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# How Popular Music Artists Form an Artistic and Professional Identity and Portfolio Career in Emerging Adulthood

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UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS, MINNESOTA

How Popular Music Artists Form an Artistic and Professional Identity and Portfolio  
Career in Emerging Adulthood

We certify that we have read this dissertation and approved it as adequate in scope and quality. We have found that it is complete and satisfactory in all respects, and that any and all revisions required by the final examining committee have been made.

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How Popular Music Artists Form an Artistic and Professional Identity and Portfolio

Career in Emerging Adulthood

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UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

A Dissertation Submitted to the Education Faculty  
of the University of St. Thomas in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements of the Degree

Doctor of Education

December 12, 2013

UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

St. Paul, Minnesota

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## Abstract

This qualitative, phenomenological study sought to understand ways popular music artists experience and make meaning of their transitions from the role of college student to roles as professional artists and independent adults. During lengthy individual interviews, 15 young artists ages 23 to 28 described their transitions into multifaceted portfolio careers after graduation from specialty music colleges. The primary themes revolved around the formation of artistic identity, transitioning from college into professional life, managing financial challenges, and ultimately, becoming and being a creative artist by aligning artistic expression with life balance. While all participants intended careers as working musicians focused primarily on performance, 12 of the 15 began or significantly increased an emphasis on original composition after graduation to enact their artistic identities. A central finding of this study involved balancing this compelling creative drive with personal life balance at an early career stage.

A lack of paying work, competition, and self-doubts emerged as key early career challenges. Original composition may not provide significant income, and particularly in the United States, substantial student loan debt may further exacerbate financial challenges. Participants demonstrated effective reflective and proactive approaches to challenges, acknowledging personal temperament and individual circumstances while developing and adjusting artistic and life balance. For some, financial stability initially took precedence, enabling creative freedom, while others expanded musical activities to create sustainable and creative careers. Participants who began professional work prior to graduation demonstrated a clear advantage over those who waited. Four theoretical

frameworks provided analytical lenses to examine transition issues of young artists: identity theory, emerging adulthood, self-efficacy, and systems creativity theory.

*Key words:* musician careers, identity, emerging adulthood, creativity, college to work transitions, self-efficacy

## Acknowledgements

Without the encouragement and support of many people, I could never have completed this study. I would like to acknowledge and thank those who helped me along the journey, especially my ever-patient husband David, who offered cogent insights as he listened to my stories, theories, and musings. I appreciate your key editing at crucial moments in the process, but mostly, your loving support.

My sons, both young artists finding their creative paths in life much like the participants in this study, provide inspiration in my work. Chris and Scott, I admire your passion, work ethic, humor and humanity, and continue to learn from you both.

I owe a huge debt of gratitude to my advisor and dissertation chair, Dr. Sarah J. Noonan. Thanks, Sarah, for your patience, for sticking with me over time, and for your academic rigor. Thanks also to Dr. Thomas L. Fish and Dr. Kathleen M. Boyle, for your insights and care in serving on my committee.

Many thanks to my colleagues Kerri Vickers and Kali Freeman, whose virtual pom-poms cheered me on, and Dr. Sarah Schmalenberger, who demystified the dissertation writing process with pithy comments and encouraging suggestions. Dr. Kevin Schwandt challenged and encouraged me throughout the dissertation process. Thanks, Kevin, for your deep knowledge and expertise.

My many international friends and colleagues in the Commission for the Education of the Professional Musician provided inspiration and support, especially Dr. Diana Blom of Western Sydney University in Australia and Dr. Dawn Bennett of Curtin University in Perth, Australia.

J.S. Bach's Goldberg Variations, performed magnificently by pianist and MacArthur Fellow Jeremy Denk, provided the soundtrack for writing this dissertation. The beauty, structure, energy, and pathos in this beautiful work anchored and centered my thinking and writing process.

Finally, I express my deep thanks to the amazing young artists who opened their lives to me with intimate honesty, passion, and colorful storytelling. I look forward to following your careers and life journeys over the coming years.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

My study on musician career development involved learning how emerging professionals in traditional and popular music programs in higher education made the transition from college student to working artist. My fascination with the nature of artists' work extends back to the 1970s, when I started my diverse career in music. My awareness of the challenges associated with starting and sustaining a career as an artist started during my undergraduate years in college. As a college music student, the work options available to me appeared limited to orchestral performance or teaching. Some time after my college graduation I discovered the rich variety of options available for tailoring a career to my interests and talents. I also learned I needed many additional nonmusical skills to successfully realize those options.

I launched my career by creating music education programs at two parochial schools in the small town where my new husband directed junior high bands at the public school. I simultaneously took on a new role a music educator and entrepreneur. In addition to inspiring young people musically, I learned to market my services, recruit students, bill clients, keep financial records, arrange for space and equipment, respond to student, parent, and administrator needs, and teach students how to play everything from trumpet to snare drum. I also taught flute privately and worked a freelance performer. These activities represent the start of my *portfolio career*, a term used to describe the multifaceted, multiple income stream career paths common to professional musicians throughout history (Hahn, 2010; Salmen, 1983; Weber, 2004). When students leave college for careers, they are challenged by more than establishing professional identities.

For me, this early period marked a budding awareness of my shifting adult identities and heterogeneous emerging professional roles.

I noticed the career choices of many of my colleagues who strove to fit into existing artistic work structures and opportunities with varying levels of success. As I matured into adulthood, I combined several different professional experiences to build a successful career largely independent of established institutions. I cofounded a chamber ensemble with 14 subsequent years of successful performances. The ensemble started as a casual freelance group and evolved into a formal nonprofit organization complete with an active board of directors, national grants, a season of over 100 concerts a year, and combined administrative and artistic roles for the musicians. I blended teaching with work as a performing artist and consultant, recognizing and meeting the challenges associated with establishing and sustaining a portfolio career in music.

After a long career teaching, performing, and managing in a variety of contexts, I accepted a position at a college of popular music in 2007 as a faculty member and, later, division chair and department head. I teach the required capstone course for music performance majors, working closely with young artists in their final weeks of higher education to prepare them for the next steps in their artistic journeys. Although our work together focuses on discovering and planning their emerging professional lives, curiosity about their paths and processes following graduation inspired me to conduct this study.

As the parent of two adult artist sons and the teacher of numerous diverse artists over many years, the transient nature of the artist's life and the resulting opportunities and potential challenges remain a central part of my work and personal life. I incorporated into this study learned skills and fundamental psychological traits serving as

important elements of career development. However, essential but less explicit components that entail shifting and expanding identities and roles and the social milieu in which they become accomplished became the primary focus of this study.

I learned a great deal about how young musicians discover and make the transition from college student to working artist, including their experiences of establishing a portfolio career and adult identities. As students graduate from college, they face the challenge of establishing professional identities and also maturing into adult roles. My study focused on the twin challenges facing college graduates: establishing adult identities and developing professional careers. I learned how emerging professionals experience the transition process as they leave formal education institutions and enter the musical work world.

### **Research Question and Significance**

My study on musician career development focused on identity development and the interpersonal aspects and challenges involved in making the transition into fully professional work, including achieving a sustainable career as an artist and forming an adult identity. I adopted the following question to frame my study: How do popular music artists experience and make meaning of their transition from the role of college student to professional artist and independent adult?

This study may contribute to the research associated with the career development of musicians, providing a valuable resource for aspiring artists regarding the necessary and perhaps mundane tasks associated with leaving higher education and transitioning into a multifaceted portfolio career and achieving goals associated with adulthood. This

study may also contribute to research on the nature of the identity transitions of artists as both an individual and social phenomenon.

I first define key terms related to my study, followed by an overview of the dissertation chapters. I follow with a review of literature, describing research related to college to work transitions, establishing a professional identity and career, and forming an adult identity.

### **Definitions of Terms**

*Entrepreneur/entrepreneurial:* While the conventional definition involves the starting of a business and the acceptance of risk in the quest for profit, this study defines the musical entrepreneur as capable of balancing both the artistic and the business elements of a multi-faceted career.

*Musical Instrument Digital Interface (MIDI):* Hardware and software connecting devices that send and receive digital signals.

*Multiple income streams:* Includes various sources of income developed by individuals in portfolio careers. For musicians, these may include activities such as concerts, private teaching, composition, recording, and day jobs.

*Musitopia:* A term coined by Bennett (2007, p. 188) describing a balance between one's professional practice and personal and artistic needs.

*Pay-to-Play:* An increasingly frequent arrangement between performers and venues requiring performers to presell a guaranteed number of tickets prior to their event or pay for the difference.

*Popular music:* in the context of this study, popular music includes all music genres apart from Western art (classical) music or explicitly world music traditions.

*Portfolio career:* the historically congruous artist career format consisting of many different and often changing types of work and sources of income (see multiple income streams).

*Professional musician:* for the purposes of this study, musicians who attain a high level of technical and aesthetic artistry and make at least a portion of their income as a performing musician.

*Protean career:* named for Proteus, the ancient Greek sea-god known as a shape-shifter. Considered an extreme example of portfolio careers (Bennett, 2009), protean careers require quick responses to opportunities, adaptability, flexibility, and openness to risk-taking.

### **Overview of Dissertation**

In Chapter 2, I present a review of literature around college to life transitions in the general population and among musicians, also sharing literature on identity development, mentoring, and entrepreneurship. I introduce the analytical theories used in my study: emerging adulthood, identity theory, self-efficacy, and systems creativity theory. Chapter 3 outlines the study's methodology, including the selection of participants, interview process, and IRB process.

I describe the deeply rooted yet mercurial nature of artistic identity in Chapter 4. Artistic identity appeared inborn among the participants, a core element of their personal identity from a young age. I describe how artistic influences and support from family throughout childhood and adolescence provided underlying support and context for artistic identity. The impact of diverse mentors, beginning in childhood and extending into emerging adulthood, provided important influences and guidance. Young artists'

choices to attend music college and the generally positive impact of formal musical education further shaped their professional lives.

Young artists shared experiences and responses as they sought meaning in emerging identities. The lens of identity theory provided insights into the enactment of multifaceted identities—personal, artistic, and professional—within the context of personal (internal) reflection and social (external) interactions. While all 15 artists entered professional careers focused on musical performance, 12 of the 15 began shifting artistic focus toward original composition, a significant and unexpected finding of this study. All participants continued to perform, but found increasingly greater artistic satisfaction from performing original works, further expanding merged identities. An internal motivation to compose required balance from concurrent external drives related to group identity formation and financial sustainability.

Chapter 5 concerns the relationships between artistic and personal identities and the time of transition from higher education into professional life. This section begins with contextual background into the nature of musicians' work in multifaceted portfolio careers. I describe the process of transition, highlighting challenges and opportunities during this time including a lack of paying work, competition and professional networks, and self-doubts experienced by most young artists. Chapter 5 concludes with a description of the process of reassessing the freelance, portfolio lifestyle initially undertaken by many of the young artists and the life/career adjustments they made during the first several years after college. Young artists discovered ways personal temperament affects life choices and plans, influencing many career and life decisions. They proved remarkably reflective and proactive in affecting change and modifying their lives and

career paths to fit personally evolving needs and goals, demonstrating resilience and grit (Duckworth, Peterson, & Matthews, 2007).

The theoretical perspective of emerging adulthood provided insights into the transition experiences of young artists. Emerging adulthood spans the time from high school graduation through the 20s. Arnett (2004) described several key qualities of emerging adulthood, including identity exploration, instability, self-focus, transition between adolescence and adult life, and a time of optimism. These characteristics proved consistent with the transition experiences of participants. Arnett (2004) described emerging adults' proclivity toward risky but attractive career choices in entertainment and sports. While time will determine the risk and reward levels of participants' career choices in music, their abilities to stay true to artistic identity while realistically assessing financial sustainability supports future success.

In Chapter 6, I considered the economic constraints of student loan debt and financial conflicts experienced when deciding whether to monetize music or play and create music as a purely artistic endeavor. Many experienced significant financial challenges, particularly those with large student loan debts. The participants developed unique and creative methods for dealing with these challenges, again demonstrating proactive problem solving. Some prioritized stability in their lives, freeing creative work from financial constraints. Others focused first on creative activities and adjusted employment as necessary. All participants shared a desire for life balance and opportunities to define and realize their artistic identities in distinctively personal ways. I found the participants' focus on life balance at this early career stage both a surprising and encouraging finding of the study.

Using self-efficacy theory, I share examples of resilience, responsibility, and high self-efficacy as young artists strived for work salience and life/work balance. In some cases, participants reset and achieved new goals very different from their initial career goals as they left college. While most participants experienced expected and unexpected challenges in these early years, even those who struggled to some degree accomplished significant self-defined progress.

In the last data section, Chapter 7, I consider the enactment of artistic, personal, and/or professional identity by examining the nature of creativity for participants. I begin by describing a range of creative processes as recounted by the participants. I then describe the merger of personal, artistic, and professional identities as enacted by these young artists. A systems approach to creativity theory contextualized the experiences of individual young artists within the larger music industry and social culture, expanding beyond a primarily individualistic perspective, acknowledging the interactive, connected and social nature of work (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996).

A summary of my study, with implications and recommendations, makes up Chapter 8. The formation and expression of an artistic identity, ramifications of the postcollege transition into portfolio work styles, and strategies for managing financial issues contribute to a balanced artistic life. After summarizing the findings, I consider implications of those findings and make recommendations for advising young artists personally and developing curriculum. The next chapter reviews the literature on school to professional life transitions and introduces the analytical theory used in this study.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

How do popular music artists make the transition from college student to professional artist? To address this question, I conducted a review of scholarly literature to identify and describe aspects of the transition from formal higher education into the musician's typically multifaceted workplace. I adopted both a personal (identity development) and an interpersonal perspective to conduct my review because identity shifts and development and career socialization, as interactive processes, require young professionals to examine themselves while engaging in world activities and scenarios (Cohen, Duberley, & Mallon, 2004).

I began the search within a broad area of research called *school to work (STW)*, using this term to search EBSCOhost, Academic Search Premier, Music Index Online, Sociological Abstracts, and Dissertation Abstracts databases. I identified nearly 250 peer-reviewed articles and books. Many studies addressed challenges faced by adolescent, at-risk populations; no studies related to the postcollege experience of young musicians. I expanded my search to include the subject terms *professional identity* and *transition* and found a limited number of studies focused primarily on teaching and health care professions.

I then adopted various subject terms, such as *professional identity*, *transition* *group formation*, *organizational socialization*, *occupational socialization*, and *professional socialization*, to locate studies of social transitions among professionals. Using the search terms *career development* and *musicians*, I found four studies on the transition of music students into professional life.

I also reviewed conference proceedings from the International Society for Music Education Commission for the Education of the Professional Musician and uncovered a number of blind, peer-reviewed papers addressing musicians and identity. I conducted dissertation searches in ProQuest using search and subject terms such as *career transition, career development, music/musicians, and communities of practice* paired with *transition and career development.*

I organized my literature findings into the following categories: (a) challenges in college to work transitions, general and musicians, (b) professional identity and socialization in transition, and (c) personality characteristics and social interaction in transition. The findings show a developmental progression, beginning with leaving college and seeking employment, establishing a professional identity as an artist, and finally engaging with other artists to increase artistry and grow in the profession.

I first describe scholarly literature associated with making the transition from college to work, including the challenges encountered in transitioning from educational culture to professional practice and personal and relational activities associated with identity formation. Following a general description of studies associated with college to work transitions, I then describe a limited number of studies related to musicians. This same pattern occurs in the next two sections. Following these sections, I summarize the findings in the scholarly literature and then identify how my study addresses a gap in the research literature. I then describe related theory to form my conceptual framework, follow with a description of methodology.

Making the transition from college to work signals the end of a long and critical period of formal education and the beginning of an exciting time marking the next of

many changes and stages associated with becoming a professional artist and adult.

Students leaving higher education face a common dilemma, namely finding work in their field and sustaining themselves as financially independent adults.

### **Challenges of College to Work Transitions**

Transitioning from college to work presents many challenges (Baker & Pifer, 2011; Gardner & Van der Veer, 1998; Graham & McKenzie, 1995; Perone & Vickers, 2003; Plunkett, 2001; Wendlandt & Rochlen, 2008), involving much more than a simple job search (Perrone & Vickers, 2003). As a complex process, fraught with uncertainty and risk (Goodwin & O'Connor, 2007; Graham & McKenzie, 1995), transitions cause some graduates to feel great stress, while others navigate them smoothly (Holton, 1995). Arnett (2004) identified a sort of “tyranny of freedom,” particularly in the United States, in which new graduates may have too many options and little direction in focusing on these possibilities (p. 151). “Transition starts with an ending and finishes with a beginning” (Bridges, 2009, p. 5). A young graduate’s adaptation and coping ability during this transition depends on the individual’s support systems and broad psychosocial competence (Schlossberg, 1981).

Graduates leave structured and comfortable environments for the unknown (Gardner, 1998; Sharf, 2002) and may experience considerable challenge, despite the nature of normative career transitions involving generally anticipated and voluntary changes, such as college graduation (Schlossberg, 1981; Sharf, 2002). The transition out of higher education may represent one of the first major examples of these adult transitions. A small but growing body of research has addressed the significance of the college to work transition and its effects on this population (Perrone & Vickers, 2003).

Even within the field of human resources, organizational entry has been somewhat overlooked (Holton, 1995).

Although limited, studies that address the transition from college to work concentrate on organizational entry, in which the graduate becomes an employee as opposed to developing the portfolio career of multiple income streams experienced by many musicians (Escolas, 2004; Graham & McKenzie, 1995; Holton, 1995; Perrone & Vickers, 2003; Wendlandt & Rochlen, 2008). Much of the career-oriented literature assumes graduates transition into a single workplace rather than the multifaceted work places experienced by the typical freelance music professional (Perrone & Vickers, 2003; Holton, 1995; Holden & Hamblett, 2007), although authors of one article examined portfolio work in comparison to organizational work (Duberley, Mallon, & Cohen, 2006). The next section begins discussion of research that focuses on the career entry and transition experiences of musicians.

Much like authors of general college to work literature, researchers of college to work transitions specifically focused on musicians acknowledge the significance of this important life transition and recognize its many challenges and opportunities (Bennett, 2007; Creech et al., 2008; Gaunt, Creech, Long, & Hallam, 2012; Johansson & Hager, 2008; Uscher, 1998). Despite a growing number of significant new programs in major conservatories spurred by recognition of the skill and mind sets needed for successful professional lives, students in many other colleges, universities, and conservatories still receive little explicit training in the skills or lifestyle expectations needed for professional life as musicians (Bennett, 2007). Instead, many programs continue to focus primarily on developing musical expertise with little specific attention on broader personal, social,

entrepreneurial, or cultural objectives (Beckman, 2007; Beckman, 2010; Bennett, 2007; Bennett, 2009; Carruthers, 2008; Cordell, 2011; Gaunt, 2009; Hoverman, Kuuskoski, Weingarten, & Zeisler, n.d.).

In studies at one U.K. conservatory, almost half of the music students focused the majority of their energy only on developing their musical skills, exhibiting a passive approach to career awareness and development and with few plans for connecting their love of music to the next steps in their careers (Gaunt, 2009; Gaunt et al., 2012). Given that most musicians remain either fully or partly self-employed, the studies' authors expressed concern that a significant number of students appear unaware of the workings of the music profession and prefer to avoid developing concrete goals for the future (Bennett, 2007; Gaunt, 2007; Gaunt, 2009; Kubacki, 2005).

Rather than entering a traditional single place of employment, most musicians from the Middle Ages to the present have pursued portfolio careers comprised of multiple income streams, some of which are protean in nature, requiring constant recognition of opportunities and adaptability to changing conditions (Bennett, 2009; Mills, 2004; Salmen, 1983; Weber, 2004). While this mode of work proves common for artists, researchers now recognize a significant rise in fragmented career practices outside the arts as well (Bennett, 2007; Duberley, Mallon, & Cohen, 2006).

### **Transitioning from Educational Culture to Professional Practice**

Identifying, planning, and negotiating work and career transitions represents a robust area of research in both the general population and specifically in music education (Arnett, 2004; Bridges, 2004; Burland & Davidson, 2002; Creech et al., 2008); Goodwin & O'Connor, 2007; Graham & McKenzie, 1995; Gunz & Mayrhofer, 2007; Holton,

1995; Johnson, 2001; MacNamara, Holmes, & Collins, 2006; Murphy, Blustein, & Bohlig, 2010; Perrone & Vickers, 2003; Plunkett, 2001; Ramirez, 2013; Vaughn & Roberts, 2007; Wendlandt & Rochlen, 2008). Recurring themes in transition from college to work in the general literature include acknowledging the difficulty, complexity, and risks of the college to work transition (Arnett, 2004; Goodwin & O'Connor, 2007; Graham & McKenzie, 1995; Holton, 1995; Murphy, Blustein, Bohlig, & Platt, 2010; Perrone & Vickers, 2003; Plunkett, 2001; Wendlandt & Rochlen, 2008 ), the culture shock of leaving college for the work world and adult life (Graham & McKenzie, 1995; Wendlandt & Rochlen, 2008), high expectations held by transitioning young adults (Arnett, 2004; Graham & McKenzie, 1995; Perrone & Vickers, 2003; Wendlandt & Rochlen, 2008), development of traits to support transition such as persistence, assessment, and change (Plunkett, 2001), the element of serendipity in transition (Plunkett, 2001), many graduates' lack of work awareness (Holton, 1995), and the identification of personal work values (Johnson, 2001).

Music education research on college to work transitions includes the recurring theme of difficulties inherent in this transition (Burland & Davidson, 2002; Creech et al., 2008; MacNamara, Holmes, & Collins, 2006). Researchers demonstrating a strong psychological focus internationally in music education have identified traits enhancing transition for musicians, such as motivation, effort, social skills, “perseverance, self-belief, determination, dedication, and commitment” (MacNamara, Holmes, & Collins, 2006, p. 297). Researchers mentioned practical considerations including financial survival and life balance (MacNamara, Holmes, & Collins, 2006).

Creech et al. (2008) identified four initiatives important for higher education to provide for graduating students: continued mentoring, strong professional networks, many performance opportunities, and support to assist students in musical autonomy. Mentors, particularly specialist music teachers, figured prominently in the likelihood of transition success (Burland & Davidson, 2002; Creech et al., (2008). The transition process relates closely to identity development. A successful transition aids the enactment of individual, group, and role identity (Graham & McKenzie, 1995).

The college to work transition creates at least some challenges for virtually all graduates and affects all aspects of their lives, not just work (Gardner & Van der Veer, 1998; Graham & MacKenzie, 1995; LeMaistre & Pare, 2004; Perrone & Vickers, 2003; Wendlandt & Rochlen, 2008). Leaving the security and structure of the educational system for the unpredictable, often competitive, and ever changing world of work requires skills and an awareness of the world and of one's self (Eunjoo & Gysbers, 2007). These skills may include problem solving, teamwork, time management, and communication skills, accomplished while managing varying structures, expectations, methods of feedback, insider politics, and a wide generational spread of colleagues (Adler & Adler, 2005; Perrone & Vickers, 2003; Vaughn & Roberts, 2007; Wendlandt & Rochlen, 2008).

The expectations of employers may not match those of new graduates, and new employees may lack the skills, experience, and attitudes that the work world requires (Graham & McKenzie, 1995; Louis, 1980; Wendlandt & Rochlen, 2008). Students making the transition from higher education to work may have high, yet often inaccurate expectations and show ignorance of the process of moving from the structure of college

classes to professional work systems (Graham & MacKenzie, 1995; Holton, 1995; Louis, 1980; Perrone & Vickers, 2003; Wendlandt & Rochlen, 2008). While optimistic and eager to learn, young graduates may also demonstrate apprehension and lack of awareness of the work environment, and they may lack specific skills that employers expect (Graham & MacKenzie, 1995; Holton, 1995; Perrone & Vickers, 2003; Wendlandt & Rochlen, 2008).

Graduates transitioning from college to working life experience both a culture shift and culture shock (Graham & MacKenzie, 1995; Wendlandt & Rochlen, 2008; Louis, 1980). Numerous differences exist between academic assignments and work projects, including processes of working, the timing and methods of feedback, and an individual versus collaborative culture (Graham & McKenzie, 1995). Graduates may not understand the requirements of what they need to know and do for a successful transition to work and may also remain unaware of the significance of this transition (Graham & McKenzie, 1995; Holton, 1995; Perrone & Vickers, 2003; Wendlandt & Rochlen, 2008).

The transition period remains a process, not an event, just as a career consists of a process, not a predetermined structure (Holton, 1995; Vaughn & Roberts, 2007). Easing the many challenges of the college to work transition consists of a proactive process of research and information gathering while seeking out work experiences such as internships before graduation, developing networks of potential mentors and connections, and, optimistically, finding time for reflection on the changes to come (Holton, 1995; Wendlandt & Rochlen, 2008). I discuss the commonalities and differences for musicians making this transition in the next section.

