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What is This?

Possible selves as a source of motivation for musicians

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Abstract

Music can be a core element of the sense of self. Integration of the future, possible musical self within the self-concept helps to account for the enormous investment of time and energy necessary to become a musician. In this qualitative study, we explore the motivational dimensions of the possible musical self. Possible selves exist in multiple domains with both positive and negative elements. Respondents from a diverse, snowball sample ($N = 204$) of musicians completed an online survey describing their hoped for, expected and feared musical selves. Coding of the responses identified major themes. The 'hoped for' selves yielded four main themes among 171 responses: improvement, social connection, success and enjoyment. The 'feared' selves yielded a total of five main themes among 160 responses: being a poor musician, injury/illness, financial difficulty, lack of knowledge and lack of social connection/recognition. The 'expected' selves yielded only one additional category, negative expectations. The balance or tension between the positive and negative elements of possible selves is analysed to produce a composite description of the possible musical self. Limitations of the study and links between the present results and possible selves theory are discussed.

Keywords

expectancies, motivation, musical self, possible selves, qualitative methods

There may be no more human experience than imagining the future and its possibilities, only to experience simultaneously hope and fear at the thought of the person one might become. For a musician, music can be a core element of both the sense of self and the vision of his or her future. The hopes and fears that a person integrates into their self-concept can have a powerful effect on the inner workings of an individual's motivation. Levitin (2006) suggests that approximately 10,000 hours of practice are required for almost anyone to become an expert musician; an impressive investment of time and energy. Where does this level of commitment come from? The musician's sense of possible future selves, phrased in terms of hopes and fears, are explored in the present study. Our goal is to describe the possible selves of musicians and the motivational implications of tension between various aspects of 'the musical self'.

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Motivation for music

The literature on motivation highlights a long-standing distinction between motivation that is based on hope for success versus fear of failure (Pang, Villacorta, Chin & Morrison, 2009). Whereas hope motivates a person based on anticipating positive emotions, fear implies that a sense of relief will come from avoiding a potential pitfall (Clark, Teevan, & Ricciuti, 1956). On the one hand, the hope for success highlights goals that are to be gained through effort. On the other hand, the fear of failure increases the salience of goals that are to be avoided (McClelland, 1987). Indeed, the complex interactions between cognition/emotion (including hopes and fears), memory and sensory systems lead to strong emotional attachments and reactions to music (Juslin & Laukka, 2004). Links to the fundamental elements of emotional and motivational regulation help to account for the close ties that music has with the sense of self (see Levitin, 2006). The individual's concept of his or her musical self summarizes and integrates the various elements of emotional and motivational regulation into a coherent whole.

Musical selves

The musical self is an aspect of the self-concept that integrates perceptions, beliefs and schemata about a person's musical abilities and possibilities. Research shows that musical self-concept is associated with participation in music-related activities (Reynolds, 1992). Austin's (1988) research into the effects of a music contest format on self-concept, achievement, motivation and attitude of elementary band students showed that musicians who were being evaluated had greater gains in musical achievement than a non-rated group. Austin (1991) also found that adolescent girls have higher musical self-esteem than male counterparts, and that musical self-concept correlates positively with music participation both inside and outside of school. Research suggests that children believe ability and effort are major causes of musical success or failure (Asmus, 1985). Ability and effort attributions vary inversely as a student ages, with ability attributions increasing and effort attributions decreasing over time (Asmus, 1986; Covington, 1983).

A person's general self-concept (Harter, 1983) and young musicians' musical selves (Reynolds, 1992) develop in childhood. Children's musical self-concept in elementary school has been found to predict their musical achievement (Hedden, 1982). Among adolescent instrumental band students (grades 7–12), self-concept ratings were shown to be significantly correlated with motivation variables, and with intrinsic motivation in particular. In general, the literature shows that the self-concept is relevant to music motivation among children, but an understanding of how possible selves fit into the motivation of adult musicians is absent. The present research begins to fill this gap by describing the possible selves of musicians. Drawing upon the terminology proposed by Markus and Nurius (1986), possible selves can fit into three broad, interrelated categories: the hoped-for self, the expected self, and the feared self. The hoped-for self is the person we would most like to be, and is likely positive in nature. This self need not be easily attainable or even phrased in achievable terms. The expected self is the realistic self that the person expects to become, and may contain positive or negative expectancies. The feared self represents what a person is afraid of becoming; future states to be avoided, if possible. Whereas the positive elements of possible selves provide motivation to approach a goal state, the negative elements motivate a person toward the ideal self out of fear. Overall, our research adopts a qualitative approach to give a description of the musical self, while also looking for balance and possibly tension between its positive and negative elements.

Possible selves

The conceptualization of the self has changed a great deal over the last century (see Epstein, 1973, 2003). Markus and Wurf (1987) note that '[w]hat began as an apparently singular, static, lump-like entity has become a multi-dimensional, multifaceted, dynamic structure that is systematically implicated in all aspects of social information processing' (p. 301). For musicians, social interactions can be closely tied to music – how, when, where, and with whom it is played. We believe that the musical self emerging from the interactions among musicians can be shaped by an individual's orientation toward music in the future, that is, the person's hopes and fears. The emergent possible future self should not be viewed as a static, lump-like entity; rather the self-description is likely to be influenced by the contexts in which music is played and the musical self is discussed.

