

ENGAGING INNOVATIVE KNOWLEDGE THROUGH APPLIED QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

MCAST 2nd ANNUAL CONFERENCE IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS



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Moving On Donations of musical instruments and changing musical identities



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Musical identities and engagement

- Sustaining a strong musical identity seems to protect individuals in terms of keeping involved with music
- Children who think they are musicians are more likely to have concrete plans about music (Lamont, 2020)
- Interviews with older adults showed how important early experiences were for providing a foundation (Lamont, 2011)
- Routes into (and out of and into) music are complex across the lifespan (Burland Clark & Bennett, 2020, Davidson & Burland, 2004, 2006; McPherson, Davidson & Faulkner, 2020)

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Constructivist and narrative approach

- Interviewing donors at or after the point of donating a musical instrument to a charitable scheme
- 16 adults interviewed so far ranging in age from 20s to 80s
- Semi-structured interviews about the history of the instrument, how it was acquired and used, and why it was being donated
- Set in the wider context of life story through music, experiences of music, motivation for music and musical identity
- Analysed inductively for key themes, then related to literature on emergent topics using a grounded theory approach

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Themes around donation

- *Past orientation*

1. A strong desire to have and play an instrument
2. The often chance nature of acquisition of an instrument
3. Acquiring a musical identity

- *Future orientation*

1. To ensure the instrument would continue to be used –creating a legacy
2. Decluttering and replaceability
3. Changing musical identity and moving on

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Use

I could give it to a home where it, you know, could **be of use to someone**, because it seems such a shame, you know, it just sits and does nothing, and somebody else might be able to make music with it (Jenny, 70s, mandolin)

Move towards reconsidering objects as passive – ‘things’ embody attitudes and experiences, have unique agency and life force of their own (Brückner, 2019)



Perpetual Canon
Cornelia Parker
Tate Britain, 2022

“a mute marching band, frozen breathlessly in limbo”

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Decluttering

I wasn't that attached to it. So, you know in a way, it was almost like when you take a bag of old clothes to the Oxfam shop or whatever, you know, it wasn't a massive kind of grand gesture or anything like that (Kathy, 40s)

- Physical objects can serve as symbols of identity (e.g. car, house; Fraine et al., 2007) and ownership conveys status (Nelissen & Meijers, 2011) – 'sign-equipment' (Goffman, 1959)
- Clearing objects out at different life stages (Philips & Seago, 2011)
- Cherished possessions within groups - 'inalienable wealth' (Curasi et al., 2004)

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Changing musical identity

that whole point of decluttering is passing on to somebody who would value it, which isn't me, and I feel like I can make my peace with handing it on in that way. (Sabine, 40s, flute)

- Marcia's (1980) phases of identity: donors particularly fit into foreclosure or moratorium
- Changing identities through choice not an area yet explored

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Concluding remarks

- Talking about instruments is an interesting and accessible route to uncovering people's musical life stories
- Musical instruments are more than physical objects and our relationships with our instruments can provide insight into different stages of musical lives
- Loss of guilt and gain in self-worth achieved through donation is valuable
- More work needed on different kinds of musical instruments, different types of donations, and instruments that would never be donated

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THANK YOU

