the sunshine
But the sun, oh, coming up
Doesn’t always bring the light, oh
And somehow, somehow I feel, oh
It’s just not right
No, not for me

Well it’s been so long
Since I’ve been loved by name, oh-ho
Love me by name, ah
Love me by name
Come on, come on, ooh-hoo
Love me

Here I feel afraid, ooh
And I don’t know why
You’re surely not the first I’ve had, ah, oh
Who held me gently, yeah
Oh, who took the sweet time
Just to ask me about me
Well, well maybe this time
Oh God, let it be
Oh, it’s such so, so, so long
Since I’ve been loved, oh, by name

Love me by name
Ah, love me by name
Come on and love me, oh baby
Yes, love me, aah, aah

Oh, love me by name, oh
Why don’t you love me, ah
Come on, come on, ahh, ahh
Sweet baby
Oh won’t you love me, yeah
Love me by name
Chapter 5 Analysis

5.1 Coding the Data

a. Introduction.

What is the role (value/meaning/function) of popular singer Dusty Springfield and her music in the identity development of her not-straight fans? Four main themes related to this research question arose from the data:

Fans’ connections to Dusty via emotional music

Fans’ relationships to Dusty

Fans’ identifications/similarities to Dusty

Life changing nature of fandom.

Each theme had sub-themes to indicate variations. Figure 5.1 illustrates the Coding Scheme for the themes and sub-themes of the data.

I constructed the themes as a way to manage the data most relevant to my research topic, an arbitrary process by nature. By presenting the themes in a straightforward way, their inter-relation may not be immediately evident. To foreshadow the connections, in brief, the themes suggest that for Dusty Springfield to become the fan-object of not-straight fans, fans must feel an emotional connection to Dusty through her music. The connection, which I also understand as a relationship, is often based upon the identifications and similarities fans feel they have with Dusty. This relationship, in turn, can be life-changing for the fan, in a variety of ways.

I first illustrate each of the major themes and sub-themes in the order they appear in the Coding Scheme by offering illustrations from the data. Following this discussion, I discuss in more detail how themes are inter-related.
Figure 5.1 Coding Scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CODE</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>CASES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Fans’ Connections to Dusty via emotional music</td>
<td>L, I, M, N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-NE</td>
<td>Dusty’s naked emotions in her music</td>
<td>L, I, M, N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-C</td>
<td>Conflation of Dusty’s songs with her life/feelings</td>
<td>L, I, M, N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-A</td>
<td>Dusty’s voice capturing the needed emotion</td>
<td>L, M, N</td>
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<tr>
<th>R</th>
<th>Fans’ Relationships to Dusty</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R-FA</td>
<td>Fan/admirer</td>
<td>L, I, M, N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-FA-O</td>
<td>Fans’ obsession with Dusty</td>
<td>L, I, M, N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-FA-U</td>
<td>Dusty as unknowable</td>
<td>L, I</td>
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<tr>
<td>R-FA-BC</td>
<td>Boldness and courage</td>
<td>L, I, M, N</td>
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<td>R-SR</td>
<td>Sexual/romantic attraction</td>
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<tr>
<td>R-EF</td>
<td>Empathetic friendship</td>
<td>L, I, M, N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(mutual understanding; kindred spirit)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-P</td>
<td>Protector</td>
<td>L, I, N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-CR</td>
<td>Comforted, reassured by Dusty</td>
<td>L, I, M, N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-RM</td>
<td>Role model in life and music</td>
<td>L, I, M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Fans’ Identifications/Similarities with Dusty</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>ID-SI</td>
<td>Sexual identity</td>
<td>L, I, M, N</td>
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<tr>
<td>ID-SI-HC</td>
<td>Heterosexist context</td>
<td>L, I, M, N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ID-SI-CI</td>
<td>Constructed identity</td>
<td>I, L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ID-O</td>
<td>Outsider (sexuality, religion, race, class)</td>
<td>I, M, N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ID-HL</td>
<td>Heartache and longing</td>
<td>L, I, M, N</td>
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<td>ID-LSE</td>
<td>Low self esteem; vulnerability</td>
<td>L, M, N</td>
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<td>ID-EL</td>
<td>Emotional illness</td>
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<td>ID-V</td>
<td>Victim of abuse</td>
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<tr>
<th>LC</th>
<th>Therapeutic and Profound/Life Changing Nature of Fan Relationship/Experience</th>
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<tr>
<td>LC-P</td>
<td>Fills life with purpose; focus completion</td>
<td>N</td>
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<tr>
<td>LC-BH</td>
<td>Broadens horizons (people, places, music, politics)</td>
<td>L, N</td>
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<tr>
<td>LC-FC</td>
<td>Facilitates community; provides insight into others</td>
<td>L, I, M, N</td>
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<tr>
<td>LC-U</td>
<td>Offers feeling of being understood</td>
<td>L, I, M, N</td>
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<tr>
<td>LC-A</td>
<td>Helps find their way; accept themselves</td>
<td>M</td>
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<tr>
<td>LC-SI</td>
<td>Helps fans find their way; accept themselves</td>
<td>L, I</td>
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<tr>
<td>LC-SOE</td>
<td>Aids in birth of/confidence in sexual identity; relationships</td>
<td>M, N</td>
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<td>LC-ECS</td>
<td>Provides sense of security; outlet for emotion</td>
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<th>L</th>
<th>Loretta</th>
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<th>Isobel</th>
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<td>M</td>
<td>Malcolm</td>
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<td>Nathan</td>
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b. Fan’s connection to Dusty via emotional music.

Without exception, the four fans in this study felt an emotional connection to Dusty by way of her music. For fans, who “have the capacity to kind of have that level of sensitivity,” “there is something intangible in Dusty’s voice . . . that does affect you profoundly, and emotionally and spiritually,” as Isobel explained; “It’s to do with the vulnerability . . . the ache . . . the longing . . . this ability to just… make you cry, and to make you a wreck and to make you think about things deeply.” To Nathan, the sound of Dusty singing “feels like love.” Malcolm described Dusty’s vocal quality as having “this shading to it and this emotional ache.” For both Isobel and Loretta, the song “I Can’t Make It Alone” illustrates Dusty’s conveyance of powerful emotion through her music, specifically the “climax” of Dusty singing “help me,” which Loretta proclaimed “almost breaks the listener’s heart.” For Malcolm, Dusty’s performance of “You Don’t Have to Say You Love Me” on her BBC TV series takes “the audience on one of the most harrowing emotional roller-coaster rides pop music has ever produced.” Nathan explained the connection between Dusty’s voice and the listener most directly: “I felt every word she sang with her because she was making me feel it. I didn’t have a choice.”

1. Dusty’s naked emotions in her music.

Fans agreed that Dusty exposed her vulnerability through her music. As Nathan described it, “We get to strip Dusty down . . . we can get to her soul.” Malcolm cited the album *Dusty in Memphis* as the first recording where Dusty “truly feels emotionally bare,” comparing it to walking in on a lover undressed: “You witness every part, every piece that’s utterly perfect, every inch that may be brilliantly flawed. And you realize in
this moment of vulnerability they are more beautiful than you could’ve possibly imagined.”

2. **Conflation of Dusty’s music with her life/feelings.**

   All of the fans felt there was a connection between what Dusty was feeling and what she was singing. Nathan insisted, “She must have been able to understand [the feelings] to be able to put that emotion into the song.” Or, as Loretta expressed it, “It really comes from her heart; it’s not just flat singing. . . . It’s proper emotion and that’s really difficult to fake or replicate.” Isobel compared Dusty to a famous blues singer: “When Billie Holiday sings and you know everything that happened . . . in her . . . tragic horrible life, and you can hear it in every single song that she sings. . . . Dusty is like that as well.” “When she closes her eyes in a song . . . she *is* that lyric, she *is* that emotion,” was Nathan’s characterization of the conflation of singer and song. Malcolm explained that “Knowing the parallels between the personal and professional lends an extra poignancy to the songs she recorded.” In a follow-up interview he elaborated: “Vocal stylists” like Dusty “don’t just sing. They don’t just tell the story. They live it, in all its glory and shame. They share a bit of their own soul.”

3. **Dusty’s voice capturing the needed emotion.**

   Loretta suggested that Dusty captures the emotion an audience needs to hear with her remark that members of a particular group “are more likely to label her songs and the emotions that she depicts in them” in a way that “relate to them specifically.” Malcolm described Dusty’s “unusual” voice as “this kind of entity that can take on basically whatever it needs to take on; it can encompass whatever it needs to.” Similarly, Nathan
characterized his first listening of Dusty this way: “It was almost as if I’d had one thousand buttons, and she pressed the right one straightaway and carried on doing so.”

c. **Fans’ Relationships to Dusty.**

The fans in this study described a number of different ways they felt in relationship to Dusty.

1. **Fan/admirer.**

The findings show how the fans feel obsessed with Dusty, especially early in their fandom. In addition to their obvious admiration of Dusty’s voice and its conveyance of emotions they felt themselves, these Dusty fans are attracted to her enigmatic qualities and admire her for her pioneering contribution to music and her boldness and courage.

i. **Fans’ obsession with Dusty.**

One theme common among all of the cases was a consuming obsession fans felt about Dusty, especially early in their fandom. According to Loretta, “When I first found out about her, I just wanted to find out everything,” because “she’s not just a singer and she’s not just got sexuality, she’s got different parts of her that you just want to break down and analyze.” Nathan “fell in love with her,” “went a bit mad,” and “had to know everything about her straight away, binging on the Internet.” Part of his feeling “obsessed” with Dusty and her music was “a great need” for others to understand “that this fantastic thing had happened to me.” As he described it, “All of a sudden, one day, you lead a normal life; the next day, the only topic of conversation is about a singer that isn’t with us anymore called Dusty Springfield, and getting [others] to kind of adjust to my feelings was difficult.”