Although there has been a proliferation of studies on the self (Erikson, 2007), for our purposes, we are guided by the well-established cognitive approach of Markus and Nurius (1986, 1987) wherein the self is operationally defined as a system of affective and cognitive structures that both integrate and lend a sense of coherence to a person's experiences. This self-knowledge is influenced by a powerful sense of future possibilities, in the form of possible selves.

Possible selves are cognitive manifestations of one's self in the future (Markus & Nurius, 1986) in various life domains (Marsh & Craven, 1997), tied together by the current self-concept. Similar to incentives, possible selves prompt one to take action towards reaching or avoiding a particular future state. Not all possible selves are attainable or even desirable. Possible selves provide a necessary link between cognition and motivation because they involve domain-specific cognitive schemata that are influenced by social and environmental processes, such as comparing oneself to a role model (Erikson, 2007; Stein, 1995). Respected musicians can serve as role models for a student in pursuit of a possible future self. Conversely, a student might work on avoiding the fate of a negative role model (Norman & Aron, 2003).

Possible selves can help to inspire action, facilitating the formation and implementation of plans to move towards, or away from, the envisioned possible self (Markus & Nurius, 1986). These selves can be seen as cognitive depictions of various abilities, qualities, features, traits and properties that the self does not yet possess. A possible self can act as a bridge between current self and an ideal self (Markus & Ruvolo, 1989). The bridge metaphor is powerful because bridges are stable structures that allow movement from one place to another (Markus & Wurf, 1987). Oyserman, Bybee, Terry and Hart-Johnson (2004) use the metaphor of possible selves as roadmaps, to capture the notion of a possible self acting as a plan to direct behavior towards the goal(s). A feature of roadmaps, like possible selves, is a description of alternative routes to the same destination.

Whether viewed as bridges or roadmaps, it is important to differentiate possible selves from similar constructs such as dreams, aspirations and life tasks. According to Erikson (2007), a defining feature of possible selves is the experience of agency; exerting some form of control, which can range from weak to strong, with the specific form of agentic action varying between relatively individualistic and collectivistic cultures (see Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Possible selves are more than simply a cognitive representation of the self in question (e.g., 'piano player'), they include a visualization of the experience of being in the state in question. The idea of being in a specific future situation allows for the separation of possible selves from life tasks, which are the larger broader sense of the goal one is trying to realize (Cantor, Markus, Niedenthal & Nurius, 1986). Possible selves give personalized meaning to life tasks (Erikson, 2007) and may also carry a plan of how to reach the desired end-state (Oyserman et al., 2004).

It is well accepted that the experience of tension or conflict between cognitive structures has the potential to be highly motivating (Reeve, 2005). In an influential study, Oyserman and Markus (1990) found that among delinquent youth, those with the highest levels of motivation had a strong positive possible self, as well as a countervailing feared self in the same domain. Oyserman, Gant and Ager (1995) found that, among students in the USA, balance in possible selves appeared to motivate students to realize the positive self, avoid the negative self and enhance perseverance. This presence of positive and negative aspects of the self creates a discrepancy that has been shown to have greater motivational properties than simply having a standalone expected, hoped-for or feared self. In this manner, feared possible selves can be beneficial, even essential, to motivation (Oyserman & Markus, 1990).

The central question guiding this research is: What qualities do musicians use to describe their possible musical selves? In asking such a question, we must remain mindful that the context in which the question is posed and answered is likely to have an influence on the responses. Given that not much has been written about the qualities of possible future musical selves, either to be approached or avoided, our strategy has been to employ a diverse sample and describe common themes.

The present study

We used an online survey to examine musicians' possible selves. Sampling was conducted on a referral basis (snowball sampling) where musicians alert each other to the existence of the survey and its purpose. This sampling procedure has both advantages and disadvantages (see Heckathorn & Jeffri (2001) for a more complete discussion of sampling issues among jazz musicians). The survey included demographic questions, items from established scales measuring aspects of motivation, three open-ended questions tapping into key dimensions of possible selves and a comments section. In their comments many respondents expressed appreciation for the research and the self-reflection that participation encouraged. Although the survey contained several sections, we will analyse only the open-ended questions on hoped-for, expected and feared possible selves for this article.

Responses are summarized to identify major categories or themes among the descriptions of possible future selves. The musicians we studied are self-identified and their concept of music is broad. In analysing the data, attention was given to balance or tension among possible selves. After describing the major themes, we will propose a summary characterization of 'the possible musical self'.