## **Musicians' Transitions from Educational Culture to Professional Practice**

Nearly all of the factors described above also apply to young artists transitioning from educational culture into professional practice. Moving from college to professional work represents a highly significant life transition for musicians, as well (Burland & Davidson, 2002; Perkins, 2012). Defined as a process rather than an event, this transition remains a culture shift as well as a culture shock for artists (Graham & MacKenzie, 1995; Wendlandt & Rochlen, 2008; Louis, 1980). Researchers described the student transition from the safety and structure of higher education and into professional performing careers as both formative and transformative and conducive to “fear and frustration” as musicians begin careers (MacNamara, Holmes, & Collins, 2008, p. 299). In addition to the general changes in the expectations and styles of working between higher education and the workplace, a variety of challenges specific to musicians can affect early music careers, including lack of music-related work, time pressures, financial hardships from dependence on unreliable freelance work (including a lack of work benefits), general and performance anxiety, professional competition, self-doubt, and the challenge of building a career outside of formal organizations (Creech et al., 2008; Kirschbaum, 2007; MacNamara, Holmes, & Collins, 2006). Similarly to the general college to work research, studies related to musicians’ transitions appear limited in these matters (Bennett, 2003, 2007; Burland & Davidson, 2002; Rogers, 2009).

In an effort to address some of these challenges in the last 10 years, the concept of entrepreneurship education for artists has grown significantly in the U.S., addressing a perceived need to expand business skill sets and encourage innovative, proactive career development (Beckman, 2007; Beeching, 2012; Kubacki & Croft, 2005). In spite of

resistance to the term entrepreneurship in some institutions, a number of music conservatories, colleges, and universities recognized the challenges and opportunities for their students and created courses, workshops, and centers for addressing this defining professional transition (Beeching, 2010; Cutler, 2009; Cordell, 2011; Eastman Institute for Music Leadership, 2012; Manhattan School of Music Center for Entrepreneurship, 2012; University of Colorado-Boulder Entrepreneurship Center for Music, n.d.; Woelfel, 2009). For example, one of the earliest and most comprehensive programs, the Institute for Music Leadership (IML) at the Eastman School of Music launched in 2001 and features four distinct but interconnected programs, “where ideas can flourish and students are empowered to shape their own destiny by developing the skills and networks they need to adapt to the changing and challenging arts world” (Eastman Institute for Music Leadership, 2012, section 5, para. 4). The Manhattan School of Music Center for Entrepreneurship represents one of the newer programs, “focusing on the intersection of artistry and enterprise” and offering comprehensive services that include courses, workshops, coaching, referral services, career advising, and more (Manhattan School of Music, 2012, p.1). The University of Colorado-Boulder Entrepreneurship Center for Music provides similar services within a university setting, partnering with the Deming Center for Entrepreneurship on campus, “developing new paradigms for education, leadership, and advocacy in the emerging field of arts entrepreneurship,” (Entrepreneurship Center for Music, University of Colorado-Boulder, n.d., p.1). One-time conferences such as the Brevard Conference on Music Entrepreneurship (2007) reflect the growing interest in entrepreneurship education.

In 2010, the College Music Society convened a summit concerning best practices and trends in music entrepreneurship education (CMS, 2010). Dempster (2010) described these practices in a keynote address:

What makes little sense is expecting that we can drive students through four or five or six years of a highly regimented curriculum that affords few choices and asks for little initiative and then expect them to flourish in a world that rewards creativity, opportunism, experimentation, and distinctiveness more than anything else—in short, an entrepreneurial world. (Beckman, 2010, Chapter 1, section 3, para. 3)

A 2009 survey of U.S. music faculty in higher education noted that only 31% of surveyed faculty considered themselves arts entrepreneurs and just 32% confirmed that entrepreneurship was ever a topic in faculty meetings (CMS, 2009). Authors of a student-driven research project for the College Music Society noted a profound difference between the career expectations of college music students who remained focused on a traditional, performance-focused path, and professional artists who clearly recognize the misalignment of college curriculum with the realities of professional life (Hoverman, Kuuskoski, Weingarten, & Zeisler, n.d.).

While entrepreneurial expertise provides vital skill sets and attitude shifts for budding professionals, the process of shifting from a student identity to a professional identity, melded with professional socialization into many unique work settings, became the focus of this study, as introduced in the next section.

## **Professional Identity and Socialization in Transition**

Work, as a strong component of self-identity, remains a still-developing and somewhat unstable value in young adults, and the transition into work requires both psychological and social adjustments (Johnson, 2001). Individually constructed meaning (Arnett, 2004; Plunkett, 2001; Vaughn & Roberts, 2007), the inevitability of multiple identity shifts (Arnett, 2004; Plunkett, 2001), and socialization into professional groups (Plunkett, 2001) all prove vital. Self-identity shifts during the college to work transition as the young graduate moves from a student identity toward a new professional identity (Baxter-Magolda, 2004). Organizational socialization research emphasizes the change into a new role rather than the movement from a previous role (Louis, 1980). New challenges emerge as students become graduates and then move into employment. It becomes necessary not only to transition one's personal identity but to then also redefine identity within the context of a new job and then within the new job in relationship to the workplace's organizational culture (Holden & Hamblett, 2007) moving from "newcomer to insider" (Louis, 1980, p. 231). In the process, the person in transition may experiment with a variety of possible professional identities or provisional selves as he or she works to discover and develop an appropriate new identity consistent with the role and setting while also aligning with the individual's self-concept (Ibarra, 1999). Sometimes, an individual's identity upon entry to a new workplace may even interfere with learning in the new setting (Baker & Pifer, 2011). Vaughn and Roberts (2007) argued occupational identity and career are created dynamically and simultaneously and career paths are constructed, not merely followed passively. Ultimately, the gradual process of

discovering meaning in work plays an important role in identity construction during transition, and the role of serendipity must also be considered (Plunkett, 2001).

Historically, researchers have shown interest in ways new employees become socialized into a new workplace (Adler & Adler, 2005; Ibarra, 1999). Identity transition remains a social process as well as an individual shift, requiring validation and acceptance from personal and professional relationships for full occupational identity and a balance of new skill development along with social awareness and integration (Baker & Lattuca, 2010; Baker & Pifer, 2011; Ibarra, 1999; Perrone & Vickers, 2003; Plunkett, 2001). Impression management becomes a vital element of this process, as the newcomer negotiates social structures in the workplace (Adler & Adler, 2005). Baker and Lattuca (2010) suggested learning and identity develop concurrently and within professional practice. Role development and the responsibilities associated with new roles intersect with workplace cultures and traditions as modeled by coworkers, supervisors, and mentors in this evolving practice of assimilation (Baker & Lattuca, 2010; Ibarra, 1999).

A musician's identity remains fluid, balanced by personal elements including values, self-concept, and intentionality (Hirvonen, 2004; O'Neil, 2002). In addition to individual professional goals, identity transfer evolves with a musician's connections to community and social responsibility (Carruthers, 2006; Hirvonen, 2004). Relational identity development is closely connected to professional socialization aspects of the college to work transition for musicians as well, and will be discussed in the following section.

## **Musician Professional Identity in Transition**

Significant research addresses the development of professional identity in music teachers, but fewer studies have focused on the identity issues of professional performers (Russell, 2012; Schafter, 2006; Thornton, 2008). Work identity remains a central element of personal and professional identity (Johnson, 2001). The time of transition from higher education into professional life as a musician also reflects the need for exploration of personal and professional identity issues, regardless of the field of interest, and professional group identification becomes a strong focus (Arnett, 2004; Baxter-Magolda, 2004). The development of a core musical identity involves a complex process that begins early in life and remains fluid and evolving throughout a career (Burland & Davidson, 2002; Carruthers, 2010; Hargreaves, Miell, & MacDonald, 2002; Hargreaves & Marshall, 2003; MacDonald, Hargreaves, Miell, 2002; Mills, 2004; Welch, Papageorgi, Haddon, Creech, Morton, de Bézenac, Duffy, Potter, Whyton, & Himonides, 2008). The self-definition of professional identity (“I am a musician,” “I am a guitarist”) connects closely to self-concept even when that identity may or may not align with the realities of a professional life that includes other elements such as teaching, composing, or a day job (Bennett, 2008; Burland & Davidson, 2002; Flude, 1977; Frederickson & Rooney, 1988).

Musicians’ work lives frequently consist of multiple roles. Bennett referred to this as being “musically multilingual” in a portfolio or protean career (Bennett, 2007, p.122). A clear definition of professional identity for a musician remains difficult due to these typically wide ranging portfolio or protean work lives (Bennett, 2007). While the term musician often implies performer, reality remains much broader and may encompass

many jobs and roles of varying status and hierarchy, making the reality of the musician's career more complicated (Bennett, 2007).

For example, one individual's professional identity might include guitarist, songwriter, publicist, recording engineer, screen printer, and bartender, depending on the day. In addition, individuals construct multiple identities based on roles and needs within these identities. A musician may have distinct and separate identities on stage, in rehearsal, talking with fans, at a day job, and as a parent, for example (MacDonald, Hargreaves, & Miell, 2002). Each seemingly separate identity involves varied meanings within social structures and hierarchies affecting self-concept and self-perceptions, even within the single, overarching role identity of performer. Identity shifts further with the ability to adapt to new opportunities (Bennett, 2007). In an effort to link these many possible musician-related identities, Bennett coined the term, "Musitopia," describing a balance between one's professional practice and personal and artistic needs (p. 188). In addition to a shifting array of individual identities, musicians have typically been active members of numerous musical communities of practice for many years by the time they enter professional training in higher education and these identities may be both assumed and deeply ingrained (O'Neill, 2002; Hirvonen, 2004).

Ongoing discourse in the field of musician career development regarding the actual definition of the term *professional musician* creates further ambiguity affecting the pursuit of a professional musical identity (Bennett, 2008, 2009; Carruthers, 2010; Drummond, 1990). Carruthers (2010) defined the professional musician as, "someone who makes a living in and by music," but found this definition lacking in specificity, since the owner of a music store or a booking agent could fit this definition. Froelich and

Rainbow (1990) defined the professional musician as having formal education in music, having learned an appropriate body of knowledge and who provides musical services for a fee. The term professional musician is culturally specific, driven by social, political, and culture differences and expectations (Froelich & Rainbow, 1990). For example, a professional African drummer may hold his community's proverbs, history, and rituals (Froelich & Rainbow, 1990). Even the *Occupational Outlook Handbook from the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics* recognized the portfolio nature of the field and avoids an absolute definition (2012). As stated in the definitions (pp.6-7), in this study, professional musician describes a musician who attains a high level of technical and aesthetic artistry and makes at least a portion of his or her income as a performing musician.

The process of professional socialization requires the development of work-based cultural awareness and both personal and interpersonal values in young graduates (Johnson, 2001; Louis, 1980; Wedlandt & Rochlen, 2008). New and existing relationships shift as roles and expectations change, with newcomers and established workers cocreating new social networks for the benefit of both groups. New professionals may have difficulty differentiating various types of networking opportunities: informal social networks, informal work relationships, and formal work search processes (Eunjoo & Gysbers, 2007). For the novices, provisional identities emerge through real world experimentation on the path to a newly professional identity (Baker & Pifer, 2011). New workers may feel like outsiders in the new organizational culture, yet interpersonal skills and values prove vital for developing socially constructed

job values and full occupational socialization (Adler & Adler, 2005; Johnson, 2001; Louis, 1980).

Social job values include development of positive relationships in the workplace, leading toward both intrinsic and extrinsic altruistic benefits for the worker (Johnson, 2001). Johnson further emphasized the important role that personal job values play in choosing a field of work, and the occupational socialization process ultimately shapes future work values (Johnson, 2001).

While the process of identity development consists of an individual and personal process, identity development for musicians also involves a strong relational component (Conkling, 2002; Johnsson & Hager, 2008). Skills in developing interpersonal relationships remains one of the most important elements in predicting a successful transition from college into professional musical life, beginning at early stages with the support of parents, family, and teachers and extending into the many distinct work situations of a portfolio career (Creech et al., 2008; Gabor, 2009; Johnsson & Hager, 2008). At the point of transition into professional work, interpersonal skills and networked affiliations with peers, colleagues, and mentors become indispensable, providing potential access to performing and other opportunities and setting up the interdependent relationships and life long learning of adult and professional life (Creech et al., 2008; Jackson & Oliver, 2003; Johnsson & Hager, 2008). Mentors play an important role in facilitating the gradual change to a professional identity during the college to work transition.

On an intimate level, mentors, whether teachers or working professionals, provide important relationships for bridging the transition, serving first as instructors and later as colleagues (Creech et al., 2008; Gaunt, 2009; Gaunt et al., 2012; Johnsson & Hager, 2008). Co-mentoring collaborations with peers, fellow students, and young professionals provides highly effective resources, and experience, not age, serves as the most important element of good mentoring, so lateral mentoring between individuals of any age can be effective and influential (Baker & Lattuca, 2010; Dobrow & Higgins, 2005; Gaunt et al., 2012).

Studio teachers serve as primary mentors for performers throughout young musicians' educations (Gaunt, 2009). With a strong relationship between teacher and student, this mentoring role can continue after graduation through introductions, tips, connections, gigs, referrals, and other support (Burland & Davidson, 2002; Creech et al., 2008). As the teacher-mentor engages the former student in increasing numbers of professional activities, the teacher/student relationship shifts to that of professional colleagues, even while some mentoring aspects may continue (Burland & Davidson, 2002; Johnsson & Hager, 2008). While the teacher/student mentoring relationship remains hierarchical, peer mentors, or peer co-mentors can also provide highly effective relationships during the transition into professional life and beyond. As shown above, developmental networks of influential individuals in many life arenas support learning and psychosocial development during and beyond professional transition for musicians as well as other graduates (Baker & Lattuca, 2010; Dobrow & Higgins, 2005; Escolas, 2004; Gaunt et al., 2012).

In another mentoring example related to professional socialization, Johnsson and Hager (2008) examined an Australian program that provided mentors for new members of a symphony orchestra. The study's results focused on the central importance of relationships in preparing successful transitions into the orchestra. Researchers discovered the importance of becoming part of a community working together through interviews with recent graduates of music colleges (who were Fellows of the Sydney Symphony program chosen by competitive audition) and fulltime members and staff of the Sydney Symphony (Johnsson & Hager, 2008). The organizational socialization and growing professional identity of orchestra members develops with the orchestra as an ongoing community of practice, creating a rich contextual basis for the situated learning in which the players participate (Baxter-Magolda, 2004; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wendlandt & Rochlen, 2008). Members participate in communities of practice, causing learning to occur for the veterans as well as for the newcomers (Bennett, 2007; Burland & Davidson, 2002; Holton, 1995; Johnsson & Hager, 2008). Young graduates must recognize the distinctive characteristics of professional communities with regard to existing and changing practices, striving to achieve membership in the field while also recognizing its dynamic qualities and their ability to influence their organizations and the field over time (Conkling & Beauchesne, 2002; Eckert & Wenger, 1994).

Unlike the culture of many schools of music, where competition between students may be a central aspect of the culture, professional work, while highly competitive to attain, remains strongly collaborative in nature, and development of strong interpersonal skills becomes an important transition competence (Creech et al., 2008; Johnsson & Hager, 2008; MacNamara et al., 2006). Closely aligned with general interpersonal skill

development, young graduates must nurture professional networks as they develop performance opportunities but also to foster the exchange of creative ideas, provide moral support, and help reinforce a positive self-concept during this challenging time (Creech et al., 2008). On an even broader scale, Johnsson and Hager (2008) used the term *cultural citizenship* to describe ways self-identity serves to connect artists with the larger society to ascertain societal roles and connections (p. 531).

Bandura (1977) argued that through watching and modeling others' activities, young professionals begin to understand the many roles and opportunities life presents. Johnsson and Hager (2008) stressed the importance of relationally-based life-long learning over more individually based skills, attributes, and attitudes in defining "graduateness" (p. 526). They emphasized the importance of contextualizing learning and expectations in work situations, the importance of personality characteristics in the transition process, and interweaving relational skills and awareness. I describe these characteristics next.

### **Personality Characteristics and Social Interaction in Transition**

Personal initiative, risk-taking, planning skills and assessment (Vaughn & Roberts, 2007), self-directed learning (Escolas, 2004), a proactive work style (Holton, 1995), and persistence (Graham, 2010) help create career agency: a type of self-efficacy that leads to increased self-confidence and resilience in the face of setbacks (Plunkett, 2001). Socialization into the workplace involves the development of appropriate values, expectations of behavior, and a sense of social knowledge in anticipation of fulfilling a work role (Graham & McKenzie, 1995; Louis, 1980).

A common theme and a central focus in several major studies of musicians in college to work transitions consisted of the individual's psychological make up of traits and attributes (Burland & Davidson, 2002; Creech et al., 2008; MacNamara & Collins, 2009; MacNamara, Holmes, & Collins, 2006). Personal traits and psychological makeup serve as important roles at various transition points, but appear highlighted as students leave higher education for professional life (Creech et al., 2008; MacNamara, Holmes, & Collins, 2006). Talent and highly refined expertise in music skills and artistry remain central for a successful transition, but inadequate in themselves (MacNamara & Collins, 2007; MacNamara, Holmes, & Collins, 2006; Zwann, ter Bogt, & Raaijmakers, 2009). Intrinsic motivators such as perseverance and self-confidence (Burland & Davidson, 2002; Creech et al., 2008; MacNamara, Holmes, & Collins, 2006), determination (MacNamara, Holmes, & Collins, 2006), self-discipline and adaptability (Creech et al., 2008) serve as traits most commonly mentioned for a successful transition into the music profession, but could be considered important skills for any type of work or career transition. Regarding negative traits and attributes, Kemp (1996) discussed a study of the characteristics of a group of popular musicians, noting a high level of neuroticism and stress attributed to a lack of job security, work schedules that focus on evenings and weekends, and a general feeling of underappreciation.

Less frequently mentioned, traits and skills outside of music provide important elements for conducting a successful and sustainable professional and personal life. These include skills in organization, planning, coping strategies, and strong interpersonal abilities (Burland & Davidson, 2002; Creech et al., 2008; MacNamara, Holmes, & Collins, 2006). Entrepreneurial traits and mindsets provide assistance, described in this

context as focusing on opportunities and growth, being comfortable with change, and having a strong predilection for innovation (Beckman, 2007; Jackson & Oliver, 2003). Authors of only two studies directly mentioned the external factor of luck or serendipity (Creech et al., 2008; Plunkett, 2001). While a high degree of musical expertise remains an expectation, versatility appears valued over skills that are too specialized, at least by some authors (Creech et al., 2008; Johnsson & Hager, 2008). Individual psychological traits and extramusical skills and abilities remain a central aspect of career development for all young graduates entering the workforce, and serve a particularly important role in fields such as music, where a strong entrepreneurial element proves useful in the evolving process of work and career development. These traits and skills relate directly to career entry and transition.

A combination of individual traits along with interpersonal experiences and skills and a strong sense of identity and self-concept provide elements necessary for successful transition (Burland & Davidson, 2002; Johnsson & Hager, 2008). In fact, interpersonal skills may be the most important element at the point of professional transition (Creech et al., 2008; Johnsson & Hager, 2008). Together, these combinations of traits help provide the motivation to persevere through the challenges of developing a music career, yet these psychological traits prove insufficient alone for examining this transition (Burland & Davidson, 2002). Social and interpersonal attributes and skills can be more difficult to define, but appear highly influential in the transition process. In this study, I examined the nature of these important elements.

## Summary

I described scholarly research related to young artists transitioning from higher education into professional artistic work as popular music performing artists, including the formation of a portfolio career. The literature identified some issues in this major life transition common to both general populations and musicians, but some issues prove more central in musician transitions. Unlike students transitioning into more traditional workplaces after formal education, diverse work environments form an inevitable reality for musicians and, with that, distinctive challenges and opportunities.

Another significant element of this important life transition involves moving from a student identity to a professional identity, and socialization into the work environment provides a critical element of this identity shift. Many college graduates expect to transition into employment within an organization, whether a business, school, or cultural organization such as an orchestra. However, the portfolio careers of young popular music artists most often require simultaneous transitions into multiple, and often varied, communities of practice with numerous identity shifts, identification of new roles, and general socialization into these new work environments.

A limited number of studies focused on musician transitions, mostly emphasizing the individual psychological aspects of traits and skills needed to establish portfolio careers. Those authors who examined the social elements of transition focused on entry into a single workplace. While previous researchers recognized these important elements, I focused on the importance of relationships and social interactions needed to establish multifaceted careers as working artists and the formation of adult identities. These two challenges occur as life and career challenges affect recent college graduates

from music schools. This gap supports my study of musician career transition and development. I now turn to analytical theory to provide an interpretive lens for my findings and also contribute to my conceptual framework. I selected four theories to help analyze the themes emerging from the data. In the following section, I describe these theories and ways these theories relate to the lived experiences of young artists.

### **Analytical Theory**

Theory serves as an overarching framework for understanding the research question, illuminating stories to explain and interpret the issues while providing insights and deeper awareness to the phenomenon under study (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010; Maxwell, 2005). Existing theory plays an important role in qualitative research, but it must be used appropriately; while carefully chosen theory provides significant and necessary insights into a study, its overuse serves to impose theory on research, limiting its ability to develop naturally (Maxwell, 2005).

I used four theories to analyze the phenomenon of college to work transitions in young musicians. First, a newer theory, emerging adulthood, helped explain transitions and changes from postadolescence to achieving typical normative markers of young adulthood, such as marriage, family, and/or a somewhat stable career (Arnett, 2004). Secondly, I used identity theory to describe both inner/personal identity and outer/social aspects related to establishing personal, artistic, and professional identities. Third, self-efficacy theory determined how individuals perceive their abilities and motivate themselves to take action, a useful perspective in understanding adaptations and adjustments necessary in transitions (Bandura, 1994). Artistic identity and a focus on original creative composition emerged as a key finding of the study, so I used a systems-

based creativity theory to help explain individual creativity embedded within the field and domain of music as a fourth theoretical framework (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Gardner, 1993). Systems creativity theory also provides a social context for individual creativity. These four theories provided effective lenses for the study of young artists transitioning from college into professional work and align with the four principle themes of this study: artistic identity formation, transition from college to professional life, managing financial challenges, and seeking life/work balance. I begin with emerging adulthood to describe the demographic context of the study.

### **Emerging Adulthood**

From the 1950s to the first years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, scholars and popular culture publications recognized that markers of transition to adulthood appeared to be undergoing significant changes (Arnett, 2004; Henig, 2010). Whether termed quarterlife crisis (Robbins & Wilner, 2001; Wilner & Stocker, 2005; Vanrenen, 2007), emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2004), or odd combinations such as kidults or adultolescence (Hunter, 2009), the frequent postponing of traditional adult roles and trajectories of career, marriage, home purchase, and starting a family became increasingly common in Western cultures (Arnett, 2004).

Emerging adulthood, a term first coined by Jeffrey Arnett (2000), proposed a new developmental stage and life span theory of individuals from age 18 through the late 20s, rather than simply defining a time of transition between adolescence and young adulthood (Arnett, 2004). Arnett (2004) described emerging adulthood as “a period of independent exploration” without the oversight (by parents and teachers) of adolescence and before the onset of fully adult responsibilities like marriage, parenthood, or even

committed career paths (Arnett, 2004, p. 4). Arnett maintained that emerging adulthood consists of a distinct period of identity exploration and instability, marked by highly self-focused, transitory, and yet optimistic discovery, and not merely a time of transition (Arnett, 2004). Emerging adulthood marks an extraordinarily optimistic and hopeful time when all dreams seem possible, “because for most people the range of their choices for how to live is greater than it ever has been and greater than it will ever be again” (Arnett, 2004, p. 17), an ideal alignment for pursuing the unstable and riskier career options available in the entertainment and music industries.

Rather than the quarterlife crisis view of this period as filled with angst and transition (Robbins & Willner, 2001), the perspective of emerging adulthood provides opportunities for the exploration of self and the world with openness to possibilities not yet colored or jaded by life experiences (Arnett, 2004). Through the theoretical lens of emerging adulthood, I sought to understand the experiences of these young artists in the first few years following college graduation, investigating young artists’ perceptions of their personal explorations and transitions and their paths toward personal and professional identity development as they pursue their vocational dreams and aspirations.

In this study, I focused on emerging adulthood concepts related to work and career development. Work proves essential to identity development in emerging adults (Murphy, Blustein, & Bohlig, 2010). The generation coming of age in the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century seeks to combine their interests and abilities with their self-identity, to create enjoyable and meaningful careers (Arnett, 2004; Schwartz, Coté, & Arnett, 2005). Arnett (2004) speculated riskier or unusual career choices may serve as key points of exploration in emerging adulthood. Because Arnett performed as a musician during his

emerging adulthood years, he added his personal experience and perspective to these challenges (Arnett, personal correspondence, January 21, 2010). The alignment of emerging adulthood and the exploration of a nontraditional career, such as popular music performance, reinforces the use of this theoretical lens for analysis.