**ii. Dusty as unknowable.**

Fans also admired Dusty’s mysterious persona. Loretta characterized Dusty’s intangibility this way: “She could be quite an enigma to people; she could share a lot, but she didn’t share everything.” Loretta later added, “She contained a mystery about her. She was always very charismatic to people and very open in that way, but she wasn’t full on, and she was deep down, a very shy person, very insecure, which also had an X-factor as well, because you could see that she didn’t want to be put on a pedestal . . . but that added to her charm.” Isobel echoed those thoughts: “It’s all these things we don’t know about her, so that she has this certain quality of being enigmatic, and you find out quite a lot, and it’s fascinating, and there’s always something that you can’t find out, and that makes somebody an intriguing persona doesn’t it? So, she’s . . . got that quality . . . Hollywood stars had, when they really were just unknown and untouchable.”

**iii. Boldness and courage.**

All of the fans admired Dusty feistiness, boldness and courage in standing up for herself and others who had less recognition and power. Malcolm called her a “trailblazer,” citing how she “rallied unsuspecting British musicians to recreate the sounds she fell in love with in America, and slipped into the ladies room with a microphone to obtain the acoustics she desired.” “I admire her . . . almost feminist approach to music,” Loretta said; “I’m glad that she was difficult to work with, because . . . the producers needed that. It was a very male-dominated business back then, and she paved the way for many female singers, and she also paved the way for many other minority groups. You know, gay and lesbian, Black people.” Nathan praised “the bravery that it must have taken [for Dusty] to deal with [hiding her sexuality] on a daily
basis.” Malcolm admired Dusty’s “bravery” to “overcome” the strictures of her Catholicism to “establish some type of norm” in her life as a not-straight individual.

Dusty’s introduction of Motown groups to Britain as well as her stand against apartheid by refusing to play to segregated audiences were mentioned by most fans as admirable acts. “She may have said in that interview, ‘I don’t know the first thing about politics’ but she did! . . . I think she did a lot of things that meant she was quite Bolshie and quite stroppy . . . when she was speaking out at a time that was not at all acceptable and normal for girl singers to be doing those kind of things,” was how Isobel explained Dusty’s courage.

2. Sexual/romantic attraction.

Loretta was the fan who emphasized the physical attractiveness and allure of Dusty. “She was small and petite yet quite powerful on stage.” Loretta elaborated on this point:

She had a really unique quirky little way about her, she wore these cute little outfits, she had hairstyles that would that looked awful on other people but suited her to a T, she had these amazing eyes, . . . the pastel pink lipstick and the long eyelashes and the black eye shadow . . . it was like ‘Wow’!

In her early fandom Loretta imagined herself as the love object when Dusty sounded “vulnerable yet seductive” in some of her songs. If she had met the 1960’s Dusty, Loretta would have first asked “‘Would you go out with me?’” Then she conceded, “No, not really, but I probably would have flirted with her like crazy.” Looking back on her late adolescence she explained Dusty’s romantic appeal this way:
“Dusty was ‘safe.’ She was a nice thought which couldn’t hurt me, because I was vulnerable . . . more so back then. I had come out not long ago.”

3. **Friendship (mutual understanding; empathy.)**

All of the fans in the study perceived a “relationship,” a “connection,” or “bond” with Dusty. Malcolm described her as a “kindred spirit.” The relationship is marked by mutual understanding and empathy, which relates directly to the emotional connection these fans feel with Dusty. Loretta, for example, noted that through her music, Dusty is “showing [the listener] that she understands” because she “knows what it’s like.”

Nathan proclaimed, “There is an empathy between me and her because of the situations of unrequited love . . . not being able to deal with being alone, the pain and the anguish which was in her voice.” He went on to explain:

I’ve had a lot of tragedy in my life, a lot of emotional experiences that have wrung me out, and I felt empathy with the way she was singing. It was like I could feel the notes go through me, even though I wasn’t singing them.

Nathan saw his friendship with Dusty as one of reciprocal empathy. “I couldn’t have helped her; I’d have gone with her on the paths she went really. . . . She’d have cried on my shoulder, and I’d have cried on hers. And that’s why I feel the need to be thinking about her and have her in my life every single day.” Nathan imagined that he and Dusty would have a mutual understanding about “emotional illness”: “I think she would have a great deal of sympathy, empathy . . . She would have seen a lot of that in me, and I think she would have wanted to try and help me as well.”
4. **Protector.**

Most fans in this study also described their relationship to Dusty as one of protector. Isobel explained that like her, other fans have said . . . that they’re really sad that she’s not here anymore . . . and they . . . feel this kind of connection to her that is more than fan and star. They feel kind of protective of her. Even though she’s not here anymore, in the sense they want to look after her.

Isobel’s protectiveness arises from her sense of Dusty’s life as “unbearably sad”: ‘Yesterday When I was Young’ is one [song] that I find very hard to listen to because even though she was only [in her] . . . early thirties when she sung it . . . you can now listen to it as somebody who knows what happened in the years after that song. . . . [It’s] a lament; it’s about . . . the fact that she had a very, very short time . . . of being in the spotlight, of doing very well.

Isobel also cited a second and more personal reason she will “always” be “looking after” Dusty: “It was against the backdrop of discovering her and discovering her music that I also . . . discovered myself.”

Other fans, like Nathan, “felt sorry for [Dusty] in that she couldn’t be who she wanted to be [sexually],” or, as Loretta said, “She had to create a false persona.” Loretta explained that Dusty “would have understood the turmoils in knowing who to tell [because] . . . you’re always coming out your whole life.” Nathan characterized his feelings as “the protectiveness you build up for yourself and other gay people.”

When Dusty is singing “Beautiful Soul,” Nathan wants to tell her, “‘It’s all right! I’m going to look after you’” because, he explained, “What drives me to be protective
towards her and others [is] I see people’s vulnerability.” At times he wonders if those he feels protective toward really feel vulnerable, but underscores, “Dusty was, and I am. And this is why I know that Dusty and I would have been friends had we ever met. I would have defended her against [everyone who hurt her], and I wish I had the chance.”

Nathan cited two recent manifestations of protectiveness toward Dusty: One came after Dusty Day, when “a musician became very personal and critical of Dusty” and he wanted to “smash his face in.” Another time he was among a group of fans who disposed of a card from an abusive ex of Dusty’s that had been left with flowers on Dusty’s grave: “I didn’t want those flowers to touch ours; I didn’t want to see that kind of bollocks [the abusive ex’s proclamations of love].”

5. Comforted, reassured by Dusty.

All of the fans in this study also felt in relationship to Dusty in the sense that she sometimes reassured, calmed, or affirmed them. When she was “scared shitless” to come out, Isobel felt comforted by Dusty: “I’ve had some dark moments when I’ve thought I can’t tell anybody. . . . You know my friends back home . . . they’re not going to see me in the same way . . . so I used to listen to ‘Beautiful Soul’ at that time a lot.” In this song, Dusty’s “message” to her was “‘You can’t cope with the fact that you love another woman, and that you’re gay, and it’s okay, it’s all right. I’m trying to help you; it’s going to be okay.’” Similarly, from her recording “Closet Man,” Malcolm felt Dusty’s “very sweet, reassuring” words about “the release of one’s shame” in being gay: “‘Why, it's older than religion and quite honestly more fun’ she sings. Thank you Dusty! I'd never compare the two, but thank you for making me feel like it's not such a bad or alien thing to feel what I feel.’”
Corroborating this view, Nathan found Dusty “soothing” and “calming” when he experiences a panic attack. “When I feel that I need to get out of an office, my first thought is, ‘I need to get out of here.’ and my second thought is, ‘I need to listen to Dusty.’ It’s my first port of call.” In a time of financial trouble, Malcolm found a familiar encouragement from Dusty via her song “Getting it Right”: “What a calming, confident affirmation!” It “feels good to have her on your side,” he declared. Citing lyrics from the song, he explained:

‘Hey boy, it’s alright, someone understands, you don’t have so far to go’—how fucking beautiful is that? Her voice, when she comes off the bridge . . . ‘you’re made of love, hey boy’—she sounds so beautiful, her voice older, wiser, [saying] ‘I’ve been there and I can tell this tale now.’ . . . Again, a word of encouragement . . . ‘this is the secret to getting it right.’

6. Role model in life and music.

Although fans did not use the words “role model” in discussing Dusty, one may draw inferences from their admiration of her, their identification with her, and the ways she altered their life. Loretta praised Dusty for helping her to say, “Yes, I am gay,” explaining that knowing “there are people like that, who are like me” gave her “confidence.” She went on to explain why she wishes more fan-objects would come out:

It would help people a hell of a lot. It would produce more role models, idols, because everywhere that gay people turn, they are always bombarded with heterosexual norms and values, and rarely do you get a film that’s about gay lovers. . . . It can be very confusing to those growing up. . . . I know what it’s like: I didn’t know how to understand my own feelings when I was little.
Isobel found in Dusty a role model for difference. “I absolutely think she was subversive,” she declared. “I think Dusty was kind of someone to hang my identity on, because . . . in this country if you’re White and you’re from the South and you’re middle class . . . you don’t have a history of being repressed or being in a minority. . . . I used to think “I want to be Irish, or Black or something”; then she “discovered” she was “actually . . . a member of a minority group.” As Isobel described the discovery: “it has given me an identity that I never had before. Massively. Absolutely massively.”

Malcolm saw Dusty as a unique pioneer who could model a way to negotiate the difficult terrain of a straight world: “There was no precedent for her, she was kind of forging her own path, she didn’t have any predecessors, you know, certainly not as far as being a big star who happened to be lesbian, who was trying to find a way to cope with that, to make that work without it destroying her career, which it could’ve in the sixties.”

d. Identifications/Similarities with Dusty.

Fans found similarities between themselves and Dusty, typically identifying with her in multiple ways. Several similarities between the fan and fan-object were characteristic of all the fans in the study.