Method

Participants

The sample of participants, each of whom plays at least one instrument (including voice), consisted of 204 participants; 97 males, 90 females, and the rest chose not to identify their sex. Respondents ranged in age from 18 to 69 years, two-thirds were under 30 years of age. Participants in the study represent 25 different nationalities, the majority being from North America or Europe (85%). Sixty-six different musical instruments were mentioned in various combinations; some respondents indicated that they played as many as 15 different instruments. Participants were asked to name their 'primary instrument.' The most frequently cited primary instruments were guitar (29%), piano/keyboards (16%), brass instruments (10%),

Table 1. Genres of music named by participants

Genre of music	Occurrences	Genre of music	Occurrences
Pop	99	Musical Theatre	2
Rock	94	Indie	2
Classical	88	Hardcore	2
Folk	82	Punk Rock	2
Blues	81	Opera	2
Alternative	76	Pop Punk	1
Jazz	63	Pop Rock	1
Country	55	Post Rock	1
Celtic/Scottish/Irish	46	Post/Progressive Punk	1
Metal	40	Hardcore Punk	1
World Music	30	Blue Grass	1
Historical	28	Art Rock	1
Dance	27	50's Rockabilly	1
Reggae	26	Native Drumming & Chanting	1
Gospel	25	Noise	1
Children's	23	No Genre	1
Comedy	23	Polka	1
R&B	19	Electronic	1
Latin	18	Spanish	1
Disco	10	Social Commentary	1
New Age	13	Traditional European	1
Punk	13	Psyche	1
Rap	11	Improv	1
Ska	5	Military/Concert Band	1
Avant Garde/Contemporary	4	Other	7

bass guitar/upright bass (10%), drums/percussion (9%) and voice (9%). Participants were presented with 24 Recording Industry Association of America categories of music (as well as an open-ended box to add 'other' categories). Respondents identified being involved with at least 50 separate genres of music (see Table 1). Respondents were also asked to indicate the type of training they received. Fifty-one percent indicated that they had received formal training of two years or more (defined as private lessons, classes, a school-based music programme, etc.), 31% had less than two years of formal training and 17% reported being self-taught. Given that the survey was part of the first author's thesis project, many of the respondents completed the survey as a way to help a fellow musician.

Possible selves prompts

Possible selves were generated with three open-ended items above expandable text boxes. The following preamble was included:

> Many people have in mind some things that they hope to be in the future, regardless of how likely it is that they will actually be that way or do those things. We call these **hoped-for** selves. People consider not only what they want to happen, but also what they believe will happen to them. We call these **expected** selves. Finally, people also think of what they don't want to happen to them, in other words, what they fear will happen. We call these **feared** selves. We are interested in these three types of possible selves in music.

A. Please list below three possible musical selves that you would hope to describe you in the next year. When I think about Music, next year I **hope** to be ...

B. Please list below three possible musical selves that are most likely to be true of you in the next year. When I think about Music, next year I **expect** to be ...

C. Please list below three possible musical selves that you fear or worry about being in the next year. When I think about Music, next year I am **afraid** that I will be ...

The responses provided by participants tended to be brief and often included incomplete sentence structure; the median length of response is 21 words per section.

Data collection

Respondents were first directed to an online consent form describing the purpose of the study, the terms under which data was collected, including that respondents would be anonymous, the data was considered confidential, and that there was no penalty for refusal to answer any question or withdrawing from the study. Contact information for the researchers and the Cape Breton University Research Ethics Board was also given, in the event of questions or complaints. Snowball sampling was employed via discussion groups for musicians, listservs for two music societies, and electronic 'word of mouth' via email referrals from other participants. An online survey tool was used to collect data (posted at www.googledocs.com). This sampling process has the potential to tap into a diversity of instruments, locations, musical styles and a richness of respondents' musical motivation.

Disadvantages of using an online survey include the absence of random sampling procedures to ensure a representative sample, a self-selection factor, the need for a computer, internet access and a referral to the survey. The absence of tangible incentives for participation likely produced a sample with some interest in the psychology of music, either generally or personally.

Data coding

We performed an analysis to identify the themes present within each of the three possible selves categories (hoped-for, expected, and feared). We did not use an existing coding scheme; rather, we began with the raw data to allow patterns to emerge. Our goal is to develop a composite description of the possible musical self, rather than a theory of musical self-development. This methodology provides rich data and an opportunity for respondents to discuss views about their own musical self in their own words. Inspired by grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1997, 1998), our approach to the coding data is primarily inductive. There is, however, an overarching deductive lens provided by Markus & Nurius's (1986) specific questions about three possible selves categories. Although coding was done without reference to prior research on possible selves, we will connect our results to existing theory in the 'Results and discussion' section below.

To get a broad sense of the overall data, all responses were first analysed by a thorough reading. *In vivo* coding was then employed, in which each response category (hoped for, expected and feared) was carefully examined line-by-line, and coded into words closely resembling those of the respondents. Rather than identifying a single dominant category, responses could be

assigned more than one code. This process resulted in a large number of preliminary codes. Other persons likely would have produced a different coding system because the researcher is integral to the data analysis (Maxwell, 2005). Next, open coding involved comparing and contrasting responses in order to fully develop the codes. Substantially overlapping codes were merged, and new codes created, until no new codes emerged. Finally, axial coding extracted categories from the open codes by comparing the interpretation of codes until central themes emerged. Themes represent the common ideas that encompass several open codes and further summarize the data. Throughout the process we looked for the relations of emerging codes to the concept of a musical self.

Results and discussion

In the sections that follow we will present the most prominent themes. It was common to find multiple themes in a single response as respondents organized their thoughts in different, sometimes unique or even poetic ways. The themes identified are supported by quotes from the participants. Following each direct quote we include the respondent's sex, age group and primary instrument, if the respondent provided the information.

