

## Explorations in music and identity among aging populations

**Fields of study:** psychology, social work, cultural studies

**Background:** What happens when we form attachments to certain kinds of music during developmental stages of our lives? How does it relate to identity? Can the power of music, and its attendant connection to identity, be used in ways to reach aging adults who have been challenged in language or memory?

The award-winning documentary *Alive Inside* begins to explore some of these questions. Based on the findings of social worker Dan Cohen, the movie illustrates the potential for dramatic engagement when aging or ill individuals are reunited with the music of their youth.

Could these findings be locally replicated?

**Goal:** To explore the connection to music and identity by working with residents in a local nursing home, and to provide supportive, personalized engagement in the process.

### Objectives:

- Become familiar with current findings on the connection to music and identity, with special attention on aging populations (see bibliography below for examples of readings)
- Work with local organization, Sound Connections, to develop professional and trusting relationships with one specific nursing home in the Olympia area.
- Learn effective interviewing techniques, with aging adults or their family or friends, to identify meaningful music for two or three specific residents.
- Establish playlists for these residents and develop techniques for sharing these with them.
- Debrief weekly with Sound Connections staff and/or academic advisors, about readings, concerns and findings.
- Keep careful journal records and report qualitative findings in a paper, set within the larger context of music and identity.

Sound Connections will —

Supply assistance with establishing trusting contacts, along with the necessary equipment, e.g. iPods, headphones.

Conduct weekly sessions with the student(s).

Students will provide their own transportation.

## Suggested Resources:

Bradley, Andy. "Crossing the bridge—connecting with people in the later stages of dementia." *Working with Older People* 19.4 (2015): 177-181.

Brown, Steven and Ulrik Volgsten, eds. "The uses of background music for personal enhancement" in *Music and Manipulation: On the Social Uses and Social Control of Music*. 2006: 57-73.

DeNora, Tia. "Music as a technology of self" in *Music in Everyday Life*. Cambridge University Press, 2000: 46-74.

Elliott, David and Marissa Silverman. "Personhood" in *Music Matters: a Philosophy of Music Education*. Oxford University Press, 2015: 153-192.

Elliott, Melanie, and Paula Gardner. "The role of music in the lives of older adults with dementia ageing in place: A scoping review." *Dementia* (2016): 1471301216639424.

Gerdner, Linda A., and Melen R. McBride. "Individualized music intervention for agitation in dementia care and disaster preparedness." *J Gerontol Geriatr Med* 1.005 (2015).

North, Adrian C., David J. Hargreaves, and Jon J. Hargreaves. "Uses of music in everyday life." *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 22.1 (2004): 41-77.

Patel, Aniruddh D. "Brain sources of music's emotional power" in *Music, language, and the brain*. Oxford University Press, 2010: 88-109.

Scheidt, Rick J. "Alive Inside: reprise." *The Gerontologist* 55.6 (2015): 1058-1059.

Scheidt, Rick J. "The quickening art." *The Gerontologist* (2012): gns151.

Turino, Thomas. "Habits of the Self, Identity, and Culture" in *Music as Social Life: the Politics of Participation*. University of Chicago Press, 2008: 93-121.

Van Dijck, José. *Mediated memories in the digital age*. Stanford University Press, 2007.

## Additional resources

Interviewing techniques and suggestions from the Alive Inside Foundation.