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Editors' Response: The Sound of Ideologies Clashing

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Editors' Response: "The sound of ideologies clashing"¹

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In trying to respond to the four different but equally provocative reviews we were faced with a gargantuan task. On the one hand we want to outline the thinking behind the book so as to respond to some of the key points in detail: on the other hand, we wish to avoid the age old (and some would say hackneyed) debate about the relative epistemological merits and ontological status of psychological / sociological / philosophical and feminist theory. What the following paragraphs shall do is respond to what we feel are some of the central academic issues raised.

In producing the edited text it was our aim to bring together a number of chapters that highlighted the current research and thinking within the broad area of musical identities. These chapters were collected under a very general heading of the psychology of music - a specialised discipline that has a long academic history throughout the world, and especially in Britain. The book was never intended as the first or the last word on musical identities, but rather as a contribution to the growing body of knowledge in this area. For example, many of the concerns raised by the reviewers are dealt with in significant detail by other related texts, such as *The Social Psychology of Music* (Hargreaves and North, 1997) and *Music and Emotion* (Juslin and Sloboda, 2001). Both these texts are referred to throughout *Musical Identities*, and we hope that our text will be viewed as contributing to recent developments within the psychology of music and music education. These developments advocate a more theoretically eclectic position for academics endeavouring to develop our understanding of the psychology of music. This multidisciplinary and pluralistic position is entirely in keeping with post-modern research priorities within the wider academic community, and so *Musical Identities* contains chapters by psychologists, music therapists, musicologists, music educationalists and others who can adopt quite

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different theoretical stances on the research processes. The text includes chapters that are qualitative empirical, quantitative empirical, review based and biological in focus. However (and this is a crucial point) it is impossible to include every possible orientation, and we would hope that reviewers would engage with the content of each chapter rather than focusing on the absence of what any given individual believes is their particular speciality.

Perhaps an issue of more fundamental importance is that of positioning identity research within the academic spectrum. The influential sociologist Anthony Giddens suggests that identity is the key theme for late modernity (Giddens, 1991). We find identity research not only in all branches of the arts and humanities, but also within the much more positivist world of medicine and science. No single discipline has exclusive rights to identity research, nor can each identity research project be informed by all current thinking in identity. For example, Tarrant et al 's chapter is informed by the pioneering and influential work of Tajfel (1978) and Tajfel and Turner (1979), and as such utilises some basic principles of social identity theory. The key point here is that chapters written within one perspective, with a clear history and recognised methodology, cannot incorporate all other theoretical orientations. Moreover, reviewers of this type of work should take into account that there is already in existence a set of well-developed key principles that influence such work. To review a chapter such as that of Tarrant et al without recourse to the main substantive points raised, but rather by focusing on what is not in the chapter, does a disservice to the authors. Such reviewing is akin to visiting an Italian restaurant for dinner and then complaining that there is no Indian food on the menu.

One particular chapter attracted detailed comments from the reviewers, and perhaps warrants further mention. We felt that many of the conclusions drawn by Alexandra Lamont raise the same issues as do the criticisms of her chapter. For example, the children were asked to describe themselves as either ‘musical’ or ‘non-musical’. She demonstrates, quite emphatically, that the term ‘musical’ is not based upon the achievement of a set of prescribed technical abilities but rather on a social construction that involves self-assessment with regard to significant others within a child's wider social network. This brings us on to the status of social constructionist research within the book as a whole. While the opening chapter acknowledges the

significance of social constructionist ideas and attempts to integrate them into a range of possible approaches that can be utilised within the broader context of identity, the book does not take a fundamentalist position on this matter. Indeed, social constructionist theory is positioned within an eclectic psychological perspective in this opening chapter. It is worth noting that the majority of chapters make no mention of social constructionist theory.

Social constructionist theory does figure substantially in two chapters at the end of book that with music therapy, and music education for individuals with special needs. The criticisms of these chapters are provocative for a number of reasons, and not least because they focus on what the reviewers would like to see in the chapters rather than what is actually presented. For example, it is suggested that Wendy Magee's chapter (and music therapy in general) fails to take serious account of the centrality of music listening in everyday life. This does a disservice to the profession of music therapy, which is predicated upon a sensitive understanding of the processes involved in musical communication, which includes listening as well as playing. The vast majority of introductory texts on music therapy quite clearly delineate between two possible types of music therapy: one involves listening, and the other involves playing. There is a vast array of music therapy programmes throughout the world that utilise music listening, and which quite clearly acknowledge the fundamental importance that music listening has within everyday life. Moreover, music therapy interventions that utilise music making recognise that many people play music primarily because they enjoy listening to it (MacDonald and Miell, 2000).

This brings us on to a more general point regarding the status of music listening within the text. While the majority of the chapters do focus on music making, we would argue the crucial role played by music listening and musical taste is not neglected. We would anticipate that one of the conclusions to be drawn by readers of the first two chapters is that we are all musical; every human being has a biological and social guarantee of musicianship. This is not a vague utopian ideal, but rather a conclusion reached by an increasing number of academic researchers involved in investigating the foundations of musical behaviour, which is itself of course defined by music listening and music making. In saying that we all have a musical identity, we are suggesting that the music we listen to plays a crucial role in

determining how we view ourselves and the image others have of us. The previous work of Zillman and Gan (1997), which is referred to in a number of places in *Musical Identities*, shows that music listening is perhaps the most important recreational activity in which young people engage. In addition, Colwyn Trevarthen's chapter highlights that the earliest communications between a parent and a child are essentially musical, and that to respond emotionally to music is a defining feature of our humanity. In proposing that we can indeed sing before we can talk, he is emphasising the ubiquitous nature of music making and, in many ways, acts as an advocate of the notion that we are all musical.

In conclusion, it is our opinion that the majority of criticisms raised in the reviews stem from fundamental epistemological differences between the authors of the chapters and the reviewers, and not from an informed view of the broad area within which we positioned our text. While the reviewers may wish to assert that any text focusing on musical identities takes into account their own conception of what identity is, each of which are quite different, we would argue that that this is impossible. Identity researchers and academics in general should be sensitive to, and indeed should embrace this diversity as a point of departure for ongoing and future work rather than use it as an opportunity once again to turn up the epistemological volume of the sound of ideologies clashing.

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Notes

¹ Billy Bragg (1986)

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