Hoped-for selves

An analysis of the 'hoped-for' selves yielded four main themes among the 171 responses: improvement, social connection, success and enjoyment.

Improvement. The desire for improvement was most frequently cited in the hoped-for self (63% of respondents). One woman wrote:

> I always wanted to be in a band, but lately I have been thinking more and more about starting one with my husband. Would give me the most freedom and easy to find practice time. By next year I hope to at least be practicing more than 3 times a week. Right now I am EXTREMLEY erratic at practicing. This one is most important to me. [I hope to] practice regularly on guitar because I like the sound and it is most versatile and my best instrument. (F, 40s, Guitar)

Under improvement we found that the five most recurring areas for improvement include creativity, versatility, technical ability, knowledge or expertise, and performance.

Being creative was identified as being of particular importance, for example a male guitarist said 'Next year I hope to be a more knowledgeable, more proficient, more creative musician than I am now' (M, 40s, Guitar). Composing and songwriting was a key outlet for musicians' creativity. Respondents hoped to be 'recognized as a writer of beautiful, profound songs ... a singer-songwriter performing my songs for appreciative audiences' (F, under 20, vocals), and 'respected composer of classical music commissioned to write songs and song cycles' (F, 40s, Piano).

Increasing versatility by developing technical abilities and music theory is a second key way in which musicians hope to improve. Participants identified specific techniques to be mastered, such as finger picking on guitar, improvisation on drums, consistently hitting high notes on trumpet, reading music, playing by ear and others. The ongoing self-assessment of technical ability was evident in many responses, including a male guitar player who wrote:

> I would hope to dedicate more time to practicing; I would hope to learn new techniques, as well as perfecting the ones I already know; I wouldn't even mind learning how to play another instrument ... from time to time I beat around on the drums ... but I'm not very good. (M, 20s Guitar)

Some responses linked understanding music theory to the concept of improvement. Participants' (12%) desire to begin or further their studies ranged from individual private lessons to formal post-secondary education in music at the master's and doctoral levels. Linking theory to creativity, one respondent said, '[I hope to be] applying some of the music theory I have learned directly to songwriting' (M, 30s Bass Guitar).

Versatility also comes from exploring new genres and the music of other cultures. One respondent was very specific about three hoped for selves. He hoped to be:

> 1. playing klezmer music with klezmer musicians on my ukulele.
>
> 2. playing Afro-Cuban and Afro-Brazilian music on my ukulele and on percussion with Afro-Cuban and Afro-Brazilian musicians.
>
> 3. comfortable jamming with other musicians in a wide variety of idioms on either ukulele or bongos. (M, 20s, Ukulele)

Several participants (15%) wanted to expand their horizons through travel and further exploring the links between music and cultures. One participant wished to be 'better able to understand the social role music is playing in the culture I'm currently studying (I'm an ethnomusicology grad student). Also hope to be able to participate in this music somehow' (F, 40s, Piano).

Finally, participants wished to improve their skills as performers or entertainers, including being less shy around other musicians, more comfortable on stage and gaining confidence in demonstrating their ability in a public setting. Whereas some respondents described playing with a few other people, others discussed performing on a grand stage gaining the respect of other musicians and the audience. The responses suggested that improving skill allows for better social connections.

Social connection. Music enables social connections and collaborations that can range from simply playing with a friend as a hobby, forming a band or playing in an orchestra. Forty-five participants stated that they hope to be in a band. Being a musician facilitates entry into a social network that allows for growth, both as a musician and a person. Growth comes from regular practice/performance, enhancement of skill, and fellowship. 'I hope to perform more often at public venues, whatever they may be [and] possibly join a band, a creative collective of some sort that performs and practices regularly' (M, 40s, Guitar). Various participants hope that the intense atmosphere of a band will help foster a tight bond amongst the group members.

Social connection is also provided when entertaining others. A performer is able to communicate to audiences large and small, while receiving both verbal and non-verbal feedback. One musician wrote: '[I hope to] give my message to the masses [and] bring joy with my music' (M, 50s, Voice). Others expressed a hope to enjoy, support and experience the music of other musicians as audience members, in 'administrative capacity at a music organization' (F, 20s voice), or to be 'busier supporting my friends in a "side guy" capacity' (M, 40s, Drums).

The role of teacher also connects musicians. The act of teaching another person involves social exchange; forming a relationship of mutual respect and common interests. Teaching music allows one to share one's abilities with a network of both established and aspiring

musicians. One of the participants wrote: 'When I think about Music, next year I hope to be enrolled in a Performance program, applying to music graduate school, and teaching music on the side for some income' (F, 30s, Voice). Teaching music facilitates achieving pragmatic goals, such as making money, and is itself indicative of some success as a musician.

Success. Approximately half of the participants (47%) expressed the desire to become successful, broadly defined. The vision of future success can help to push a discouraged person through difficult times during the learning process. One participant said he hopes to be 'HIGHLY PAID AND JETLAGGED' (M, 40s, Drums and Bass Guitar), with capital letters to emphasize his goal. Although a few desire an extravagant lifestyle, the majority (65%) of the 60 participants who wrote about financial success simply wish to 'make a living' (F, 50s, Drums), 'pay the bills' (M, 50s, Voice) or 'make a little more money' (F, 40s, Guitar). For these respondents, financial success means being able to support themselves with their music. For some, financial success means that they will not have to pursue a non-music-related career.

