

Professional Identity Development in Music Therapy: A Phenomenological Inquiry

Page McIntyre, MT-BC

The State University of New York at New Paltz

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We, the thesis committee for the above candidate for the Master
of Science degree, hereby recommend acceptance of this thesis

Michael Viega, Ph. D., LCAT, MT-BC

Michael Viega, Thesis Advisor

Music Therapy Program Director, SUNY New Paltz

Michele Ritholz, MA, LCAT, MT-BC

Michele Ritholz, Thesis Committee Member

Rick Soshensky, MA, LCAT, MT-BC

Rick Soshensky, Thesis Committee Member

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Abstract

The following research study is a phenomenological inquiry exploring how music therapists develop their professional identities. Three board-certified music therapists were interviewed and asked to describe what has influenced and shaped their professional identity development. Data was analyzed according to the procedures of interpretive phenomenological analysis. The data revealed four emergent themes that music therapists' described as playing a role in developing their professional identity. The themes are *significant experiences*, *identities in music*, *intrapersonal skills*, and *journey of growth*. Related literature is reviewed and implications for future research is discussed. The researcher hopes that this study will benefit music therapists by giving them insight into how they can develop and strengthen their own professional identity.

Keywords: professional identity development, music therapy

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This study will investigate how music therapists describe what has impacted their professional identity by examining the lived experience of three music therapists. Ibarra (1999) defines professional identity as “the relatively stable and enduring constellation of attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences in terms of which people define themselves in a professional role” (p. 764). Professional identity is a term that encompasses both the collective understanding and individual’s sense of self within their professional role of a profession (Feen-Calligan, 2005). A basic assumption is that professional identity forms over time, through varied experiences and meaningful feedback that allows one to gain insight into one’s unique preferences, strengths, and values (Ibarra, 1999). Although the topic of professional identity development has been explored in related fields, there is little research that has focused on this phenomenon specifically in relation to the field of music therapy. Therefore the need for this study is justified.

Review of Literature

Music Therapy

According to the American Music Therapy Association (2018), “music therapy is the clinical and evidence-based use of music interventions to accomplish individualized goals within a therapeutic relationship by a credentialed professional who has completed an approved music therapy program.” The profession of music therapy formally began after World War II when community musicians played music in veteran hospitals for the thousands of veterans who had posttraumatic stress disorder (AMTA, 2018). Music therapists work with individuals at all stages of the lifespan. They work in a variety of settings in order to address the physical, emotional, cognitive, social, and the spiritual needs of individuals through the utilization of music therapy

interventions. Music therapy interventions aim to strengthen an individual's abilities and transfer these strengths to other areas of their lives. Interventions may include singing, creating, moving, and/or listening to music. Music therapy can be used to strengthen communication and socialization for those who struggle to express themselves in words. Research shows that music therapy is effective for promoting physical rehabilitation, facilitating movement, increasing motivation to participate in treatment, providing emotional support for both individuals and their families, and providing an outlet for self-expression (AMTA, 2018).

Professional Identity Development in Music Therapy

The field of music therapy is unique in that one has to gain expertise in two domains, music and therapy. According to Hesser (1985), "being a music therapist is an in depth, lifelong process, not begun or completed with a degree" (p. 67). The process of becoming a music therapist happens as one matures. According to Prefontaine (2006), this happens as one "integrates constitutive elements of both music and therapy in deeper and more effective ways until they become so intimately interwoven that music *becomes* therapy and therapy *becomes* music."

According to the existing literature, professional identity development in music therapy has been described as a complex process that begins early on, even before one begins their degree. Many researchers have agreed that professional identity consists of one's personal work values, knowledge, skills, growth, success, imagination, and innovation (Alves & Gazzola, 2011). Seath & McFerran (2015) explored newer music therapists' professional identity development by examining the experiences of music therapy graduates as they transitioned from students to working professionals. Findings revealed the challenges and complexities associated

with entering the field as a music therapist such as feelings of ambivalence, learning to shoulder responsibility, and bracing the self (Seath & McFerran, 2015). Literature has revealed that professional identity development is an interwoven, lifelong process that is multidimensional and has various influences and challenges.

Stages of Professional Identity Development. There have also been several research studies which have focused on the process of professional identity development. It is important to examine the findings of these studies as they give us insight into the process and demonstrate that professional identity development happens in phases. A study by Slay and Smith (2010) describes professional identity development as a process that is formed in three stages: first through socialization and learning experiences; later influenced by an adjustment or adaptation period; and finally through greater self-understanding as experience is gained. O'Brien and Goldstein (1985) also theorize that there are three stages essential to the development of the professional identity of music therapists. They theorize that it first develops through one's early education and experiences. It then develops through mastery of professional skills and later develops through one's consolidation and integration of music therapy experiences and concepts.

Gibson et al. (2010) explore the lived experiences of counselors in training. Results of this study found that there are three transformational tasks required of professional identity development: first, finding a personal definition of one's profession; next, internalizing responsibility for professional growth; and finally, developing a systematic identity in order to obtain self-validation. The authors define their holistic theory of the process of professional identity development as "the successful integration of personal attributes and professional training in the context of a professional community" (Gibson et al., 2010, p. 24). The preceding

research indicates that professional identity development is a longitudinal process that happens through phases of development.

Components of Professional Identity Development. Several studies on this topic have explored the components that influence a music therapist's professional identity development. These studies reflect that the individual music therapist does not exist in isolation from his or her life experiences, individual traits, music, and personal beliefs and values. Feen-Calligan (2005) states "professional identity is defined as a product of biography, personal choices, and social circumstances through which professionals begin to test and accept the traditions and obligations of a profession" (p. 122). This reveals that much goes into shaping a music therapist's professional identity. Another study by Warren and Rickson (2016) found that music therapists' professional identities were formed through their experiences, values, beliefs, interactions, musical experiences, training, and clinical experiences.

The current literature provides insight into some of the components that shape music therapists' professional identity development. There is evidence that music therapists' professional identity development is formed by many components such as one's experiences, background, beliefs and values, and music. These studies demonstrate the complexity of this phenomenon and indicate that this topic needs to be further explored.

Music Identity. Literature on identity reveals the significance of one's musical identity and that one's musical identity develops over time similar to one's personal identity. According to Hargreaves, MacDonald, & Miell (2017), one's identity in music relates "with those aspects of musical identity that are defined by established cultural roles and categories" (p. 4). One's role as a musician or performer are examples of identities in music and these identities form an

important part of the self-concept of any person deeply involved in music (Hargreaves et al., 2017). In an article by Gibson, Dollarhide, & Moss (2010), the researchers explored how the presence of music was integrated into music therapists' professional identities and found that music was a major component. This study is important because it demonstrates the importance of music to music therapists' professional identity development. It is surprising that there are few studies that have explored if and how music is a component of music therapists' professional identity development.