1. Sexual identity.

Although Dusty only came out as bisexual, Loretta and Isobel identified with Dusty, as Isobel described it, as “wanting to . . . be a person who loves women in this open and very normal kind of way.” Loretta placed Dusty’s sexuality in the historical/professional context of Dusty’s life: “People to this day will argue that she’s

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23 Dusty never technically described herself as “bisexual.” In a 1970 interview with Ray Connelly for The Evening Standard she famously said “I’m just as easily swayed by a girl as by a boy.” In a 1973 interview with Chris Van Ness, she stated “People are people. . . . I go from men to women; I don’t give a shit” (cited in Randall, 2009, p. 136).
bisexual, and that’s their prerogative, but . . . all of her long-term relationships were with women”; “she was attracted to women.” Isobel similarly stated, “[Dusty’s] great love affairs were with women. Having an occasional attraction to a man, or sleeping with a man, or having some kind of involvement with a man, if everything else is about women, does that make you bisexual?”

Malcolm identified with Dusty’s sexual ambiguity, and refusal to be labeled. “Based on what we know, there is no doubt that her predominant interest was women . . . but . . . she was kind of hesitant to put that kind of label on herself. That appealed to me.” “To just close everything off and say ‘I’m gay’ is almost to dismiss another part of myself.” He feels no “shame” having a male partner; “It’s just that idea of confinement. I don’t like it at all, I never did,” he explained.

i. Heterosexist context.

The fans in this study were all empathetic with Dusty’s being not-straight in a heterosexist world. Isobel stated that she “identified” with Dusty “in terms of the fact that I perceive her, correctly or incorrectly, as a woman who felt she had to hide her sexuality to some people . . . and that she had a bit of a battle with that. . . . I went through a period of hiding it from everyone, which was horrible, and that’s when my identification with [Dusty] was strongest.” In the same vein, Nathan articulated that he “related to Dusty” because “she was dealing with her sexuality at a time when it all had to be so secret, which must have made things so much more difficult. Was she looking for love or was she trying to belong?”

The harassment about her sexual identity that Dusty experienced from the media was an additional component of the context identified by Loretta: “A lot of this stuff she
said about ‘a few men’—I think she did it to put people off the scent . . . and to be honest, I don’t blame her because many of the press were on her case about it, and they were just after information, you know, to make money out of it and to exploit that. So, I don’t really blame her for being coy about the whole issue.” In fact, Loretta identified with Dusty’s decision and concluded that Dusty would not have wanted to be dishonest: “[In the same situation] I think I would have felt pretty hounded, and I probably would have given some responses that I wouldn’t want to have given.”

ii. Constructed identity.

Isobel and Loretta recognized their construction of Dusty’s sexuality as what they needed it to be. Isobel described Dusty’s “bisexuality” label as “redundant and useless”; “the meaning [of the fan-object] resides in “the consumer,” she insisted. Sometime after her initial interview, when Loretta was dating a young man for about six months, she explained how her perception of Dusty’s sexuality had changed: “Now I have a more open mind and better understanding that [Dusty] may have perhaps genuinely fallen for a man or two because they may have possessed qualities that she might have adored, whereas before I would have denied that because I had never experienced it myself, and wanted to relate to her so much.” In both cases Loretta saw Dusty’s sexuality as she saw her own.

2. Outsider (sexuality, religion, race, class).

Speaking primarily of his sexuality, Nathan stated, “As an adult I realize that I am not alone with my feelings of not belonging, being excluded, being different, and I imagine Dusty to have been searching for the same rule book that I did, one that we were never going to receive.” Malcolm identified with Dusty as an outsider in multiple ways:
In her I see a kindred spirit; I would like to think that with me she would find the same, someone who has had to buck conventional things—one of those underdogs, one of those outsiders that she had been and that she had championed and that she would be able to relate to.

He underlined the primary ways he identified with Dusty by referring to a passage in a biography published soon after her death. “There were three things Dusty wanted to be, and that was . . . straight, Black, and a good Catholic and she felt she had gotten the reverse of all three. . . . I felt all of three of those at one time. I wanted to be straight so much.”

Malcolm also outlined his identification with Dusty’s religious upbringing:

Mary O’ Brien was this Catholic girl . . . She could have stayed at a convent, she could have stayed in a little town in England, she could have just adhered her life to whatever . . . her local priest and . . . the nuns . . . told her. . . . But she didn’t, and . . . even though that may have continued to have caused her . . . conflict or maybe feelings of guilt, she decided to pursue her own path and find her own way and that let her outside of that teaching and I think that caused her to acknowledge feelings that she couldn’t hide. Just like it took me a while to come to terms with myself and feelings I couldn’t hide.

Malcolm also “felt a kinship with Dusty” in their “identification with Black culture.” “My mother is Cape Verdean, and my father is White, he’s from Canada. That caused—growing up for me, especially being very fair skinned . . . a bunch confusion and insecurity. . . . And not knowing where I wanted to be or . . . where I belonged,” he explained. He and Dusty shared a love for soul music: “She recognized . . . something
raw and something real . . . that's what I saw as well.” “She had to have been in heaven [hosting the Motown special on BBC], so, to see that kind of joy . . . I identified with that.”

Isobel identified with the “subversive” aspect of Dusty as an outsider: “I could access a bit of the ‘not mainstream’ by her music,” which was important because Isobel did not identify with her middle-class White English background. She was “absolutely certain that if [Dusty] had done what some people thought she might have done, married Burt Bacharach, have a couple of kids, I wouldn’t be interested.”

3. **Heartache and longing.**

All of the fans in this study identified with the heartache and longing Dusty communicated in her music, which coincides with their connection to Dusty through the emotion in her songs, as discussed earlier. For Loretta,

the listener can relate to the song ‘All I See is You,’ in knowing what it’s like to really… not being able to have [the one you love], and . . . it’s . . . torturing the listener, in a way, because it’s showing empathy with people, knowing how they can feel that loss.

Malcolm “relates” to Dusty’s song, “Who Gets Your Love,” which asks “How do you get past a relationship that's over when it's so immediate to you?” He explained, “I've seen relationships reach unhappy ends, and then had to adjust to an existence around the ruins.” Nathan identified with Dusty’s “huge longing” for the right relationship or even “completion as a person, even though . . . I’ve got a long term, loving, wonderful relationship, there’s still a part inside you that longs, and I’m not sure what it is you’re longing for.”
4. **Low self esteem; vulnerability.**

Two of the fans in this study identified strongly with Dusty’s “vulnerability” and “low self esteem.” Loretta thought Dusty would understand her “insecurities”: “Like me, she does crave attention. . . . We’re both weak to flattery . . . but at the same time, probably would shun it.” She continued: “It’s like being misunderstood by other people, and feeling that you’re no good for anyone.” She underscored her identification with Dusty’s feeling of worthlessness: “I know how she felt, that she wasn’t any good sometimes.”

Dusty’s song “How Can I Be Sure?” resonated with Nathan. “Am I taking a chance here? I’m too fragile to take another risk. Kind of a lost insecure feeling that I . . . have always had.” He gave another example, citing Dusty’s performance during a comeback attempt that was not entirely successful: “When she sings ‘I’m Comin’ Home Again’ . . . the vulnerability in that performance is absolutely breathtaking”; he describes what he sees in Dusty’s face as the same insecurity he described having himself: “She brings out this beautiful vulnerability, because she was thinking . . . I can’t believe that . . . people are going to love me again.” He explained how insecurity relates to having low regard for oneself: “It’s hard to believe that people do care for you when you’ve got that low self-esteem.”

5. **Emotional illness.**

Beyond “low self-esteem,” Nathan identified with Dusty’s “emotional illness,” seeing her as someone with greater problems than his own, yet fewer resources for help.

We are so similar. I’m hysterical in ways and can throw things and have tantrums and feel better. I can be stupid, I can take risks, I can get lost in my own misery
and my own thoughts. I remember [reading about] Dusty’s anxiety problems when she would literally be curled up in the corner. I have been there so many times. . . . I think she was having panic attacks way before they were even known. . . . She was in torment, she was mentally ill . . . which I’m treated for, [and] I’d have a bag full of medicines for half the problems that she had. So I’m able to live my life with that medication normally, but she never had it.

6. Victim of abuse.

Not unrelated to issues to “low self-esteem” and “emotional illness” is the identification Nathan felt with Dusty as a victim of physical and emotional abuse by a partner. “I want everybody to be pleased, and . . . I will do so at my own cost, occasionally. I think there was a lot of that in Dusty. . . . I think that was the vulnerability that the abuser honed in on, and that was the same with me.” He believed that like him, Dusty became “very skilled at blocking out what’s happened.” “When your head is in a mess, as Dusty’s was, sometimes it’s easier to believe that everything’s going to be ok, than actually having to sit and confront the reality that maybe this is over now.”

He explained further, “I think Dusty was trapped in a cycle.” He experienced the pattern himself: “Your brain gets used to this kind of repetitive behavior . . . and it seems almost a normal way of life”; “the reason you’re not walking away is because you’re caught up in this repetitive cycle of violence, making up, violence, making up.”

e. Life changing nature of fandom.

Fans reported important life-changes resulting from their Dusty fandom, ranging from their view of themselves and others to their sense of place in the world.
1. Fills life with purpose; focus; completion.

His being a Dusty fan has completely changed Nathan’s life, giving it direction and making it special. “I just can’t imagine life without her; well, I wouldn’t have any focus. I wouldn’t have things to buy, friends to meet, a forum to be part of. . . . I would just be sitting in front of a television or a computer.”

“[Dusty’s] given me more texture to my life. . . . She’s . . . filled a hole that needed to be filled, and daily, my life is so much more enjoyable. I do sometimes feel that I’ve got a secret that nobody else has got, that I’ve got something special that they haven’t got.” As for those who tease him and “don’t understand,” Nathan said, “I just think ‘Well, who do you love? Who’s in your life, you know? Who fills your head with thoughts and feelings, and emotions, and who takes you on journeys every day? Nobody, you know? [You] sit and watch . . . some inane bland bullshitty crap on the television, and then you go to bed and you get up and you do it all again.’”

Similarly, Malcolm stated, “If [Dusty] wasn’t around or I didn’t have her as a part of my life I think that it probably would have a negative impact, I think I would be a bit stunted, a bit less inspired and thoughtful and contemplative of everything. She’s been very positive in that area.”