Participants also defined success in terms of being well known and respected as a musician, both among the general public and peers. For her hoped-for self, a clarinet/trombone player in her 40s wrote only three key words: 'recognized, respected, and remembered'. A more materialistic 20-year-old guitar player also used only three key words: 'rich, famous, and respected'. Although these entries are tied together by the term 'respected', the first musician combined respect with recognized and remembered but the other chose to pair respect with being rich and famous. These word choices significantly colour the motivational profile being communicated by the participants.

Recording often was mentioned as an avenue to achieve success, recognition and can be linked back to most of the goals discussed so far. One respondent was very specific about his hope that within the year a 'Recording deal has been signed for a three disc deal, studio time is underway and management is working on collaboration deals' (M, 50s voice).

Almost 15% of participants expressed the hope of being successful enough to go on tour and travel the world. One especially ambitious participant hoped to be:

> (s)elling some albums with my band and playing some shows on the road, building a fan base. Playing concerts and tours while selling merchandise and T-shirts, and playing live in front of thousands. Causing a riot with our music and changing the game and how it is played. (M, 50s, Drums)

Thirteen musicians (7%) stated that they hoped to be able to work with music in careers such as production, composing/arranging, running a record label, and being a music teacher or professor.

Personal enjoyment. Given its connection to intrinsic motivation, it is somewhat surprising that personal enjoyment of music was cited by only 9% of the sample. Enjoyment may be strongly implied by other responses, such as those related to success or social connection among musicians. One participant summed it up well by saying; '[I hope to be] enjoying the music I play just as much if not more than I do now' (M, 50s, Guitar). This hoped for self reflects the motivation of musicians to pursue intrinsic interests in music, rather than being consumed with the trappings surrounding their musical activities.

Expected selves

Expected and hoped-for selves are highly similar categories. Every hoped-for self summarized above also appears among the list of 168 expected selves. One astute participant explicitly

wrote that expected selves are the '[s]ame as the "hoping for" category: I don't really understand the difference, unless hoping for is "oh-it-would-be-nice" kind of thinking without an actual action following through on that goal' (M, 20s, Trumpet). Analysis of the expected selves, however, led to the formation of one new category not found in the hoped for selves section: negative expectations.

Negative expectations. A percentage of the expected selves (20%) carry with them undesirable connotations. These negative expectations include concepts such as being in uncomfortable situations, faltering due to age, being too busy or unmotivated to practice. External obligations were often blamed for stagnation or an expected lack of improvement. According to one participant: 'As much as I would like to be better skilled at playing the piano, given that the amount of free time I have is limited due to school and work, the likelihood that I will become a perfect piano player is low' (F, 40s, Piano). Falling into debt, and being unable to support one's self solely through a musical career were also common negative expectations, as noted by one participant who expects to be 'still VERY broke, in debt' (M, 30s, Bass Guitar). Unfortunately, some expected that their enjoyment of music would decline over time; one woman said: '[I expect to lose] interest in my primary instrument and no longer have the desire to play it' (F, 50s, Viola).

Feared selves

Responses to feared selves (*n* = 160) yielded a total of five main themes necessary to describe future worries and concerns: *being a poor musician*, *injury/illness*, *financial difficulty*, *lack of knowledge*, and *broken connections/being irrelevant*. Although this data shares common themes with the hoped-for and expected selves (see Table 2), it is phrased very differently, indicating that perhaps the feared self plays a somewhat different role in motivating the respondents.

Being a poor musician. The majority of participants (59%) included a concept related to being a poor musician among their feared selves; this theme contains a wide variety of specific

Table 2. Key dimensions of the musical self

Hoped-for self	Feared self
Improvement, including being creative, developing versatility, improving in technical ability, knowledge and expertise, and high-quality performance.	**Being a poor musician**, including insufficient skill, poor performance, lacking confidence, losing the desire to play, and not being true to oneself.
Personal enjoyment, including developing an intrinsic interest in music	**Lacking knowledge**, being seen as a fraud, having a serious defect in skill or knowledge, and encountering educational barriers.
Social connection, including being in a group or band, entertaining audiences, and teaching music.	**Broken connections/ being irrelevant**, not having collaborators, including losing one's place in a group, and being ordinary.
Success, including financial stability and being respected as a musician	**Financial difficulty**, including not being able to support oneself
	Injury or illness, including a generalized fear, and concern over specific physical injury or mental illness

Note: Major categories are shown in bold.

responses. Musicians fear a future self that does not improve technically, or whose skill level will decline due to lack of determination and effort. One participant commented: 'I fear that some-day I may hit a plateau and I believe that I cannot get any better at playing my instrument' (M, Guitar), while another feared 'not feeling like a "real" musician"' (F, 40s, Flute). Losing focus, the passion for music, the motivation to practice and the desire to play were common themes observed within the feared self.

Performance-related feared selves of some musicians include that they will 'not be playing shows or touring' (F, 50s Drums) or that they will loose confidence and/or remain reticent per-formers. One participant stated: 'I'm scared that my lack of music theory will catch up with me, that I won't practice enough and will start getting worse on my instrument, and that I will lose the respect that I may have gained as a musician' (F, 40s, Clarinet). Having the respect of one's peers is an important part of feeling like a true musician.