For those whose career goals reside in the highly competitive but often financially unstable fields of arts, entertainment, and athletics, artistic work identity may be rooted in childhood, providing additional challenges (Arnett, 2004). Young artists often form their identities and career perceptions in childhood, as talents and interests frequently emerge at early ages and may be encouraged by parents, teachers, growing networks of supporters, and other role models through educational and performance experiences, as well as self-designed opportunities, which might entail forming, booking, and performing with a band (Messersmith, Garrett, Davis-Kean, Malanchuk, & Eccles, 2008). I sought to learn about the ways this early artistic identity formation combined with varied support systems in potentially influencing later career choices.

The time of emerging adulthood spans the college years and well into early career (Arnett, 2004). The college years, in the United States in particular, remains a safe haven that aligns with key elements of emerging adulthood, such as personal and vocational identity exploration (Arnett, 2004). While many college students flounder as they search for personal and work alignment (Arnett, 2004), music students can appear more focused, perhaps attending specialty music colleges or conservatories to follow a long-standing passion and identified or tested talent.

Musicians in emerging adulthood continue the development of professional identities started earlier in life through ongoing discovery and clarification of personal

strengths and preferences (Arnett, 2004). Arnett provided several thoughts on the close relationship between an artist's work and his or her identity in a personal email correspondence:

Music/art is the kind of creative, fun work that many EAs would like to do, yet (I know!) it's a very difficult way to make a living. Musicians and artists usually see their music/art as being at the heart of their identities (in a way that, say, accountants do not). So, what happens in the course of the 20s as EAs in music/art collide with the reality of how difficult it is to live on the wages from those professions? How do they adapt their identities to that reality?

Also relevant is EA as the age of possibilities. I'm sure in the early 20s there are many talented EAs who see a glorious future for themselves in music/art; maybe not so many by the end of the 20s. Again, how do they respond to the harsh realities of their chosen professions? (Arnett, personal communication, January 21, 2010)

The optimism of emerging adults coincides with the stresses and challenges of this often extended transitional time (Murphy, Blustein, Bohlig, & Platt, 2008). The idealism of career choices personally aligned with identity, interests, and abilities may prove problematic when faced with the realities and expectations of the marketplace and the subsequent lifestyle demands within these fields (Arnett, 2004). Social support systems form critical elements of successful growth for emerging adults as they move from often homogeneous age and interest-based social connections in college to the broader diversity of workplace relationships (Murphy et al. 2010). With external social support and networks and internal psychological readiness encompassing agency,

adaptability, and resilience, and career flexibility supporting an ability to both survive and thrive, career opportunities and challenges may become realistic expectations (Murphy et al. 2010).

In this study, I learned about the attitudes and approaches of popular music students regarding their choice to attend music college rather than learn the field on the job without formal training. I wanted to know if they saw education as a core necessity for their career plans, as a time to mature and explore within the music field, or whether separation from the professional field while in school, along with the stresses from demanding course loads, outside work, impending debt, and employment unknowns preclude the benefits.

Much of the current research in the growing field of emerging adulthood concerns dysfunctions within this age group, including drug, alcohol, and tobacco use, effects of imprisonment, crime, mental health issues, foster care, and disease, along with other social issues such as sexuality, education, religion and spirituality, socioeconomic concerns, and cultural differences (Society for the Study of Emerging Adulthood [SSEA], 2010). Only a few studies of emerging adulthood address collegiate musicians, but not specifically from a career point of view. This study may contribute a new perspective to the growing body of emerging adulthood research by examining the transitions of young artists beyond formal education and into diverse career settings. Next, I consider identity theory, examining the melding of personal and artistic identities and the attainment of social roles influencing transitions into professional musical life.

## **Identity Theory**

Rooted in symbolic interactionism proposed by George Herbert Mead and developed by Herbert Blumer, identity theory recognizes the influence of individual behavior, emotions, evaluation, planning, and social connections, illustrating complex and mutually dependent relationships between individuals and society (Burke & Stets, 2009; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Identity theories appear in many social science fields, including psychology, sociology, history, psychoanalysis, and political science (Deaux & Burke, 2010; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Some identity theories emphasize the internal processes of individuals while others concentrate on external social structures (Stryker & Burke, 2000). However, the central importance of individual meaning-making remains an important common element in varied identity theories (Stryker & Burke, 2000).

In this study, I addressed this process and the interrelatedness of identity development and multiple role development within the multiple facets of young musicians' early portfolio careers. First, I address the substantial body of work on general identity issues during transition to work, followed by musician identity literature.

### **Identity Theories—General**

Every individual holds multiple identities and fulfills complex and interconnected roles throughout life, and the acquisition and evolution of these multiple identities transform over a lifetime (Kraus, 2012; Yellin, 1998). College graduation marks a profound time of role and identity change and discovery, regardless of career plans. Leaving the comfort and familiarity of an educational environment for work requires development of numerous modified or new identities and roles.

Stryker and Burke (2000) described identities as “self-meanings developed in the context of roles,” linking identities and roles (p.287). Identities held in prior situations may not be conducive to learning required in a new domain (Baker & Pifer, 2011). New identities in a workplace become a social construct cultivated with others, highlighting the importance of developmental networks in professional identity progression (Baker & Pifer, 2011; Dobrow & Higgins, 2005). Developmental networks also emphasize the importance of mentoring relationships, a key element in this study (Baker & Lattuca, 2010).

Role theory addresses the socialization of individuals into existing societal roles (Jackson, 1998), thereby providing social stability and cohesion while helping to avoid unnecessary social conflict (Jackson, 1998; Merton, 1957). Role theory identifies three core principles: social behaviors, role identity development, and the social expectations that result (Biddle, 1986; Nicolson, 1984; Yellin, 1999). Biddle (1986) stated expectations generate the roles and their resulting behaviors, and through this process, participants learn the personal and social expectations of a given role, ideally becoming both personally and socially aware in the process. Merton (1957) designated social status as a position in a hierarchical social system carrying both rights and obligations, along with varying degrees of power and authority.

Closely related to social status, the social role reflects behavior associated with a given social status, including attitudes, skills, and knowledge (Merton, 1957). Work settings, after family, form an important aspect of adult socialization along with identity and role development (Adler & Adler, 2005). All individuals within a society have numerous social statuses and corresponding social roles, creating complex webs of

interactive relationships (Merton, 1957). As young artists leave college, their previous statuses and roles shift, often dramatically, as they step into a variety of fluid and changing professional roles (Kraus, 2012).

Each of these professional statuses and roles requires a level of self-awareness enhanced by reflection and cultural understanding that can be encouraged by mentors or role models prior to graduation and throughout the transition into professional work (Kraus, 2012; Merton, 1957). For example, stellar musical and technical skills alone may not be sufficient for a party band where an appropriate look and high-energy showmanship engages listeners, demanding additional, layered roles and identities. An understanding of expected social behaviors within the various performance settings remains critical for successfully fulfilling socially appropriate roles (Jackson, 1998). Identity theories provided an effective lens to explore both the conscious and intuitive nature of professional identity and role acquisition in young artists.

Informal interaction impacts role development and contributes concepts of role taking, self concept, emotions, self presentation, and impression and identity management, all issues particularly relevant to this study of transitioning artists (Biddle, 1986).

### **Identity Theories—Musicians**

Music psychologists study all aspects of human interaction with music, whether listening or creating, along with the impact music has on individuals and society (O'Neill, 2002). Individuals, groups, and whole societies use music to express identity, unity, values, shared emotions and goals, and to celebrate or mourn. For nonmusicians, listeners and consumers of music, the personal and social power of music enhances social

and cultural identity development and realization (Hargreaves & Marshall, 2003;

Hargreaves, Miell, & MacDonald, 2002).

For young artists, a musical identity may emerge early, at about age 7 (Hargreaves, Miell, & MacDonald, 2002). Identity within music may focus on role (guitarist, songwriter), or even define distinct personality or lifestyle characteristics associated with particular instruments or genres of music (Hargreaves & Marshall, 2003). Further complicating definitions, artistic identity differs from professional identity within the music field (Mills, 2004). Mills (2004) defined professional identity as a multilayered public presentation of professional identity carefully selected by the performer, while other artistic aspects of identity may remain private (Mills, 2004). The identity of *musician* may be socially conferred, not personally selected, in the act of musical performance (O'Neill, 2002).

Portfolio careers necessitate a range of professional identities and a great versatility of musical and nonmusical skills (Bennett, 2008; Bennett, 2009; Carruthers, 2012; MacNamara, Holmes, & Collins, 2006). Johnsson and Hager (2008) suggested life long learning and relationship development may prove more important than specific skills.

Identity theory and role theory also help explain role conflicts. Life and career transitions can lead to social, intellectual, musical, or emotional crises affecting identity development (Manturzewska, 1990). Professional musicians deviate from normative career paths and societal expectations, representing additional potential role conflicts for young artists (Clarke, 2011; Frederickson & Rooney, 1988).

Various perspectives on identity development apply to the varied portfolio work settings of musicians. Identifying role development elements central in the college to career transition process and combining these concepts with emerging adulthood theory helps to better understand the age group in question. Identity and role development align closely with self-perception and self-efficacy, the third analytical theory.

### **Self-Efficacy Theory**

Fundamental to successful transitions, self-efficacy serves as an individual's belief in his or her own ability to effectively cope with a challenging situation (Bandura, 1977a). Bandura's basic definition of self-efficacy as "experiences of mastery arising from successful performance," relates directly to a performing musician's experience (Bandura, 1977a, p.79; Bandura, 1977b).

Bandura (1994) defined four sources for building self-efficacy. First, mastery experiences provide the most productive and effective means to achieving the resilience and persistence necessary to overcome significant challenges and helps develop self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994). Musicians practice these skills intensely over many years in developing their craft. The second source of building self-efficacy involves social models (Bandura, 1994). Chapter 4 discusses the impact on young artists of mentors and other support systems. Bandura (1994) did not view these social models as teachers in positions of authority or hierarchy. Instead, he emphasized the importance of an individual's similarity with the model in demonstrating higher or lower self-efficacy. As young artists begin working professionally, they perform with musical colleagues of widely varied experience, ages, and attitudes, providing rich opportunities for social modeling.

Bandura (1994) identified encouragement, or “social persuasion” (p.2) as a third means to strengthen self-efficacy. Here, he recognized the importance of positive but authentic encouragement reinforced by success (Bandura, 1994). Musicians learn and develop experience through a variety of tiered performance opportunities varying in prestige, expectations, and pressure. Carefully managed, these opportunities can develop the young musician’s confidence and stage savvy. Finally, the fourth means of increasing self-efficacy involves reducing negative emotional and physical stress responses (Bandura, 1994). Individuals with low self-efficacy find stress responses debilitating while high self-efficacy individuals find stress responses energizing (Bandura 1994).

Similar to self-efficacy theory, the theory of symbolic self-completion states individuals use a variety of indicators to prove competence and attainment in a particularly domain (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1981). Three components define symbolic self-completion: (a) commitment to self-defining goals requires persistence in pursuing specific identity goals; (b) symbols of completeness define competencies for others, for example, by musical performance; (c) self-completion depends on the social reality of acknowledgement from others (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1981).

Musicians deal with varying degrees of stress, frequently showcasing their talents and preparation on stage. Stress responses may energize the performer or create performance anxiety. Raising self-efficacy may help ensure an energized response to performance situations and mitigate anxiety. General self-efficacy may increase when individuals apply skills learned in mastering music to life as well as to music career challenges. Managing stresses related to developing a portfolio career in music calls for

motivational and self-efficacy processes such as effort, perseverance, resilience, the ability to make decisions, and, specific to career, work performance and satisfaction (Bandura, 1977a; Bennett, in press; Locke, 1997; Pajares, 1997).

Intrinsic motivation, pursuing an activity purely for enjoyment and interest, supports self-efficacy since both require self-perceived mastery and also require autonomy and self-determination to sustain (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Core artistic identity represents an intrinsic motivation to create and perform music (Parkes & Jones, 2011). Ryan and Deci (2000) acknowledged the importance of intrinsic motivation but stated it “becomes increasingly curtailed by social demands and roles” (p.60), the numerous tasks and duties inherent in adult lives. Conversely, extrinsic motivation requires a “separable outcome” reward (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p.60). For musicians, extrinsic motivators might include fan response, financial rewards, critical acclaim, and independence. Personal self-efficacy, along with intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, provide useful perspectives in analyzing early career challenges for the participants. Artistic creation links closely with artistic identity and self-efficacy, forming a central finding of this study. A systems-based creativity theory forms the fourth analytical theory.

### Creativity Theories

Numerous creativity theories have emerged from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present in cognitive and developmental psychology, psychometrics, social research, and many more fields, providing insights into the creative mind (Runco, 2004; Sawyer, 2003). Many creativity researchers focus on the individual, those people who are “personally creative,” (p.25) or intellectually stimulating (Csikszentimihalyi, 1996). These approaches take an “everyday creativity” perspective to capturing creativity, emphasizing personal

characteristics and immediate outcomes of creative thought (Runco, 2004, p. 678).

However, Csikszentmihalyi focused instead on “capital C” creativity, emphasizing how creativity changes the culture in some fashion (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, p.27).

Connections between developmental and creativity theory evolved from the 1970s on, emphasizing creativity as a process rather than a trait description of individuals (Sawyer, 2003). Creativity develops not as an isolated personal activity, but as part of complex social systems (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988/1997; Gardner, 1988/1993). Situating creativity within society and communities of practice provides a deeper, richer, and more accurate perspective on the potential impact of creative work. The impact of creative work, both on the field and domain of music and in society at large, proves interdependent (McIntyre, 2008).

The systems theory of creativity recognizes how individuals work with the languages of a culturally-based domain in conjunction with a social field; the culture selects and validates creative products (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988/1997; Gardner, 1988/1993). The systems approach does not isolate the individual as a creator in a vacuum. Instead, the systems view integrates the individual with cultural and social elements already embedded in the process and not generally acknowledged in the trait approach to creativity (Sawyer, 2003).

Csikszentmihalyi described three basic elements to a systems-based creativity theory. First, the overarching domain, embedded in the culture, includes language, symbols, and rules unifying the domain. The second element, the field, includes the “gatekeepers to the domain,” who facilitate and determine the inclusion of new creative products or ideas into the domain (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, p. 28). Individuals who use

the symbol systems of the domain to create something potentially new or novel represent the third element in the creativity system (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996).

Csikszentmihalyi (1996) defined creativity as: "Any act, idea, or product that changes an existing domain, or that transforms an existing domain into a new one" (p. 28). He explained the necessity of the "explicit or implicit consent of a field responsible for it" to complete the process (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996 p. 28). Gardner (1993) defined similar parameters, including the elements of consistent problem solving, novelty, and ultimate acceptance within a domain. Csikszentmihalyi defined and described distinctions between domains and fields and their relationships to individuals, framing the importance of all three elements in realizing the full potential of creativity and the creative act (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996).

### **Summary**

I used four analytical theories to expand my understanding regarding the transition experiences of young artists: identity theory, emerging adulthood, self-efficacy, and creativity theory. These theories provided insights into individual and social aspects of the college to work transition and the early establishment of sustainable artistic lives for young artists.

Emerging adulthood theory proposes a new stage in life span theory that spans approximately age 18 through the 20s. In Western industrial societies, this period of exploration, risk, and reflection may delay the more traditional expectations of young adulthood. A slower path to traditional markers of adulthood provides opportunities for young artists to practice their art and establish themselves as professional artists. Identity theory considers the uniqueness and motivations of the individual and his/her multiple

roles as a member of numerous groups and of larger society (Burke & Stets, 2009).

Similarly, role theory provides insights about the acquisition of societal and work-related life roles. Together, identity and role theories acknowledge the interrelated and complex nature of individuals' many evolving roles in life and work. An individual's self-efficacy determines levels of intrinsic motivation and resilience vital to achievement in the music industry and in personal life choices. Finally, systems-based creativity theory provides insights into a creative individual's artistic process in the context of the field and domain of music and larger society. These four theories provided effective tools for examining the unstable, flexible, portfolio careers most frequent among young artists of the current generation, informing my understanding of the research question. I adopted a qualitative research method to conduct my research and describe methodology next.

### Chapter 3: Methodology

I chose qualitative research to explore and examine in detail the complex, lived experiences of young music college graduates as they moved through a process of identity transformation after leaving formal education and entering the multiple work settings common to multifaceted portfolio careers. Qualitative research focuses on naturalistic, contextual settings and the interpretation of individuals' experiences, a methodology well suited to observing and learning from musicians (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Creswell, 1998; Henscheid & Keup, 2011). An inductive process, qualitative research begins with amassing detailed information and then, through a highly interpretive process, discovering significant themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Henscheid, 2011) to create a "complex, holistic picture" (Creswell, 1998, p. 15). Through this qualitative study, I realized an intimate view of the transition experiences of these young performing artists. The process enabled me to better understand factors affecting the challenges and rewards of this significant life transition. To focus on the lived experience of the participants, I used a phenomenological approach. Using phenomenology, I focused on the lived experience of young artists after graduation from music college. Phenomenology helped balance my connections and potential biases to the topic as a researcher, while exploring the essence of young artists' personal experiences with identity transformation and professional transitions.

#### **Phenomenology**

Defined as focusing on the "meaning of the lived experience for several individuals about a concept or phenomenon" (Creswell, 1998, p. 51), phenomenological research studies examine "subjective aspects of people's behavior" (Bogdan & Biklen,

2003, p. 23). Smith (2011) described phenomenology as “the study of the structures of experience or consciousness” (n.p.).

The roots of phenomenology date back to 18<sup>th</sup> century German idealist philosophers Kant (1724-1804) and Hegel (1770-1831), who used the term phenomenology to describe lived experience (Creswell, 1998; Moustakis, 1994; Smith, 2011). Moustakis (1994) described Hegel’s perspective on phenomenology as “the science of describing what one perceives, senses, and knows in one’s immediate awareness and experience” (p. 26). Through open interview questions and lengthy, semi-structured interviews, I supported participants’ in sharing personal, individual experiences and awareness.

Credited as the founder of the philosophy of phenomenology, Husserl (1859-1938) described several key elements, including the search for a central essence to the lived experience and an understanding of experiences grounded in both external appearances and an inner consciousness (Creswell, 1998; Smith, 2011). This ‘central essence’ often began to emerge during the interview process, as participants considered their lived experiences in the music world after college and reflected upon their responses to these experiences over time. Husserl described phenomenology as nonpositivist, emphasizing the importance of intuition and essence over strictly empirical evidence (Moustakis, 1994; Smith, 2011). Husserl developed a “philosophical system rooted in subjective openness” (Moustakis, 1994, p.25). Exploring intuition and essence served as a natural process for young creative artists, enabling thoughtful and well considered responses.

Phenomenologists attempt to avoid preconceptions about others' experiences while recognizing the researcher also holds a perspective on the phenomenon and accounting for the researcher's potential biases (Groenewald, 2004). As a teacher and researcher with many years of experience in working with young artists' career development, I recognized an important need to manage potential biases. Data analysis in phenomenology involves searching the data broadly for common themes and any possible meanings, and requires the researcher to bracket, or clearly separate personal experiences to avoid prejudgments or biases while demanding "intuition, imagination, and universal structures" to understand the participants' experiences (Creswell, 1998, p.52). Using a phenomenological approach provided an effective process for managing biases while maximizing my deep background in aspects of musician career development.

Phenomenology proved a deeply rich method to illustrate and analyze the lived experiences of the young artists in this study from both individual and social interaction perspectives (Creswell, 1998). While focused on the essence of each individual's responses to these issues, social connections and interactions remain an important and integral aspect of the concepts and issues in this study. I first delineate methods used in conducting my study and then follow by describing the process of seeking permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct my study.

### **Recruitment and Selection of Participants**

I used a purposeful selection process to identify participants selected primarily from a college of popular music in the Midwest. I contacted individuals who graduated within the past 5 years. Fifteen young artists volunteered to participate with openness

and enthusiasm for the project. The group included five women and 10 men for whom music performance served as a primary source of artistic expression and some percentage of income. The popular music field remains heavily male, reflecting the gender balance in my study (Whitely, 1997).

I conducted the interviews from March through May 2013. At the time of the interview, participants ranged in age from 23 to 28 and had graduated from college nine months to 5 years prior to our interviews. I selected graduates with a range of musical and professional experience. While in college, the participants demonstrated the talent, intrinsic motivation, and work ethic for potential success as professional performers. I deemed these characteristics vital to the intentions of this study. Table 1 shows demographic information for each participant. The age listed in Table 1 reflects each participant's age when interviewed.

Table 1

*Participants*

Pseudonym	Age	Grad Year	Instrument	Ethnicity	Gender
Anthony	24	2011	Guitar	European American	Male
Matt	24	2011	Voice	African American	Male
Mike	27	2009	Saxophone	European American	Male
Jack	25	2011	Voice	European American	Male
Kyle	26	2011	Keyboards	European American	Male
Christina	23	2012	Violin	European American	Female
Alyssa	26	2009	Saxophone	European American	Female
Derek	25	2011	Guitar	European American	Male
Jared	24	2011	Drums	European American	Male
Bryan	25	2011	Bass	European American	Male
Caitlin	25	2010	Voice	European American	Female
Riann	24	2011	Voice	European American	Female
Tommy	25	2012	Voice	European American	Male
Ashley	23	2012	Musical Theatre	European American	Female
Allen	28	2008	Drums	European American	Male

Nine participants started some professional performance work prior to graduating from college. Six started their careers after graduation. After college, some found success in ways they anticipated, others moved in unanticipated directions, and some struggled to some degree.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection in this study involved conducting substantive individual interviews with participants, supplemented with my memos and reflections. Prior to beginning interviews, I considered and noted my personal biases and assumptions regarding the transitions of young artists from college to professional environments. I also considered and noted my professional relationship with each participant. This process of bracketing forms an important step in phenomenological research (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Because of my background and research in working with young artists in high school and college and having two artist sons who had gone through similar transition processes, I made some assumptions about the nature of transition and some of the difficulties experienced when establishing a professional career. I used this experiential knowledge and data to enrich the study while remaining personally aware and critical of the assumptions and values I brought to the research process (Maxwell, 2005).

I periodically used “researcher identity memos” to examine my experiential knowledge and reflect upon my values and assumptions related to this study (Maxwell, 2005, p. 39). I worked regularly with a musician/scholar colleague who helped me assess my methods and analyses throughout the process. I developed “explicitly descriptive, non-evaluative note taking” strategies (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 203).

## Interview Preparation

I invited the participants to take part in the study via an emailed letter (Appendix A). As each person agreed to participate, we set a mutually agreeable day, time, and place to meet for the interview. I conducted all interviews one-on-one and face-to-face to establish a similar level of personal contact with each participant. Interview locations included coffee shops, private homes, a library, a bookstore, a participant's workplace, and public atriums. Two interviews took place in Los Angeles, close to the homes of two participants. I conducted the remaining interviews at various locations in the same Midwest metropolitan area. I took care to find quiet, semiprivate locations for the interviews in public places.

Before each interview, I reviewed the protective features, including confidentiality and the voluntary nature of the study. I used a script to inform the interviewee of the study's purpose (Appendix B). I then asked each interviewee to describe their understanding of the study, asking clarifying questions to ascertain their understanding of the research intent and their rights as participants (Appendix C). Using five open-ended questions, I confirmed each interviewee's understanding of the process. The five questions included: (a) How do you understand the purpose of this study? (b) What is your understanding of how information will be kept confidential? (c) What are your risks in participating? (d) What are your options if you feel unable answering a question? (e) What can you do if you feel uncomfortable taking part in the study?

After answering any additional questions from the interviewee, I next asked the interviewee to sign two copies of a consent form (Appendix D) that I also signed. The interviewee received one copy of the signed consent form for his/her records. The

interviewee also completed a Research Participant Intake Form (Appendix E) to confirm contact information. I filed the consent form and intake form in a master folder I created for each participant. I designed open-ended interview questions (Appendix F) to elicit conversation and answers beyond the obvious or expected and to help generate thoughtful, reflective, and personal responses (Maxwell, 2005). Prior to interviewing, I attempted to anticipate some ways participants might respond and react to individual questions (Maxwell, 2005). Many of the participants consisted of former students; this eased the conversation but also posed some challenges. I balanced this familiarity with the formality and structure vital to the researcher–participant relationship and every interviewee responded appropriately.

### **Interview Process**

After obtaining consent, I used a digital recorder to record each interview. I started each interview with a broad and open-ended question: Tell me about your life currently. What has it been like to leave college and start this phase of your life? I used the interview questions in Appendix F as guiding questions to cover general areas of interest. I used a notebook to record impressions, follow up questions, and highlights during the interview and wrote reflections in the form of “notes to self” following the interviews. I filed my interview notes in each participant’s master folder.

Interviews ranged from 45 minutes to almost 120 minutes in length, averaging about 90 minutes. In qualitative research, the participants’ perspectives evolve through long, intensive, conversational-style interviews emphasizing participants’ lived experiences of the phenomenon, and I observed this process unfold with each interview (Maxwell, 2005; Moustakis, 1994). I took time at the beginning of each interview to

establish rapport and a comfortable atmosphere (Moustakis, 1994). During the interview, I strived to use an emic perspective, focusing on the participant's outlook, rather than an etic perspective focused on my viewpoint (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). I focused on respecting and validating participants' points of view and interpretation of experience (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). I continued conducting long, intensive interviews until I recognized a point of data saturation, concluding after 15 interviewees (Groenewald, 2004).