Personal Identity. Studies demonstrate that professional identity development is related to personal identity development. The following studies demonstrate that personal identity and professional identity are concepts that coexist and are influenced by one another. According to Gibson et al. (2010), "professional identity development is defined as the successful integration of personal attributes and professional training in the context of a professional community" (p. 23). Additionally, Alves & Gazzola (2011) found that those who had strong professional identities made connections between their personal and professional identities and used interventions and approaches that fit with their personal style, attitudes and values towards life and people. According to the findings, the participants gravitated toward approaches and interventions that mirrored the relational dynamics they were accustomed to in their culture. These studies show us that music therapists' personal identities coexist with their professional identities and that the two identities are integrated in different ways.

Literature also reveals that music therapists' professional identity development is an internal process which is strengthened by an individual's self-concept, confidence, and self-awareness. Studies have shown that one's self-confidence, self-understanding and focused

direction play a role in professional identity development. According to Feen-Calligan (2005), “therapists who are clear about who they are and what they do should develop a sense of strength as well as the ability to keep their visions and ideals at the forefront of their work” (p. 130). In another study, participants with a strong sense of professional identity felt it was strengthened by feelings of confidence, competence, and self-awareness (O’Brien & Goldstein, 1985). It is evident that one’s personal identity and self-concept play a role in professional identity development.

Justification for Research

Professional identity development in music therapy is a phenomenon that has been explored from many different angles. The existing literature shows us that it is a multidimensional process with many influences. Research reveals the process, components, and integration of other identities in shaping one’s professional identity. However, it is important to further explore how music therapists describe their professional identity development and learn what influences and helps them to form their professional identity.

Although there is much literature and research on professional identity development in music therapy, there is a need for more research specific to music therapy. Many of the current studies on this phenomenon focus on interns and new professionals and are not specific to the field of music therapy. It is important to give voice to the experience of veteran professionals because this phenomenon occurs over the course of one’s life. Gibson et al. (2010) state “studies that examine professional identity development for practicing professionals may also provide a longer vision of professional identity development” (p. 36). Also, veteran music therapists have spent more time in the field and have had more opportunities to develop their professional

identities and reflect and think about their experiences. Therefore, there is a need to explore how experienced music therapists describe their professional identity development.

When new professionals have not successfully integrated into professional culture and do not develop a well-defined sense of professional identity, they may experience role confusion which may impair their ability to function ethically in the field (Gibson et al., 2010).

Understanding one's personal process of professional identity development is important because it improves one's self-awareness which will allow a music therapist to better serve their clients. Additionally, further research on this topic may prevent burnout. Burnout can be defined as "a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who work with humans in some capacity. Clements-Cortes (2013) states "music therapists work in a range of settings that may evoke higher than normal levels of professional stress." Burnout can cause emotional and mental stress, leaving professionals feeling unsatisfied in their careers and may cause some to leave their career (Chang, 2014). It is also important to note that the field of music therapy has a high rate of burnout (Chang, 2014).

This study is justified because it is important for music therapists to be aware of what has influenced their professional identities because doing so will strengthen the field and will allow music therapists' to better serve their clients. Feen-Calligan (2005) state that professional identity as very important to creative arts therapists because the profession involves both interaction with and responsibility for other human beings. It is important to explore how music therapists describe what influences their professional identity development. Pelliterri (2009) states "it is necessary for music therapists to be clear about our own professional identities so to present ourselves and our clinical specialty in a manner to others that commands respect and

understanding” (p. 228). In order for the field of music therapy to advance it is essential that music therapists have a strong sense of their professional identity and an understanding of what has shaped their identity thus far. Also, by reflecting on their own identities as music therapists, music therapists can maintain authenticity and self-awareness in their work. The researcher hopes that this study will benefit music therapists by helping them gain a greater understanding of this phenomenon and learn how to strengthen their professional identity.

Research Question

The research question and sub-question are as follows:

How do music therapists describe what influences their professional identity development?

Does music play a role in music therapists’ professional identity development?

Approval from Human Research Ethics Board

Approval from Human Research Ethics Board Approval to conduct this study was granted on October 23rd, 2017 by The State University of New York at New Paltz Human Research Ethics Board. This study met the criteria for interview/survey research exemption. In order to meet these criteria, it had to be determined that there was minimal risk of participant identification, minimal risk of physical, psychological, or social harm, and minimal risk of undue stress to the participants. Additionally, all participants were above the age of 18 and were capable of providing informed consent.

Epoche

This topic is personally relevant to me because I am new to the field and beginning to develop my professional identity. I thought of this idea after reflecting on how different music therapists can be from one another although we are all part of the same field. I was curious about what solidifies one's professional identity and interested in finding out what helps to form and shape a music therapist's professional identity. This study is also personally relevant to me because I'm a graduate student preparing to enter the field.

My worldview is centered in constructivism. Constructivism can be defined as "a perspective that views meaningful human reality not as objective--not out there to be discovered or uncovered--but rather as constructed by individuals through their interactions with and interpretations of the world and each other" (Hiller, 2016, p. 50). From this perspective, meanings will emerge from constructions and reconstructions of our experiences. I assume that people construct reality as they interpret their experiences and will explore phenomena as it unfolds and reveals itself.

I'm hoping to gain an understanding of how music therapy professionals interpret and make meaning of their experiences of professional identity formation. From this study, I would like to gain valuable data that will help both new and veteran music therapists reflect on their own professional identities in the hope that this will enhance their work as music therapists and also help them to find and/or solidify their professional identities by relating to, identifying with, and learning from the lived experiences of other music therapists. It is my belief that music therapists' professional identity development will have many influences, including the influence of one's personal identity, musical identity, background, culture, education, and clinical

experiences. I also feel that professional identity development is a different process for everyone and involves both self-reflection and growth.

Method

Phenomenology

Phenomenology takes an interest in the embodied lived experience of a group of individuals and the meanings held about that experience. Phenomenological researchers adopt a non-judgmental approach so that the researcher is open and unbiased to the information he or she is receiving (Finlay, 2011). Phenomenological research seeks to find the essence of a group of people's lived experiences. According to Creswell (2014), "the basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence" (p. 58). There is a focus on the nature of the experience and what the participants have in common or what they share. Phenomenology can be transformative, it offers individuals the opportunity to be witnessed in their experience and it gives voice to what they are going through (Finlay, 2011).