2. Broadens horizons (people, places, music, politics).

Nathan claimed that his “daily life . . . would have been a bit boring, because of everything that’s come along with Dusty—the friendships, the experiences, the traveling, the Dusty Day.” Being a Dusty fan was a “milestone” for Loretta, exposing her to a more diverse group of people: “The problem with uni[versity] and school was that it was too sheltered—many of my friends had the same experiences. . . . I met a wider variety of
people . . . on the boards [Dusty forums]; you get people of different ages, genders, sexualities, and from different countries. . . . Some are disabled . . . so that’s been interesting.”

Loretta noted that, “If I had never had become a Dusty fan I wouldn’t have had half as much fun! . . . I wouldn’t have been able to go to America to see [other Dusty fans].” “I know that I probably could . . . have met people in other ways, but I wouldn’t have formed the close friendships that I have today. . . . The forums helped me to establish those relationships with people. I mean, I even got my second . . . long-term girlfriend from one of the sites—that’s how I met her.” For Loretta, Dusty also broadened her musical tastes: “Listening to Dusty when I was 17 kind of helped me to re-discover soul music I once listened to. Because I liked her so much, and noticed she had many styles. I began to appreciate them more.”

Finally, Dusty influenced Loretta’s political awareness.

When I was a lot younger, I never really appreciated the fact that . . . [I was] living as a . . . White middle class female. . . . I think I was really impressed and amazed at how courageous [Dusty] was when she did stick up for the Black people in the ‘60s in South Africa. . . . She put her foot down, and I’m glad that she was stubborn . . . and didn’t play for segregated audiences. . . . And I [thought] that, you know, some people back then had . . . beliefs that everyone should be equal.

3. Facilitates community; provides insight into others.

Malcolm expressed the sentiment of all of the fans in the study: “Dusty’s impact has been such that I have friends and people I care about who have become a part of my
life. Our common ground that has brought us together has been Dusty.” He described his initial meeting with other fans: “My first interaction . . . in such a warm environment, where I could—unload, and just let everything out, everything that I had been holding in for so long—that was wonderful to me.”

Nathan described the “community feeling” in going to Dusty Day and visiting Dusty’s grave with the same people year after year. He also “loves . . . the way that the new people . . . [become] part of the big family so quickly,” which “shows the generosity and spirit of most of [his] Dusty’s friends.”

Loretta explained that if Dusty had not come into her life,
I wouldn’t be the person I am today . . . not with all the insight that I have. . . . I’ve certainly become more experienced in knowing who I can trust, and who lasts forever, and who is . . . a flitting friendship, someone who is more casual, just friendly to your face, but doesn’t remain in contact that much. So, in that sense, it’s given me more insight in knowing how to read people better.

4. Offers feeling of being understood (via music; life/identification).

As indicated in the discussion of their identifications, relationships and other life-changes the fans describe, feeling understood by Dusty was important in the life of all the fans in this study. For example, Nathan said of the empathetic relationship between himself and Dusty that she would have “understood” and had “sympathy” for his “emotional illness” and “would have wanted to try to help” him. Isobel stated that through Dusty’s “Beautiful Soul” recording she felt understood regarding her struggle to come out. Malcolm felt Dusty understood what it was like for him to be an outsider, as she was one too, and this aided him in finding his unique path. Loretta implied it was
helpful knowing Dusty “would have understood the turmoils in knowing who to tell” because “you’re always coming out your whole life.”

5. **Helps fans find their own way; accept themselves.**

Dusty helped Malcolm negotiate his place within another culture:

I felt a kinship with Dusty . . . the identification with Black culture. . . . She tried to find her own way. She knew ultimately she would always be on the outside looking in. She was actually never going to . . . and I’m the same, I would never actually be a part of it, I’m not Black, I’m not Southern . . . but to find your own way, and find your place in it, that appealed to me and even if Dusty wasn’t able to actually do it. Her endeavor to, her attempt to, had an impact on me.

Malcolm said Dusty has deeply influenced him; she was:

a key to helping me be comfortable in my own skin. . . . She struggled for me in a way, ‘cause she had to go through that difficult period. I gain some form of strength looking at her life . . . in a time when it was much harder. I can . . . appreciate the distance that was traveled, and towards the end she was able to come to some sort of peace. . . . She’s helped me to become more comfortable . . . with who I am and what I am, and what I’m not.

I got so tired of hating myself—I used to really hate myself. . . . It’s taken me a long time . . . to get to a point to be okay to feel this way. . . . Dusty really was a big part of that. For her to sing the song like ‘Born This Way’ late in her career, that’s such an affirmation. That’s her kind of just stepping back and saying, ‘You know what! To hell with all of this!’
6. *Helps give birth to/gain confidence in sexual identity; relationships.*

Loretta explained that during her own late adolescence

Dusty really gave me the confidence to say ‘Yes I’m gay,’ because before, I was a bit stupid and indecisive. . . . After I split up from my first girlfriend [in secondary school], I kept saying, ‘Well, what if I do like guys as well?’ . . . I never really was sexually attracted [to them], but . . . I just didn’t have the confidence to be 100%. But [now] I do feel okay, and I know there are people like that, who are like me out there. So she changed that for me.

For Isobel the experience came some years later.

It’s very hard to kind of convey the seriousness of this now—but at the time . . . [I knew] that I had to come out to all my friends and family . . . supposedly a decade or more after my sexuality has supposedly developed. . . . Dusty’s ‘Beautiful Soul’ was a very meaningful song for me, just because it was a woman singing to another woman that she was in love with.”

Furthermore, as Isobel explained,

This is the really important thing, I don’t know if I’d be aware of my sexuality . . . . Being a Dusty fan helps me to get to a realization about myself about where I should have got to ten years ago. . . . It’s just been a massive relief. . . . Thank god . . . I don’t have to sit across a table from a man in a restaurant and think, ‘Why doesn’t this feel right?’ or be in bed with a man, and think, ‘Why doesn’t this feel right?’ So [Dusty has] had a profound and immeasurable impact on my life.
If she could meet Dusty now, Isobel would say “thank you very much. . . .
Because of her, I met the love of my life, because of her, I looked for a job in London, rather than elsewhere. I live in London, my life is how it is because of Dusty.”

7. **Provides security; outlet for emotion.**

Dusty has also given Nathan a “feeling of security . . . because I know she’s there for me whenever I want. She’s accessible. I can always have Dusty, and if for one particular moment I can’t, I can make sure that I can very soon. I can get to her, I can see her.”

Two of the fans in this study stressed how Dusty provides them with an outlet for emotion. From the day he brought home a compilation CD of Dusty’s music and heard “How Can I Be Sure,” Nathan knew his life had changed: “I remember thinking . . . why, why is it that I suddenly feel like this? It was almost like a kind of epiphany, like some kind of religious experience. . . . I remember the feelings and the tears started to come with that song.” For Malcolm, Dusty’s music also marked a discovery through emotional release: “Vocal stylists” like Dusty “provide us with a cathartic mirror. They live the lyrics, and when those words take up residence with the voice, we may just discover something previously unearthed about ourselves.”

Listening to Dusty sing allows Nathan to release feelings of intense distress: “It’s virtual bi-polar in this head with my mood changes. One day I’ll feel wonderful and have a fabulous day; the next I’ll feel devastated, distraught, and then I’ll start playing certain Dusty songs. Once she opens that valve in me . . . I can cry it all out.” Being a Dusty fan also provides an outlet for his positive feelings: If Dusty had not come into his life, he surmised
I would probably have thirty cats, because I’d have to have somewhere to put all that love and affection. I can’t give it all to my partner. There’s loads in me and . . . Dusty uses that up. . . . I don’t know where it would have gone, whether it would have bottled around inside me, and I’d have never gotten rid of it—I would have been a frustrated human being.


Nathan connected the understanding between himself to Dusty’s expression of his feelings: “Going back to what I say earlier about the empathy, the similarities between us, these are the feelings I get very strongly, and when I hear the pain in her voice, it evokes the pain that I used to feel, only I couldn’t sing it out, the way Dusty could.” The “emotional desperation” and “nakedness” of Dusty’s voice appealed to Malcolm because we can’t always express it; even when I’m by myself and have permission to cry a little bit I can’t effectively convey that. I can’t communicate it to people. . . . We find things we identify with . . . in Dusty [it’s] that emotional vulnerability, that exposed part of herself that came out in that crazy voice. . . . She carries that for me. . . . She’s doing all that suffering for me.

f. *Inter-relation of themes.*

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, the themes that arose from the case studies do not really stand separately from each other. The overarching example of their inter-relation begins with Dusty’s emotional music drawing in the listener, who then becomes a fan. This connection or relationship the fan feels with Dusty and her music is often based upon how the fan identifies with the singer. The fans’ relationship to Dusty,
and fandom more broadly, alters the fans’ sense of themselves, their relationships with others, and their understanding of where they fit into the world.

This connection between the themes of identification, relationship and life change can best be illustrated on a case-by-case basis. For example, Loretta primarily identified with Dusty in the area of sexual identity. Her most important relationship with Dusty was based upon mutual understanding/empathy. Loretta felt that Dusty understood the struggle of coming and being out in a heterosexist society, because Dusty had experienced it and Loretta was experiencing it when she was interviewed. Loretta also related to Dusty as a role model in terms of not-straight identity. Feeling understood and having a role model were critical elements of how Loretta felt Dusty helped her to accept her sexual identity, a critical life-change. Isobel’s case followed a similar thematic arc to Loretta’s in terms of not-straight sexual identity.

In Malcolm’s case, the primary identification with Dusty was as an outsider, not only sexually, but also in terms of race and religion. Again, his central relationship to Dusty was one of empathetic connection; he felt them to be “kindred spirits” based upon his sense of Dusty as an outsider in these same areas. When he felt comforted by Dusty’s music, it was because he felt she understood this status and, as a role model, had navigated this difficult terrain. The result of his relationship, based upon similarities with Dusty, has been that Malcolm came to find his own way, and to accept himself as an outsider.