The interview questions provided a semistructured approach to the interview process. I used the open-ended questions to guide the conversation initially and provide focus for several broad topics (Moustakas, 1994). However, the questioning process allowed and encouraged each participant to respond beyond the parameters of a direct question. I used the questions as prompts during the interview, ensuring I asked questions in several topic areas, including college to career transition and identity transformation. When participants wished to steer the interview in specific directions, I listened carefully and made adjustments to hear the participant's story.

### **Interview Questions**

I asked interview questions divided into three categories: background, identity, and additional.

**Background questions.** I asked the following background questions:

1. Tell me about your life currently. What has it been like to leave college and start this phase of your life?
2. Tell me how your career has evolved over the past five years (before and since graduating).

3. How do you describe your professional goals at this point in your career?
4. Tell me about your support systems. How do others help you professionally, personally, financially?

**Identity questions.** I asked the following identity questions:

1. Tell me about your expectations for professional life prior to graduating.
2. How do those expectations compare with your experiences since finishing school?
3. When did you begin to consider yourself a “professional musician”?
4. Tell me about your biggest challenges in moving from student to professional status.
5. Describe the different types of work you do within your profession or in other areas to sustain yourself financially.
6. What non-musical skills have you found important in managing your career?

Describe the type of activities and the knowledge and skills needed to manage your career.

7. What personal qualities or traits have positively or negatively affected your transition out of school and into professional life?
8. How does your work affect your self-esteem and view of yourself? What is the role of music in your personal identity and life?

**Additional questions.** I asked the following additional questions:

1. On a continuum from smooth to challenging, how was the transition from college to work? Give this a rating from 1- 10 and offer reasons why you assess this experience in this way.
2. Tell me about the influence of mentors in school and since graduating. Who are

they and how did they help you? What types of support did they offer?

3. Tell me about your initial experiences rehearsing and performing in professional settings and compare those with your experiences in college. What differences did you experience? Looking back on your school preparation, what gaps or strengths prepared you for your current challenges and experiences?
4. How do your interactions with others affect your career?
5. Do you consider yourself entrepreneurial? How?
6. What has been your biggest surprise about the professional world since leaving college?
7. What areas of your experience may add to my understanding of your transition from school to work as a professional musician?

### **Postinterview**

Immediately after each interview, I downloaded the recording to my personal, password-protected laptop. I backed up each interview to password-protected hard drives and my private Dropbox account. I then personally transcribed each interview using DragonDictate software. I printed out each transcript, placing the printed document in each interviewee's individual folder with the consent form, intake form, and my handwritten notes and reflections from the interview. I sent a transcript of each interview to the respective interviewee via email for review and approval.

I began the analysis process by rewriting and reorganizing my observer comments and memos, noting new insights, relationships, and emerging categories (Maxwell, 2005). This iterative process helped to deepen my understanding as I explored the

interview transcripts for connections and expanded into the full data analysis process, described in the following section.

## **Data Analysis**

I carefully planned and organized a systematic process to provide focus, efficiency, and clarity to the analysis of data. A balance of efficiency and flexibility provided effective organization while avoiding rigidity or presuppositions and allowing openness to serendipity (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). An inductive analysis process helped me in “discovering patterns, themes and categories in [one’s] data”(Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 159). This plan included inprocess analysis while collecting, organizing, coding, and categorizing the data. I used personal notes, a spreadsheet, and interview transcripts to begin organizing emerging themes. I then entered the interview transcripts into HyperResearch qualitative data analysis software to thoroughly discover and code for relevant themes and categories.

I addressed each interview transcript through a continuous and iterative analytical process (Maxwell, 2005). I read, coded, and annotated each transcript multiple times, identifying, adjusting and rewriting categories and refining themes as the data required. Maxwell (2005) described three categories for coding data. The first category, organizational, served to capture and organize the broad issues. This stage provided an opportunity to view the data from a macro level as I looked for emerging common themes.

Maxwell (2005), however, expressed caution about getting stuck at the organizational stage. He suggested organizational categories lead to substantive categories, focusing on descriptive data, and may be able to capture unexpected ideas

(Maxwell, 2005). In my study, this second stage opened unanticipated recurring thematic ideas, including life balance and financial sustainability. Finally, theoretical categories may include either existing theories or inductive theory growing out of the study (Bogdan & Bicklen, 2003; Maxwell, 2005). Over time, four relevant theoretical foundations emerged, providing interrelated theoretical frameworks for data analysis. I kept Maxwell's three coding categories in mind as I reviewed and evaluated the data for patterns and developed appropriate coding categories throughout the process (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). HyperResearch provided an effective tool to identify and manage recurring themes and later helped me reduce these themes into major categories and subcategories for reporting findings.

Initial categories became evident through close and continual analysis. By comparing similarities and differences in the data, categories began to emerge (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Categories and related subcategories developed continuously through ongoing testing against the data (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Axial coding expanded on these initial categories and subcategories by including context, influences, causal conditions, and patterns that led to related consequences and created new perspectives (Creswell, 1998).

### **Validity and Evaluative Criteria**

I addressed validity issues by identifying specific potential threats to the viability of the study, "the relationships of your conclusions to reality" (Maxwell, 2005, p.105). Testing the validity of conclusions served to assess the credibility, interpretations, and explanations of the study results (Maxwell, 2005). Potential validity concerns in qualitative studies consist of two important elements: (a) researcher bias, marked by

potential preconceptions, values, and expectations toward study results; and (b) reactivity, the inevitable influences of the researcher's presence during the study (Maxwell, 2005). I handled these validity concerns by continually noting my personal biases along with providing open-ended interview questions to encourage personal perspectives among the interviewees. I made consistent efforts to present a neutral demeanor in the interview process, recognizing an inability to present absolutely consistent neutrality. I reassured interviewees no hidden or overt agenda existed for results, and any and all opinions provided value to the study.

I employed a number of data collection and analysis methods to help substantiate the validity of this study. I strived for rich data collection methods resulting from my detailed notes and memos on interviews, participant feedback through the review of their interview transcripts, and the inclusion of negative participant examples (Maxwell, 2005). I supported increased dependability by careful accounting for changes through the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). To further maximize validity, I addressed issues of researcher bias by analyzing data with an open mind and avoiding reaching premature conclusions. Analyzing participants' responses with care and developing findings through a careful approach to data analysis reduced researcher bias. Ongoing comparisons of the data played an important role in overcoming bias and subjective expectations (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). I recognize transferability or generalization remains problematic with qualitative studies (Maxwell, 2005; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). I present data, themes, and analyses understanding the participant sample size does not provide for generalizability, yet furnished a valuable perspective.

## **Ethical Issues and Confidentiality**

Ethical considerations remain a central concern in qualitative research, informing both the research process and the relationships between the researcher and the participants. To this end, I treated participants respectfully at all times, beginning with a cosigned letter of informed consent carefully outlining the research process and expectations (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). I offered participants the opportunity to review and edit their interview transcripts (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) and provided direct and honest descriptions of the study's purpose (Creswell, 1998). The participants had ongoing access to me as researcher via email and Facebook messages. Some participants took advantage of this access to contact me with questions. I arranged careful, secure management and storage of materials to further ensure confidentiality (Creswell, 1998).

As adults with no particular needs or affiliations, no overt risk existed to participation (Bogdan& Biklen, 2003). Some participants found the personal nature of the project and the interview questions occasionally challenging, but several mentioned a personal benefit to reflecting on the interview questions and their personal experience of transition. I commend the openness, trust, and spirit of sharing each participant exhibited throughout this process.

## **Protecting Confidentiality**

I made every effort possible to ensure and support participant anonymity by using pseudonyms, and participation remained completely voluntary throughout the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The letter of informed consent also outlined the methods of storage and disposal of documents and recordings (Bogdan

& Biklen, 2003; Creswell, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). All documents and recordings generated during the study remain confidential and have been stored securely. I took great care to avoid any information identifying any participants in participants' files (contact information, transcriptions, etc.). I have stored all digital documents on my personal password-protected laptop computer, a backup hard drive in my home office, in cloud storage via my personal Dropbox account, and in personal, password-protected email accounts. These records include recordings and transcriptions of interviews and some additional hard copy documentation, such as memos and observer comments.

I created several different types of documents, including intake forms with demographic information, documents including consent forms and field notes/memos, recordings of the interviews, transcriptions of the interview recordings, and documents (hard copy and digital) from the interviews used for analysis. I stored all hard copies securely in my home office. I removed recording disks from the recording device and stored them securely in my home office after each interview. I downloaded interview recordings from the recording device to my password protected home office computer. Dr. Sarah Noonan, my dissertation chair, and I remain the only individuals with access to the documents, recordings, and transcripts of this study.

Six months after successful defense of the dissertation, I will delete and/or shred, as appropriate, all field notes, transcriptions, memos, audio recordings, intake forms, and any other confidential materials. The remaining transcribed interviews will be stored on my password-protected laptop and back up drive in my home office. I will destroy intake forms, researcher notes, and interview transcriptions compiled using pseudonyms and the original forms and notes within 6 months of successful defense of my dissertation.

## **UST Institutional Review Board Permission and Guidelines**

I submitted the appropriate forms and the study application to the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board (IRB) through IRBnet.org after successfully defending my proposal on December 17, 2012. The IRB approved the study (396962-1) by evaluating and validating the ethical requirements for the study related to the protection of the participants. I provided appropriate safeguards as required by the University of St. Thomas IRB, even though there were no substantive threats to participants. These safeguards included a thorough and informed consent process, the use of pseudonyms throughout the study, and secure storage of research-related documents and recordings as required. Following approval from the IRB, I began formal recruitment of the participants.

### **Summary**

I completed a qualitative research study using a phenomenological approach to learn about the lived experiences of young popular music artists as they transition from higher education to the world of the professional music industry. I followed carefully prescribed procedures to ensure participant confidentiality and anonymity, and took care to acknowledge and bracket my biases. I interviewed 15 young artists. The University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board provided protection of study participants.

## Chapter 4: Forming an Artistic Identity

The essence of a creative person is the uniqueness of his or her ideas and behavior. (Feist, 1998, p.290)

Young artists find themselves drawn to music and a musical life. Considered a calling or perhaps a core essence, a drive or a passion, many participants emphasized the central importance of music in their lives, beginning early in life. This drive may emanate from the strong connections made between personal identity and artistic identity, the two fused together as one—a core identity.

Early life influences and experiences affect the development of an artistic identity, whether participants grew up in artistic or nonartistic families. Artists benefitted from family support, mentors, and formal education to form an artistic identity and advance their musical talents and interests from childhood to adulthood and the pursuit of a professional career. Many types of mentors affected artistic growth for these musicians, including teachers and former teachers, family members, colleagues, friends, and acquaintances. I first describe how 9 young artists recognized the centrality of a unique artistic identity, and then trace the ongoing formation of an artistic identity from childhood through adolescence and college years, nurtured by family, other mentors, and educational experiences.

### **Artistic and Personal Identity Recognized**

Kyle described the melding of his personal and artistic identities: “I’m hoping that it leads somewhere because it’s weird, I want to do this because it’s me.” He continued, connecting an inner artistic drive with the hope that his art reaches others and makes a difference in the world:

Is it absolutely important to be an artist? I don't know. People who are artists have wrestled with the meaning for centuries. But they still do it, there's something there. I guess that's the hope, that someone would have an experience, be moved.

Kyle blended his personal and artistic identity, describing a life-long goal: "My personal identity is what I can feel the best about when I'm dead. Something I could feel good about or something that I can contribute to the world, a legacy. These [my songs] are my babies."

Matt temporarily lost his passion for creating music while exploring nonprofit education as a career path, but soon recovered music's important role in his life. He said, "Music makes me feel good. It's a release of self because I'm a creative person. Doing music allows me to be me." Similar to Matt, Mike decided to focus on composition rather than performance, initially expressing this decision as a loss: "This conversation is almost more about my transition out of music rather than into music." Mike described the links between his music, his sense of self, and the ways he examines the world through the lens of music. "My passion for music is closely linked to my self-esteem. Music is a clear lens for looking at other things and the end result is more than music alone." Ashley said simply, "I am an artistic being."

Derek initially argued for separation between the artist and the self as an individual: "Finding other ways to define yourself, aside from music, is good. It's not to say that music can't be one of prominent factors, but I think being able to relate to people outside of the music atmosphere is very important." But he admitted:

I think it becomes a pretty closely entwined thing from musicians or any artists.

What you do is such an expression of who you are. How you perceive yourself

and also how other people are judging you and choosing or not to pay you money for gigs and whatnot. It's really, really tough to separate the two.

All aspects of the creative life suit Riann, whether performing, writing music, or entertaining:

I got the tattoo that says my life motto, ‘dance to find freedom, sing to express emotion, and perform to survive.’ And so that’s the tattoo on my ribs. That’s what makes me who I am, and I’ve always known that. Music is intertwined in all of that.

Music represents Riann’s core identity. She developed her identity, adopting practical approaches to balance the realities of art and life, enabling the pursuit of music on her own terms.

Tommy transitioned from aspirations in music performance to high-level work in the music industry. Along with his successes in music business, Tommy retained his artistic identity centered on writing and performing music: “I would be a mess if I didn’t still have opportunities to be creative.” The career demands in his international artist development firm relegated writing and performing music to an avocational pursuit rather than vocation in his current life. From an outside view, writing, playing, and performing music appear as a hobby for Tommy. However, his artistic identity as a singer and songwriter stem from a core artistic identity. His artistic sensibility informs his work in his day job and often inspires his own creative work: “Work has opened up new creative opportunities and possibilities for me. It’s helped me grow as a songwriter, helped me grow as a producer, helped me grow in my recording knowledge because I’m surrounded by creativity all day.”

Some young artists discovered a life in music presented not a choice but an inevitable path. Christina said, “I’ve always had the advantage of knowing what I wanted to do.” She noted the downside to a preordained route: “Because I always knew what I wanted to do, I never branched out to try anything new.” Caitlin received consistent acknowledgement of her natural gifts and embraced her identity as a singer from a young age:

I think I got used to everybody telling me I was so good when I was little. “Oh my God, you’re so good.” “Oh my God, you should be on American Idol.” “You’re going to be famous.” And so I was like, hell yeah, I’m going to be famous!

Music forms the core individual identity of these artists. Less a conscious choice than an unconscious drive, these young musicians find themselves compelled to perform and create music, whatever the personal benefits or cost. Both intentionally and serendipitously, they continue to discover and create in pursuit of a personally meaningful artistic life. They remain intrinsically motivated to pursue music as performers and, as became evident in this study, as composers.

Next, I describe the impact and influences of family members and other mentors. A demonstrated, intrinsic desire to make music along with personal and professional support eventually led to the decision to attend a specialty music college or conservatory, an alternative often perceived by family and society as a risky educational choice. While all the artists in this study graduated from a music college, 6 shared stories related to their college experience and the impact of formal education on emerging careers.

## **Forming an Artistic Identity**

Artistic identity forms at a young age, influenced and inspired by family and mentors. The next section describes artistic influences and support during childhood and emerging adulthood provided by parents, partners, teachers, and mentors. I also describe the decision to attend music college and the impact of formal education on artistic identity development.

### **Childhood Artistic Influences and Support**

Some young artists enjoyed the influence of artistic environments and musical experiences in childhood. Many young artists, whether raised in artistic families or not, felt their interests and talents supported and nurtured from an early age. Adults provided emotional support by sustaining the process-oriented acquisition of skills, attending lessons and performance events, and encouraging children's interests and talents. Family constituted important primary support structures for these participants. Many young artists mentioned parents, grandparents, siblings, and partners who provided financial and moral support for their artistic interests and activities. Many parents (and grandparents) provided personal and financial support through childhood, paying for instruments, music lessons, and camps, and later helping with college expenses. Parents and families also modeled aesthetic values, helping to develop an inherent worth to art and music.

Artistic influences began in childhood for many young artists. Some artists grew up in musical and artistic families with musician parents or siblings providing a supportive atmosphere and role models of creative expression and formal learning. Surrounded by music at home, these artists found a strong attraction to creative activities from an early age. Alyssa remembered a childhood of creative activity, modeling the

value of art, music, and dance: "Music was always a part of my life. I was surrounded by arts at different times. Music, acting, this house that we're in right now was just a hotbed of creativity for me as a child." Through adolescence, music and dance remained central in her life. "It gave me confidence. It was great; I loved it. I just love performing. There's just something about being on a stage in front of people and just expressing myself that was so fulfilling."

Christina also grew up in a musical household. "Both my parents were musicians. First (my dad) was in a rock band, then engineering, then sound, then he worked in a music store." Jack sees his dad as an important influence: "He plays guitar and piano now. He was in a band. I kind of followed his lead. I think he feels partly responsible for me getting so involved in music. I have the most desire in my family for music." Ashley said, "[I was] born into a family of artists and musicians. My mom plays the violin; my dad plays the viola, my stepdad plays bassoon--everybody's a musician in my family." A career in music also feels second nature to Riann: "Both of my parents are musicians so even though they're in Florida, everything we're doing they are just awesome about, always words of encouragement. Ashley's mother, a musician herself, recognized her child's artistic talents and passions while understanding the challenges of a musician's life:

My mom knew it was going to be hard so she would say things like, "don't you want to be a singing pediatrician?" And I thought, "well, not really, mom," and she said "okay." She knew then. It wasn't like she was really trying to push me. So I've been totally supported artistically by my family forever. And I'm eternally grateful for that.

Other young artists grew up in supportive, if not musical, families. Strong musical influences from family proved limited for Kyle. His father played “a very little bit of guitar.” Though lacking strong musical models at home, Kyle’s family supported his interests and he began piano lessons as a young child. Kyle had no memory of learning to play the piano: “I started when I was like six, I hardly remember.”

Kyle forged his own musical path through childhood and adolescence. Along with playing piano, Kyle’s compositional interests emerged at an early age: “I started writing music when I was very young and I wrote some pretty cool piano songs when I was eight or nine.” Soon after, he assembled random bands of friends to jam together and explore musical ideas. Support from family enabled Kyle’s musical development but Kyle said, “Nobody in my family is in the music business. I was kind of on my own on this. I had no idea what to expect, no idea.”

Tommy grew up in a small Midwestern town. His family remained supportive, trusting his judgment when he made several career and school changes during college:

My family has been really great and they always have been. I was going to be a music teacher and they were all over the moon. Then I came to them and said, ‘okay now I’m going to go to this kind of small performing school that you probably don’t really know anything about’ and my mom [said] ‘are you sure that’s what you want to do?’ and she said, ‘okay then, go for it.’

Tommy’s family continued supporting his new directions in the music industry of Los Angeles, providing ongoing emotional and financial support after his move. Musical families provided strong modeling for aspiring artists, but nonmusical families also provided necessary support for young artists’ development.

Support from parents and family extended beyond school and college years, not ending with college graduation. Two years after graduation, Anthony spoke appreciatively of his parents' personal and financial support as he pursued his musical goals: "I have a lot of personal support, moral support, financial support, getting out of school. I'm really grateful for that. [I've been able] to leave the nest a little bit in terms of relying on them financially."

Mike said, "My parents have been immensely supportive, not only throughout my education but even after. I've been incredibly fortunate." An only child, Mike credits his parents' support making pursuit of his art possible. Matt recognized the ongoing financial and emotional support of his mother and grandmother. He said, "I was growing as a man and I wanted to wean off that support and do it on my own." Still, he recognized the vital and continuing support his mother provided, saying, "My mom is always there if I pick up the phone." Jared said, "since college, my parents, they're always my mentors. They're the number one everything for me. Without them, I wouldn't be able to do any of this." He elaborated on ways parental support has enabled his career path:

My parents aren't just spoiling me. They're making me work. I was very fortunate, the way I was raised. [I have] really good parents. I've met musicians whose parents don't care at all what they're doing and they had to do all of that by themselves with no one tell telling them, 'yes we believe in you.' So I feel really fortunate as I've been able to dedicate my life towards music because I've been supported so much.

The support roles of partners increased as young artists transitioned into adult life.

Some partners share musical goals and ambitions; others work in different fields. Partner support included musical partnerships along with personal and emotional support. Four young artists mentioned beneficial support and mentoring from their partners. Providing emotional understanding regarding career goals, artistic perspective, and the balance of work and fun mutually strengthened relationships.

Riann and Alyssa both married fellow musicians. Riann and her husband have similar interests and different work styles, creating a strong working balance: “Sometimes he has to force me to flesh things out [when writing a song]. Then I'll say, ‘you don't need to practice anymore, let's go do something fun’. We kind of balance each other out, which is really helpful.” Riann and her husband pursue some career projects as a team and others independently. They are committed to supporting each other's career opportunities. “He's got his own projects. I have my own stuff too like where I want to write and be a solo artist, so really, it's supporting each other.”

Alyssa appreciates personal counsel from her musician husband. “He's very supportive. He speaks the truth in my life that I need to hear. I feel like he's the best mentor I know right now.” Tommy successfully maintained a long-distance relationship with his girlfriend. The cost of travel precludes frequent visits, but “there is constant positive reinforcement. I'm lucky.” Anthony expressed a similar appreciation for his girlfriend. She remains “intentionally supporting and unintentionally just getting my mind off of me. I'm really lucky.” Partners provided intimate, ongoing support for these young artists.

Music became a natural fit in life and career for each of these young artists. In order to realize a life in music, young artists require considerable financial and emotional support from a young age. Parental support systems along with mentoring relationships anchored these young artists in their early career development. Mentors provided support throughout childhood into adulthood. The next section describes significant and varied mentoring relationships allowing their talents and artistic passions to develop and flourish before, during, and after college.

### **Mentors**

From a young age, mentors played central roles in many participants' musical growth and artistic identity development. The importance of mentors remained crucial throughout formal education and into professional life for 13 participants. Two young artists noted, with disappointment, little involvement with mentors, while acknowledging significant support from family. Mentors emerged from many sources, including teachers, former teachers, and bosses, colleagues and friends, parents and friends of parents, and partners. Several young artists identified temporary or accidental mentors. Some short-term mentors developed from direct contact on gigs or rehearsals and others indirectly through observations live or in recordings. Three participants identified "everyone around me" as potentially influential mentors, noting the important information and insights these unintentional mentors might provide. As several young artists moved more deeply into teaching activities, their teaching roles began to take on mentoring characteristics. One young artist recognized mentoring her students, representing a role shift from mentee to mentor. Mentors provided important training, education, and reinforcement of musical goals for these artists. The next section

describes the vital role of mentors in these preparatory periods. I first describe a variety of mentoring relationships experienced by these participants.

Bryan defined mentors broadly, as “anyone who inspires you, or [something] you draw inspiration from, [such as] a painting.” Bryan recognized some of his mentors might not define themselves as mentors while others serve intentionally as mentors. Mentoring relationships take many forms in a variety of situations. This section describes many types of mentoring experienced by these young artists, beginning with music teachers.

Teachers provide vital elements in the long apprenticeship to gain musical expertise. Along with technical and musical knowledge and expertise, music teachers model the artist’s life and mentor young musicians from their earliest lessons through higher education and often beyond. Music teachers and former teachers provided significant ongoing mentoring support for many of these artists.

Alyssa listed several private instructors as mentors, sharing their unique strengths, but she focused on one in particular because, “he understood me the best. He was really straightforward and it kind of took me aback.” She appreciated this mentor’s directness. “He’s just an older man, very chill and relaxed and it was almost like having my grandpa work with me. There was something I just attached to.”

Tommy also appreciated honesty from his voice teacher/mentor who sent him away from unprepared lessons. “If I didn’t do what I was supposed to do he didn’t try to sugarcoat it. He was an amazing teacher for me.” Kyle studied piano in college for three years with his teacher/mentor. “[He was] my main teacher and I love him to death.” Reflecting on his years of formal education, Kyle emphasized a proactive rather than

passive approach in seeking teacher mentors: “If you want to learn, ask the teachers to teach you. You can coast if you want to and not learn much.”

Teacher–mentor relationships evolved as young artists became active professionals. Derek illustrated the transition occurring as a formal teacher/student relationship shifted to colleague and friend. Derek noted his long-time guitar teacher/mentor provided both wonderful guitar instruction and long conversations revealing insights into the music industry. “On a very personal level the friendship/mentorship role became very important. He taught me more than I’ll ever be able to digest. That kind of relationship, it’s very, very easy for those to have a huge, huge role.”

Teacher/mentors continued to influence participants after formal lessons and classes end. “When I handed [my CD] to him I was like, wow, because I still worry about what he thinks. I still look up to him,” said Christina, who continues to play in several bands led by former instructors. Riann stayed in touch with her college voice teacher, calling her “a very helpful kind of transition mentor.” Her former teacher served as a willing listener, providing advice when asked, along with occasional meals.

Allen also stayed in touch with a former teacher he calls, “absolutely like my drum dad.” Allen turns to his mentor as a “life, career, whatever mentor,” and says, “After I hang out with him I feel like super inspired and ready to kick some serious ass.” While teachers make up a familiar category of mentors, these young artists described a variety of other types of mentors. I describe these in the next section.