After researching professional identity development in music therapy, I felt that the phenomenological method would be appropriate to study professional identity development in music therapy because of its focus on a group of individuals' lived experience. Professional identity formation is a complex phenomenon that can only truly be studied by looking at the unique lived experiences of professionals. Therefore, a phenomenological approach is best suited for answering the research question because phenomenology focuses on understanding the lived experiences and meanings that emerge as individuals experience phenomena in the lifeworld (Hiller, 2016). Phenomenology gives voice to individuals' experiences which is what I

wish to do. By learning about the lived experiences of three music therapists, we can gain insight into a complex phenomenon by looking at the essence of the experience and discovering what is shared across experiences.

Participants

Three participants with at least three years of experience were chosen to participate in this study. I felt that participants with three years of experience would feel solid in their professional identity and also be able to reflect on how they have developed their professional identity. Participants for this study were recruited using purposeful sampling. They were contacted via email and sent the consent form, information about the study, and the interview questions in advance in order to determine if they wanted to participate. A small number of participants were chosen so that I could look at their experiences in depth. I determined that the participants for this study must fit the criteria of obtaining their board certification in music therapy (MT-BC) and have at least three years of experience in the field. In order to recruit participants, I conducted a search on the internet to find individuals who fit my criteria and also obtained references from music therapy colleagues. I reached out to the participants via email. See Appendix B for the recruitment script.

The participants all held the music therapy credentials (MT-BC) and had at least three years of experience ranging from four to nine years. The participants ranged in age between 27 and 41 and two of the participants were male and one was female. All participants completed degrees in music therapy, two obtained their Master's in Music Therapy, and one participant was currently working towards his Master's. One participant completed advanced trainings in music therapy in Neurologic Music Therapy and NICU (Neonatal Intensive Care Unit) Music Therapy.

The participants currently work in a variety of settings. Two of the participants work with children with cancer and other life-threatening illnesses, one of which works at a children's research hospital and the other works at pediatric center. The other participant works with children with developmental disabilities and older adults in private practice and also teaches music therapy and performs as a musician. It is also important to note that two of the participants have implemented music therapy programs abroad. All of the participants have had experience working with many different populations, across a wide variety of settings. See Appendix A for the informed consent document.

Procedure

After consent was obtained through electronic communication, participants selected a time and location that was convenient for them. Two of the participants opted to interview over the phone and the third participant opted to interview in person at the location of his choosing. The interviews each lasted between 45 minutes to one hour. Participants were then asked open-ended questions about their experiences of professional identity development in a semi-structured interview format in order to give the participants both direction and freedom in describing their experiences. Participants were given an opportunity to add anything else about the topic at the end of the interview. See Appendix C for the interview questions.

Data Collection

Data was collected through interviews which were recorded using a digital voice recorder. Two of the interviews took place over the phone and the other was held in person. The interview location was chosen based on location and convenience for the participant. The

interviews took place in a private setting and were later saved on the researcher's password protected computer.

The interviews were semi-structured and lasted between 45 minutes to 75 minutes in length. Each interview began with asking the participant questions about his or her demographics such as age, gender, level of education, and years holding the credential MT-BC. Participants were also asked to briefly describe their past experience in music therapy and their present experience and work setting. The interview then shifted focus to the topic of professional identity development.

The data was transcribed by the researcher after each interview and saved on the researcher's password protected computer. It is important to note that the transcribed interviews were sent back to the participants for member-checking and participants were given the opportunity to change or erase anything they were uncomfortable with. Two of the participants responded and the other did not. This was done in order to increase validity of the findings by ensuring that the data represented the experiences of the music therapists.

Data Analysis

According to Finlay (2011), "Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) seeks idiographic accounts of people's views and perceptions: how participants themselves as individuals make sense of their experiences" (p. 140). Interpretive phenomenological analysis is a fluid, iterative, inductive, and emergent process that involves the double hermeneutic. The term double hermeneutic is the two stage interpretation process in which the participants are making sense of their world and the researcher is making sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world (Finlay, 2011). According to Eatough (2009), "the strength of this style of

research lies in its ability to identify meanings and develop understandings which emerge out of sustained, interpretive engagement.” (as cited in Finlay, 2011, p. 146). Interpretive phenomenological analysis is usually conducted using in-depth interviews, which were used in this study. Finlay (2011) describes the benefits of using semi-structured interviews in this approach, she states “the interviews enable the participant to provide a full, rich account while allowing the researcher the flexibility to probe interesting areas that emerge” (p. 141). For this reason, a semi-structured interview format was chosen.

The researcher analyzed the data according to the following steps:

1. The researcher analyzes the data by reading through each interview a few times separately and next, carefully conducts an analysis of the experiential claims by going line by line through the material, which is known as coding.
2. The researcher identifies the emergent patterns or themes within the material, while emphasizing convergence and divergence for each case and then across cases.
3. The researcher develops a structure which illustrates the relationships between themes.
4. The researcher develops a narrative which takes the reader through the data interpretation (Larkin & Thompson, 2012, p. 105).