A motivational quality of the feared self involves remaining true to one's self; not being jaded or changed by the music industry, or falling into a lifestyle of abusing drugs or alcohol. '[I fear I will be] overweight, alcoholic drug addict who can't sing or make beats anymore, [who] lives with his mother on disability' (M, 50s, Microphone). Participants feared that in the future they may mistake being pretentious for confidence, and lose humility in their attempt to be seen as competent musicians. One participant expressed a fear that he 'will become some serious ass-hole or an image of something outside of what I am' (M, 40s, Guitar). Some participants also feared becoming a failure or a quitter in the eyes of their peers. Such fears can be powerful moti-vators, especially when balanced against the hoped for self.

Injury/Illness. Some participants (21%) expressed a fear of possible injury or illness that would interfere with their ability to play their instrument. Participants cited several ailments that might interfere with the ability to play or practice. Such fears include loss or damage to limbs and digits, tendonitis, loss of voice, back problems, loss of hearing, loss of agility, physical illness, and mental illness or cognitive/memory deficits which may lower one's ability to engage in music. For example: '[I fear] playing hockey and getting a split lip and not being able to play my instrument. Or if my lungs were to ever collapse and therefore I would have to take it easy when it came to my practicing' (F, 50s, Trumpet). Some respondents expressed generalized fears; one woman stated: '[I fear being] incapacitated or limited by illness so that I will not be able to practice or play my instrument' (M, 50s, Voice). Others expressed more specific worries, specifically the lose of 'agility to arthritis (or) failing eyesight' (F, 50s, Harp). Injury and illness seem to be among the most prominent reasons musicians envision for potentially abandoning music.

Financial difficulty. The loss of financial stability, and being unable to make a comfortable living through music was a common theme, and in that respect the feared self mirrors the hoped for self. One respondent feared 'having to resort to a job at Walmart because I cannot find a full-time music related job' (M, 40s, Bass). Participants voiced their dismay with being forced to seek employment outside of the music industry to support themselves and their families. Those whose primary source of income is performing were concerned about buying and repairing their equipment. For example, 'I am afraid I will not earn sufficient money to afford the latest tracks, or purchase more up to date equipment/software (although this is not the "be all and end all" of production and DJing)' (Male, Decks & Production).

Lack of knowledge/expertise. In the 'hoped for' self section of the study, participants described being viewed as competent and knowledgeable experts in the field of music. The corresponding elements of the feared self include being seen as incompetent by other musicians, exposing a serious weakness in technique, and being viewed as a musical fraud. '[I fear I will be] some cheeseball playing G,C, and D over and over while crooning some watered down classic rock tune that everyone and their grandmother has been sick and tired of hearing for the last 20 years' (M, 20s, Guitar and Bass). The notion of being a fraud also includes the fear of embarrassing one's self. '[I fear] that I will not sound knowledgeable when I discuss music with other musicians [or] identify composers with some accuracy' (F, 30s, Viola).

Those planning to pursue higher education in music worried that they might not be accepted into a desired program; or if they gained acceptance, that they would not be able to meet the demands of the curriculum, such as 'struggling to complete my graduating recital pieces' (F, 50s, French horn). Other fears include struggling with specific course work, being asked to leave the music programme, or being forced to drop out because of failures. One participant, who had already completed graduate school, expressed his fear of becoming 'a music professor without standards' (M, 40s Guitar). Another participant was more specific; he feared becoming a 'crabby and disappointed music professor … without standards … who does not understand the younger generation at all' (M, 50s Autoharp). Another expressed the fear 'that no new students come to my studio/no talented students want to study with me' (M, 20s, Ukulele).

Broken connections/being irrelevant. As with hoped for selves, issues of social connection and recognition were expressed in the 'feared' possible selves' data. Some musicians (13%) feared not having collaborators, either professional or recreational, for example, being 'lonely, without musical peers with similar interests' (M, 20s, Trumpet). Having difficult and unreliable band mates was highlighted by a participant who said: '[I fear] being stuck on a gig with musicians who do not care or put in the same percentage and level of commitment to their craft as I do' (M, 40s, Bass Guitar). On the other side of the coin are participants who fear rejection by band mates. One person cited a fear of 'being asked to leave my band and being replaced by another drummer' (M, 50s, Drums).

Several musicians (8%) in the study expressed a fear of being irrelevant or invisible to others. Participants noted a fear of 'unmotivated, discouraged, falling even further into obscurity' (F, 20s, Drums), and 'yet more resigned to obscurity in the national scene' (M, 50s, Guitar). Another expressed the fear of being seen as ordinary or unable to make an impact on listeners, of 'being incapable of generating a reaction from people (good or bad). I'd rather have 100 people tell me I suck than 1 person saying I was just "alright"' (M, 20s, Bass Guitar).