Colleagues and friends served as both intentional and unintentional mentors. An experienced musician noticed Bryan’s talent and drive when he started college,

encouraging Bryan to audition for a position in this musician's well-known band; "you're not good yet, but you will be. Be at my house at 7 a.m. every day this week." Bryan explained, "we'd go to his basement and we would work out shit all day. He drilled me. That was incredible. He took so much of his energy to make me better." Their relationship provided many benefits for Bryan, including musical and technical growth, networking, and increased employment opportunities. Jared described his bond with fellow musicians, saying, "Mentors are the musicians I'm around—band mates, roommates." Whether sharing basic information or brainstorming new ideas, Jared understands the importance of these ongoing relationships.

Several participants identified the important roles of short-term, accidental, or temporary mentors. Derek takes a very intentional path in seeking out these short-term mentors. Whether in teaching or performing situations, he looks for individuals with expertise he needs: "I learned very early on that I don't know everything and there are a lot of people who know a lot of things that I don't."

Similarly, others recognized mentoring potential in virtually everyone. These artists recognized and reached out to many possible people and opportunities. Christina described several intentional mentors in her development. Afterward, she said, "and really just everybody around me. I take everyone's opinions into consideration." For Christina, bandleaders, family members, colleagues, and "even big musicians on T.V." all provide both positive and problematic examples as she models and builds her career and life. Similar to Christina, Bryan embraced a wide circle of potential mentors, recognizing the potential for building his career:

You look at all the people around you and you try to figure out the best things about them. It's like learning licks. Like you hear Lester Young and you say, I want that shit. Hear that dude? I want that. I want to have the perfect bag of tricks. So mentorship was huge for me. Really important.

Mentor relationships proved lacking for two young artists. Matt described informal associations with people he admired, but explained regretfully, "We don't have that mentor relationship, so I feel weird about not having a mentor." Similar to short-term mentoring described by Derek, Matt said, "I just consult with different people in my life." Mike expressed some dissatisfaction when asked about mentors through his education and beyond: "Really lacking; I didn't feel any true mentors in college."

Christina demonstrated her growth as a teacher and mentor, recognizing her impact with some young students and the potential power of one-on-one teaching:

I say, "I'm not teaching you how to play this, you're teaching yourself." I tell them every lesson, instead of grasping on to me they need to grasp onto their own self-confidence and determination because it's not just about music, it's about the rest of their life too.

Thinking beyond teaching music or violin, Christina continued, "I can tell they don't learn it anywhere else, at school or maybe not from their parents. I know that I am going to be one of their biggest influences." Kyle decided to teach piano lessons to increase his income streams building his private lesson studio. He expanded beyond individual instruction, discovering a natural talent for working with groups as well as individuals. He moved gradually into mentoring roles conducting clinics and group sessions mentoring middle school jazz musicians and adult choirs.

A diverse array of support systems and mentoring relationships helped young artists define and refine their artistic talents, interests, and identities. From early in childhood through adolescence, college, and into emerging adulthood, relationships played a vital role in the personal and professional development of young artists. Some found themselves acting as mentors for colleagues, partners, and students. I next describe the decision of all participants to attend a specialty music college in furthering their skills and developing their talents.

### **College Choice**

Many artists in popular music, at various levels of fame and fortune, learn their craft onstage, backstage, in managers' offices, and in tour vans. Through day-to-day experiences in the so-called real world, they learn the musical, interpersonal, and business aspects of the field, often through trial and error. Higher education offers a small but growing number of institutions in which to study popular music in a formal setting rather than within the industry itself. All of the young artists in this study made the conscious choice to pursue music in higher education. Finances or varying goals determined early college choices. Some decided to attend music school right after high school graduation. Others started college at a university, liberal arts college, or community college before transferring to a specialty music college. Some young artists never considered a different path, while others weighed alternative options.

The decision to start at or transfer to a music college presented challenges to some young artists. Alyssa said, "Luckily the year that I graduated was the year that my school came out with a bachelor's degree for music performance or otherwise my parents

wouldn't let me go. So it was kind of a blessing in that sense." Alyssa's musician grandfather, however, disapproved of her choice:

My grandfather found out I was going to music school. He wasn't very happy about it. "She needs to get a real education." I think maybe he knew what the business was like and didn't want me to get into it? I don't know. We didn't talk about that.

Alyssa's parents, both former musicians, remained supportive of her choice. While Alyssa graduated with significant loan debt, she said, "they helped me out financially. They helped with everything. The support and backing was never an issue."

Some young artists attended music college to expand and deepen their musical knowledge beyond on-the-job training. The flexibility provided by theoretical knowledge and strong technical training helped make these artists adaptable, quick learners. Ashley chose a music conservatory for its rigor and depth of training but began to regret that decision during her freshman year: "I reached a, 'Oh, well, I'll just go to pharmacy school' by the end of freshman year. What was I thinking? I think I was just trying to get far away from it because I was freaked out." Eventually, she decided the conservatory provided an ideal mix of education and skill development for her growth as an artist.

As a trained singer and musician, Caitlin found some less positive consequences could also result from formal training:

Sometimes in rehearsals [the bandleader] says, 'okay that was good' and I say, 'I don't think you're singing the third' and he wants me on the fifth because she's

singing that. Sometimes I just knew a lot more than some of his other singers, because they were untrained, you know? And it was maybe threatening?

After graduation, some young artists regretted not maximizing opportunities while in school. The importance of business knowledge in building a music career became more apparent to Kyle after leaving school: “I felt very unprepared [about business] leaving college. Then, maybe it wasn’t the college’s fault. Maybe it was my own fault because I was pretending that it didn’t matter.”

Tommy also remarked music students “need to be informed about the real world. Sitting in a classroom, it’s hard to really grasp that until you’re in the middle of it.” Musically, Tommy praised his educational experiences. “I tell people all the time my education was phenomenal, it was a great education. I prepared myself to be a teacher/performer and that was my choice.” He regretted a lack of business courses in his college degree but found his internship, “the best four-month education” he could have imagined. Jared wished he had developed technology and production skills to complement his musical and performance education. After college he began teaching himself multimedia programs to meet the needs of his bands, but “I need to learn how to do this. It should be good quality but it’s not, because you’re teaching yourself. It’s taking too long and you don’t have the time for that now.” Jared developed a heightened awareness of diverse skill sets needed for a 21<sup>st</sup> century career in music once he lived the realities of professional life.

Many musicians build a career by developing expertise through practical experience in real world settings. The young artists in this study chose to develop

understanding and musical practice in an academic setting. Artists realized the full value of formal music education after completing a degree and entering professional life.

### **Summary**

Music forms a core essence of these young artists, a central element of their personal identity and self-esteem, often identified and integrated from a young age. This deep and innate connection to music led to considering music as a potential professional career. Although some moved away from music to pursue other means of livelihood, all young artists found the connection to music a vital and continuing component of their lives. While all participants self-identified as performers initially, the urge to create original music grew for most of them, providing an important artistic anchor whether music served a vocational or avocational role in their lives.

Some young artists grew up in artistic families who provided vital resources for musical development, immersion in artistic activities, and modeling of artistic lifestyles. Not all families proved artistic, but each provided significant support through childhood, adolescence and often into emerging adulthood. Mentors played a vital role in the personal and artistic development of most, but not all young artists. Those lacking mentoring relationships felt the loss of this potential support. Mentors included teachers, former teachers, bosses, colleagues, and friends. Young artists also identified the importance of temporary and spontaneous mentors, both in direct relationships and indirect situations through observations and media.

While popular music artists often learn their craft and its related business elements on the job, these young artists chose to pursue a formal music education in college. In most cases, families and mentors supported this decision. Most artists found a

formal music education beneficial as they started their careers. Artistic and technical skills, along with significant networking opportunities, proved useful. After describing the formation of an artistic identity, I next analyze how artistic identities merged with the core identities of young musicians. The expression and enactment of identity plays a critical role in identity expression and career development.

### **Identity Theory and Development: Claiming and Affirming an Artistic Identity**

I used identity theory to analyze both personal (internal) and social (external) identity development in young artists. First, I describe ways young artists examine and reflect upon three distinct identities: personal and artistic identities and the emergence of a professional identity. Second, I examine role conflict and the threats to enacting identity whether personal or societal. Third, I consider the transgressive social nature of music as a career choice and the potential impact of social expectations on identity enactment.

#### **Identity Theory**

Identity theory addresses key considerations relevant to young musicians' transitions from college into professional life, considering both the individuality and motivations of the individual and his or her multiple roles as a member of numerous groups and of larger society (Burke & Stets, 2009). Elements of identity include both internal and external aspects (Baker & Lattuca, 2010). Ultimately, finding meaning remains the central activity of identity enactment. (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Young artists typically begin musical study in childhood, affecting identity development (Hargreaves, Miell, & MacDonald, 2002).

## Personal, Artistic, and Professional Identities and Roles

Musical talent often appears early in life; therefore, internal identification as an artist may start before external formal structures such as education or opportunities for public display arise (Hargreaves, Miell, & MacDonald, 2002). This early blend of personal and artistic identities creates complexity in realizing identity development over time. Regardless of life and work choices and situations, young artists find themselves pulled to music emanating from the core of their personal identities.

Young artists approached these ambiguities in individualized ways. Kyle, Christina, Allen, Matt, Jared, Derek, Bryan, and Rachel faced many challenges but exhibited a mature self-awareness manifesting in a generally optimistic spirit and a proactive, a self-responsible ability to assess and change directions as necessary by staying true to a core artistic identity. Ashley and Tommy took advantage of serendipitous opportunities, adjusting personal artistic identities while developing unexpected professional identities. They each rose to the required demands of new work expectations, relying on talent, good training, and a strong work ethic for success. Others, whether due to personality and temperament and/or life demands, found a less direct path to identity realization. However, all the young artists have dealt successfully with significant challenges and moved forward in their lives and careers.

Figure 1 illustrates aspects of identity theory relevant to the transition experiences of the young artists in this study (Stets & Burke, 2000). Along with identity theory, I include the social constructionist perspective, recognizing individuals have multiple identities, constantly changing, and formed in interactions with others over time (Perkins, 2012).

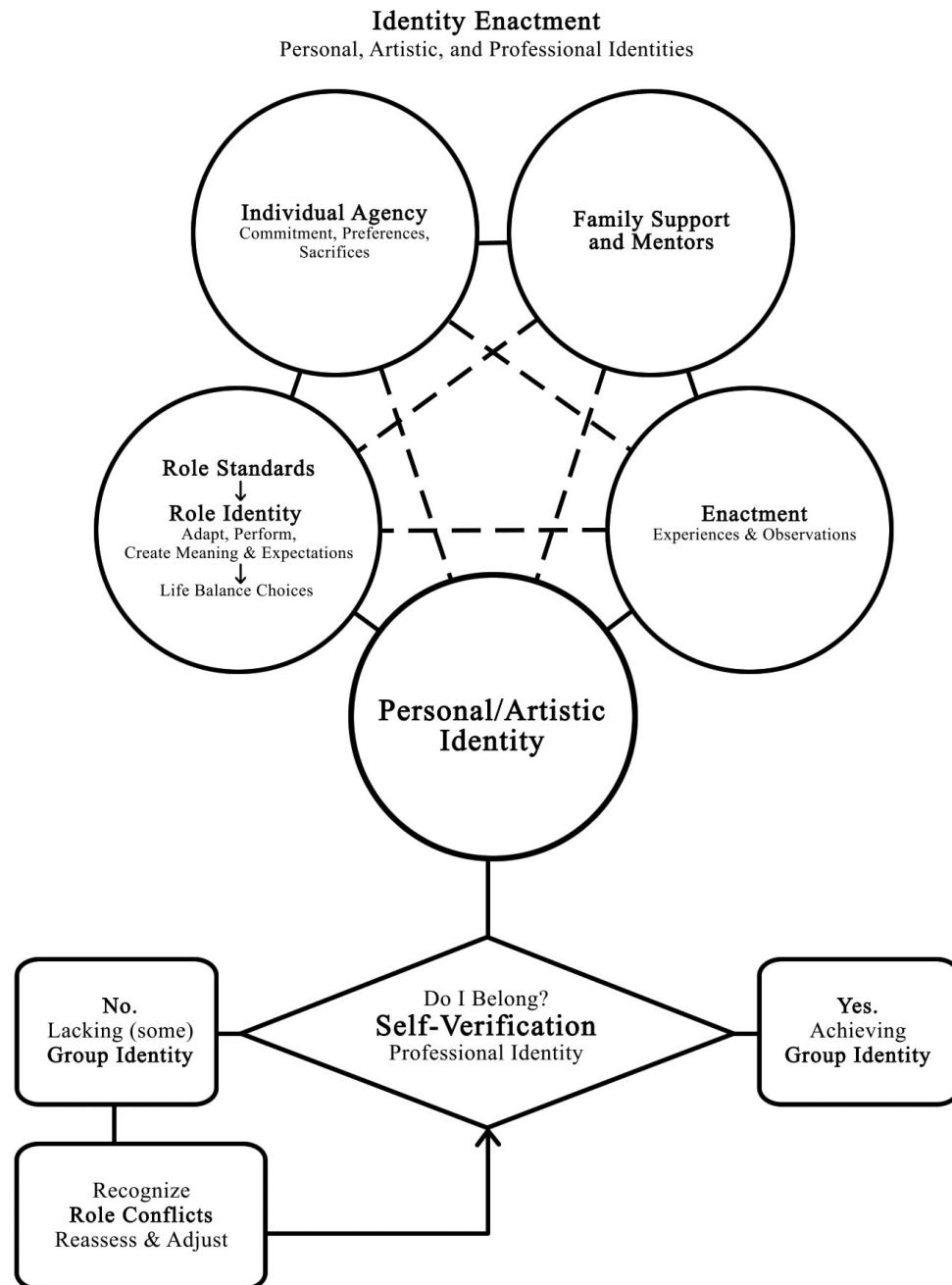


Figure 1. Identity theory in relation to young artists' transitions.

Identifying theoretical language and applying these concepts to young artists' transition experiences clarifies both the internal and external processes of this significant life event (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2006; Stets & Burke, 2000). Balancing the inner (personal) and outer (social) aspects of identity formation becomes further complicated by young artists' merged personal identities—both personal and artistic as a core identity—along with the diverse nature of portfolio careers (Baker & Lattuca, 2010). Next, I describe the perpetual and cyclical nature of young artists' career identity development processes as illustrated in Figure 1.

Many interactive elements help young artists form a personal/artistic identity. Based on self-reported identity perspectives shared by young artists, personal and artistic identities frequently merge. Artistic identity, manifesting early in life, melds with personal identity in the formative years. Although blended personal/artistic identities do not inevitably lead to professional or fulltime artistic participation in adulthood, a core personal/artistic identity remained quite consistent for these artists, regardless of their decisions about livelihood. Personal/artistic identity developed through a 'spiral of experiences' linking personal activities and interpersonal relationships to varying degrees, illustrated by interconnected circles in Figure 1.

Discovering personal meaning and further developing personal/artistic identity became an important quest for some young artists. After graduation, Mike found continued frustration in his work as a performer and composer. He struggled to reconcile feelings of anger and disappointment when his expected career paths failed to materialize in spite of considerable effort. Conflicted about his evolving artistic identity, he turned to Nietzsche and other philosophers, seeking to understand his core artistic identity. He

spent several years considering his connections to art and identity aligned with potential practical considerations for his next life steps. After periods of deep reflection, he moved from performing to composing music on his own terms. Frustrated by a lack of financial sustainability in music, he developed advanced technology skills outside of music for financial support. Mike prioritized the meaning he found in his artistic identity above role salience as a performing musician. He discovered greater satisfaction in enacting his artistic identity as a composer and enhancing internal meaning rather than playing an unsatisfying role.

Mike's identity development process exemplifies the enactment and individual agency circles in Figure 1. Through his personal experiences and, importantly, his observations and reflections on those experiences, Mike defined his personal and artistic preferences, ready to make the necessary commitments and sacrifices. Personal/artistic identity enactment and growing agency helps young artists gain additional experience, make cogent observations of their professional situations, identify personal preferences, determine potential sacrifices while reflecting on the totality of their professional experiences. Enactment of artistic identity depends upon experiences and observations, commitment and salience, along with personal choices and agency (Stets & Burke, 2000).

Individual agency along with reactions and responses to situations and opportunities enhance enactment of identity (Stets & Burke, 2000). Graduation freed up Kyle's already busy performing schedule and he immediately filled it with additional high-level cover band performances. His portfolio of work expanded consistently, "but it wasn't about the music, it was more about the job and making a quick buck. So after some reflection, I wasn't feeling very great about creating music doing the jobbing thing

... which led me to teaching." Kyle responded proactively, comparing and refining his artistic identity to evolving work situations and emerging opportunities, assessing goodness of fit in multiple and ever-changing work roles. Kyle's ability to remain true to his core identity, assess and reorganize his work and work relationships, while retaining commitment and salience, represents a particularly successful application of identity theory principles.

Family, especially parents, provide critically important support for young musicians, according to numerous research studies (Burland & Davidson, 2002; Creech et. al, 2008; Manturzewska, 1990). Mentors, both individual and through broad networks of support, have been positively linked to work satisfaction and the development of professional identity (Creech et al., 2008; Dobrow & Higgins, 2005; MacNamara, Holmes, & Collins, 2006). Family support and mentors from childhood into adulthood provide resources, training, motivation, and feedback (Burland & Davidson, 2002). My findings support the vital importance of parental, family, and mentor support systems as young artists recognize and develop talents, interests, and ambitions in music.

Finally, role standards and role identity help young artists discern the requirements and characteristics for identity enactment, salience, and role identity leading toward a professional identity within the music industry along with a growing understanding of self-defined life balance. For example, role identity builds on the strength of group connections, specifically, numbers of individuals in one's relevant group(s), along with the depth of connections with those group members (Stets & Burke, 2000; Stryker & Burke, 2000). When commitment to the group(s) proves strong, identity

salience enhances the likelihood of enacting a particular identity (Stryker & Burke, 2000).

For young artists, the breadth and depth of a musician's networks of fellow artists, business and support individuals and organizations, combined with fans who might attend live shows and/or purchase recordings and participate in social media, provides varying degrees of identity salience and role identity for an individual artist. By building relevant networks and groups, young artists who started professional work while still in school gained increased commitment and salience, anchoring their early careers. In summary, "commitment shapes identity, salience shapes role choice behavior" (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p.286). A professional identity presumes congruence with both one's personal/artistic identity and roles among significant group members (Ibarra, 1999), although alignment may present demands. The following section discusses the management of identity and role challenges.

### **Self-Verification, Role Conflict, and Realignment**

Evolving into one's role identities both individually and as a member of various groups requires identity enactment and responsive self-agency (Stets & Burke, 2000). A strong role identity creates meaning through accepting and adapting to role expectations (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Ultimately, confirmation of role identity necessitates self-verification (Stets & Burke, 2000). Self-verification identifies one as a member of the group, confirming role identity. Conversely, role conflict results from a lack of congruence with others.

Among the young artists in this study, role conflicts occurred frequently, especially in the early postgraduation period. Beginning their careers by anticipating

particular music work and lifestyles, and with varying degrees of salience in the enactment of artistic identity, reality often proved different from expectations. Explicitly taught to make a living performing music, young artists set out to prove the veracity of this goal. Caitlin shared the mantra she learned in school: "I was always taught job, job, job when you first get out. I've never been choosy because I just want experience. I want a challenge. I want so many options." Artists lacking significant performance experience prior to graduation and those with weaker commitments to role groups experienced lower identity salience. Ibarra (1999) suggested a possible solution, "experimenting with provisional selves," to discover and practice professional identities, a process modeled in many music colleges (p.764).

Musicians, as members of many diverse personal and professional groups within multifaceted portfolio careers, may find self-verification a daunting challenge. Only a few young artists continued pursuing the presumed career path they planned prior to graduation while many others shifted their personal goals and artistic identity to focus more on individual creative output rather than less satisfying work with cover bands. The latter group explored a variety of new options to realize better alignment of identity and role salience.

Two artists, Jared and Allen, planned and carried out strictly freelance career paths with constantly changing work groups in various bands, churches, and recording sessions, finding the variety and uncertainty challenging and stimulating. Jared and Allen each achieved salient role identity fairly smoothly. However, for others, doubt or a perceived lack of role identity completeness resulted in role conflict, necessitating reassessment and adjustments. Although Riann transitioned seamlessly and successfully

into a performing and teaching career after graduation, she soon discovered role conflict given the freelance realities of working constantly and the relentless ongoing search for additional work. Riann created an intentionally balanced work life including music activities on her own terms and a fulltime nonmusic job for stability.

Addressing role conflicts, young artists made career modifications based on personal reflection, adjustments to work life and future goals, and by responding to external opportunities. Finding better life balance after course corrections, they developed career paths personally well suited to their long range career goals and newly defined lifestyle expectations.

The process functions iteratively as artists continuously refine and develop elements of their personal/artistic/professional role identities. Assessing different aspects of their fledgling portfolio careers caused many young artists to carefully consider the optimization of life balance, leading to adjustments and further assessments. While Alyssa left college expecting to develop a full-time performing career, she discovered by limiting her performing she found greater enjoyment and meaning in music. By expanding nonmusical skill sets, she achieved a balance of music and other activities. Reflective and proactive methods enabled young artists to continuously work toward uniquely meaningful life balance. Young artists experience *being* an artist as a core identity, yet *do* art to enact that identity.

Musicians struggled with negative societal views of the importance of artistic identity and career. A societal perception of artistic careers as transgressive, nonnormative options outside acceptable adult career choices results in additional challenges for young artists' identity development after college. Original thought, by its

nature, proves deviant (Runco, 2004) in society. Music, or any art form, remains a pastime, hobby, or avocational pursuit in the general culture, rarely viewed as a legitimate adult career path. As artists band together, often in nonnormative lifestyles different from others on more traditional career and life paths, a “tribal stigma” of social identity results, binding but potentially isolating artists (Goffman, 1963, p. 4).

A central factor in social/cultural identity relates to emotional responses to the ‘us and them’ of difference (Clarke, 2011). For those who self-identify fundamentally as artists, social attitudes toward art and artists may prove challenging. Ashley admitted, “sometimes my self esteem takes a hit from that,” because:

Musicians are different. While other people are hitting other milestones like getting a raise and moving up in a company and getting married and having a family, these things are very different artistically, because sometimes you’re working hard and being successful, but things don’t change as expectedly as they do in other fields.

Society’s nonnormative view of art as a career challenges artists, separating them from the mainstream. Ashley continued, saying:

Success and growth as a musician doesn’t always mean making more money or changing things drastically and that success and growth often happens artistically which is harder to explain to someone on the outside. It’s such an internal experience. Because it’s more concrete in the outside world, it is easier to explain to someone.

Musicians often perform work society considers low status (Frederickson & Rooney, 1988). Cover bands and background music gigs may provide significant income

yet not align with an individual's artistic identity. Identity salience may help offset the identity differences of a multilayered career, helping to balance truly artistic and less artistic work.

Identity theory addresses key considerations relevant to young musicians' transitions from college into professional life, considering both the individuality and motivations of the individual and his or her multiple roles as a member of numerous groups and of larger society (Burke & Stets, 2009). Elements of identity include both internal and external aspects (Baker & Lattuca, 2010). Ultimately, finding meaning remains the central activity of identity enactment. (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Young artists typically begin musical study in childhood, affecting identity development (Hargreaves, Miell, & MacDonald, 2002).

## Chapter 5: Transitions—Artistic and Life Identities

Holy crap, I'm no longer a student!

—Anthony

College graduation marks a significant life transition. College graduates continue developing their adult identities while moving away from a deeply embedded student identity. Navigating the transition from lifelong student to professional adult life provides opportunities and challenges, and the young artists demonstrated uniquely personal approaches to managing this transition. Some young artists followed a traditional postgraduation path, starting a career after completing school. Others began the transition to professional life well before graduation. Some experienced virtually seamless transitions, while others struggled for a period of time before finding a satisfactory path or continued to manage careers in flux.

Several artists began professional work while still students, making the transition out of college into a professional career an organic continuation. The transition remained more complex, and continued as an evolving process for others. Some individuals, surprised by unanticipated realities of adult life and musician lifestyles, eventually adjusted their lives into unforeseen work and life choices. Many demonstrated mature self-awareness whether staying the course or changing directions.

Searching for life and work balance remained a sometimes elusive and dynamic goal. I describe these disparate transitions, focusing on the first year after graduation. Beginning with the nature of musicians' portfolio careers, an often complex, frequently changing array of different income streams, I show how musicians accessed disparate

income streams to develop a sustainable and meaningful work life. I then follow with a description of the psychological challenges in forming an artistic identity.

### **Portfolio Career**

Being an artist, being a musician, you're like a big melting pot of different things you put together to call your career.