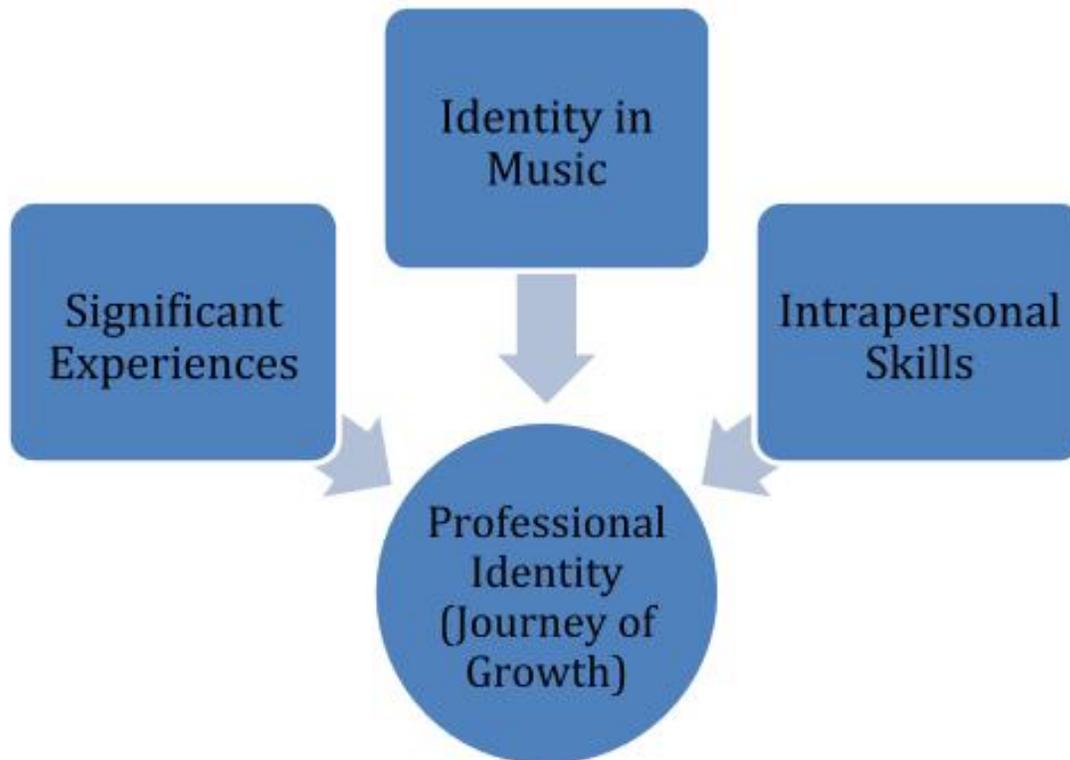
This protocol guided the methodology for this study on professional identity development in music therapy. Each participant interview was transcribed by the researcher line for line. The researcher read over each interview separately and highlighted important material and took notes. The researcher then identified codes or themes that corresponded to salient material related to the research question. Codes were placed into groups and through both reflecting on the material from the interviews and looking at the code groups, patterns or themes emerged. A

total of 49 codes were identified and were synthesized to create four final themes. Results of this study are presented in a narrative and include the themes and participant quotations. See Appendix D for an example of the coding process and Appendix E for the initial codes and code groups.

Results

There were four themes that emerged from the analysis of the participants' interviews. The aim of this research was to find out how music therapists describe what has influenced their professional identity development. The four emergent themes are: *significant experiences*, *identities in music*, *intrapersonal skills*, and *journey of growth*. Music therapists described their *significant experiences*, *music identity*, and *intrapersonal skills* as having a major role in influencing and shaping their professional identity development. The final theme, a *journey of growth* is how music therapists described their experience of developing their professional identity.

Figure 1. Themes that play a role in music therapists' professional identity development



Significant Experiences

All of the participants discussed how their professional identity has been shaped through two types of significant experiences, clinical and life experiences. Through their clinical experiences, the participants described how they learned from both their mistakes and successes. From these experiences, the participants learned what they needed to improve or change. The participants also describe how their unique life experiences have played a part in shaping their professional identities.

Clinical Experiences. Participant 3 describes how a significant experience she had with a client was a catalyst for her professional growth because she learned from her mistake, which was overstepping her role and inhibiting the individual's growth.

I think it's more the experiences with patients more than anything, the good and bad, you know you learn a lot about yourself as a professional. I especially learned from one patient who had a lot of complications and difficulties throughout her time here, there were never any specific boundaries broken or blurred. Like I never spent time outside of work or gave out my phone number but I was definitely there for support when anything bad happened so she was never able to learn coping skills on her own and so it was really difficult, she ended up passing away through treatment and that was really difficult for me because I had grown really attached. I learned that it wasn't healthy for me to be someone's favorite because it's about them learning to use music as a coping skill for themselves when we're not there rather than during the specific times so that was a really good learning experience for me. I definitely learned a lot through experiences like that, I think that was one of the big moments for me (Participant 3).

Participant 2 describes his experience of living and working in the foster care setting in the city as contributing to his professional identity development through raising his cultural awareness and helping him to feel comfortable.

Frankly, living in the city was great for raising awareness of many cultures and foster care too and going into people's houses. And you know, and just learning the best thing is you have to act comfortable and other people will feel comfortable (Participant 2).

Life experiences. Participant 1 describes that his life experience of battling cancer at a young age has played a role in his professional identity at the pediatric hospital he works in. His life experience is integrated into his professional identity and it has influenced his career path in addition to helping him empathize with his clients.

I had my own medical history of cancer when I was younger so I can empathize with these kids, I was in their shoes. I understand that it is scary and it is disorienting and I can get to their level and be in their world due to my own experience, it did shape who I am as a person and did influence my career path and life entirely. That's one thing I can bring to the table and I can empathize with these kids when the majority of people can't (Participant 1).

Participant 2 described his experience of studying music in India and later implementing a music therapy program there. He describes his experience as influential to his professional identity development.

Firstly, studying music in India affected me as a musician, music therapist, and a person. Having decided to start has influenced my music now in a total big way, now it's like the music that I do (Participant 2).

Participant 2 describes how his experiences have built the foundation for him to stand on in his professional identity. He describes feeling solid in his professional identity.

I feel really solid in having sort of been able to be deeply involved in music and music therapy and thinking about it and doing some work, I definitely need to do more work in the field but I've tried a lot of things and I have a lot to stand on so that makes me feel really solid (Participant 2).

Identities in Music

The three participants discussed how their identities in music shaped their professional identity. Each participant described how music came to play in shaping their professional identity as music therapists. Participant 2 describes the importance of his music identity to his professional identity as he is also a musician and performs often. Participant 1 discusses how his primary instrument is part of his professional identity. Participant 3 talks about her use of music self-care.

Participant 2 discusses how he is in the process of integrating and unifying his dual identities of both musician and music therapist. He states that it is helpful to be both a musician and a music therapist in his professional identity. The two identities enhance one another and go hand in hand.

I thought as an artist it'll help that I'm a music therapist and as a music therapist, it'll help that I'm an artist. I do think that for music therapy it helps if you're a musician. You can show that you are, aside from music therapy itself...producing and practicing work and maybe performing (Participant 2).

Participant 1 describes that his music identity is a major part of his professional identity and musical identity. Voice is his primary instrument and he brings in his background and knowledge of voice to his work and his professional identity.

I work a lot with vocalizations because my primary instrument is voice so I use it a lot...without breath you don't have a voice. Diane Austin says "the voice is the deepest root of a person." I truly believe that, it *is* the deepest part of the person because it does connect them to themselves because it is the only internal instrument that we have, every other instrument is an extension of oneself. I try to use the breath as much as I can whether it's just a sigh or guttural sound, any time there is a sound, I incorporate it into the music and that's what I tell my students, when someone verbalizes or vocalizes it's an expression of themselves (Participant 1).