Finally, Nathan’s identification with Dusty was primarily in terms of emotional vulnerability, mental illness, and as a victim of abuse. These similar characteristics between the two formed the basis of what he felt was an empathetic friendship in which
he felt comforted by Dusty. To have an outlet for his strong emotions and to feel understood was life-changing for Nathan.

In several of the cases, we see Dusty act as a “comforter” to the fan, based upon how the fan identifies with her. A similar connection is expressed in the fan’s role as “protector” to Dusty. For example, Nathan feels protective of Dusty based upon his identification with her and thus, his perceived understanding of her as an emotionally vulnerable person and fellow victim of physical abuse. Isobel feels protective of Dusty as someone who struggled with coming out with her sexual identity, as she did.

5.3 Relationship of findings to literature review

a. Introduction.

To consider how the findings relate to the theory, research, and practice outlined in Chapter 2, I returned to the research question: What is the importance of celebrities/stars/icons in the identity development of not-straight fans? In this inquiry, I focused on four cases of not-straight fans of a single fan-object, refining my question to investigate the phenomenon of the role (value/meaning/function) of Dusty Springfield and her music in the identity development of her not-straight fans.

In this discussion, I have not attempted to generalize about not-straight Dusty Springfield fans or any other group, for the findings were conclusions drawn from only four cases. Nor have I attempted to generalize about how theory, research, and practice might relate to not-straight Dusty Springfield fans or any other group. My intent is to illustrate how some of the literature may apply to one or more of the cases in my study. In this sense, my overall conclusion is that an inter-disciplinary approach is useful to begin to understand the role (value/meaning/function) of popular singer Dusty
Springfield and her music in the identity development of her not-straight fans. As I hope the following discussion will make clear, the areas of identity development, fan studies, and projective psychology have all made essential contributions to my understanding of the phenomena, in a way that any one of these areas could not. Implications for education and counseling will be discussed in the conclusion.

**b. Fandom as relational.**

As I stated at the beginning of this chapter, the themes suggested that for Dusty Springfield to become the fan-object of not-straight fans, they must feel an emotional connection to her through her music. The connection, which I contend can also be understood as a relationship, was often based upon the identifications and similarities fans have with Dusty. This relationship, in turn, can be life-changing for the fan.

The relational aspect of identity development through fandom was supported by the literature which argues that we are hard-wired to connect to others, that development is not a solitary journey, but a process in which our identity emerges by way of our connections to others (Gilligan, Brown & Rogers, 1990; Spencer, 2000). As social psychologist Mishler (1999) and clinical psychologist Josselson (1996) have written, relationships are key influences in identity development. In my exploration, these relationships clearly included fans’ connection to stars and icons. As Davies (1998) concluded about mourners’ responses to the death of Princess Diana, “human identity is intrinsically relational” (p. 174). The cases in my study illustrated fan theorist Duffet’s (2010) description of stars as “vast, complex semiotic constellations” that provide “hooks and objects of fan love [that] can almost be varied as the fans themselves” (Slide 6). The concept of semiotic productivity (Fiske, 1992) from fan studies is also relevant here;
fans’ creations of their own interior meanings about a fan-object can be understood best in terms of relationship. Wolf’s (2002) discussion of identification and desire as two means of audiences relating to Broadway musical performers aligns with the ways fans in my study related to Dusty, as do the categories of assistance and protectiveness that I identified in the literature review. For instance, Loretta had a romantic/sexual attraction to Dusty, while Malcolm felt comforted by the singer. Fans also experienced other kinds of relationships with Dusty, such as an empathetic friend and/or role model, as discussed later in this chapter.

From the perspective of identity development theory, Erikson (1968) and Freud (1925) argued the fan object’s appeal was based to a large extent upon the lack of reciprocity in a parasocial attachment (as cited in Adams-Price & Green, 1990). My study, however, described how some fans experience the attachment as reciprocal, especially in the empathetic friendship they described having with Dusty. In his ethnography of Bruce Springsteen fans, Cavicchi (1998) makes the case that describing fans’ connection to the artist in pejorative terms such as “‘false,’ ‘unreal,’ or ‘artificial’” is analogous to “calling parents with adopted children a ‘pseudo family’ or an ‘artificial family’ because their relationships are not based on blood” (p. 55). In my study, Nathan’s experience was an apt illustration of the fan’s sense of the reality and truth of the relationship. In trying to explain the centrality of his connection to Dusty, he said that without her “he wouldn’t have any focus” and then compared himself to non-fans who “don’t understand” his relationship with Dusty: “I just think, Well, who do you love? Who’s in your life, you know? Who fills your head with thoughts and feelings, and emotions, and who takes you on journeys every day? Nobody, you know?”
c. Identification with the fan-object as basis of relation.

The most common basis for the fan’s relationship to the fan-object in my study was identification. Fan studies and projective psychology contributed to understanding this connection, as did identity development, discussed later in the Role Models section. From audience studies came the uses and gratifications theory which posits that individuals actively interpret media to satisfy their particular needs (Brooker & Jermyn, 2003), a position later refined by the Birmingham School’s insistence that social class, political beliefs, race, class, gender, and age influence audiences (Williams, 1983). Race was a clear influence on Malcolm’s response to Dusty, as was social class on Isobel’s. Fiske (1992), de Certeau (1984/1974), and Jenkins (2006) took the concept a step further in their conception of audiences as active resisters to conventional interpretations of texts, creating meaning by “integrating” the art into the fan’s “sense of self” (Jenkins, p. 15). This was evident in Isobel’s insistence that she would have no interest in Dusty had she followed the conventional path of marriage and family other fans had wished for her; instead, she found meaning in the “stroppy” and “Bolshie” aspects of Dusty’s life with which she identified. Hills and Helmers’ (2004) conviction that fans feel themselves in real relation to the object, often feeling empathy or identification, was exemplified especially in Nathan’s sense that Dusty and he understood each other’s emotional states and “victim” personalities.

In my study, fans’ identification with Dusty was sometimes mediated by how the fan understood her life story. Drawing upon Winnicott’s (1953) work in object relations theory, Josselson (2007) explains how in transitional experience, “we construct stories about the other, making sense of their behavior along the lines that we need to see them”
Similar to cultural studies theorist Richard Johnson’s (1999) view, sociologist and clinical psychologist Cottle (2002), posits that in identity development, we feel connected to an object, we see ourselves “reflected in the narrative” (p. 545). This was illustrated, for example, in Malcolm’s identification with Dusty’s wish to be “straight, Black, and a good Catholic” and feeling “she had gotten the reverse of all three.” Furthermore, fans’ conflation of Dusty’s music with her life meant that her songs were also a powerful source of identification; in the words of Nathan, “when [Dusty] closes her eyes in a song . . . she is that lyric, she is that emotion”—feelings that Nathan strongly identified with, such as “unrequited love” and “not being able to be alone.”

Gabler’s (2001) description of how a celebrity’s narrative can “instruct and guide us, transport us from our daily routine, reassure us that we are not alone in what we think or feel” (p. 16), will be illustrated in further discussion of the fans in this study. Dusty’s life story is subject to a number of interpretations (Valentine & Wickham, 2002; Mitchell, 2006; Randall, 2009), but the fans I interviewed appropriated only the aspects of her story that resonated with them. For example, Dusty’s apparent gay sexuality resonated with Isobel and Loretta, who identified as gay women. For Malcolm, Dusty’s refusal to be categorized sexually is what is essential to him. For Nathan, Dusty as lesbian was not “wholly important” “because lesbians . . . are different a species as I am to a rhino.” What did resonate with him in Dusty’s story was her emotional vulnerability in being drawn into the wrong relationships on “the gay scene,” as Dusty sang about in “Love Me by Name.” This is similar to what I witnessed at the gates of Kensington Palace in 2007, when admirers of Diana seemingly identified with her rejection by a
faithless husband and displacement by Camilla Parker-Bowles, discussed earlier in Chapter 2: Literature Review. (See Figure 2.2.)

My study has illustrated how fans appropriate the fan-object to mean what they need her to mean, someone with important traits with which they identify. To cite but a few examples from my study: For Loretta, Dusty was gay (even if occasionally attracted to men), just as she saw herself. For Isobel, Dusty struggled with coming out, as she herself did. For Malcolm, Dusty was in awe of Black culture, as was he. For Nathan, Dusty had been trapped in a cycle of domestic abuse as he had been. This is not to say that Dusty’s sexuality is other than how Loretta interpreted it or that Dusty did not struggle to come out or that she was not in awe of Black culture or that she was not trapped in a cycle of domestic abuse. The point is that as fan-object Dusty held many possible meanings for fans, and the fans were drawn to those aspects of the fan-object they see in themselves.

Literature from fan studies and projective psychology lends support to this finding. For example, mourners of Princess Diana’s death identified with her subordination, although hers was within from The Royal Family and theirs were other “oppressions” (Johnson, 1999). Other examples include Stiffler (2007) and Dyer’s (2004) claims of gay male Judy Garland fans identifying with her resilience and personal strength as well as with her suffering and Wilson’s (2007) claim that lesbians identifying with Garland’s sexually ambiguous appearance in certain film roles. These instances illustrate de Certeau’s (1984/1974) use of concept of “bricolage”—piecing together and filling in the blanks from dominant culture what is useful for the resister.
The fans’ identifications with Dusty formed the basis of what they experienced as an empathetic friendship with the icon; what Nathan called “an empathy” between them; what Loretta described as showing the listener that she “understands” because she “knows what it is like.” Because the fans saw commonality between their struggles and the fan-object’s, Dusty sometimes took on the role of “comforter” for them. The same sense of commonality allowed some of the fans to take on the role of “protector” toward Dusty. They understood how she felt because they felt the same way. “I imagine Dusty to have been searching for the same rule book that I did, one that we were never going to receive,” Nathan related about his “protectiveness” toward Dusty as another “gay” person. This tendency can also be viewed through the frame of percept orientation (Proudfoot-Edgar, 1998), which illustrates the connection as a form of projection: in traditional language the fan might say, “Dusty needs protection,” but in percept language the fan would state “I’m having Dusty be the part of me that needs protection.”

