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After writing and publishing twenty or so articles and monographs on identity construction and music you can imagine my delight to receive a book titled *Musical Identities* to review. My first response was to pour over the reference lists of the chapters looking for places where my contribution to this area of expertise would be noted and considered. The book, after all, claims in many places throughout the two hundred or so pages to be in the "social-psychology" corner of scholarly tradition.

Sadly, I was disappointed because nowhere in the entire book is a single reference made to my work. I was crushed particularly since I have been given to believe from many corners of the globe that at least a few people held some of this work to be moderately important. So I resumed my review of chapter bibliographies chapters, looking for any signs that those of us who have struggled with identity issues in music, musicians, and music teachers had been absorbed into the scholarship of this volume. Once again, sadly, no sign. So I pushed on with even more enthusiasm because this was now to be a whole new beginning, a fresh start unencumbered by any of the multitude of studies previously done in pursuit of an explanation of musician identity construction.

My first wave of enthusiasm waned when I started to read about "development." This is the "poison" word for the sociologist, after all: like the red flag to the bull. I realized now that I was in largely foreign territory. Nevertheless I pushed on, since there was always the possibility that the psychologists had discovered new things, or had unpacked mysteries that had eluded those of us other side of the fence – in the sociology camp – despite our diligent and persistent work over so many years.

The book acknowledges as early as its third page that "music psychology has very clear overlaps with a number of related disciplines. . ." Yet, after completing the short journey through the book, it seems that few if any of these overlaps are appreciated or valued. The book states on page five that the "social functions of music in the lives of individuals have been seriously neglected" in the research agenda of music psychologists. But the text makes little attempt to acknowledge those studies that do, in fact, attempt exploration of the social construction of identity of musicians. Odd indeed.

All right. I've vented enough, and want to move on to find the meat of the text. As I say, I hoped I might discover some things we of sociological bent have missed in our attempts to see into these problems. And there it was, staring at me large from the page in the midst of a discussion of the ideal self-image: we are told that when there is an incongruity between self and self-image or between self-image and actual behaviour "psychological distress can be the result" (8). This is surely an important launching point to make a case defining a musician according to a set of perceived skills upon which an ideal "self" can be constructed. I was being won over until I remembered reading in McCall and Simmons (*Identities and Interactions: An Examination of Human Associations in Everyday Life [New York: Free Press,*1978] 98) the point that when self constructed identities do not match perceived realities that "misery and anguish" result. I find the

more colourful, sociological language more persuasive and compelling. While "psychological distress" may be meaningful to some with a degree or two, I just get "misery and anguish" so much more in the gut!

I continued to read, in hope the following chapters would yield new and exciting insights. After bounding through the first couple chapters I landed with some excitement in Susan O'Neill's chapter on the "Self-identity of young musicians." Here I was positive I would find new ground-breaking evidence of brilliant insight – or not. O'Neill begins by stating that there is clearly a need to continue the discourse to distinguish "who are musicians and who are not." Who could disagree with that? O'Neill goes on to suggest that to be a musician may, in fact, entail more than the demonstration of music performance skills. Who could disagree with that, either?

Somewhat further on O'Neill discusses musical "ability." That some self-identity constructions accept the notion of ability as something that can be improved with effort while others conceive of ability as "innate and fixed" is accepted. My own work investigating music majors at universities, however, reveals a more complex vista of self-identity, based on a constructivist approach in which one's current identity complex shapes "ability" to support to and confirm identity – rather than the other way around, as O'Neill's account might suggest. The book's neglect of the social construction of talent leaves O'Neill's argument vacant.

Later in the chapter O'Neill suggests that "the case of a 'musician' might be viewed as a socially bestowed identity rather than something which can be defined by a predetermined set of characteristics" (85). The naiveté of this statement stands out on the page because work in sociology has shown that the musician identity is constructed for the most part in a manner consistent with a modified labeling theoretical perspective.

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There is little factual support (in the form of "predetermined characteristics") for musician identity because it is constructed, confirmed, and maintained almost exclusively through interaction with others.

When degree holding applicants come to audition for an orchestra or opera company they might as well leave their university performance degree certificates at home: what is required is to show only if you can actually play or sing! So to suggest that we can claim an identity without explicit support in social interaction is to fully misunderstand the process.

Later, in a discussion of that talent-identity of four girls, it is observed that even "significant people in the girls' lives" were unable to reassure them of their talent (87). But it is naive of the author to think that interaction in the construction of an identity should somehow be validated in a linear system. It is not just "significant others" who must make the assertion of talent, but other musicians, who accept their own claims to talent and enact that acceptance socially. In other words, it is not as simple as just going up to someone and asking if they would call you a musician and then when they say "yes" the matter is settled. While the chapter does acknowledge this fluid nature of identity development, it is still fuzzy as is the maturity of O'Neill's observations made here.

Late in the chapter the author suggests that "there is a gulf in meaning" (93) between the researcher and the subject of investigation, a point so basic to sociological research that it scarcely warrants mentioning. The lack of shared meaning is a cornerstone of this type of investigation, and one discussed at great length in the sociology literature. This is a point of some importance, as an increasing number of studies in this area are being undertaken by musicians themselves. This creates a more difficult interpretive scenario, since traditionally researchers have worked in social environments far removed

from their own lives -- by investigating drug cultures or ghetto gangs, for instance. As researchers situated within the musical arena itself begin to look in the mirror, the challenge is to withhold one's own "meaning" from the interpretive process. The idea that Alfred Schutz (1964) was explaining in "The Stranger: An Essay in Social Psychology" (in *School and Society: A Sociological Reader,* B. Cosin et al, eds. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971) with his disinterested observer is challenged each time a musician investigates a musician. This is an area of concern that needs careful attention in our world of research where more and more of the research is being undertaken by those symbolically inside the community – rendering the objectivity of analysis at least potentially questionable. I worked through this problem in print some time ago in a paper titled "The Problem of Over-Rapport" (*Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education* 123 [1994] 90-97) and more attention is still needed given the assertions in this chapter.

Despite my criticisms, I hold this book to be a profoundly important manuscript that outlines a program of cohesive research into the nature of musical identities from the disciplinary perspective of psychology. But it presents only part of the story. Anyone interested in a fuller encounter with the nature of identity construction will need to venture into the world of sociology where exploration of these issues has been on-going for considerably longer, resulting in an extensive and equally compelling body of literature. It would be more than an appropriate time for both these two branches of investigation to join forces and share the growing expertise as the newcomers in psychology revisit areas long established in their sister discipline.