Participant 2 describes how the Indian classical music he does is incorporated into his music therapy work. He brings a lot of his knowledge and training of Indian classical music into his professional identity.

I think about the North Indian music I do is about holding tones for long periods of time and developing the piece is more calm, it's like the tranquility of starting and holding tones for a really long time and there's intricate ways of getting to the note that's a big part of it, how you come to the note without coming too far up or down the scale, you're really trying to open it...I bring elements of this into my work. The power of staying, don't bring too much in because you can really get creative in the small spaces in between the notes..Nordoff-Robbins wrote a lot about that, the ecstatic experience of an interval (Participant 2).

Participant 3 talks about the role that music has played in her professional identity development. Her love for music and bringing music to people who need additional support was what brought her to want to become a music therapist.

I always wanted to do something with music...I just really enjoy music, I feel like I tend to be kind of an emotional person, I feel things really intensely so music was a good way for me to get that out...I was planning on double majoring in music education and special education and just by fate I went to a university that offered music therapy, I had never heard of it, it was a perfect fit because it combined the two things I love, working with people who need additional support and bringing the music into that so I think that's where I kind of fell into it but it's been a great career choice and kind of awesome to bring that human aspect into healthcare (Participant 3).

Intrapersonal Skills

The participants all described how their intrapersonal skills were essential and a huge component of developing their professional identity. The participants discussed the role of authenticity and self-awareness as the major intrapersonal skills that influenced and shaped their professional identity.

Authenticity. Participant 3 describes that she feels it is important to be genuine to who she is in her work and she describes how she maintains her personality in her professional identity.

I think it's really important to be genuine and honest with who you are as a person so my personality with my patients is very similar to how I am as a person (Participant 3).

Participant 1 also discusses bringing in aspects of his personality into his professional identity.

He states that his personal self and therapist self are not separate and that his personal self is his

unique contribution to the therapeutic environment. His professional identity is aligned with his personal identity.

So I bring in a lot of humor within my practice especially with my kids, I'm more animated than maybe some therapists especially in the psychodynamic light, that's what I bring to the sessions. Because I am an animated person, I allow the boundaries to be there when they need to be there, I'm not going to tell my clients my personal life...some people say they have their therapist self and their personal self, and I bring a lot of my personal self into the session because that's what I'm contributing to the environment so why not utilize myself to bring therapeutic change (Participant 1).

Participant 2 describes how there have to be parts of his personal identity in his work.

There's definitely parts of my personal identity in my work for sure. I feel like there has to be being a music therapist (Participant 2).

Self-awareness. Participant 1 discusses how strengthening his self-awareness through supervision and personal therapy have helped him develop his professional identity. Self-awareness was brought up several times throughout his interview. He views self-awareness as playing a salient role in his professional identity development.

I think a lot of it is knowing yourself, I've done a lot of personal therapy in many different senses. I've done a lot of exploration for myself and I know where certain things come up for me and I've processed those things and I know that to be truly present with my clients and authentic-I have to know myself to know where I can go with them and where areas are that I'm not as comfortable with. I have some blockage issues and some transference issues with a client that were coming up in the music and I was not

able to push them aside because these were areas that I had not processed yet and I did personal supervision and therapy because there were things from the past coming up in the music and that's where the anger was rooted and after processing this in supervision and personal therapy, I was able then to come back to the session with the clients and go further into exploring the client's anger without it affecting me. I would say, you have to know yourself and your deepest parts of yourself to be fully authentic because otherwise you're not being fully authentic and you're reining it in so you don't show all parts of yourself (Participant 1).

Journey of Growth

All of the participants described their experience of professional identity development as an ongoing process in which they feel they are constantly growing and changing. Many of them used the word, journey, in describing their experiences.

Participant 3 states that her professional identity has evolved, she implies that she is at a place where she is able to explore and learn how she is as a therapist. She feels that her professional identity has evolved.

I feel like my professional identity will keep changing. I felt like in the first few years I was just trying to get my bearings on what I felt was music therapy, I didn't have a professor telling me what to do, you're kind of on your own. I feel like it took me about three years to feel settled and to the point where I can explore and learn how I am as a therapist, it's definitely for me more about the connection and less about the music and the music is how we get there but the connection is the important part and developing

coping skills and having positive experiences in the hospital, I think that my professional identity has definitely evolved. (Participant 3)

Participant 2 looks at professional identity development in stages and feels he is transitioning into a new stage. He states that he has grown and feels he is solid and an artisan in the field.

However, he recognizes that he is not done developing professionally. He is transitioning into a new stage.

Part of the answer is that nobody masters anything. You can't think of yourself as a master or whatever. In terms of being solid, I really really want to feel solid, now. I want to feel that a lot of my time of growth and trying to figure out what I want to and how I want to be in music therapy...I did that so I feel like I'm in the beginning of the next stage which is the artisan in the field and the stage after that is more like the guru and where you're fostering many other therapists and you're really taking your work to a place where it's something you really want to be in...it's impactful on the whole field (Participant 2).

Participant 2 describes his experience of cooperating with the facility he works in, which prefers a behavioral approach which is different to Participant 2's therapeutic approach. In order to meet the demands of the workplace, he feels that he can stretch his own self-concept.

A little bit but not that I can't stretch my own concept and I think any music therapist who can actually really strike a good balance is really talented and is a fine music therapist because you have to cooperate with the IEP and the system (Participant 2).

Participant 3 described that her experience has been ongoing and that she continues to develop her professional identity by learning and continuing to grow.

I think when we think we've figured it all out, all the repertoire and all the instruments, I think we're doing a disservice to ourselves and to our patients so I think that's really important and keep learning, I never regretted going for my Master's, I would love to get my PHD at some point, I think always continuing to learn from others, supervision is important and a huge component of developing yourself, reading articles and journals and publishing yourself and stretching and growing your boundaries of what you do as a music therapist. I definitely learn new things and experience different challenges and have different cases that test me as a music therapist so I don't know, I think when I think about developing your professional identity, I think for me the big takeaway is that you're never not developing your professional identity, you should always continue to do that because you feel when you have it all figured out, you're gonna do yourself a disservice, it's continuous, you never stop developing yourself as a person, it's very similar (Participant 3).

Discussion

This research on professional identity development explored the lived experiences of three music therapists. The research question aimed to find out how music therapists describe what has influenced their professional identity development. The three participants all described having very different experiences, however, there were four themes across all three participants that relate to this phenomenon. The three themes of *significant experiences*, *identity in music*, and *intrapersonal skills* all had to do with shaping and influencing music therapists' professional identity. The fourth theme of *journey of growth* was how music therapists described the process of developing their professional identity. Therefore, the participants' experience of developing

their professional identity can be described as a *journey of growth* that is influenced and shaped by one's *significant experiences, identity in music, and intrapersonal skills*. In this section, each of the emergent themes are accompanied with a suggestion for music therapists to use to strengthen their professional identity. These suggestions were determined by the researcher and are based on both the data from this study and relevant research on professional identity development.