As I have illustrated above, my research portrays Dusty as a “Moby Dick” of popular music; like the great white whale, she is large and multi-faceted enough to carry whatever needs to be held; in Dusty, these fans found aspects of themselves that needed nurturing and understanding. The term “iconic flexibility” Doss (1999, p. 17) used to characterize Elvis, and that Stafford (2002) described about Xena: Warrior Princess may also account, in part, for Dusty’s enduring popularity. As Loretta said, “I love how her music can touch the lives of so many people, no matter what group they’re from, what background they’re from.” The idea of the wide appeal of the fan-object also aligns with the percept orientation of John and Joyce Weir (Mix 2006)24 and the constructive-developmental theory of Kegan (1994), which emphasize how we create meaning.

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24 The Weirs did not publish their theories; the scholarly account of their work can be found in Mix, 2006.
through “projections, interpretations, and assumptions” of others to “mirror” ourselves (Proudfoot-Edgar, 1998, p. 3). Nathan illustrated this concept with his conclusion that he “had one thousand buttons, and [Dusty] pressed the right one straightaway.”

d. Identity development; sexual identity development.

The fans in this study never referred to their Dusty fandom as a vehicle of identity development. That she functioned this way for the fans can be inferred both in the broader sense of identity development and in the narrower aspect of sexual identity development. Josselson’s (1996) description of “forming and sustaining” our identity as a creative act, resulting in “feeling at home in ourselves and in our world, and having an inner experience of coherence and purpose” (p. 27) is echoed in the findings of my study.

As Malcolm described it, Dusty had “been a key to helping me be comfortable in my own skin”; “more comfortable with who I am and what I am, and what I’m not.” Without Dusty, Nathan said, he “wouldn’t have any focus” and his life would be “boring.” Dusty also offered him an “outlet for grief” and “love.” For Isobel, “it was against the backdrop of discovering [Dusty] and discovering her music that . . . I’ve discovered myself.” For Loretta, Dusty fandom was “a milestone”: “I wouldn’t be the person I am today,” otherwise. That the fans in my study, with their ages ranging from their 20s to 40s, were still engaged in identity work, reinforces the sense of identity formation and retention as a lifelong pursuit (Erikson, 1965; Josselson, 1996; Marcia, 2002).

The findings of the study also offer some support for the place of icons in the achievement of social identity: the sense of belonging to a social group (Gardiner and Kosmitzki, 2005). Again, this concept is described as part of adolescent identity development (Erikson, 1963; 1968b). For the fans in my study, becoming a Dusty fan
became part of their later lifelong identity work. For Loretta, being a Dusty fan initiated “close friendships” and learning “who I can trust.” For Isobel, her Dusty fandom brought her a “small core of . . . friends” with whom she communicates online and sees once a year around Dusty Day. These social “exchanges” had a great deal of “real meaning and significance” for her, and the intensity of her connection with this community during Dusty gatherings caused her to “get emotional afterwards” and “have a comedown for like a week.” Malcolm, too, found “friendship,” “a warm environment,” and “very loving people” in the “Dusty universe” he joined. Nathan described the “generosity and spirit of “Dusty friends,” even fantasizing about Dusty herself as part of the family. If Dusty had a choice of standing with her ex or with the protective group of fans, “it would be [with] us,” he concluded.

Erikson’s (1950; 1956; 1958a; 1958b; 1968a; 1968b; 1968c; 1975) model of psychosocial identity formation defines identity achievement as a task of adolescence. Identity formation comes about when we can choose between which of these identifications we want to carry forth and synthesize into our own unique self (Erikson, 1968b). In this identity crisis, youth try on various identities, in which role models, as I later discuss, play a critical role by introducing us to the possibilities of who we may be (Boon & Lomore, 2001). My study suggests that over-idealization of others, including stars, recognized as a characteristic of adolescent identity struggle, may re-emerge in later identity exploration through the use of fan-objects. As in adolescence, this later identity struggle may be a developmental moratorium in which fans experiment with different identities to arrive at a sense of who they are and what their purpose in the world is.
Whether based in idealization or eroticization, Erikson (1963; 1968a) considered “adolescent love” an effort to achieve identity “by projecting one’s diffused ego image onto another and by seeing it thus reflected and clarified” (p. 262). This idea of reflection of ego ties back to the concepts from fan studies and projective psychology discussed elsewhere: fan-object as mirror leading to self-understanding. Josselson’s (1992) description of identification with and idealization of “powerful others” as attempts “to climb through the distance that separates us as we try to be where they are as a way of expanding ourselves” (p. 7), echoes the use of identification in relational model of identity development through fandom. These concepts are illustrated, for example in Malcolm’s claim that Dusty’s Catholic upbringing gave her a lifelong conflict, “but ultimately she had to come to a point where she was like, ‘You know what, I’ve got to live this life,” just as he did.

The literature on identity as a narrative project (de Certeau, 1984/1974; Giddens, 1991; Mishler, 1999; Gauntlett, 2002; Hills, Rivers, Watson, & Joyce, 2007) may also be applicable to the findings in this study. Life story viewed as a narrative to “impose structure on the flow of experience” (Crossley, 2002, p. 3) means we relate our past to our present and expected future, selecting, organizing, and presenting aspects of our lives into an autobiography, thereby becoming responsible for ourselves (Crossley). Similarly, McAdams (1997) sees narrative as a centering process for both “creating a purposeful self history” and integration “into society in a productive and generative way” (p. 63).

The fans in my study each presented themselves in coherent narratives. Loretta’s story was of a sensitive young gay woman coming out in a heterocentric world. Isobel’s story was of the blossoming not-straight identity of a woman in her 30s, finding the
person she deems the love of her life. Malcolm’s story was of a sexual and racial outsider finding his place in the world. Nathan’s story was of a “victim” type of personality, vulnerable and unstable, who survived an abusive relationship. Dusty, as the fan-object with whom the fan identified, played an essential role in each of these narratives. For Loretta, she was a sensitive role model who gave her confidence in her sexual identity. For Isobel, Dusty offered compassionate understanding and encouragement in her struggle to come out. For Malcolm, she was a fellow outsider who understood his affinity for Black culture and his resistance of being sexually labeled. For Nathan, Dusty was an unstable and vulnerable victim of abuse who understood his past and present struggles to live a more stable life.

Isobel’s struggle with coming out and Malcolm’s struggle with his sexuality in the context of his religious upbringing bring to mind Josselson’s (1980) concept of individuation, similar to Erikson’s identity formation. In this second individuation process (the first having been in childhood), the adolescent challenges the dominance of the internal parent (Blos, 1967). Kroger (1989) explains that this requires an adolescent to regress into idolizing pop stars, similar to how he idealized his parents when younger. Although both Isobel and Malcolm are years beyond adolescence, their stories show that the task of sexual identity development is not necessarily restricted to that age group. Malcolm was married to a woman and divorced before he had his first relationship with a man. And as Loretta said, “you’re always coming out your whole life.”

Josselson (1996) and Erikson (1972) describe identity crises beyond adolescence. For Isobel and Malcolm, Dusty may have stood for the potential; in her they may have recognized something that inspired them to achieve that which they previously feared
(Josselson, 1996), their true self (Erikson, 1972; Marcia, 2002). This possibility clearly connects to the relational identity development theory. Isobel’s sense of Dusty’s understanding of her revised sense of sexuality strengthened her in coming out to family and friends. “I used to listen to ‘Beautiful Soul’” when “I thought, ‘I can’t tell anybody.’” Her connectedness to Dusty allowed her to develop what Gilligan (1993) calls her “authentic voice,” as it was heard by those to whom she was closely connected.

Fans in this study also illustrate Holleran’s (2008) application of Erikson’s (1975) concept of negative identity to not-straight identity development. For example, Isobel’s sense of identification with Dusty as “subversive” shows her need to define herself as “the complete opposite of the patterns urged on [her] by family, community, custom, church, schools, and law” (Holleran, p. 295).

While traditional psychoanalysis defines not-straight identity development in terms of failed heterosexuality—arrested development or regression to an early psychosexual stage (Deutsch, 1995)—this study suggests ways that regression and developmental lag can be understood as developmentally appropriate. Isobel’s description of realizing her love for women, not men, “supposedly a decade or more after my sexuality has supposedly developed” is reminiscent of the discussion of developmental lag by Coleman (1981/1982), Grace (1992) and Ritter and Terndrup (2002). The heterosexist nature of society affects the not-straight individual’s ability to master the necessary “psychosocial milestones” (Coleman, p. 33). Developmental lag also may result from the lack of role models (Coleman) that Loretta described, and which I discussed in the Role Models section, as well from as a sense of isolation from peers,
family, and community (Coleman) described by the other fans in this study, e.g., Nathan’s feelings of “not belonging, being excluded, being different.”

My study was not designed to test theories of sexual identity development. My focus has been more broadly upon identity development of not-straight fans of which sexual identity development is one aspect. There are, however, additional aspects of such theories that are relevant to my findings. For example, the cases in my study struggled with not-straight identity confusion in their adolescence, dealing with feelings that “do not confirm to what everyone else seems to be thinking, feeling, and worse, expecting of the sexually unsure person” (Freedman, 1999, p. 8). This can be seen in Loretta’s statement, for example, that “I didn’t know how to understand my feelings when I was little” and Nathan’s sense that Dusty had been “searching for the same rule book that I did, one that we were never going to receive.” The fear of losing friends and concern over family reaction that Anhalt and Morris (1998) identified as a stress of young people coming out is foregrounded in Isobel’s story: “My relationship with my family’s not going to be the same anymore and all these close friends . . . who thought I was trying to find a husband and have a family . . . what are they going to think,” she worried. The focus of heterosexism or homophobia as obstacles to not-straight identity development (Grace, 1992; Coleman 1981/1982) is relevant to my study. Loretta discussed “the turmoils in knowing who to tell” about her sexual identity. “Growing up,” Isobel “didn’t know anybody who wasn’t heterosexual or at least apparently so,” and got “insidious” messages from her parents “that they didn’t think homosexuality was okay.” Malcolm related how being raised Catholic taught him “that with homosexuality comes eternal fire or damnation” which “pushed” him into a “shell” and “scared off” any thoughts of not-
straight sexual identity. That a second self (Grace, 1992) or a false self (Winnicott, 1960) may develop in this context is suggested by Malcolm’s trying to “be a good boy” and Isobel’s proclamation that if she hadn’t “discovered” herself through Dusty, she would still be with men, saying to herself, “Why doesn’t this feel right? I don’t get it.”