—Ashley

The portfolio career, a common term describing multiple activities and sources of income many musicians use to create sustainable careers, has remained the standard musician career model from the Middle Ages to the present (Hahn, 2010; Salmen, 1983; Weber, 2004). Portfolio careers provide a measure of financial stability and a variety of work often requiring widely differing skill sets. The types of work included in a portfolio career may be music or nonmusic related. As young artists transitioned out of college and into professional lives, they developed active, intentional portfolio careers. Their portfolio careers included musical performance combined with a variety of complementary employment in teaching, recording, producing and/or non-musical employment.

Performance work included solo and band employment falling into several categories, including (a) single events in bars, coffee shops, concert venues, festivals, churches, casinos, or recording studios; (b) “house gigs,” playing regularly (weekly or monthly) at a particular venue such as a club or church; and (c) longer contracts such as cruise ships or theatrical productions, and some touring.

Participants described music-related work outside of performance work, such as teaching in their descriptions of portfolio careers. This work included offering private lessons in home or commercial music studios, schools, or music stores, teaching small

groups of people in clinics and master classes at schools or music studios, providing music technology customer service support, directing an artist discovery and development company, composing and writing songs singly or with others, and repairing instruments.

The third large category of employment for these young musicians included day jobs outside of music. This work falls into four related and overlapping categories, including, (a) fulltime or parttime employment; (b) employment opportunities with flexible schedules to accommodate musical opportunities; (c) finding work suited to individual skill sets, interests, experience, opportunities, and location; and (d) temporary, shortterm work versus developing an additional career path. Participants worked in a variety of positions encompassing diverse roles, including working for nonprofit organizations, serving as a certified network administrator, graphic designer, realtor, barista, college admissions representative, and administrative assistant. Fourteen of the 15 participants interviewed included some work outside of the performance work category to form a portfolio career; this included at least two or more music-related or nonmusic-related jobs.

Young artists continuously explored options to pursue music performance and creative work, achieve financial stability, and create balanced professional and personal lives after entering the workforce. They combined multiple aspects of music-related work for pleasure, creative fulfillment, and income, sometimes including nonmusic work. Adopting a variety of work options, participants continuously sought opportunities to enhance their portfolio mix, remaining fluid, and making changes due to new opportunities and also reflection on their experiences and goals.

Participants achieved varying levels of success staying employed in music-related work. They developed and continuously changed their portfolio careers based on shifting priorities or circumstances. The desire to engage in musical performance and creative endeavors required thoughtful planning to achieve financial stability and/or lead a balanced lifestyle.

Next, I describe the transitions of young artists into the freelance, portfolio lifestyle typical of performing musicians. Some artists embraced the work expectations of a portfolio career, simply continuing and expanding professional work started during college, while others discovered a need for more structure and stability than provided by the freelance lifestyle. These artists found other ways to pursue music without the time and financial pressures of a fulltime commitment. Those who built on professional work already underway experienced smoother transitions, while others endured more challenges and rougher transitions. The next section describes reflections leading to changes in portfolio careers prioritized for artistic fulfillment, financial stability or a more balanced lifestyle.

### **Transitioning into Professional Life**

How did I think it'd go? Not like it went!

—Anthony

Young artists adapted to life changes as their transitions from college into adult life unfolded. Opportunities fell into place fairly smoothly for some, while others experienced slower development. Eight young artists embraced the freelance lifestyle, actively adjusting and modifying their mix of professional activities along the way. One to five years since graduation, these artists continue to manage careers focused entirely within music or a mix of frequently changing freelance and employment work.

Kyle, Allen, and Riann developed substantial professional work experience prior to graduating from college and plunged immediately into building deliberate freelance careers after graduation. Their initial post college transitions proved generally smooth, although all of them later made significant career adjustments. Bryan, Matt, Jack, Caitlin, and Christina also performed frequent professional gigs while still in college but experienced a more challenging transition. In the next section I describe the stories of both groups.

Three participants started their careers during college and transitioned easily into the professional world. They continued to expand their range of work after graduating. Hired by faculty members into gigs or as regular members of bands while in school, they continued to build their professional resumes with church and wedding work, recordings, lesson teaching, community theater, and freelance club work after graduation. Kyle described his transition experience: “It felt pretty smooth, the transition, because when I got done with school I was doing the same thing I was doing before, just not going to school anymore.”

Allen started freelancing early in his college career, taking a year off in the middle of his degree to tour with an up and coming band. He developed his career model early, playing “freelance, with whoever, whenever,” regardless of genre or style. “The transition out of school was a smooth continuation of what I was already doing, continued on a bigger scale with more time.” He maintained a similar pattern 5 years postgraduation. Riann also followed her carefully planned career goals:

I wanted to make money solely from music and do that for a job so that included teaching and gigging all the time but then also on the side writing my original

music, because most moneymaking things are cover bands. That was my main goal so right out of college, that's what I did.

Kyle, Allen, and Riann built on experience and connections made while students as they established their careers. Several young artists experienced more challenging transitions after leaving school in spite of similar professional experience prior to graduation.

Three artists graduated from college particularly well respected and celebrated on campus. They finished their college careers with exceptional senior recitals and active professional work in the community. Selected by faculty and staff in a competitive process as student commencement speakers, these three found themselves feted as examples to the student body. All three artists later experienced significant post-graduation declines. Bryan described his experience:

I've had some of the highest highs and some of the lowest lows. And a big thing, there is a hard depression after graduation. I think everyone goes through it. Right when you graduate you have one week of just pure bliss and hope. You just have faith and hope in the world and music and people you work with. It's amazing and you're just like "I'm going to change the world" and then your stimuli just gives up, and you just can't take it anymore, and you sort of start of leaning back and then you start moving your arms to gain balance and then you start falling and you're grabbing onto something.

Bryan held a well-respected place in the gigging community, yet he continued: "But man, that shit hit me hard, super hard. Way harder than I thought. I wasn't as strong as I thought I was and it knocked me down pretty hard."

These three experienced a tremendous crescendo of activities and accolades leading to graduation, followed by exhaustion and loneliness. Matt's postgraduation experience proved similar to Bryan's:

When I first graduated it was a complete 180. [The month I graduated, I] had four shows. I spoke at my graduation. I was on a high; I was on a high. And two weeks later I didn't have a job at the school anymore, no other job for me to work, everything was pretty much gone and I was at a low.

Matt struggled throughout his first year after graduation, unable to find steady employment. He pieced together performances and graphic design work supplemented by food stamps, to sustain him through the first year. Matt's selection for an elite nonprofit leadership training program the following summer opened new doors for him and helped him focus on his growing interests combining education and music.

Christina also experienced an unexpectedly challenging transition. She attended college fulltime year round and sped through her college career in 3 years. Christina paid a personal price for her pursuit of excellence and her college degree as a driven personality. "The whole last semester I was just pushing, pushing, pushing, pushing. I had tendinitis problems all through school but I was just pushing myself through everything. So after I graduated, I just, pfft," she said, tossing her hand in the air. Christina continued teaching for financial support, but cancelled other activities for several months. "I pretty much told just everyone I'm checking out for a bit because I was just mentally gone; my brain was mush." She reengaged and started rebuilding her performing career by the following January. Talent, recognition, and multiple accomplishments did not help these exceptional students prevent a postgraduation slump

and provided no guarantee of a smooth transition. All three, however, have since rebounded and successfully evolved their careers.

### **Challenges and Opportunities in Transition**

Transitioning from higher education into professional life represents a complex and significant life change for most individuals. These young artists encountered challenges in making this transition. The recurring challenges form three principal themes. These themes include: (a) lack of paying work in music, (b) competition and networking, (c) self-doubt. Frequently interlinking, these challenges present varying degrees of challenge and/or inspiration. Several of these challenges appear more pervasive than others among the young artists in this study. This section begins by describing transition challenges of these young artists.

#### **Lack of Paying Work**

Potential paying work for musicians remains an elusive and ever-changing issue, dependent on geographic location, musical genres, networks of relationships, audience preferences, musical and nonmusical skill-sets, and personal appearance. The complex interrelationships of these elements partially determined the available work during participants' transitions into professional life and continued to affect work opportunities. Musical genres and location present career dilemmas as cultural tastes ebb and flow, influencing obtainable work and its potential market rate of pay. Jazz, while still a vibrant art form, attracts small but devoted audiences. Jazz artists may find consistent paying gigs difficult to find. Kyle expressed disappointment in the realities of paid work for jazz artists: "I was surprised how little money there was in jazz. I was hoping it wasn't like that."

Kyle works comfortably in many genres, but Mike and Alyssa specialized in jazz. They discovered many gigs did not pay at all and paying gigs offered very little remuneration. Alyssa prefers a modestly active musical career without the pressure of paying the bills from her musical income. She joined two jazz groups, each with varying styles and goals, both rehearsing and performing regularly. Alyssa manages her time in music without significant concern for the income these performances produce by concentrating her work with two high quality bands.

Mike aspired to work as a freelance jazz saxophonist but became discouraged quickly. In jazz, he noted, “(even) the guys in New York actually make their money when they tour in Europe. They don’t make money in New York. Even the biggest names don’t make much in New York.” This realization helped frame a financial and career reality for Mike and he gradually transitioned toward creative options more suited to his personal style and evolving interests. A career outside of music now supports his musical goals focused on composition.

Genre and location may intertwine, presenting multifaceted options. Jack recognized his location and genre dilemma: “It’s just not a big pop, acoustic scene [in my home town]. [Here it] is very alternative, experimental, underground, but hipster-y you know? So yeah, it’s not like it’s my niche here but I’m like doing okay here.” Jack recognized a need to align himself with a more suitable market: “So that’s why I am trying to get out.”

A particular city or region may foster a thriving country music scene with many venues and a large, consistent fan base. Riann described this genre preference: “Country’s kind of the hot thing to do right now.” If a musician nurtures a well-linked

network in a particular genre, demonstrates the core musical skills, and has “the look,” paying work may prove abundant. “It has a lot to do with your looks,” confirmed Riann, “you have to be in shape and looking the part, but for women, for a vocalist, I think it's pretty open especially in today's music.” Caitlin found less openness and more contradictions in describing a bandleader's expectations after she lost her position in his band:

So you're going to pick a girl who physically looks better but she stands on stage and looks like a potato. She never dances. She has no personality at all. She has a big voice and she can sing in one style. But we're a variety band; we sing everything. And he was like, “you're the only singer I've ever had who can sing everything and sound good on it.”

This bandleader appeared conflicted in his priorities. While recognizing Caitlin's musical gifts and contributions to the band, he made his choice based on his appearance criteria (a sexier look), a frustrating resolution for Caitlin.

Location, genre, networks, audience preferences, musical and non-musical skillsets and appearance or bandleader expectations may interfere with locating consistent work opportunities. Competition with peers and colleagues and for audience time and money reinforces the necessity of building professional networks. The next section describes these challenges and opportunities.

### **Competition and Professional Networks**

Competition proves an inevitable reality in music school culture. After graduation, the marketplace for fine musicians remains competitive regardless of genre or location. Competition proved an evident but minimal concern during initial transition

into professional work for most of these young artists. Four individuals reflected on professional competition, and they each found insight and future direction in their experiences with competition.

In her senior year, Ashley participated in a highly competitive New York showcase:

Things didn't really turn out the way I wanted them to, because I didn't really have any agents or managers that were interested in working with me, and I felt good about the performance. It wasn't that I felt that I didn't represent myself well; it just didn't pan out and that was okay.

This experience helped Ashley further define and refine her personal artistic vision as a singer-songwriter rather than a Broadway performer and provided clarity in planning her transition into a satisfying postcollege life.

Jack heard stories about tough competition in internships. These stories caused him to avoid applying for internships: "I regret that I didn't (do an internship in Los Angeles) because then maybe reality would've hit me a little bit earlier." Taking decisive action in career directions remains a challenge for Jack.

Allen emphasized opportunity rather than competition, by supporting peers to build effective networks: "Be comfortable with yourself and less competitive with other drummers." Allen's attitude toward competition, maturing over his 5+ years in the music industry, frames a positive perspective on competition. He suggested a proactive approach to managing competitive situations and opportunities. Allen merged his competition and his career networks.

Network development includes building and expanding professional connections for Allen. Networking also includes fostering a personal reputation as a dependable, pleasant, adaptable individual. Allen recognized a symbiotic relationship between fellow professionals: "Give gigs to others and get gigs in return. Sometimes it's luck to get hired; it's a relationship business." A competitive approach, in Allen's view, does not foster the mutuality central to consistent employment in the freelance music industry.

Kyle also emphasized building networks, starting in college:

The network is where it's at. You make some friends with the right people that you admire and you'll end up in a circle of musicians. I still play with so many of those same musicians. It's just so cool.

Mike found an uneven playing ground as he began his freelance performance career out of college. He found low and unequal pay rates discouraging. He described competition from the perspective of potential audiences. Performing musicians compete with an ever-expanding array of entertainment options available to the public:

Do you realize how much we are competing with these days? Say you're a jazz musician. You're competing with other jazz music that's happening in this town tonight, and then on top of this you're dealing with the other music and then other types of things you can go out to see like theater, dance, opera, now on top of that you'd compete with sports and on top of that you're dealing with the Internet and video games. There are so many things that people can be doing with their time.

Competition, whether with fellow musicians directly or when competing for the limited time and money of potential patrons, remains a concern for performers at all career

stages. Competition appears particularly influential early in a career, prior to building substantial networks of colleagues and fans.

### **Self-Doubt**

So the thing that brings you joy can also bring you pain.  
It's basically two sides of the same coin.

—Matt

Regardless of postcollege experiences, plans, or ambitions, these artists exhibited considerable self-confidence and readiness along with distinct ambivalence, contradictions, and self-doubts as they entered postcollege life. Self-doubt took many forms, including (a) doubts about musical capabilities, (b) whether or not to relocate and where, (c) reality differing from expectations, (d) doubts about career paths, and (e) self-doubts leading to career indecision.

Mike and Anthony shared similar reflections on self-doubt from the performer's perspective, concerned about musical capabilities: "That was the hardest thing about being a straight up performer. You're only as good as your last note. Your performance the night before is the one that defines you." Anthony added a similar perspective: "It's too reliant on me for me to be comfortable. But that's how it is. You are as good as what you just did. And so it's tough when you're constantly exposed to that model."

Decisions regarding location created indecision and self-doubts for Jack: "I'm waiting for a sign: 'you have to go here'. I might stay (home) then two years from now I might say I should have gone to California. I think sometimes you just have to go do it." Ashley shows similar indecision and ambivalence regarding the best location for the next steps in her career,

I'm in [a large, east-coast city] so I wonder if that's the right city for me. I felt like the artistic community is definitely different there. It is more diverse, maybe there are more opportunities, so I'm glad to be on the East Coast, but I don't know...

New York someday, maybe L.A. someday, maybe something like that would get me into my career. Maybe that's another step I will eventually take. I have so many different ideas that sometimes they just stay ideas for too long.

Doubts about career choices created anxiety or spurred change for some artists. Caitlin reflected on her time as a singer in the show band on a cruise ship. Her initial excitement mixed with ambivalence became evident: "I was just really excited to do cruise lines. I mean all I kept thinking about was how much money I could save, how much I would be able to travel. And I was also terrified. I was so scared." The experience measured up to her lofty expectations at first: "When I went it was so glamorous and so glorious and so awesome." But reality for Caitlin changed, as she described a reality shift shortly into her contract: "It was really a lot of work because I was losing my voice and I was struggling with friends and isolation and dictators." Caitlin finished a 4-month contract then returned home to land-based work.

Career indecision caused self-doubts for Jack and Ashley. Jack performed fairly frequently but remained indecisive about his next career steps. "You're at that standstill where you could really do anything with your life. If I go this way am I going to regret it? I think about it so much. It's so overwhelming." His self-doubts extended to the way he framed his life when speaking to others:

It's hard to tell people what I'm doing right now. I find it very difficult. I know I shouldn't, but I do. Yeah, I'm doing music full-time. 'Oh you're not working

anymore?' And I had to make up this huge story to make it sound like I didn't just quit to just do music because it doesn't sound smart, it just doesn't. So I said all this other stuff.

For Ashley, freshman orientation into college created doubts she felt early in her college career, "In orientation, the director the program says things like 'your child will grow up to be a waitress.' And that was like, 'oh great, thanks.'" She considered a career change during her first year of college, but ultimately recommitted to the artist's path.

Kyle became disenchanted by the gigging reality he experienced relative to his career expectations. Confident in his musical abilities, he experienced self-doubts about his career choices as he performed with some of the city's top freelancers after graduation.

I was gigging 5 to 7 times a week, doing that for money, thinking about why I started music. I don't know. I just didn't feel good. I didn't feel as great on the gig. I just didn't feel that good about music. You want to feel good about what you do, you know?

Self-doubt takes many forms and proves common among these young artists. Jack suggested an antidote to counteract self-doubt but finds it personally difficult to implement:

Just having that grit attitude, that's the quality you have to have to be successful. Not being so calm about it. You have to be kind of gritty and have a go-get attitude and not care what other people think almost, you know? And I think that's what maybe slows me down.

Transition issues such as finding work, dealing with competition, and managing self-doubts challenged these young artists as they left college. Many of them responded proactively within the first year after graduation. They assessed their work and personal lifestyles and began making choices, adjusting and becoming more selective. In the next section, I describe examples of transition adaptation stories.

### **Reassessing the Freelance Lifestyle**

Several artists entered an ongoing self-evaluation process, assessing experiences and opportunities postgraduation. They began to initiate adjustments in their professional and personal lives. Some changes resulted from careful observation and thoughtful planning, while other outcomes evolved from unanticipated life events. I describe four groups of young artists and their varied career assessments and adjustment: (a) five artists who chose fulltime work in or out of music to balance their artistic endeavors; (b) four artists who made significant, intentional adjustments within their freelance music careers; (c) four different artists who continued their initial path, building and developing the career they envisioned or started before graduation; and (d) three artists who experienced personal transformations based on significant life events.

Within the first year after graduation, the reality of the freelance, portfolio lifestyle created stress and a lack of financial stability for several young artists. They began reassessing the alignment of a freelance career with personal and creative aspirations. Five young artists did not find the freelance, portfolio career path amenable to their musical or personal goals and lifestyle needs. They chose to move into auxiliary careers both in and out of music to stabilize and structure their artistic goals, personal life, and finances. Two found nonperforming work within the music industry and three

retrained into fields outside of music. Adjustments in work lives provided additional options and the ability to focus more energy on creative as well as re-creative activities. All continued to self-identify as musicians and consider music the centerpiece of their lives.

Before he graduated, Derek “was still very eager to find out what things look like [in the professional world]: I didn't care what kind of gig it was. If I wasn't getting paid, fine, I still get to play. Give it to me.” After about 9 months piecing together teaching and playing gigs post graduation, Derek accepted a full time administrative position with his alma mater. Derek continued building his active portfolio career as a performer and teacher while working his day job. A fulltime salary provided more options and selectivity in his performing and teaching. The job also secured his monthly student loan payments.

Anthony lacked specific plans at graduation, a common situation among his friends at school, according to him. He outlined his perspective of typical performance majors as they approach graduation:

You listen to the murmuring between students saying like, “oh you know, I have a job not related to music; it's a good thing, some stability.” You hear a lot of that and I agree with it, of course. And I was thinking I'll get a job, whatever it is, and then as my loans come out of deferment kind of check that and then continue to pursue anything directly music related that I want to do until eventually I can quit my job and there we go.

Anthony described a naïve hope for transition serendipity. He transitioned from college passively, continuing his part-time college barista position and playing guitar for occasional gigs in hotels, clubs, and churches. Full-time freelance work did not figure into his gradually evolving plans. His barista job ended a year later and he began a more serious job search. Anthony recognized his good fortune in successfully finding employment as a technology support employee at a well-known music technology firm. “I’m lucky because I have a good balance now of having the 9 to 5, 40 hour week job that I kind of anticipated, and still having it music related.” He continues to perform by choice and on his own terms.

Three others sought employment stability outside the music industry. Riann started performing and teaching prior to graduation and quickly built those income streams into a successful freelance career after college. She followed the cover band and lesson teaching route to achieve financial success, but quickly burned out. Meeting her ever-changing professional obligations while constantly searching for additional performing and teaching work became exhausting and precluded significant creative work. She searched for a more stable day job. She found an auditing position in a small international firm:

Things change really quickly. It was definitely a hard decision because this is what you've been working toward. It was always music is all I'm going to do. And that has changed and I have bills to pay and I have loans to pay off and I still want to do music but I want to enjoy it more than just gigging to make money.

With time and financial structures in place, she constructed a musical life built upon selective, high quality performing groups with time for composing and songwriting.

Like Riann, Alyssa and Mike retrained and found stable employment in non-music fields to support their musical activities. After a 4-month cruise ship contract immediately following graduation, Alyssa felt unsure about her professional directions and continually felt challenged by time management: “I was just kind of floating. Okay what do I do with my time? How can I better myself, just make sure that my day wasn’t a waste? It’s still a huge struggle for me.” Alyssa recognized time management and the ability to follow through form key elements of developing a freelance portfolio career:

The thing I like the least about being in the real world is I don’t have a set schedule. Okay, you’re signed up for these classes and you go to these classes and you do these assignments and everything was just already set up for me. I just had to go and do it. And now I need to create my own... it’s like I need to set up my own syllabus for life and I’m not capable of doing it yet.

Ultimately, Alyssa reconciled her artistic goals and lifestyle needs. She became licensed in real estate and started her own business, while focusing her musical performance activities on two musically satisfying bands:

For a little time out of college, I wasn’t [satisfied]. I thought, I went to school for this; I want to do this. As I’ve gotten older, I’ve come to the conclusion of don’t put yourself in a place where other people think you should be. You need to be comfortable with where you’re at, and what you want to do in life. And who cares what other people think? So that’s where I’m at right now.

Mike experienced many frustrations in his transitions into professional music life, from lack of work, to low pay, to the politics of the musical establishment. Mike developed a deepening interest in independently creating his own music through electronic MIDI and synthesizing gear he could control himself. After long and deep reflection over several years, Mike decided to support himself outside of music, freeing up time and money to pursue music on his own terms. Sustaining himself with a non-music job allowed him to create music and hire out the business elements of managing the people and the work:

That's why I'm not doing much gigging right now. It's admin from the very beginning to the end. From getting musicians together, to booking shows, to publicity, it's a lot of unanswered emails, and so I'll be saving myself so much time to pay someone to do that.

Fulltime work in or outside the music industry provided stability and security, allowing these artists to pursue their musical goals free of financial concerns.

Four young artists made adjustments within fulltime music performance careers during the first year after graduation. Active in the upper echelons of freelance gigging, Kyle and Bryan both tired quickly of high-level cover band gigs. Both branched out to diversify their work and income while enhancing personal opportunities for creative expression and composition. A colleague referred Bryan to a touring company gig, leading to additional theatrical work with several companies. Unlike single gigs, theatrical runs paid well and provided ongoing work, helping Bryan to stabilize his income for a period of time. Theatrical work also inspired Bryan to form his own production company.

Kyle diversified by expanding his original composition activities with like-minded players and developing a teaching studio. Teaching income allowed him to reduce less fulfilling performance work and achieve more satisfying balance in his musical life. Discovering and developing his talents for teaching provided both musical and income balance for Kyle. “Slowly I was able to make a smooth transition between gigging a ton and teaching a ton and find a balance between the two; a different transition. It happened over time.” Ashley also diversified into teaching, as an instructor of general music in a private K-8 school, while Matt blended performance with nonprofit education and community work, using his musical talents and name recognition to reach inner city youth.

Allen, Tommy, Jared, and Christina made few changes from their original paths after college. Tommy slipped easily into an internship that led to a fulltime position in an artist development company. The firm continued to give him greater responsibilities. Allen began significant freelance performing work prior to graduation and built his performing career into bigger gigs with better-known musicians over the past several years. Jared moved to Los Angeles to start his career as a drummer, gradually increasing the prominence and scope of bands and projects. Christina began teaching string lessons her last two years of college. After graduation, she continued teaching to support herself as she took a break from performance activities to recuperate from completing her accelerated bachelor degree.

In addition to changes and adjustments to work life, several artists went through personal transformations predicated by life events and/or a desire to move in new directions. Christina’s personal turning point followed a sexual assault during the

summer following her first year of college. Her intense work ethic eventually led to illness and exhaustion: “I pushed myself too hard and I was kicking my own butt.” Her response to rape proved personally transformative and ultimately positive. She said: “I’d been a weak, young female and I’d had enough. So after that, I was like, a badass. I can say whatever I need to say.” Christina transitioned suddenly from “the shy, naïve girl who went to college” into an adult woman. “I can stand on my own and fight my own battles,” she said. She chose to view this event positively and confidently. “I don’t think I would be where I am now as a person or as a musician without that happening. Is it weird now, to say I’m grateful? Because I wouldn’t be me and I wouldn’t be a badass.”

Christina made physical changes related to this transformation. She started college with a girlish haircut and a simple, conservative clothing style. Gradually, her hair and clothes became more creative as she developed a distinctly original look. After college, she remade herself with a punk hairdo, shaved close on the sides with a shaggy top dyed bright red. She now dresses in hip, edgy styles feeding her confident nature and badass image while retaining her strong work ethic and engaging personal style.

