

## Overview of Project

Brain research has demonstrated that music uniquely contributes to neural functioning, but little is known about how losing the ability to produce music, which may be inherent to personal identity for professional singers, impacts quality of life. The results of this study may provide insight for enhancing the use of music as a therapeutic tool that bridges identity and quality of life. Findings are discussed in relation to claims that awareness of personal identity in speech-language interventions can contribute to patient centered discussions about quality of life. This study explored identity and music in the lives of five well-known vocal music professionals of the same generation using case study methodology.

## Literature Review

### What is Identity

There are many different ideas on what it means to have an identity. According to the Journal of the National Medical Association, identity is a combination of "one's fixed human nature and one's on-going acquired nature" that is then used to develop a "system of values" which in turn creates a "philosophy of life."

### Development of Identity

The exact time that identity begins to develop is unclear. Some believe identities begin to form in the womb (Pellerone, 2015) while other literature addresses identity as beginning at adolescence (Lerner, 2004). Identity is an ongoing process in which people participate in activities in the context of their specific cultures. Individuals establish a narrative connection between their actions and cultural categories during these social interactions (De Nora & Mehan, 1994). As such, identity is not something that emerges from the self, but is instead a result of actions that are taken during social interactions within cultural situations.

### Music & Identity

A study funded by the National Association of Music Merchants (NAMM) concluded that identity formation is one of the main purposes of music for adolescents. Music is used as a tool to share their inner selves with the world and was described as a connector for bringing and keeping adolescents together (Campbell, Connell, & Beegle., 2007). Music also has a positive impact on quality of life across the lifespan, reducing stress, boosting mood, and improving memory (Dileo, Mitsudome & Lee, ND).

The pursuit of music in a professional capacity also yields positive rewards. A longitudinal study conducted by Burland (2005) involved interviews once every three months over a two-year period as the participants approached the end of an undergraduate music degree at either music college or university. The purpose of the study was to explore the decision making of students as they decided whether to work as musicians or to choose another career path. Both groups considered music to be an intrinsic part of their identities, an outlet for self-expression, and a way to bond with others. But the participants who went on to pursue performance gained more developmental benefits and personal fortitude than their music loving but amateur peers (Burland, 2005).

## Questions of the Study

1. In what ways is a sense of self shaped by family, culture, and opportunities across the lifespan?
2. In what ways does a professional career in music shape identity?
3. In what ways does the loss of the ability to musically perform impact identity?

## Methodology

### Demographics

This study explored identity and music in the lives of five well-known vocal music professionals selected because they have publicly talked about the role of music in their lives via books, televised interviews, and documentary. The careers of three of the individuals were disrupted by neurogenic disease; one lost the ability to sing after treatment for vocal nodules; and the fifth individual remains unaffected as she continues to perform. There was no actual contact as only publicly available source material was used.

### Materials

Publicly available audio and video interviews, news articles, books, and social media.

### Procedures & Analysis

A balanced corpus of material was selected providing insight about their careers before, during, and after the medical disruption. Line-by-line transcripts of video and audio material were transcribed. Narrative analysis was used to identify themes and subthemes that align with the questions of the study.

## Results

### Question 1

Family played a major role in shaping a sense of self for four out of the five musicians examined.

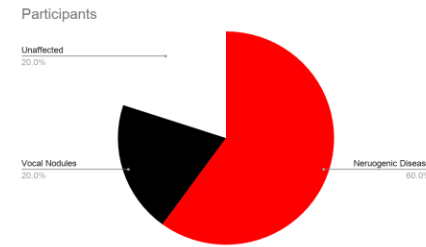
- ❖ Dolly Parton: Her family valued music and she began to perform as a child, and has maintained family connections
- ❖ Glen Campbell: Very musical family culture; grew up playing music
- ❖ Julie Andrews: Performed with her family as a young child and beyond
- ❖ Linda Ronstadt: Family in the music business but not performers, explored many cultures and genres through her career in music
- ❖ Neil Diamond: Did not come from a musical family. Began playing a musical instrument as an adolescent

### Question 2

*A professional career's impact on sense of self did not shape identity as much as family did. However three of the five musicians did express sadness about the loss of their careers.*

- ❖ Dolly Parton continues to have a professional career in music, suffering from no loss of musical ability or identity
- ❖ Glen Campbell's musical identity was shaped by songwriting, performing, and acting
- ❖ Julie Andrews, when she first lost her voice: "I'm in a form of denial about it because to not sing with an orchestra, to not be able to communicate through my voice which I've done all my life, and to not be able to phrase lyrics and give people that kind of...joy, I think I would be totally devastated...it is a tragedy. Thank God I wasn't younger. I mean, at least I've had a wonderful career, but I'm still hoping this will reverse itself."

Figure 1. Participants



- ❖ Linda Ronstadt did show appreciation for her career, but emphasized that her casual everyday singing, just for herself and with her family, was what truly changed her. "I had a very long time that I was able to make my living as a singer. And most of the singing I did was at my house, in the shower and with the dishwasher; that's what I miss the most."
- ❖ Neil Diamond announced his retirement from touring "with great reluctance and disappointment," but focusing on songwriting when he could no longer perform helped

### Question 3

- ❖ Dolly Parton: maintained both her music and her identity, had no loss of ability
- ❖ Glen Campbell: After Alzheimer's, the only thing he had was his music, but he no longer knew who he was and lost a sense of self
- ❖ Julie Andrews: Was initially withdrawn and devastated by loss of voice, but thanks to supportive family she now participates in music
- ❖ Linda Ronstadt: Has completely cut herself off from music and has described losing voice to having her legs cut off
- ❖ Neil Diamond: Songwriting shaped his identity musically even when he stopped singing (maintained musical identity but in a different way)

## Discussion

Ultimately family played a major role in sense of self, and a professional career in music often came from a love for music instilled in childhood. Loss of musical ability can be devastating for identity, but a supportive family environment and an ability to still interact with music in some capacity can counteract loss of self. In clinical practice, music could be used to reawaken or maintain lost identity.

## Selected References

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