The literature on late modern/postmodern and queer interrogations of identity applies to Malcolm’s case study. His discomfort with the “confinement” of sexual identity labels and the ambiguity he felt toward his racial identity argue against essentialist notions of “fixed and stable” identities (Bell, 2001, p. 14). As someone at the margins sexually and racially, he may view these identities as socially constructed (Foucault, 1981; Butler, 1990, 2004; Johnson, 2005), rather than essentialist.

e. Fan-object as role model.

Dusty’s usefulness as a role model is supported by the literature on celebrities and stars as role models. Role models present life-changing possibilities for learning, through their rejection of traditional gender roles (Wright and Sandlin, 2009). Isobel described how Dusty’s “subversiveness” appealed to her “instinct for something a little bit rebellious.” Isobel, Loretta, and Malcolm all alluded to Dusty’s rejection of typical feminine roles and conventional political stances. Loretta was “glad that [Dusty] was difficult to work with” in “a very male-dominated business,” recognizing that “she paved the way for many female singers and . . . many other minority groups.” Dusty’s stand against apartheid Isobel characterized as “quite Bolshie and quite stroppy,” as she was “speaking out at a time that was not at all acceptable and normal for girl singers to be doing these kind of things.”
Role models are also heavily dependent upon identification. They allow youth to try on different roles and see the world from other perspectives (Erikson, 1968b). Because celebrity idols epitomize attributes the fan would like to possess, they “may inspire efforts at self-transformation that affect, in profound and meaningful ways, many different aspects of admirer’s lives” (Boon and Lomore, 2001, p. 435). Just as Gomillion and Giuliano’s (2011) study found that media role models for gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals offered “inspiration” and “strength” in terms of not-straight identity (p.343), Malcolm claimed, “I gain some form of strength in looking at [Dusty’s] life and what she went through, in a time when [being gay] was much harder.” Similarly, in relation to Black culture her “endeavor” to “find [her] own place in it” had an “impact” on him.

Of the types of role models for young women identified by Gauntlett (2002), in this study, Dusty embodied three: “triumph over difficult circumstances,” “challenging stereotypes,” and “outsiders.” Malcolm cited Dusty’s late-career song “Born This Way” as an “affirmation” of her not-straight sexuality; after she had struggled with it for so many years, she said “You know what? To hell with all this!” For Isobel and Loretta, Dusty defied what Loretta described as the “big raving bull-dyke” stereotype of lesbians prevalent in the 1960s. Finally, in Malcolm’s fantasy of meeting Dusty in 1995 when he was eighteen, she “would’ve been able to recognize” him as “one of those outsiders that she had been.” As these examples illustrate, these role model characteristics are also important to different genders, ages, and sexual orientations.

Dusty serving as a role model related to how fans identified with her sexual identity, which corresponds with Bandura’s (1968) finding that the more one identifies with a model, the more likely one will be to imitate her behavior. For Loretta and Isobel,
for example, Dusty modeled how to deal with their not-straight sexuality in a heterosexist world. In “Beautiful Soul,” Isobel felt Dusty was telling her, “You can’t cope with the fact that you love another woman, and that you’re gay. . . . It’s all right; I’m going to help you. It’s going to be okay.” Similarly, for Loretta, Dusty “really gave me the confidence to say ‘Yes, I’m gay.’” These examples also relate directly to Gomillion and Giuliano’s (2011) study that showed media role models for gays, lesbians, and bisexuals influence their not-straight identity by offering “inspiration,” “a sense of pride,” and “comfort” (pp. 342-343).

These cases underscore the theory and research concerning the importance of role models in not-straight identity development. Sanelli and Perreault’s (2001) study revealed how the lack of role models can impede or complicate individual and social identity development. Rotheram-Borus and Langabeer (2001) and Fisher, Hill, Geube, and Grubner (2007) discuss the dearth of role models available to not-straight youth, resulting in “symbolic annihilation” (Grossman, 1997, p. 2) and Fryberg and Townsend (2008) identified the problem with “absolute” and “relative invisibility.” As Loretta explained it, if more stars came out, “It would be easier for the generation who are struggling . . . to come out”:

because everywhere that young gay people turn, they are always bombarded with heterosexual norms and values, and rarely do you see a film about gay lovers. . . . It’s always about a man and a woman because that’s always ‘the norm,’ and it can be very confusing to those growing up.

Dusty incorporated the three most important traits of role models for not-straight youth, identified by Grossman and DiAugelli (2004): openness about sexual orientation,
leadership/intelligence/perseverance, and physical attractiveness. Loretta’s romantic/sexual attraction to Dusty was based in part on a physical attraction to her “quirky little way,” “cute little outfits,” “lovely huge green eyes that matched that pastel pink lipstick,” and so on. Malcolm lauded Dusty’s leadership in paving the way for other “outsiders.” Dusty functioned as the ideal role model—“supportive” and “caring,” as well as “brave, courageous and gutsy” (Grossman & DiAugelli, 2004, pp. 93-93). In the words of her fans, Dusty would “understand” her artistic ambitions (Isobel); she would “understand” her insecurities (Loretta); her voice is “soothing and calming” in a panic attack and offers “a feeling of security . . . because I know she’s there for me whenever I want” (Nathan); and “doesn’t it feel good to have her on your side” (Malcolm).

Furthermore, she was a “prophet to modern female vocalists” and “forging her own path” as a gay singer in a straight world (Malcolm); she was “fighting opposition to get what she wanted” in the studio (Loretta) and “she put her foot down” with her “courageous” stand against apartheid in South Africa (Loretta).

While Grossman and DiAugelli’s (2004) study referred to identity development in youth, Malcolm and Isobel’s cases suggest role models are also important for not-straight identity development even at a later age. The fans’ sense of Dusty as empathetic and comforting also harkens back to Grossman and DiAugelli’s assertion that access to role models lessens “stress and depression” (p. 95) and Konick and Stewart’s (2004) finding that role models may “buffer” the not-straight individual against difficulties that arise. As Nathan stated, without Dusty “I would have been a frustrated human being,” and as Malcolm’s asserted, when he was at a financial and emotional low point Dusty offered “encouragement” by singing “you’re made of love” in “Getting It Right.” The testimony
of the fans in my study is likewise consistent with Grotevant’s (1992) theory that an environment supporting the pursuit of various identity roles is foundational for identity achievement.

f. Therapeutic and profound/life-changing nature of fan relationship/experience.

From Kohut’s (1971; 1977) branch of object relations, self psychology, we learn the importance of “mirroring” in childhood development, and the theory that without this important milestone, one becomes pathologically narcissistic, inventing internal objects which respond to “needs and fears” rather than the “actual person they purport to stand for” (Vaknin, p. 2). In other words, because they cannot see themselves reflected in others in their primary years, they are always looking for that reflection elsewhere. This narcissistic mirroring, in fan theorist Sandvoss’s (2005) view, leaves the self devoid of the potential for psychological growth. In his words, a fan text that “allows for so many different readings” (p. 126) “does not invite a reflexive dialogue with different norms and horizons” (p. 158).

The mirroring the fans in my study experience with Dusty suggests something radically different. The relationship between the fans in this study and their fan-object may be considered a therapeutic one, in which Dusty provided the empathetic attunement Kohut (1971; 1977), defined as the essence of the psychotherapeutic approach. By responding empathically, the therapist attends to the client’s developmental needs, including idealizing and mirroring. Just as children need to identify with their idealized view of those they admire, for healthy development of the self, they also need to have their self-worth mirrored back to them by empathic caregivers. The same needs continue
into adulthood, especially if they were essentially unfulfilled for the child. Dusty’s role in providing idealizing and mirroring is evident in the discussion of her function as a role model and “kindred spirit” for the fans in this study. Buloff and Osterman’s (1995) application of Kohut’s mirroring concept to not-straight development suggests that lesbians are faced with pathological distortions, rather than healthy reflections of themselves—the kind of “symbolic annihilation” Grossman (1997, p. 2) discussed. For Loretta, Isobel, Malcolm, and Nathan, Dusty provided images and narratives in which they could see themselves reflected, as well as music in which they could hear themselves echoed, both of which Gomillion and Giuliano’s (2011) participants identified as critical for feeling included in society at large. Further evidence of Dusty’s therapeutic function for the fans in this study comes from Ritter and Terndrup’s (2002) attributes of an affirmative therapists of gays and lesbians, as illustrated in Figure 5.2.

Winnicott’s (1951; 1953; 1971) theories about transitional spaces and transitional objects can also be applied to the findings of this study. Beyond their uses in childhood, Winnicott believed the same intermediate area of experience could be found in therapy where the client can learn that to be more of herself can be tolerated by the analyst (Fox, 2008). This sense of transitional space can be seen in the fans’ sense of Dusty’s empathetic understanding and acceptance of them. Dosamantes-Beaudry’s (2002) analysis of Frida Kahlo as a transitional object is also suggestive of the findings in my study; the cultural icon “serves to comfort and soothe” (p. 9) the fan, as Dusty did for Nathan, Isobel, and Malcolm.