Like Christina, Bryan made a physical transformation after graduation, redefining his visual persona. In music college, students often express their creativity through imaginative dress, hairstyles, and other body art such as piercings and tattoos. Bryan stood out with waist-length dreadlocks and large, plugged ear lobes: “It’s my visual, which to some people is trivial but to me is like a big part of expression.” He mentioned a readiness to change his look but apprehension about taking that step: “I was afraid of losing my identity and my image—my identity is who I am.” But, he paused to grin: “It’s still the same smile. Cutting my hair after 10 years of having dreads felt incredible. It felt

great to make a drastic change.” He remade himself with a new unique look. A short, stylish haircut complemented by a dramatic handlebar moustache accentuated his charismatic smile and distinctive retro hipster clothing.

Matt discovered a different identity challenge moving between his established music and emerging education careers. Well known by his stage name in music circles, his rising work in nonprofit education required the use of his given name. Matt’s music work now intersects with his educational work. His well-recognized stage name represents:

one of the greatest assets I bring to the table, especially in this world of nonprofit people who think this particular way. Here's me coming in with this creative young perspective so I don't like introducing myself as Matt Smith; it just doesn't work.

His solution: He hyphenates his stage and given names on his business card and introduces himself by the name most appropriate for a particular situation.

### **Summary—Transitions**

The transitions of these young artists from academic into professional life shared elements challenging and organic, expected and surprising. Many artists began professional work prior to graduation with established networks and regular gigs and/or teaching. For some, postgraduate life proved a continuation of previous experiences while others endured more challenging transitions. Many young artists reassessed their initial career paths within the first year, making adjustments to accommodate changing financial, artistic, or personal needs.

Artistic activities and growth require an environment and mindset appropriate for creativity. As the importance of creative work increased for these artists, they discovered making time for creativity and developing artistry involved finding balance in one's life. Some of these artists proved innovative in continually adapting and changing their work and life balance to encourage and support the time and energy required for original creative work.

### **Analysis—Transitions**

Bridges (2004) described three stages in transitions to change: (a) something ends, (b) a neutral zone follows the ending, and (c) a new beginning emerges. Concluding undergraduate education defines a significant life passage and the end of nearly a lifetime as a student for many graduates. Commencement implies a new beginning, the presumed start of independent adult life. Unlike many new graduates, young artists may reach this milestone somewhat established in a career with significant professional experience. This first-hand knowledge of the field provided many young artists with helpful awareness of career development and insights into the transition after college. In spite of professional experience, however, many challenges remained during the transition period. I use a relatively new psychological perspective, emerging adulthood, to analyze college to work transitions for young artists.

### **Emerging Adulthood**

Numerous life span (psychology) and life course (sociology) theories address the ontogenetic (age-related) changes throughout life (Baltes, 1987). Interest in analyzing and depicting the life course extends from ancient philosophy (Cicero) and religious texts (Talmud), to famous literary texts (Shakespeare), and fine art paintings depicting stages

or ladders as metaphors for the passage through life (Baltes, 1987). In the 1990s, Arnett (2000) recognized societal changes in Western developed countries. Arnett proposed a new life stage between adolescence and young adulthood, calling it emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000). Longer lifespans, greatly expanded postsecondary educational opportunities, and rapidly changing world economic frameworks led many young people to postpone adult responsibilities and roles over the past 2 decades (Arnett, 2004; Murphy<sup>4</sup>, Blustein, Bohlig, & Platt, 2010).

Arnett (2004) described five “essential qualities” of emerging adulthood. They include: (a) identity exploration, (b) instability, (c) self-focus, (d) in transition (neither adolescent nor adult), and (e) age of possibilities (p. 8). Emerging adulthood theory provides a clear model for examining college to work transitions, linking closely with identity development described in the previous chapter. Occupational identity (artistic and professional identity in this study of young musicians) remains a major activity of emerging adults’ lives (Arnett, 2004; Messersmith et al., 2008; Murphy, Blustein, Bohlig, & Platt, 2010).

Emerging adults see “work as an identity quest” (Arnett, 2004, p. 162) and this phrase serves as a mantra for many emerging adults. While an important characteristic of emerging adulthood involves attempting to align jobs/careers with personal identity and interests to find life meaning in work, young artists with merged personal and artistic identities may experience greater continuity along with potentially significant challenges as they transition from college into full professional life. Moving from unskilled jobs in adolescence to career choices in emerging adulthood and beyond frames an emerging

adulthood work reality for many young people. Yet career expression emanates from a profound sense of vocational calling in many young artists' lives, as noted in Chapter 4.

During a time of identity exploration in emerging adulthood, the merger of personal and artistic identity, often present from childhood, may help focus the young artist or may feel restricting. The decision to attend a specialty music college inherently limits broad exploration in college. Anthony reflected on simply continuing on an artistic path established years before, but in spite of challenges, most young artists have difficulty imagining a life plan other than music. The following sections frame portfolio careers, the transition from college to work, and life balance for young artists using concepts from emerging adulthood with support from other college to work transition concepts.

### **Emerging Adulthood and Portfolio Careers**

Instability of work situations presents challenges to emerging adults in all fields, but may be a particular challenge for young artists building portfolio careers (Arnett, 2004; Tanner, Arnett, & Leis, 2009). Riann and Derek, while successful in building teaching studios and gigging opportunities after graduation, discovered the lifestyle created too much stress and anxiety, affecting musical enjoyment, along with creative inspiration and output. They each added steady day jobs to their musical activities to mitigate instability. Others handled work fluctuations more easily. Allen sought out variety and challenge, even refusing to join any bands as a regular member to stay open to new opportunities, representing the most extreme portfolio career among these young artists. While all young artists made work decisions using varied practical and values-

based criteria, most embraced some form of portfolio career and the resulting instability inherent in those choices.

### **Emerging Adulthood and Transition Challenges**

The general college to work literature focuses on the challenges of transition into a single, traditional workplace (Graham & McKenzie, 1995; Holton, 1995; Johnson, 1995; Perrone & Vickers, 2003; Plunkett, 2001; Vaughn & Roberts, 2007; Wendlandt & Rochlen, 2008). Musicians, however, typically develop independently organized, multiple income streams within broad, portfolio careers. Within a single workplace, transition challenges include a lack of awareness regarding work expectations, culture shock, interpersonal challenges, and high stress levels (Holton, 1995; Plunkett, 2001; Wendlandt & Rochlen, 2008). Portfolio careers also include these factors, challenging young artists in self-directed freelance work situations. Participants recognized these challenges, but some lacked skills and/or support in managing the demands of independent work.

I described the importance of family and mentor support in forming an artistic identity in Chapter 4. While support structures of colleagues and teachers remain in place throughout college, postgraduate life requires continued social support (Arnett, 2004; Graham & McKenzie, 1995; Murphy, Blustein, Bohlig, & Platt, 2010). Parents, peers, and mentors play a continuing support role in emerging adulthood, but professional networks increase in importance and require development (Arnett, 2004; Messersmith et al. 2008; Murphy, Blustein, Bohlig, & Platt, 2010).

Emerging adulthood often provides a time of great personal freedoms, between the restrictions of adolescence and the responsibilities of later adulthood (Arnett, 2004).

Research shows emerging adults value personal transition markers including (a) self-responsibility, (b) independent decision-making, and (c) attaining financial independence (Tanner, Arnett, & Leis, 2009). Emerging adults can flourish with a “balance of relational support and space to develop autonomy and competence” (Murphy et al., 2010, p.180). Young artists clearly recognized the importance of work and support networks in building their careers.

Time pressures and vagaries of musicians’ freelance lifestyles challenged participants as they left college. Personality styles, financial expectations, and a need for a balanced life encouraged some artists to embrace freelancing and caused others to identify alternative employment. Participants recognized life balance facilitates creative expression, connecting these two challenges.

### **Emerging Adulthood and Life Balance**

In this career field in particular, there's a vortex of things where everything you do becomes work. For some people that may work but if everything I did was about getting to that next step, I don't think I'd be a happy person.

—Derek

For many young artists, life balance emerged as an important theme early in their careers. While emerging adults typically expect separation of work from personal life (Arnett, 2004), work separation and life balance prove challenging when paired with independent, portfolio careers and core artist identities.

The definition of life balance varied among individuals. Allen, Bryan, and Kyle work fully immersed in music. They define and achieve meaningful life balance through an intentional balancing of musical activities—playing, writing, producing, and/or teaching. Another group, Alyssa, Riann, Derek, and Mike, created clear boundaries

around their work, income, and personal lives, emphasizing a controlled atmosphere with specific musical goals.

A third group, including Christina, Matt, Jared, Tommy, Ashley, Jack, and Caitlin, demonstrate characteristics of the first two groups. Artistically, this third group focuses on music, while recognizing distinct individual needs for personal, not just musical balance. Some artists in the third group support themselves entirely in music. Others earn a portion of their income through nonmusical sources.

All young artists in this study discovered and implemented personally meaningful life balance utilizing aspects of emerging adulthood and other college to work transition perspectives. The recognition of inherent instability in musician work, along with the importance of work salience and life balance, financial independence, and social support, sustained with optimism and excitement about the future, helped young artists make independent decisions regarding their artistic lives early in their careers. Recognizing the needs and expectations of emerging adult artists provides opportunities for enhancing support and training.

## Chapter 6: Making a living in Music:

### Achieving Financial Stability and Sustainability

Non-musically, oh God, I've been a leasing agent, a cleaner, a barista, a bartender, a teacher, a stage host, a nanny, yeah, in three years, all these things. I'll do anything as long as I can still be singing.

—Caitlin

The individual need for predictable financial stability and security varies among these young artists, driven by personality, student loans and other debts, lifestyle expectations, artistic aspirations, and tolerance for or interest in well paying jobs. For some young artists, significant student loans drive their life choices and limit their options. Others have a strong need for financial stability in their lives, to reduce anxiety, limit the financial expectations from music activities or to plan for the future.

Two participants described the creation of art as their primary focal point and made life adjustments and sacrifices to achieve those goals. Some have met the financial challenge by obtaining fulltime work either within or outside the music industry, while others meet their needs entirely with music-related work. Still others get by financially with an ever-changing mix of employment in and out of music. Their stories illustrate broad themes around art versus money issues, including ways artists choose to allocate time, avoid burnout, and make room for artistic creation and performance.

In this chapter, I examine multiple approaches in the young artists' search for financial sustainability in support of an artistically satisfying life. First, identifying economic realities and conflicts, followed by three initial paths for managing sustainability. These paths ranged from (a) initial focus on financial stability, (b) the pursuit of art for art's sake approach, to (c) exploring a variety of options for career

development. After describing pathways, I share stories of artists merging personal, artistic, and professional identities with varying degrees of awareness and perception.

### **Economic Realities**

The realities of a constant search for paid performance work and the generally low pay for many available opportunities caused most participants to reflect upon and reevaluate their relationship to music as a fulltime career path. Many young artists felt compelled to focus their careers on creative work, composition, and songwriting. A focus on creative work necessitated devising individual plans and structures to make choices economically viable. A few participants directed their development primarily toward performance in ongoing bands, freelance situations, or solos rather than in composition or other creative endeavors.

I describe the external, economic-based factors young artists considered and managed in crafting a musically satisfying, yet financially sustainable career path. Their decisions helped them move toward a lifestyle balance suited to their evolving needs in a dynamic field. Student loan debt held a significant place in early career decision-making processes, a reminder of the price paid for pursuing art and a professional career.

#### **Financial Constraints: Student Loan Debt**

Student loan debt has grown into a national crisis, topping more than one trillion dollars as of July, 2013 (Chopra, 2013). Seven of the participants mentioned significant student loan debt as defining and determining their work options at this early point in their careers. This debt affected decision-making and influenced career choices, creating anxiety about current and future life options. While personal preferences determined some choices regarding types of work or lifestyle options, student loan debt loomed as an

immovable external force limiting some alternatives. Student loan debt took its toll on young musicians.

Alyssa married a fellow music college alumnus about a year after graduation. “I think the hardest part is the amount of student loan debt that we both had and then we got married and it accumulated and motivated us to day jobs.” Their combined debt remains substantial. Their day jobs provide primary financial support, while their music work brings in modest additional income. Alyssa described the necessity of working “day jobs” to pay off debt.

I couldn't just sit in my apartment and eat Ramen noodles every night. I have to care for this other person now too. We have to get day jobs; that's the only solution to pay off our combined student loan debt, be able to perform, and to live somewhere, and not in a refrigerator box in the alley! It was a tough thing to chew.

Alyssa recently completed licensure for real estate, establishing herself in the local market. The flexible schedule and independence of realtors appealed to Alyssa as similar to musicians.

Due in part to student loans, Caitlin accepted higher paying but less rewarding gigs in the cover band scene, first on cruise ships, and later in clubs and bars. “I am fortunate enough to do what I love. But I am also paying a lot of money and I'm forced to do more cover band stuff. It feels like work, it feels like a lot more work.” She continues working toward paying off both student loan and credit card debt: “that's just so hard, it's so hard.”

A significant financial challenge for musicians remains the low average wages for performing. Achieving independence proves particularly challenging with large student loans. Bryan, whose performing career developed quickly before and after graduation, worked consistently. Unfortunately, he lacked the means to fully support himself. He said, “I have gigs that pay 50 bucks a night, seven days a week, which is a lot of money but my loans were kicking in and I still couldn’t afford rent and so I couldn’t move out.” Bryan eventually secured theater and touring gigs with higher pay rates, but in a music economy with low to no wages (venues in some cities even require a pay to play arrangement), significant loan debt limits the variety of available options.

Student loan repayments represented significant monthly obligations for young artists and most recognized the loans provided both an opportunity to realize their artistic ambitions and a legal obligation. Although “roughly 50% of my income goes to pay off school [loans],” Derek remained positive and realistic about both the value of his education and his personal responsibility for repaying it, as did Riann. Derek and Riann credit their undergraduate experience with helping them develop musical skills and artistry. In addition, they acknowledged their education provided an awareness of the music industry and rich networks of colleagues and contacts making their developing musical careers possible. Along with the benefits of artistic growth, career tools, and industry awareness, they took responsibility for the resulting student loans they must repay. Riann expressed this awareness as she sought balance: “I have bills to pay and I have loans to pay off and I still want to do music but I want to enjoy it more than just gigging to make money.”

Two musicians mentioned student loans peripherally, folding them into overall financial concerns. Christina graduated exhausted and burned out from pushing to complete her degree in 3 years, partially to save money. She joked about winning the lottery to cover her loans. “Stress level number one on the scale of stresses for musicians is making enough money to pay bills. I had to worry about all of that and I didn’t want to have to move home.” Jack, the only participant still living with his parents two years after graduation, relied exclusively on periodic performance income to pay his bills, primarily student loans. “Financially I’m pretty stable, just paying loans and stuff. And that sucks but I don’t really have any major expenses so just playing these private shows and weddings is pretty much my income right now.”

Student loan debt appeared as one of the important drivers of many young graduates’ early career decision-making processes. While some flexibility for payoff of loans remains negotiable, the total size of the loans and long-term nature of the payoff period determines many personal and career decisions for young artists.

### **Financial Conflicts: Art Versus Money**

Whenever you mix money with art, that’s a huge conflict.

—Kyle

Finances might taint or limit the production of art through artificial restrictions or parameters, but art proves difficult to create without financial support. From aristocratic patrons in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to record companies in the 20th, those providing money for the production of art often granted financial support with additional, perhaps undesirable, expectations of the artists (Pinheiro, 2009; Salmen, 1983; Weber, 2004). Some music and money challenges remain very basic. Young artists must determine methods to

create viable business models for themselves. Most young artists proved resilient and proactive, making significant changes within the first year after graduation to accommodate financial, personal, and artistic needs. As young artists started their careers, they identified and experienced challenges in establishing their careers, this included managing the conflict between making money or art.

As a jazz saxophonist, Mike struggled as a freelance performer, questioning the motivations of job contractors hiring musicians, interpersonal politics, lack of opportunities, and low pay relative to the total amount of time and preparation expected of a gig. Playing a prestigious concert might not pay a professional wage. “It's this weird, bizarre thing. I had this gig at [a major arena]. We were opening for [a Grammy winner] and it was sold out—10,000 people, and you know what I got paid for that? \$50!” Some contractors, clients, promoters, and booking agents prey on artists’ eagerness to practice their craft and pay ridiculously low rates for performance due to the availability of talented musicians and competition for performance opportunities.

On a small scale, while in college and in larger numbers after graduation, Riann followed the cover band and lesson teaching route to achieve financial success but quickly burned out. The drain of the weekend gigs left little time for creativity.

Right out of school we were gigging constantly every weekend, playing covers for money and we got burned out pretty quickly. It wasn't the performing aspect-- I love that--but that was our income and it was our passion and so we would come home and write but our creativity was gone because we were just playing for hours.

Riann identified a basic conflict others also acknowledged: joining of income and passion

may prove problematic. Trained as a working musician, Kyle “gigged nonstop when I came out [of college], playing any music I could, trying to make money because that’s what everything was guided at—making a living; because you have to, that was the order of things.” He reflected on his many successful early performances: “I didn’t feel like it was leading somewhere that I wanted to go.” Shifting his artistic emphasis toward original composition, Kyle began to readjust his goals and working life as a musician. He summed up this challenge in the context of writing one’s own music:

For some, it’s replicating others’ music; for some it’s creating their own. I guess if you get joy out of one of them then that’s great. I just learned that it didn’t give me as much joy as writing. What gets in the way is the conflict between money and art and making a living.

Kyle now understands and respects how a variety of methods to create financial stability freed up his opportunities for music. He explained that, “without the financial stress, your music will be untainted by the money thing. That was a surprise. I can understand that choice now. A few years ago I thought if you want to play music, you’ve got to play music.”

Some participants experienced different manifestations of the money or art conundrum. Alyssa recognized a personal preference to limit her playing:

I don’t want to be the person gigging five or six nights of the week. I would lose my love for music. It would become too much of a job, too much work for me. And I don’t want to lose that love, the passion for it.

Alyssa experienced this phenomenon working on the cruise ship and her experience continued to inform her artistic values on land. She solved this dilemma by

carefully selecting two core bands to join. She found musical challenges and growth potential in both groups without the constant stress of new situations.

Jared and Tommy both experienced the pay to play phenomenon in Los Angeles, where venues required bands to presell a certain dollar value of tickets or pay the difference themselves. Many venues used this format as a money making venture, booking a dozen bands in an evening for very short sets. Jared described the process:

If you want to play the Roxy or the Viper Room, all those legendary places on Sunset Avenue, it's gunna be \$10 a ticket and you have to sell like 25 tickets. So you're telling me you have to pay \$250 just to play here? What if no one shows up?

Even in the Midwest, without a pervasive pay-to-play culture, gigs by bands playing original music (as opposed to covers) can end up costing band members money rather than earning a wage. Derek framed the situation and his priorities: "The numbers do become an issue. If I can make \$300 playing a theater show as opposed to losing \$80 playing with my original band somewhere, 9 times out of 10 I still really, really want to do the original." But the decision to take the higher paying gig or promote his original music depends on total income and cash flow.

Immediately after graduation, Matt concentrated on building his music career. "I was focused on the music part, the creation of music, and that's how I was going to secure my finances." After completing the nonprofit educational leadership program, he said, "slowly but surely I became part of the education world and now it's even deeper, of course." Matt found himself at a personal and professional crossroads with financial implications:

The challenge I face now is financial challenges but not where I was a year ago—when is my next dollar going to come in? I'm thinking of building business models around myself musically and the nonprofit sector that work for me. Then I can live the type of life that I want to live and have the type of time that I need if I want to see my son in a play. Nonprofit music—how can I support myself and support my family? Thinking more specific of what that looks like.

Ashley stressed the importance of balance in the art versus money conflict.

Eventually you realize that if you're not doing what you want to do you have to get up and do it. You have to do what you want to do. But it's so easy to get driven by things like money, this balancing of financial stability with artistic fulfillment. Making sure you have both and realizing that it's up to you.

### **Resolving Financial and Artistic Challenges**

Many young artists demonstrated clarity, proactivity, and self efficacy in assessing their work and personal lives. They began developing individual means to achieve financial stability, aligning their decisions with personal values and goals. They resolved initial challenges by two different, though related, means: either (a) focusing on creating financial stability first to support creative endeavors, or (b) prioritizing artistic work, while developing financial sustainability as needed. Their stories demonstrated the importance of an honest assessment of personal and professional priorities and temperament coupled with personal initiative.

#### **Financial Focus**

Derek, Mike, and Riann carefully examined the personal importance of financial stability in relation to a career in music, each defining distinct solutions for individual,

comfortable sustainability. All participants considered the financial implications of various choices in the art versus money conflict, and three musicians prioritized financial stability in their post college lives.

Derek works fulltime as a college admissions representative. Initially cautious about accepting a fulltime job, Derek soon recognized advantages to his current lifestyle and future goals:

I think the stability, whether I want to admit it or not, was something that I kind of like so I think what changed is that from 20-year-old Derek not wanting to do anything without a guitar in my hands to 25-year-old Derek willing to do those things, I've realized that doing this hasn't negatively affected what I do musically. If anything, it's only helped because I can be more selective. This provides more funding for the projects I'm involved in.

Derek continues his prior freelance portfolio career along with his fulltime office job, including 20-25 private guitar students, membership in several ongoing bands, regular performances with contracted theatrical shows, songwriting, and guitar repair. He chooses freelance projects selectively given the financial stability provided by his fulltime job.

Financially and artistically, Mike struggled as a freelance performer, eventually recognizing a need to adjust his approach. He considered other possibilities for several years. Mike's solution involved separating music performance from his personal art-making, and supporting himself with a career outside of music. He retrained as a certified network administrator while developing his electronic composition skills in music. "I think I would be happier going the route of being an artist and getting a day

job, and doing art any kind of chance I can get outside of that.” Like Derek, Mike sees a skilled career in another field as a means to support artistic endeavors on his own terms, unencumbered by financial expectations.

Riann transitioned successfully into a freelance career after college but found it financially unsustainable and personally draining. Shifting to fulltime work outside of music enabled her to focus her musical energies on higher level creative and performing work, secure her finances, and create time off to spend with her husband:

I work from 8 to 4:30 and then have the whole evening to do whatever, make dinner and write or watch TV if I want to. The opportunity to take gigs as you want them. We don't have to go there tonight because we need to make the money to make our rent next week. It's not that way anymore which is really nice.

Riann and her husband, also a musician, seek to establish their financial foundation now, in their early 20s, to allow more personal and artistic options in the future. They see independent sources of income as a ticket to artistic freedom later in their careers and remain disciplined in following their plan.

Three young artists acknowledged their need for financial stability and took proactive steps to set up mechanisms supporting those needs. They prioritized financial stability with planning and discipline and without compromising their artistic standards and goals. Stable employment enabled them to focus artistically and lowered stress by removing the continuous search for work and variable income.

### **Art for Art's Sake**

Other young artists concentrated on creating art with a more relaxed approach to the financial aspects of their careers. They prioritized art over finances, aware of the

need to incorporate financial decisions into career planning. Occasionally, they turned down moneymaking opportunities to pursue artistically meaningful personal projects. These artists remained aware of the need to incorporate financial decisions into career planning, but prioritized art over finances.

Kyle's many musical talents put him in high demand with the profitable high-end cover band scene after college:

I could learn music really fast, but that wasn't really what I wanted to be doing. I really like the satisfaction of creating something on my own or with other people, whatever I want to do, that doesn't entail really making any money, at least for now.

Kyle adjusted, focusing on creative rather than re-creative gigs. He began teaching to provide financial stability and exercised greater selectivity in playing gigs. He made artistic rather than financial choices his first priority. "I'm able to live pretty comfortably teaching and picking up other gigs but much less, pretty much my choice. I don't have to take the gig." Beyond the fundamentals of building a sustainable lifestyle, Kyle has strategic artistic goals as well. "What I'm trying to do is make awesome bands and create more awesome music in my taste." I want to "create a scene of musicians where they love the music and if we get paid, we get paid." He attracts top musical collaborators and creates music for and with them, regardless of funding.

Similar to Kyle, Bryan found gigging less fulfilling artistically than he initially anticipated and he began seeking out opportunities to create experimental shows and musical collaborations with like-minded artists. "I've been getting gigs, better gigs, better paying gigs, cooler gigs, better people, challenging music, but I didn't want to do it." For

both Kyle and Bryan, the creation of original music emerged as a primary artistic focus. The resulting challenge consisted of developing opportunities to pursue those artistic motivations while creating a sustainable lifestyle. Kyle and Bryan valued the creation of original music soon after beginning their professional lives, and this interest quickly became the driving force in their artistic lives, taking precedence over more lucrative but less satisfying cover work. Both Kyle and Bryan continue gigging selectively for primary income.

Making art for art's sake reflects an approach focused on artistic self-development for these young artists. They demonstrate a deep and rich commitment to furthering music and a willingness to sacrifice as necessary to pursue these goals.