Balance among possible selves

As noted above, the expected-selves category overlaps considerably with the hoped-for selves, as well as sharing negative expectations with the feared self. Therefore, in looking for balance within the musical self, we will focus on the hoped-for and feared selves. Throughout the coding process, similarities and differences were observed between the hoped-for and feared selves. To examine the balance between selves, an independent coder reviewed the hoped-for and feared selves and categorized them as closely connected (28%), moderately connected (42%) or unconnected (30%). To be considered closely connected, the same terminology had to be used in both categories. Loosely connected possible selves can be located in the same general domain but are not expressed in the same words. Examples of each are presented in Table 3. Given that

Table 3. Examples of balance among hoped-for and feared selves

Closely connected selves: Male, 50s, tenor trombone :

 Hoped-for self:1. music prof; 2. completing my PhD in Music; 3. professional performing musician
 Feared self: 1. not having music teaching position; 2. dropping out of my PhD; 3. not working as a professional musician in a part-time capacity

Moderately connected selves: Female, 20s, drums:

 Hoped-for self: A better musician who is playing more live shows and is getting known for being a solid player
 Feared self: Unmotivated, discouraged and falling even further into obscurity

Unconnected selves: Male, 40s, bass guitar:

 Hoped for self: continue to learn more non-primary instruments; play 'onstage', give performances on non-primary instruments
 Feared self: always fear the loss of fingers, medical problems with hands (arthritis, etc.), partial loss of hearing, inner ear imbalances, etc.

respondents could write up to three responses for each category, the presence of balance was defined by at least one instance of overlap. It should be noted that compared to the present survey method, future research using an interview methodology would likely produce a more in-depth discussion of interrelated possible selves.

The motivational implications of balanced possible selves can be elaborated from the respondents' descriptions. It is easy to see that feeling like a musical fraud, losing the respect of other musicians, or losing one's technical ability can be either motivating or de-motivating experiences, depending on the individual's context. As long as they remain unrealized fears, negative elements of the possible self can motivate practice and improvement, especially when there is still hope for success. However, if it appears that the feared self has been realized, and hope has been lost, the individual seems destined to lose motivation for music. Similarly, without the feared self, the hoped-for self seems to provide little impetus toward action. As one respondent said, 'hoping for is "oh-it-would-be-nice" kind of thinking without an actual action following through on that goal' (M, 20s Trumpet). Therefore we believe that the balance or tension between hope and fear is important for understanding the motivation of musicians. It might be interesting for future research to explore aspiring musicians who have abandoned music when their possible selves seemed to become impossible selves (Pizzolato, 2007).

If possible selves are expressed in highly personal ways, in terms of interacting, idiosyncratic hopes and fears that develop, change and influence each other over time, then qualitative methods are best suited for describing the balance between them. Pre-constructed questionnaire items employed in quantitative methods are not well suited to capturing the uniquely individual complexity of these selves. Perhaps this is the reason why qualitative studies of possible selves find evidence of balance but previous quantitative studies have struggled to demonstrate the relationship between them (see Oyserman & Saltz, 1993).

With the hoped-for self prominently in the foreground, and the feared self offering its motivational influence from a background position, this leaves us to consider the role of the expected self. Quinlan (1999, cited in Quinlan, Jaccard, & Blanton, 2006) argued that only two categories of possible selves were necessary; hopes (positive) and fears (negative): the expected self can be omitted. Unemori, Omoregie & Markus (2004) used only two categories, the expected and the feared self. The present study is consistent with Quinlan's data in the sense that the expected self responses include positive and negative items and are largely

redundant with the other two possible self categories. It is worth noting that the presentation of three separate response categories (expected, hoped-for and feared self) might lead to responses that differ from those that would be generated by a single prompt. Future research should consider how the self-description that emerges is dependent upon the prompts that generate the responses, and the differences between the motivational effects of far-reaching hoped-for selves and near-term expected selves.

Links to possible selves theory

Given that our treatment of the qualitative data was influenced by an inductive approach, we avoided tying the categories and themes to previous theory until after the coding was complete. In recently proposing a revitalization of the concept of possible selves, Erikson (2007) elevates the importance of agency and personal meaning in the respondents' narratives as defining features of possible selves. Much of the data is rich in personal meaning, as deeply held hopes and fears are presented by participants as central to their musical self-concept. The notion of agency is present both in the positive themes of success, improvement and performance, and the negative themes that challenge agency, including injury, poverty and losing one's position in the musical collective. Possible selves contain goals, plans, bridges and roadmaps (Markus & Ruvolo, 1989; Oyserman et al., 2004), each of which can be seen within the present data. There are individual plans for improvement, specific future goal states to be developed or maintained, and strategies for achieving success and avoiding failure. Erikson (2007) recommends using measurement strategies that are focused on the 'experienced meaning of possible selves in a personal context (oneself as an agent in a future situation)' in order to enhance ecological validity. From the Afro-Brazillian ukulele player to the cheeseball crooner recycling classic rock songs, many participants described images of themselves in future states: what they are doing, what they are feeling and how others are reacting. This allows us some degree of confidence that the data reflect the possible selves that respondents actually experience.

Although other research has employed variations on the method, for example Unemori et al. (2004: 326) chose to fit responses into a well-established, reliable coding scheme developed in prior research, the musical self and other possible selves results show interesting parallels. Unemori's study employed six categories of possible selves: (1) intrapersonal (anxious, happy, rich, excited about the future); (2) interpersonal (keep in touch with friends, strengthen relationships); (3) career/education (worried about future job, applying to medical school); (4) extracurricular (involved in club activities, swim more); (5) attainment of material goods (have a regular income, have a car, buy new clothes); and (6) health-related (in shape, less tired all the time, recovered from surgery). All six of these major themes emerged in the present research, though our categories were developed from the data. The connections between the categories emerging from the present and prior research on possible selves supports the idea that there are close ties between the musical self and the musician's self-concept, and suggests that there is much more to learn about the musical self.

