Musical Self-Portraits and Musical Identity: Using Visual Methodology to Explore Identity in Teacher Education

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Abstract

Self-portraits are a genre of art, but also constitute artefacts of identity (Jones 2012; Lent 2007; Ungluab 2004; Iskin 1997). Our research explores musical 'self-portraits' produced by more than 150 students, submitted as an assignment in a teacher education music class. We mine the self-portraits for floating signifiers of roles and identities whose meaning is dependent on context and on interpreter (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002). Previous research has explored musical identity, and student and teacher identity; but none has used visual methodology (Harper 2016) to explore musical identity of preservice teachers. Most of our students are in their twenties, not so distant from secondary school, where music tastes, dress codes, and body art define groups (Shank 2011). Students who participate in band or choir in school may align their identity with school music in obvious and traditional ways (Salvador 2015). Students who listen to death metal or punk also identify with a community of cultural practice, but one associated with disruption and 'emancipatory aspirations for marginalized or silenced voices' (Smith, Dines, and Parkinson 2018). In this paper, we examine material practices, codes, and symbols to explore how students self-edit representations of self (Becker 1972); and investigate whether any of the more socially "deviant" musical tastes or performances of identity are visible. This research is significant to understanding how preservice teachers may groom their self-image to fit the cultural ethos of "the good teacher;" and to asking, what gets lost when subversive or marginal representations of self are suppressed or self-selected out of our classrooms?

Keywords: musical identity, teacher education, self portrait, visual signifiers

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