Significant Experiences: The Need for Self-Reflection

Integrating both one's personal and clinical experiences helps music therapists develop their professional identity. The three participants all demonstrated self-reflection through their description of how their experiences were integrated into their work. This signals the need for music therapists to have the ability to reflect and learn from their experiences both in life and with their clients in the professional realm.

This finding is aligned with current literature on professional identity development as studies have shown that professional identity development occurs through experiences and one's reflection upon the experiences. According to a study by Gibson et al. (2012), professionals' abilities to self-evaluate and integrate their experience with theory, solidifies one's professional identity. Therefore, it is necessary for music therapists to be able to self-reflect and to look at their work critically. In addition to this, it is important for music therapists to have both an awareness and an understanding of how their life experiences have influenced their professional identity development and have shaped their work. Rickson (2010) discusses the importance of experiences and self-reflection and states "reflecting on everyday experiences can also help us

understand ourselves and others, and thus be used to enhance our music therapy practice” (para 4). Identity is formed through a process of self-reflection.

Additionally, this has implications for music therapy educators and supervisors who should help students and new professionals learn to self-reflect in their work and recognize how their experiences shape their professional identity. According to Edwards (2015), “the teaching of therapeutic skills demands extremely close attention to the student’s personal experience and how his or her subjectivity translates into clinical work” (p. 50). New music therapists and students need to be supported in their journey of professional identity development and may need guidance on how to self-evaluate. Therefore, music therapists who are developing their professional identities need personal growth opportunities in which their capacity for self-reflection and self-evaluation are encouraged in a supportive context.

Identities in Music: The Need for Music

Music therapists’ various identities in music are integrated into their professional identities. Each participant described their individual relationship to music and the ways in which they incorporate their music identity into their professional identity. According to Hargreaves, MacDonald, & Miell (2017), one’s identity in music relates “with those aspects of musical identity that are defined by established cultural roles and categories” (p. 4). One’s role as a musician or performer are examples of identities in music and these identities form an important part of the self-concept of any person deeply involved in music (Hargreaves et al., 2017). The participants described how their identities in music shape their work and their professional identity. This is also aligned with an article by Gibson, Dollarhide, & Moss (2010)

in which the researchers explored how music was integrated into music therapists' professional identities and found that music was a major component of participants' professional identities.

Both the research and supporting literature signal the need for music therapists to understand the role of music in their lives. Warren & Rickson (2016) state "it is important for music therapists to develop an awareness of how music influences their own identity." In a study by Gonzalez (2010), music therapists attributed the groundwork of their professional framework to their musical upbringing and experiences in music. Music therapists need an awareness of how their musical background, experiences, and relationship to music are integrated into their lives in order to strengthen their professional identities.

Participant 2 described his dual roles of musician/performer and music therapist and felt that his identity as a musician/performer enhanced his professional identity as a music therapist. According to Turner's (2013) research, music therapists who are also performers and/or musicians experience a strengthened sense of their professional identity due to developed interpersonal skills resulting from experiences in performance. Additionally, music therapists who are also musicians/performers have strong musical skills and knowledge from performing which facilitates their professional transition into music therapy. This indicates that music therapists developing their professional identity should consider seeking out performance opportunities in addition to developing their skills as a musician. In a study by Brown (2008), creative arts therapists who continue to make art while managing their careers found the art-making process vital to their affectivity as professionals in addition to their personal wellbeing. This demonstrates that music therapists should involve themselves in music-making experiences in order to develop their professional identities. Music therapists can develop their professional

identities by having an awareness of the role that music takes in their lives, seeking out performance opportunities, and involving themselves in music-making experiences. Music is vital to music therapy and must be a part of music therapists' professional identity development.

Intrapersonal Skills: The Need for Supervision

The participants described how their intrapersonal skills of self-awareness and authenticity led to their professional identity development. This aligns with research by O'Brien & Goldstein (1985) in which results showed that participants felt that they were able to strengthen their professional identity as they gained confidence, competence, and self-awareness. Feen-Calligan (2005) also found that music therapists' professional identity development is influenced by their self-awareness and that the exploration of one's personal values, attitudes, and life history can encourage a sense of ownership over one's professional growth.

In Warren & Rickson's (2016) study, music therapists felt that clinical work that reinforced their self-concepts and reflected their values and beliefs had a great impact on their professional identity development. This study demonstrates the role that authenticity plays in music therapists professional identity development and that it is important for music therapists to know themselves in order to fully bring themselves fully into their work. When therapists are self-aware, their personal identity complements and enriches their clinical practice which strengthens their professional identity (Warren & Rickson, 2016). This demonstrates the need for new music therapy professionals to seek out supervision in order to support and develop their intrapersonal skills which are necessary to their professional identity development.

Warren & Rickson (2016) state “supervision validates, supports, and offers empathy to the music therapist.” Supervision can help music therapists to become more self-aware and more perceptive of their attitudes and beliefs surrounding their clinical work. Therefore, it is necessary for music therapists to have supervision in order to develop self-awareness and feel comfortable bringing authenticity into their work and professional identity. According to Warren & Rickson (2016), supervision allows music therapists to “become more perceptive and understanding of their attitudes and beliefs, their clinical work, and the therapeutic relationship, resulting in the development of self-awareness and identity.”

Journey of Growth: The Need for Time & Flexibility

The fourth theme of *journey of growth* was how music therapists described the process of developing their professional identity. Music therapists’ professional identity changes over time and music therapists need to be both flexible and open to growth and change. According to Rickson (2010), “identity is not a simple affair, it keeps changing, or at least our perception of *who we are* keeps changing. Different contexts and circumstances demand it. We spend a lifetime trying to integrate our past, present, and future into a cohesive and unified sense of self” (para. 7). Music therapists’ professional identities will keep changing in order to meet the needs of different contexts and circumstances. According to Gibson, Dooley, Kelchner, Moss, & Vacchio (2012), professional identity development is ever evolving and involves experiential and maturational processes, because of this, learning who one is as a professional occurs most often during their on-the-job experiences. The three participants described the necessity of being flexible as music therapists in order to work effectively in the changing world of healthcare in addition to the importance of stretching and growing one’s boundaries of what one does. Music

therapists must be flexible and open to growth and self-expansion in order for their professional identity to develop and not remain stagnant.