Limitations of the study

Before concluding, let us offer six cautions relevant to the interpretation of this study's results. First, the sample was self-selected by internet referrals. Although this produced a diverse sample, there is no way to be certain that participants are the musicians they claim to be, nor

possess the skills they described. Sampling from intact music classes, as several previous studies have done (Austin, 1988; Hedden, 1982), would offer greater assurance of musical skill. Further, the data collection procedure did not employ random sampling, or a definitive population to which to generalize the results. As Heckathorn and Jeffri (2001) point out, however, (1) the population of musicians would be very difficult identify with firm boundaries; and (2) qualitative research is not designed for generalization. Second, given that this survey uses self-report methodology, there is no way to be certain that the hopes, expectations and fears participants listed are actually experienced on a regular basis, or if they were generated by respondents for the purpose of having something to say. This was more of a concern before the study began and became less worrisome as we saw the personal reflections written in the data. Third, our coding scheme was aimed at summarizing the responses, using a coding process that eliminated unique codes applicable to only one respondent. Future research might take the opposite tack, that is, focus on the distinctiveness of the unusual musician, describing more fully her or his unique musical self. Fourth, the data collected came from a relatively young sample (most were under 30 years old) that tended to play popular music on popular instruments (such as guitar and piano/keyboards). These musicians do not reflect all of the dimensions of the musical spectrum. Perhaps future research might find a different quality of possible selves among, for example, (1) classically trained, professional members of an orchestra; (2) a touring rock band; or (3) street musicians in a large city. A fifth limitation is that the culture of the sample is primarily North American and European. This cultural background likely has an effect on the respondents' ways of conceptualizing the self in general (Unemori et al., 2004), and possible musical selves in particular. Future research among other cultural groups might provide a different conception of possible musical selves. A final caution is that the use of the three possible self categories (hoped-for, expected and feared) structured the emerging self-description. Future research might use alternative methods, such as a single prompt or face-to-face interviews, to approach the question from other angles.

Conclusion

In summary, the musical self emerging from our data can be described as being composed of a set of positive hopes counterbalanced by negative fears. The hoped for selves reflect goal setting for the future musical self and construction of pathways to achieve these goals. The feared selves represent imagined impediments to the accomplishment of these goals. The expected musical self strongly resembles the hoped-for self, but phrased in more realistic terms and balanced with a proportion of negative expectations. The constant dynamic struggle that arises between hopes and fears creates tension within the musical self. Tension, or balancing, between hoped-for and feared possible selves has been shown to exert an influence on both motivation and performance (Oyserman & Markus, 1990). It seems that some level of fear provides a potent key ingredient in the motivational equation; we work harder to achieve valued goals when they are in jeopardy. Without the feared self, motivation does not appear to be as strong for a particular course of action. Contemplating negative future possibilities keeps the musician grounded and prepares the self for the frustrations and failures that the person will likely encounter along the way. Such a buffering system operates to protect the self, making it easier for the individual to rebound from setbacks and continue pursuing their goals. Fear, however, is a risky thing; when fears are realized and hope is fading, the threat to motivation might be overpowering.

In closing, let us draw upon the data to create a composite of the musical self, a characterization based upon the responses given by the musicians in our sample to highlight various dimensions relevant to their collective personal musical experience.

> The possible musical self can be described as possessing hopes for future success and fears of future obscurity. It can possess the desire to be recognized and respected by musical and non-musical peers alike; it may fear not having memorable musical accomplishments. The musical self often seeks affiliation with band-mates and other musicians, and fears their rejection. It often values cultivating expertise, and craves acceptance by the musical social scene; it often fears being seen as fraudulent – not possessing the knowledge and skill necessary to be considered a true musician. The musical self can seek validation through performance, while fearing compromising its character and values in order to achieve popularity. There may be a desire to be seen as competent and worthy of respect, yet not to mistake pretentiousness for expertise, or cockiness for confidence. For some, the musical self hopes to avoid being consumed by drugs, alcohol, and other stereotypical 'rock star' vices. It also wishes to maintain its integrity and be seen as a respectable artist based on performance rather than being overhyped and damned by faint praise. The musical self may hold out hope for improvement and at the same time fears events beyond its control that might restrict improvement, such as illness and injury. With the fear of becoming a poor musician, losing the drive and focus required to improve, essentially a musical self can envision being responsible for its own demise. The possible musical self might prefer to enjoy music for its own sake, rather than being jaded by the industry and consumed with alternative, inferior motivations to play.

The musician acts to resolve these contradictions, and in doing so, to negotiate an evolving self along the way. No matter the choice made by a musician to seek or avoid a possible future, the words of Samuel Butler ring true: 'Every man's (and woman's) work, whether it be literature, or music or pictures or architecture or anything else, is always a portrait of himself (or herself)' (Butler, 1882/2005).

Acknowledgements

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