The resourcefulness of not-straight audiences in appropriating the diva to serve their needs (Sedgwick, 1997; Farmer, 2005; Smith 2006) is also evident in my findings.
**Figure 5.2 Dusty as affirmative therapy for gays and lesbians**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute of affirmative therapy</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understands my pain in being “different”:</td>
<td>Malcolm’s sense that Dusty would recognize him as another “outsider”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has helped me heal from painful experiences:</td>
<td>Nathan’s assertion that Dusty was an “outlet” for his “grief”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps me feel good about myself:</td>
<td>Malcolm’s description of Dusty helping him becoming “more comfortable with . . . what I am and what I’m not”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is empathetic toward my troubles:</td>
<td>Isobel’s feelings of comfort and reassurance by Dusty during her struggle to come out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has helped me find a community of people like myself:</td>
<td>Loretta’s “close friendships” and “learning who to trust” and Nathan’s fantasy of Dusty herself being part of his family of Dusty friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps give me the courage to be who I am:</td>
<td>Loretta’s assertion that Dusty gave her the confidence to claim her not-straight sexual identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports and validates my inner experience:</td>
<td>Nathan’s conviction that Dusty would understand his “emotional illness”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps dispel myths and stereotypes about gays, lesbians, and bisexuals:</td>
<td>Isobel and Loretta’s identification with Dusty as defying the stereotype of the “ultra-butch lesbian”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has inspired me to transform my life in profound and meaningful ways:</td>
<td>Isobel’s assertion that she “discovered” herself through Dusty as a “preamp” and Nathan’s claim of Dusty providing “focus” to his life which would otherwise have been “boring” and “frustrated”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Farmer’s assertion that the diva is a “figure of self-authorization” “in defiant disregard of orthodox conventions of social discipline and patriarchal injunctions against feminine
potency” (p. 189) is echoed, for example, in the fans’ admiration of Dusty for standing up for herself in the recording studio, and in Malcolm’s admiration of Dusty out her own sexual identity as “none of the above.” Smith’s argument that the diva’s art and/or life embodies a “cathartic function” for the “heartache” and “suffering that almost inevitably play a role in queer life” (p. 2) is represented in Nathan’s statements that for him Dusty is an “outlet: for “grief” as well as for “love and affection.” “Once [Dusty’s music] opens that emotional valve, I can cry it all out” and that without her “I don’t know where [all his emotion] would have gone. Malcolm’s assertion that Dusty “struggled for me,” and that “exposed part of herself that came out in that crazy voice” “carries” for him that “emotional vulnerability” that he can’t always “express” or “communicate” parallels Randall’s (2009) description of the diva as the receptacle of what we cannot bear alone: “The diva releases what we are constrained to suppress” (p. 75).

5.3 Implications and Recommendations

Although as a qualitative study with only four cases, my findings cannot be generalized, they may still be useful in theory, research, and practice.

a. Theory.

Examining questions, as I did, from an interdisciplinary point of view, presents advantages and problems. Looking at a question through multiple lenses and trying to see how those lenses intersect and complement each other can liberate one from the confining conventions of the vision through a single discipline. On the other hand, such an approach dictates that the exploration of theory and research in each area will lack the depth knowledge and understanding that one can achieve within a single discipline. Also implicit in a study so conducted is the danger that the interdisciplinary study will not be
taken seriously by scholars and practitioners with narrower and more conventional
disciplinary foci. Like quantitative and qualitative studies, each approach has its own
strengths and weaknesses. The former allows for verifiable conclusions but only about
narrow questions whereas the latter examines large questions but offers no
generalizations.

In the areas I studied, I was often frustrated by the limitations of theoretical
conceptions. My study, in fact, illustrated the problems and limitations of existing
theories. As I have discussed, the categories of “gay,” “lesbian,” “straight,” “bisexual,”
and “queer” constrain how the researcher applies past theory and research to current
situations, and excludes participants who define themselves as “none of the above.”
Furthermore, identity development in general is theorized with such heterocentrism, that
it is difficult to conceive if, when, and how it applies to not-straight populations. At the
same time, the identity development of not-straight individuals is too often conceived as
simply sexual identity development. Not-straight people are more than their sexuality,
and their lives need to be explicitly accounted for in discussions about identity
development in general.

Another area where theory is lacking is in lesbian or not-straight female fandom v.
gay or not-straight male fandom. Concepts of diva worship, the gay icon, and so forth
are predominately concerned with the gay male experience, and queer theory often draws
upon traditions of camp and drag. Too little attention has been given to conceptualizing
how not-straight women experience their fandom and relate to their fan-object. My study
hopefully may make a contribution to this deficit by building upon the work of Wolf
(2002) in terms of the ways female fans or audiences read a text.
b. Research.

My study suggests many possibilities for future research. Not-straight fans could be compared to straight fans, female not-straight fans to male not-straight fans, and older not-straight fans could be compared to younger ones for example. Unlike other gay icons and dykons, Dusty attracts male and female not-straight fans with equal passion: what makes her unique in this respect? Are there different traits that appeal to the different populations, and, if so, what might these say about their respective identity work? In addition, surely more research needs to be done on fans of color and fans from different socioeconomic classes, both straight and not-straight.

By looking at a larger sample of fans, fans of different fan-objects, and so forth, certainly future studies could build upon my work suggesting that the fan’s relationship to the fan-object facilitates not-straight identity development. Fruitful exploration could be done comparing various types of fan-objects, for example singers v. actors, or even living versus dead fan-objects. Further research also might examine the relationship of protectiveness the fans in my study felt toward a fan-object. Is this particular to an fan-object like Dusty Springfield? Or is it related to the not-straight identity of the fans? How does this relationship tie to the identity development of the fan? The fan’s experience of an empathetic relationship with Dusty—of being understood and of understanding her—may offer insight into why fans who have felt themselves to be outsiders are attracted to such fan-objects. Whether studying the importance of role models or fan-objects more broadly, researchers could consider whether marginalized populations benefit particularly from relating to marginalized role models or icons, as this study suggests. Based upon the findings of this study, the importance of role models for
identity development beyond adolescence is another important area that could be explored.

c. Practice.

Whether in the classroom, in the counseling office, or in campus organizations, this study may have implications for those working with not-straight students. First, if teachers, counselors and advisors recognize the power of a fan-object’s appeal to the diverse needs of fans, they may be more willing to look for opportunities through which a fan can access an object with whom to identify. As my participants illustrated, the identification may relate to the fan’s sexual identity, emotional vulnerability, sense or racial and sexual ambiguity or sense of victimhood as a survivor of domestic violence. This research implies that popular culture icons can be a critical point of identity engagement for not-straight individuals, and consequently that such potential relationships should be encouraged (and certainly not ridiculed). These same conclusions are relevant to the experience of older adults as well as younger ones. When I was in my early 50s (my early days of Dusty fandom), after she heard me rave about my obsession, a colleague and friend admonished me with “you are so much more than a Dusty fan.” In fact, being one helped me discover more of who I was. The cases in this study reinforce that conclusion. One of the most important implications of my study is that seemingly immature obsessions with fan-objects, even by those well beyond their adolescence, can yield rich, important gains in identity development.
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Appendix A

Nancy J Young
309 Poplar St, Roslindale MA 02131-3654
njy@prodigy.net
617 325-2627

2011 WRITTEN CONSENT FORM
INTERVIEWS OF DUSTY SPRINGFIELD FANS

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Nancy J Young, a doctoral candidate in education at Lesley University's School of Education, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

I am conducting a study into the role of Dusty Springfield and her music for the identity development of her not-straight fans.

You were selected as a participant in this study because you are a self-identifying not-straight Dusty Springfield fan. If you decide to participate, I would like to audio tape a conversation with you about your thoughts concerning my topic of study. The results of these interviews may be used in oral presentations or in the form of written data, my dissertation, or possibly as published material. If you are willing, I may also attempt to follow up our discussion with another interview in the future.

You will decide if any information in this study is to be identified with you or to remain confidential: the information will be disclosed only with your permission. Subject identities will be kept private through the use of pseudonyms unless you provide permission to use your name in quotes or descriptions. Your participation is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without consequence.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the Lesley University IRB Co-Chairs, Robyn Cruz [rcruz@lesley.edu] and Terrence Keeney [tkeeney@lesley.edu]. My Committee Chair is Caroline Heller, PhD Program in Educational Studies, Lesley University, 617 349- 8663 or cheller@lesley.edu. You may contact me at 617 325-2627 or njy@prodigy.net

You will be asked to sign two copies of this form, one for my records and one for yours. Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the information.

25 Sexual orientation “as a multivariate and dynamic process” (Ritter & Terndrup, 2002, p. 35), as illustrated through Klein’s (1993) six variables individuals use to describe themselves in the past, in the present, and ideally: sexual attraction, sexual behavior, sexual fantasies, emotional preference, social preference, hetero/homo lifestyle, and self-identification. By “not-straight” fans I mean those who do not currently describe themselves as exclusively heterosexual in any of the variables above. This group includes those whose past or present self-labels of sexual identity include gay (male or female), bent, queer, genderqueer, and lesbian, as well as those who reject any labels of sexual orientation.
provided, that you willingly agree to participate, that you may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty, that you have received a copy of this form, and that you are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies. I give permission for these materials to be quoted for the following purpose(s):

Academic ____________________ Publication ________________________

Other: ________________________ ________________________________

I give consent for my identity to be revealed in data resulting from this study. Please initial:

Yes _____
No _____

Print Name __________________________________________
Signature ____________________________________________
Date ___________________
July 12, 2011

To: Nancy Young

From: Robyn Cruz and Terrence Keeney, Co-chairs, Lesley IRB

RE: Application for Expedition of Review: The Role of Dusty Springfield and her Music in the Identity Development of her Not-straight Fans

IRB Number: 10-088

This memo is written on behalf of the Lesley University IRB to inform you that your application for approval by the IRB through expedited review has been granted. Your project poses no more than minimal risk to participants.

If at any point you decide to amend your project, e.g., modification in design or in the selection of subjects, you will need to file an amendment with the IRB and suspend further data collection until approval is renewed.

If you experience any unexpected “adverse events” during your project you must inform the IRB as soon as possible, and suspend the project until the matter is resolved.

An expedited review procedure consists of a review of research involving human subjects by an IRB co-chairperson and by one or more experienced reviewers designated by the chairperson from among members of the IRB in accordance with the requirements set forth in 45 CFR 46.110.


Date of IRB Approval: October 13th, 2011