Therefore, music therapists' professional identity is not a stable entity. According to Ibara (1999), "as new professional roles demand new skills, behaviors, attitudes, and patterns of interactions, individual's self-concepts and identities also change." Music therapists developing their professional identities should give themselves time and through continuing to learn, trying new styles of working, attending conferences, and learning new instruments. These are all things that helped the participants to learn and expand themselves. The process of professional identity development is lifelong. Participant 2 realized this when he stated "Part of the answer is that nobody masters anything." Therefore, the most important thing we can do as music therapists is to keep learning and growing. We need to give ourselves time and patience in our journey.

Evaluation

This study was evaluated using the evaluation agenda, EPICURE which was developed by Stige, Malterud, & Midtgarden, 2009. The first part of the acronym EPIC refers to the researcher's engagement, processing, interpretation and self-critique. The second part, CURE refers to the challenge of dealing with preconditions and consequences of research with a focus on critique, usefulness, relevance, and ethics.

As the researcher, I recognize that my own personal involvement has shaped the study in many ways. In my epoche, I included my knowledge and personal beliefs about the topic in order for the reader to see how this may have affected the outcome of the study in some ways. Additionally, I spent much time immersed in the phenomenon through transcribing the interviews by hand and then reading them numerous times in order to discover the essence of the

phenomenon. There was a high level of engagement with the data. I was reflexive in my data interpretation because I coded and reworked the themes multiple times in order to ensure that that the themes could be traced back to the participants' experiences. I felt that as the researcher, I appraised the merits and limits of the research. In the limitations section, I list several mistakes that I made while carrying out the research.

This study is highly relevant for music therapists as professional identity development is a phenomenon that relates to all music therapists and findings are also applicable to other creative arts therapists and other closely related helping professions. This research addresses real-world problems by providing greater understanding of the topic. Additionally, this study strengthens previous research as findings are in alignment with other research. It also brings new perspectives as previous studies on professional identity development in music therapy do not discuss the role of music in one's professional identity development. This research is ethically sound, participants' identifying information has been left out so that there is no risk of harm or a breach in confidentiality. Participants signed an informed consent form and agreed to participate in the study. Additionally, the participants chosen for the study were heterogeneous and had diverse experiences and backgrounds.

Implications for Future Research

Researchers studying the phenomenon of professional identity development should consider a larger number of participants. Due to the fact that the nature of this phenomenon of professional identity development is so complex and dependent on many different factors, a larger number of participants would lead to a stronger research study. In addition to this, researchers should strive to interview a more diverse group of music therapists who work in

various settings and who work in different approaches. The theme of one's identity in music came up for the participants in the study. In my research, I did not find much literature on music therapists' identities in music as related to their professional identity. I feel that this would be an important topic for researchers to explore in the future since music is an important component of a music therapist's professional identity development. I foresee a larger scale phenomenological inquiry which focuses on how music therapists integrate their identity in music into their professional identity.

Conclusion

In this research, I intended to discover how music therapists describe their experiences of developing their professional identity and discover what influences and shapes their professional identity development. The data revealed that music therapists' describe their experience of professional identity development as an ongoing journey of growth which is influenced by their significant experiences, their identity in music, and their intrapersonal skills. The emergent themes revealed that music therapists developing their professional identities can strengthen their professional identities through self-reflection, exploring their identities in music, seeking supervision, and giving themselves time and flexibility in their journey.

This was my first time conducting phenomenological research and through learning about the lived experiences of music therapists who are developing their professional identity, I was able to gain greater insight into this complex phenomenon. I feel that this study only uncovered the surface of the intricate, multi-faceted experience of professional identity development. In the implications for future research section, I provide direction for future research on this topic. I hope that this topic benefits both new and experienced music therapists by helping them to better

understand what is involved in this phenomenon and encouraging music therapists to think more deeply about their professional identity development, as self-awareness is key to identity formation.

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Appendix A: Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT

Title of Study: Professional Identity Development in Music Therapy: A Phenomenological Inquiry

RESEARCHER:

Page McIntyre, MT-BC

Graduate Student at SUNY New Paltz, New Paltz NY 12561

B.S. Contemporary Music Studies at SUNY New Paltz

M.S. Music Therapy at SUNY New Paltz, expected May 2018

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of the proposed research is to investigate how music therapists describe their experience of developing their professional identity.

PARTICIPANTS

Participants will be recruited using purposeful sampling and are eligible to participate in this study if they hold the credential MT-BC (Music Therapist Board Certified) and have been working full-time in the field for at least three years. Participants must be currently practicing music therapists. The approximate number of participants who will participate in this study is three. The researcher will recruit participants using word-of-mouth methods and will seek out individuals who she feels have been dedicated to the field of music therapy.

PROCEDURES

After agreeing to participate in the study, the researcher and the participant will agree on a convenient time to conduct the interview. The interview will take place either in a private location or via telephone or Skype. The interview will be audio recorded using a digital voice recorder and will last for up to 60 minutes. The interview will be semi structured and the researcher will ask the participant several questions regarding their experiences of professional identity development. Three participants will be interviewed. The researcher will then transcribe and analyze the data.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

The researcher does not anticipate any risks. The participants will be telling stories regarding their professional identity and the retelling of stories may bring up memories or feelings that are intimate in nature. The researcher is a trained therapist that can provide support if needed. It is also important to note that participants will be offered the opportunity to review the transcripts and if they wish for something to be excluded from the transcripts, the researcher will remove it.

BENEFITS

Participants will have the opportunity to reflect on their experiences and may gain insight and further their self-awareness. It is important to note that others may benefit from the information gained in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. In addition, the Human Research Ethics Board, and University responsible for monitoring this study may inspect these records. The researcher will record the interviews using a digital audio recorder. The researcher will then transcribe the data without including any identifying information. The transcripts will be sent back to the participants for them to review. If the participants decide they want to exclude something from the data, the researcher will remove the unwanted information from the data. A copy of the consent form will be kept in the researcher's locked drawer for three years at which point it will be shredded.

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS

If you have any comments, concerns, or questions regarding the conduct of this research, please contact the researcher at (845)-519-0997.

For questions about your rights as a research participant, contact the State University of New York at New Paltz Human Research Ethics Board (which is a group of people who review the research to protect your rights) at 845-257-3282.

The Human Research Ethics Board of the State University of New York at New Paltz has determined that this research meets the criteria for human subjects according to Federal guidelines.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION STATEMENT

Your participation in this project is voluntary. Even after you agree to participate in the research or sign the informed consent document, you may decide to leave the study at any time.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Page McIntyre

E-mail: pagemcintyre@gmail.com OR N02431663@hawkmail.newpaltz.edu

Phone: 845-519-0997

Faculty Advisor: Michael Viega, Professor of Music Therapy, SUNY New Paltz

Faculty Phone: 845-257-2707

SIGNATURES

Your signature documents your permission to take part in this research.

Signature of participant

Date

Printed name of participant

I certify that the nature and purpose, the potential benefits and possible risks associated with participation in this research study have been explained to the above individual and that any questions about this information have been answered. A copy of this document will be given to the subject.

Signature of researcher

Date

Appendix B: Recruitment Script

Hello _____,

My name is Page McIntyre and I'm a graduate student working on my thesis towards my M.S. in Music Therapy at The State University of New York at New Paltz. My thesis is a phenomenological inquiry focusing on the topic of professional identity development in music therapy. I will be examining the lived experiences of music therapists and analyzing how these experiences have helped them to develop and internalize their professional identity. I will also be looking at the factors that have shaped professional identity and how one integrates his or her self-concept into their professional identity. I feel that this research is important because the current literature on this topic is lacking and I feel that new professionals would benefit from reading more on this topic.

I've decided to reach out to you because I feel that you would be a great candidate for my study. I recently came across an article about your work and was really impressed. I feel that you would have a lot to contribute to this study due to your experience, creativity, confidence, and dedication to music therapy.

The interview should take approximately one hour and can be conducted in person, via Skype, or on the phone. You would be asked both predetermined and spontaneous interview questions. I've attached the predetermined questions to this e-mail so that you can get a better idea of the interview. Your participation in this study is voluntary and confidential and you can choose to decline to answer any questions that you are not comfortable with.

If you are willing to participate in my research study, please let me know a day and time that suits you and I'll do my best to be available. Also, please feel free to let me know if you have any questions about the study. I'm also accepting referrals for the study so if you know of any music therapists who would be interested in participating please let me know. Thank you for your time.

Warmly,

Page McIntyre, MT-BC

Appendix C: Interview Questions

Demographics

- Gender
- Age
- Level of Education
- Years of Practice
- Past and present music therapy positions

Interview Questions

1. How do you describe your experience of developing your professional identity?
2. What brought you to want to become a music therapist?
3. How have you developed your identity as a music therapist? What has made you into a music therapist?
4. Is there a particular framework or approach that you feel is an important part of your professional identity?
5. What factors have influenced or shaped your professional identity?
6. How do you integrate aspects of yourself into your professional identity?
7. What challenges have you faced in your career have helped you develop your professional identity?
8. Do you feel that your professional identity has changed over time?
9. Was there a particular moment in which you felt that your professional identity as a music therapist was developing?

Other Questions

1. Has your workplace environment played a role in shaping your professional identity?
2. What role has music played in shaping your professional identity as a music therapist?
What music therapy experiences have led to the development of your professional identity?
3. Do you have any advice for new music therapists on developing their professional identity?
4. How have you been true to yourself as a music therapist?

Note: Interviews are semi-structured, therefore not all of the above questions were used for each participant and other questions were asked when relevant.

Appendix D: Coding process

Column 1: Raw Data	Column 2: Notes	Column 3: Codes
<p>R: How do you integrate aspects of your personal self into your professional self?</p> <p>P1: I can be goofy but I don't take myself too seriously, when I'm talking about it professionally I do, but not with my clients, within the sessions I allow the children to just be kids and I allow my own self to come through because yes, I bring the instruments but I also allow my own self to come through in the environment because I bring not a sense of not chaos but an ability to explore and try new things without my clients necessarily knowing that I'm exploring their psyche. So I bring in a lot of humor within my practice especially with my kids, I'm more animated than maybe some therapists especially in the psychodynamic light, that's what I bring to the sessions. Because I am an animated person, I allow the boundaries to be there when they need to be there, I'm not going to tell my clients my personal life because I don't...some people say they have their therapist self and their personal self, and I bring a lot of my personal self into the session because that's what I'm contributing to the environment so why not utilize myself to bring therapeutic change.</p>	<p>Allows own self to come through in his work</p> <p>Humor</p> <p>Animation</p> <p>Utilizing self to bring about therapeutic change, using self as a tool</p>	<p>Authenticity</p>

Appendix E: Codes

Initial Codes

Music identity

Change

Journey

Trying new things

Never stop developing yourself

Stretching limits

Continuous process

Performer

Humor in sessions

Similar to developing oneself as a person

Not a master

Continuous Learning

Diving deep into work

Plateauing

Self-exploration

Working on self

Supervision

Taking ownership of knowledge/wanting to learn more

Stretching limits

Authenticity in work

Similar to personal self

Establishing boundaries

True to myself

Self-awareness

Separation of work/personal life

Honesty, genuine

Boundaries between personal and professional self

Putting it into practice

Learning about client's needs

Revelation

Epiphany

Personal connection to population

Personal experience is integrated into professional identity

Learning through experience

Learning from others

Experiences with clients

Learning experience

Moment of heartwarming success

Diverse experiences in life and music therapy

Gaining comfort due to experience

Allowing own self to come through

Self-knowledge

Taking care of self

Integrative identity due to dual roles of performer and music therapist

Primary instrument

Music as self-care

Love for music

Code Groups

Group 1 -> Authenticity & Self-awareness

Authenticity in work

Humor in sessions

Similar to personal self

Establishing boundaries

True to myself

Self-awareness

Separation of work/personal life

Honesty, genuineness

Boundaries between personal and professional self

Allowing own self to come through

Self-knowledge

Taking care of self

Group 2 -> Capacity for Growth & Self-Expansion

Growth

Change

Journey

Trying new things

Never stop developing yourself

Stretching limits

Continuous process

Similar to developing oneself as a person

Not a master

Continuous Learning

Diving deep into work

Plateauing

Self-exploration

Working on self

Supervision

Taking ownership of knowledge/wanting to learn more

Stretching limits

Group 3 ->Music Identity

Integrative identity due to dual roles of performer and music therapist

Music identity

Performer

Primary instrument

Music as self-care

Love for music

Group 4->Significant Experiences

Putting it into practice

Learning about client's needs

Revelation

Epiphany

Personal connection to population

Personal experience is integrated into professional identity

Learning through experience

Learning from others

Experiences with clients

Learning experience

Moment of heartwarming success

Diverse experiences in life and music therapy

Gaining comfort due to experience