### **Artist Careers, Underway**

Artistic careers often take time to launch, and many of the artists' work experiences reflect this reality at the early stages in their careers. Six young artists launched their careers in music, achieving varied levels of artistic and financial stability and sustainability. Talented and well schooled, their goals, motivations, luck, and ambitions produced differing results to date.

Caitlin sings with several cover bands and a comedy piano duo. Vivacious and outgoing, she enjoys her day job as a barista in a busy mall. Constant changes in her personal life and a lack of stability in Caitlin's artistic and financial life exacerbates stress, making decisions difficult. "I think the two things that are the most stressful right now in accomplishing my goals are money and location. So if I can work those two things out then I can do anything." Addressing her goals and seeking adventure, Caitlin recently moved to the Mayan Riviera region of Mexico where she sings fulltime with a

Mexican resort band.

Alyssa spent 4 months on a cruise ship, accepting a contract as a baritone saxophone player in a big band after graduation. Since then, she has “just been floating around and trying to find my way in life.” Alyssa performs regularly in two jazz big bands but she realized quickly that “gigging in this town doesn’t pay the bills really.” She worked a series of menial part time jobs to supplement gigging income before earning her real estate license. Alyssa expressed satisfaction with her working and personal life, although she found herself less professionally active than she imagined before graduation,

Jack actively performs his own music and cover music for weddings and bar and private party shows in a trio, a duo, and as a soloist. He worked a year in customer service and Internet sales for a large corporation and left to reignite his music career. He remains committed to pursuing his artistic ambitions but also somewhat unsure of his next steps:

I would ideally love to be working in media, something entertainment-based. I live like two lives. I have this artist Jack life with my shows, trying to show myself as an artist, and the other half is to try to get into the almost corporate world just working, kind of balancing those two so I'm not just a bum not doing anything.

Jared lives a satisfying life as an up and coming musician in Los Angeles. In his day job he works fulltime at a national coffee shop chain, appreciative of flexible hours and support to pursue his growing performance career. He tours and records with two active bands (one band recently toured in Russia) and a small but growing amount of

freelance work. Jared hopes to find additional music-related work eventually but continues steadily building his performance career in Los Angeles. “Right now I’m so busy with performing, that I have no complaints. I’m doing everything that I want to be doing right now.”

The first year after graduation, Matt scraped together a fragile livelihood entirely on music, graphic design, and food stamps. Proud of living off his art, he also found this time very stressful. “My livelihood was based on what I love. It sucked because the frequency of how it (money) came in but it was a joy that it did come in and I could pay the bills.” His career perspective changed as education and social justice became increasingly central to his values and aspirations.

At this point (my career is) less music driven. Although music is still the pinnacle for me, an important piece of my life, it's not the centerpiece anymore. It was two or three years ago. Now it's no longer that. It's like the equal playing field of education and the arts.

A prestigious leadership training program provided a subsistence wage for Matt over 10 months. He planned to redirect his energies toward employment in the nonprofit sector, allowing him to combine his passions for music, education, and social justice. “I have a platform; I know what I'm dealing with; I know the real issues. Let me try to really make a difference here, not just teach what songwriting is about but really try to make a difference.”

Ashley graduated with a bachelor’s degree in musical theater from a prestigious music conservatory. While financially stable and happy in a variety of teaching positions, Ashley aspires to new artistic ventures:

I thought I might be headed for Broadway or something, but now I'm trying to be a singer songwriter full-time and teaching music, and theater has sort of exited the picture since I graduated. It's not what I expected but I'm happy and I'm also reaching for new things. I feel I can never be quite satisfied with everything, but it's totally different from what I expected. Totally evolved.

### **Summary**

Artist careers evolve uniquely and unfold at an individual pace. Timing, luck and opportunity may play a role, along with intentional goal setting, planning, and follow-through as demonstrated by young artists. In some cases, assumed career paths became unavailable or unsatisfactory after a period of time and goals frequently shifted. Sometimes, previously unimagined opportunities opened new options. Self-awareness and a growing attentiveness to the external world provided turning points. The merging of multiple identities, personal, artistic, and professional, was linked closely to financial lifestyle choices. All participants recognized and negotiated the art versus money conflict, balancing the need for financial stability as well as the importance of pursuing art for personal fulfillment. Figure 2 illustrates the dilemmas faced by young artists and options they chose for resolving financial challenges.

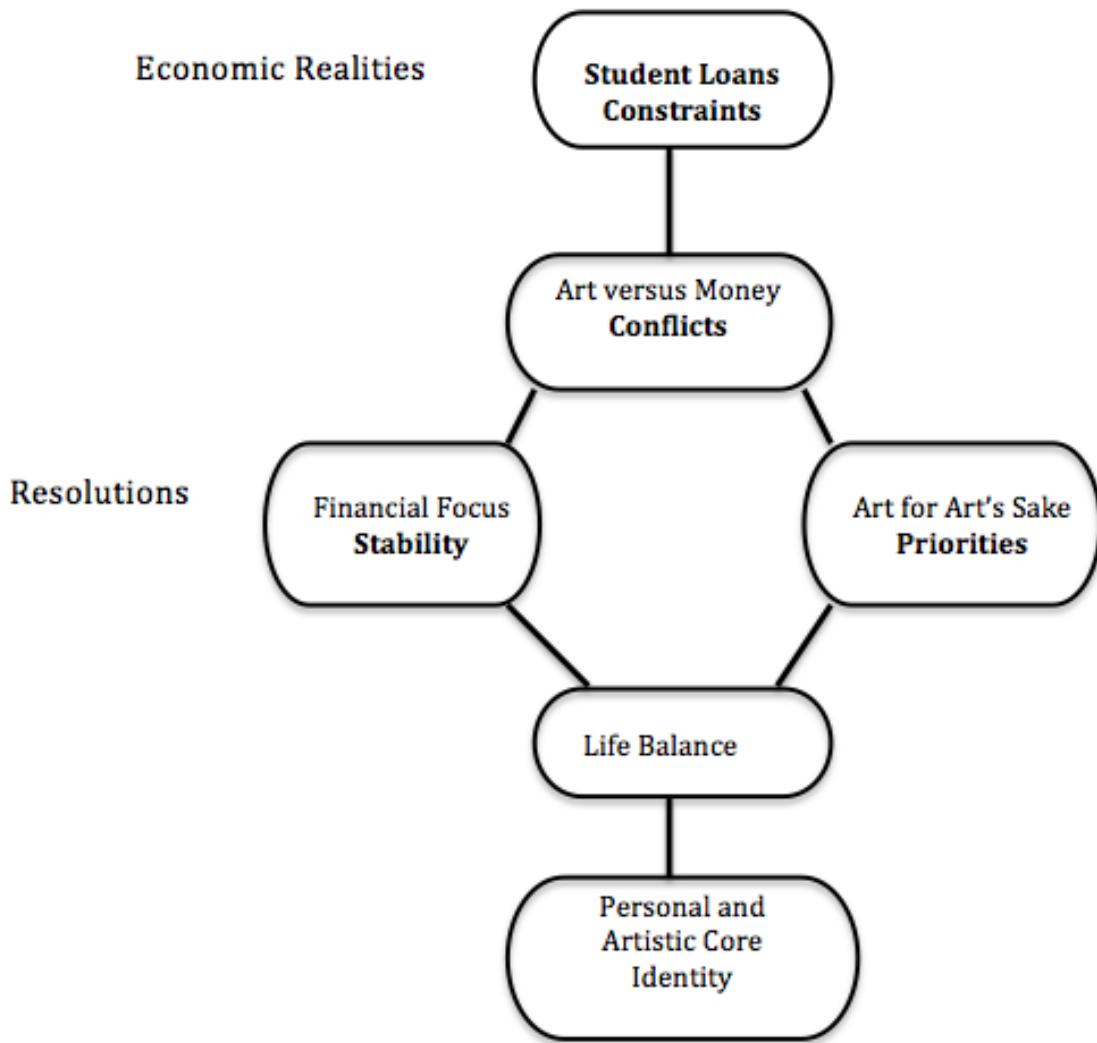


Figure 2. Factors in achieving financial stability and sustainability.

## **Analysis—Making a Living in Music**

Economic realities influence decision-making as young artists leave higher education to build professional and adult lives. Constraints caused by life and work circumstances may potentially limit career and lifestyle options. Student loan debt remains a central constraint for the current generation leaving college. Young artists also deal with a less universal economic conflict, the question of whether or not to monetize art. A deep and long standing artistic identity aligns with emerging adults' drive to find meaningful work connected to identity (Arnett, 2004).

Paid musical work may not provide artistic rewards, especially at early career stages. The financial disconnect between work perceived as original and artistic versus trite and commercial caused stress and dissatisfaction for some artists. Cover band work, while sometimes lucrative, felt mechanical and less challenging. The lack of personal connection between identity and work may discourage the emerging adult musician (Arnett, 2004). Demonstrating self-efficacy, however, many young artists resolved financial constraints and conflicts. I adopted emerging adulthood and self-efficacy theory to analyze the relationships between identity-driven work, financial constraints and conflicts, and resolutions to these challenges.

### **Self-Efficacy**

An intrinsic motivation to pursue music developed naturally for young artists, due to compelling musical attraction early in life, the support of family and mentors, and personal accomplishments. Bandura (1994) stressed the importance of self-efficacy in achievement and compared the characteristics of high self-efficacy and low self-efficacy.

The characteristics distinguishing high self-efficacy from low self-efficacy, illustrated in Table 2, reveal differences in attitudes and action.

Table 2

*Elements of High Self-Efficacy and Low Self-Efficacy* (Bandura, 1994)

High Self-Efficacy	Low Self-Efficacy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assurance of capabilities</li> <li>• See difficult tasks as challenging</li> <li>• Intrinsic motivation</li> <li>• High engagement level</li> <li>• Accept challenging goals with strong commitment</li> <li>• Resilient</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doubts capabilities</li> <li>• See difficult tasks as a threat</li> <li>• Dwells on personal deficiencies</li> <li>• Low engagement level</li> <li>• Low aspirations and weak commitment</li> <li>• Not resilient</li> </ul>

Self-efficacy for emerging adult musicians proved important in both musical and non-musical career activities. Using self-efficacy theory, I analyze how different artists responded to the challenges regarding student loan debt, the conflict between making art and money, and the desire for expression of an artistic identity. I begin with the financial constraints imposed from student loan debt.

### **Financial Constraints—Student Loan Debt**

Balancing low pay against high loan repayments caused stress for young artists. Alyssa, Riann, and Derek demonstrated high self-efficacy and strong resilience in a non-musical area by accepting the challenging goal of managing loan payments while pursuing an artistic career. They took personal responsibility and made the personal decisions necessary to become financially independent, key goals of emerging adulthood (Tanner, Arnett, & Leis, 2000).

Alyssa and Riann modified and balanced their musical work, adding nonmusical jobs. Derek continued all aspects of his portfolio musical career and added a fulltime administrative job. Their career alterations, motivated by stress over high loan payments, initially caused feelings of loss or compromise. Once initiated, the lifestyle changes removed stress and provided an increased measure of control with positive responses and increased self-efficacy. These experiences demonstrated success in achieving emerging adulthood elements of life/work balance and increased work salience (Arnett, 2004), and the personal discovery of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994). The positive results of career changes reinforced feeling of capability and problem solving, further lowering stress (Bennett, 2012a; Pajares, 2002).

### **Financial Conflicts—Art Versus Money**

Many young artists demonstrated high self-efficacy as they adjusted the musical makeup of their careers to accommodate artistic as well as financial concerns. Trained to become working musicians while in college, they discovered a greater passion for creating art rather putting income above art. Bandura (1994) described the importance of self-efficacy social models, positive or negative, in developing one's personal self-efficacy. Kyle mentioned a highly respected teacher's advice to accept all performing opportunities: "A gig is a gig is a gig." After a year following this advice, Kyle realized he needed to incorporate a higher level of creative work. Kyle's strong self-efficacy, reinforced by teachers and performing colleagues modeling both similar and very different career goals, helped him change career directions to match his emerging goals (Bandura, 1994). Again, mentors of all types proved important.

### **Resolving Financial and Artistic Challenges**

Resolution of financial and artistic challenges also required high levels of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994). One group of young artists focused on creating financial stability prior to making artistic choices. Each individual anchored personal and professional life with a fulltime job or career in a nonmusic field, creating financial stability and the time and mental energy needed for creative pursuits. While not a choice other artists chose to take at this early point in their careers, those making this choice expressed relief with the decision. Nonmusical careers remain common among musicians internationally, however, with artistic freedom an often cited reason (Bennett, 2012b).

Another group prioritized art first, while acknowledging the necessity of financial sustainability. These artists cultivated personal talent, accomplishments, and connections to procure options emphasizing artistic production, while continuing to play gigs. Their musical mastery marked high self-efficacy and a willingness to take musical and professional risks.

The largest group shared elements of the first two groups, demonstrating varying levels of success to date. Caitlin, Jack, and Ashley planned for geographical as well as financial independence, strong emerging adulthood goals (Arnett, 2004). Low self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994) for some in this group included doubt about their capabilities in managing a music career, although none professed doubts about their musical capabilities.

Jack expressed confidence in his musical talent but demonstrated low self-efficacy about fully developing his music career. During his interview, Jack expressed

many doubts, holding high aspirations but demonstrating a low commitment and resilience needed to move forward (Bandura 1977). Similar to Jack, Caitlin's musical self-efficacy proved higher than her life/career self-efficacy. She experienced high stress levels exacerbating her ability to make life changes.

Matt's confidence and self-efficacy rose when he completed an intensive and selective arts and education training program after graduation. Matt continues to build on nascent interests and skills first evident as a student, creating a personally relevant but non-traditional career combining music, education, and social justice. He personifies the desire for meaning in work among emerging adults (Arnett, 2004). Tommy entered the music industry after a successful internship. His continued growth in the firm, anchored by successful projects and reinforced by strong mentor/social models that built his self-efficacy, preparing him for new challenges (Bandura, 1994).

Achieving expert technical skills and artistry requires high levels of motivation and self-efficacy exerted consistently over a long period of time. These transferable skills might seem applicable to young artists managing the myriad non-musical challenges of negotiating an artistic career. Yet motivation to achieve in one domain does not guarantee motivation in another (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Musical interest, proclivity, talent, and accomplishment develop through a complex combination of exposure, opportunity, and support over many years. The specific nonmusical challenges of managing personal and professional life after graduation remain skills most often learned in real life circumstances.

Each young artist continued to experience a strong artistic calling regardless of the role of music work in an individual's financial sustainability planning. In fact, the

decision whether or not to monetize art-making at all developed as an important and sometimes difficult choice. All of the young artists grappled with the relationship and conflict between art and money. Some found workable and logical solutions quickly while others continued to work toward balancing art and money issues.

Many artists enact an artistic identity in conjunction with personal identity and an evolving professional identity. These three distinct identities come together to form an artist's core identity. Artistic identity manifests clearly through creative expression. In this chapter, I first describe various creative processes young artists used to express their artistic identity through composition. I then describe the uniquely individual ways young artists merged artistic, personal, and professional identities to create a unique and personally meaningful career as an artist. I show the intimate relationship between forming and enacting an artistic identity through creative expression.

### **Pursuing Art: Artistry and Creative Expression**

Twelve of the 15 participants developed varying personal balances of original work and cover opportunities, changing over time as their musical goals evolved and clarified. Leaving college, many musical artists expected to perform as a primary career activity. Several composed or wrote songs on the side. Over time, original creative activity and artistry emerged as an increasingly central focus of musicians. Composition and songwriting gradually increased in importance in the artistic lives of many participants after graduation. The creation of new art through composition became a central component in forming their adult identities.

Allocating time for creative work proved challenging for many young artists. They recognized songwriting provided little financial reward initially, but the creative rewards compelled them to find ways to support this activity. They sought career sustainability through a variety of means to support creative activity. Some artists acknowledged strong inspiration to create but less interest in monetizing the results.

All 15 young artists launched careers as musicians after graduation. Many continued active freelance careers started before graduation, while others began their careers after graduation. Ten composed and/or recorded and released albums of their original music within 2 years of graduation. Four artists released solo albums and 6 released albums as band projects. Several have new recording projects underway.

All young artists continued to perform in some capacity, some extensively while others less frequently. The participants found great satisfaction in performing, and often, also in composing music as expressions of their personal and professional identities. While 12 of 15 participants wrote and performed original music, the range of commitment to this work varied widely among this group. This ranged from composition as a primary artistic and professional activity to creative work accomplished principally for personal satisfaction. Three participants did not self-identify as music writers at this point in their careers, finding the performance of music composed by others a satisfying path for their talents and interests during the early stages of their careers.

While performing music also represents a creative activity, in this section I describe inspirations, processes, and challenges of creating original music, including writing, composing, or improvising music alone or collaboratively. These early career artists fall into two broad categories of compositional activity: (a) working alone to create and perform original compositions, and (b) working with others to creatively personalize cover songs or fully engage in collaboration with band mates, using compositional techniques and/or improvisation to create new works.

### **Composing Independently**

Some artists found composition a solitary endeavor, crafting new works in

controlled environments. Mike and Allen each made a distinct separation between performing and composing, using electronic and computer-based compositional tools to compose original music. They each acknowledged their compositional work, while central to their artistic identity, remained separate from their livelihood. Mike identified distinctions between creating original music, recording the results, and working as a performer:

I know plenty of people where there is no way in the world they want to sit down and write; that's not at all what they want out of music. It's kind of hard when you're going more of the art approach because, well, someone put it nicely when they said you have to be more of a fascist. There's not safety in numbers and that's kind of the rough side of it. But the good side is you do lose a lot of the things I get frustrated with when doing the straight up performance aspects.

Five years after graduation, Mike created electronic compositions alone, using MIDI synthesizers and effects pedals to modify the sound of his saxophone, thereby extending his capabilities for independent creative expression. Working alone using digital technology, Mike enjoyed the tangible creative product produced by this method. “When it's a recording, I really like that. It's like writing a book or something—it's right there with you. You're as good as your best recording.” While he recognized the potential for artistry in performance, true artistry for Mike meant the creative aspects of composition. Over time, Mike decided to devote his primary creative energy to creating his own music rather than performing. Making his living in another field allowed him creative freedom to pursue this path.

In contrast, performance remained Allen's central musical and vocational activity, working as an in-demand freelance drummer. While Allen concentrated on his artistry and technique as a drummer for hire, making time for composing formed an important element of his artistic identity. Similar to Mike, Allen preferred a solitary creative process produced electronically, creating ambient pop styles purely as an expressive outlet. Allen described the two sides of his musician personality. First, he noted his performer persona as a drummer: "Musically speaking, I'm an extrovert. I need to be." Allen also craves creative time alone composing in a controlled digital environment: "Personally speaking, I'm absolutely an introvert." Composition provided artistic and personal balance for Allen.

Singer-songwriters like Ashley, Jack, and Matt also followed a naturally solitary creative path, balanced by live performance. Ashley folds music creation and performance together as an emerging singer-songwriter. "If I could make a living recording songs, putting out CDs, and performing, and touring full-time as a singer-songwriter, that would be fabulous. That would be my ultimate." Ashley does not yet fully embrace the role of singer-songwriter as her artistic identity. "[My composition teacher/mentor] has been really helpful making me feel validated not just the person who writes songs, but I am a singer-songwriter. I want to turn myself into that, make myself feel like that."

Jack showed an outward rather than inward focus, challenged by the solitary nature of composition contrasted with his strong need for social interaction:

It's hard when you're like living at home and you feel like you should be working on your craft, getting better so you can go to the next stage, but I'm such an

extrovert. I need to get some energy from other people. [If] I was doing a job I felt good about, I think I'd feel more energized to work on music.

Jack recognized a dissonance between the demands of his craft and his temperamental predilections. “A lot of music you’re independent. You’re writing by yourself. You’re honing in on your skills, not really interacting as much as if you are doing something else.” Jack’s personal needs and work style contrasted with the isolated creative process of a singer-songwriter. He continued to seek balance to realize his artistic identity.

Matt spent his first year after graduation underemployed and struggling to sustain himself. In spite of that stress, he used the time productively, writing and recording his first album of original music. “I was constantly working towards something so my process of writing music and creating music was fine.” Matt transitioned into nonprofit education and community service activities and his professional identity shifted. He struggled to define the intersections between his artistic identity and community work. Recognizing the central importance of music in his life, he defined himself as a “songwriter, pop recording artist, and educator,” integrating his various professional identities. Previously Matt performed primarily a solo performer. However, he recently formed a band to work regularly with other musicians, leading to the next category of creative processes.

### Creativity and Collaboration

Collaborative composition provides an important creative process within popular music styles. Band members bring full songs or fragments of melodies, chord progressions, rhythmic beats, lyrics, and/or orchestration suggestions to rehearsal. Sometimes band mates pick up a spontaneous improvisation and develop those fragments

into a polished song. Group creative composition emerges spontaneously or intentionally, producing an integrated, collaborative artistic product. In this section, I describe varied creative processes of compositional collaboration among these young artists.

Kyle, Riann, and Caitlin demonstrated three different methods of composing when working alone and collaboratively. Kyle started his career focused on getting paid to perform on keyboards. He quickly tired of playing five to seven cover gigs a week and rearranged his work to include more creative opportunities. He said, “my angle right now for impact in the scene is to work the creative muscle to create all the different bands.” Kyle wrote music both independently and collaboratively with carefully chosen colleagues. Sometimes he brought fully crafted pieces to rehearsals. Other times he created spontaneously with band mates. His creative process remained strategic and integrated with his future goals to explore and expand his artistic capabilities. “I’m having a little bit more clearer vision of what they can be.”

A year of continuous gigging and teaching served to clarify Riann’s core artistic identity as a songwriter. Reflecting on the balance between performing and creating, she decided to stabilize her financial and personal life. She accomplished this balance through employment outside of music to reduce stress and enable time for creative production. She writes her own songs and also collaborates with her husband. When they write together, each may contribute chord progressions, melodies, or lyrics, and then together they refine and flesh out their ideas. Currently writing their first original album together, they demonstrated a thoughtful artistic process:

My husband and I are working on our first original album, just the two of us.

Everything comes down to doing it together. I’ll sit down at the piano and write

chords and lyrics and I'll bring it to Jon and I'll say what do you think? He'll say I love this about it but I think we should change that.

Caitlin demonstrated three varied compositional processes. First, as an independent songwriter, she released a solo album of original music encompassing a variety of genres. The album showcased her versatility as a songwriter and singer of soul, gospel, pop, Latin, and jazz styles. She described the music as personal expression: “the project has sass, emotion, and is the culmination of my work over the last four years.” Secondly, Caitlin emphasized the art of personalizing a cover song, making it uniquely “yours,” as a type of creativity blending performance and composition. Caitlin recognized interpretive freedom offsets the potentially stifling aspects of some cover band work such as her cruise ship experience. “You always have to follow the chart, in just a smothering way. I don’t mind singing cover music. I just want the option to be original with it.” Caitlin also enjoys collaborative composition in a traditional band setting:

That's what I like about original music. It's like being in that old school mentality of like starting a band where everyone's like, ‘what do you think about this? Oh, man yeah... oh yeah, yeah, yeah...because you are truly learning from each other. You're not being told what to do.’”

Caitlin’s description of collaborative composition emphasized the energy, excitement, and spontaneity of original collaborative work with musical colleagues.

Bryan, Christina, Derek, and Tommy collaborate with band mates and artistic partners in creating new music. Bryan exhibits a broad artistic vision. He works collaboratively with an artistic partner, his best friend Tony, developing a creative

relationship conducive to meaningful original work. They go beyond collaborative songwriting into larger scale multimedia productions.

It's the healthiest relationship I've ever had. We are essentially as much a married couple as anything, but we're not dating. We have girlfriends but in every other way—emotionally, professionally--and always I want him and I to connect, which is odd and unique but just wonderful. We both have so many creative ideas and so many different strengths in different ways and he's so very capable as well as I am, like moving quickly with music. We're so trained and able to play music and talented and do these things naturally. We don't have to learn how to play parts.

We're able to move as ideas come, which is great.

While satisfying artistically, their experimental collaborations did not provide a sustainable income. Bryan and Tony supported themselves through other means to continue their creative work together. Bryan played his bass with numerous bands and other projects as a freelancer to pay the bills.

Christina's creative process involved a merger of collaboration with improvisation. Her bands wrote songs together with each individual bringing compositional concepts and outlines to rehearsal. The band developed and refined the sketches together.

It was a great learning experience and a great growing experience because we all write so differently so it was put it on the music stand and go. Everyone had their own compositions but at the same time we had to adjust. We had worked together before so it wasn't strange so we just tried to play it through and then figured out what works what doesn't work and change things around. We change these

chords over here because this doesn't sound right. Maybe you should add a little something on your own. It's very improvised.

This collaborative compositional process resulted in songs reflecting the group's personality and trust for and with each other. "The influences were pulled from each of us. It's not separate in any way. It's very much a group compilation. It wouldn't have been able to happen with any other people. We trusted each other." The final result expressed the artistic energy of each individual and the group as a whole.

Derek included his original band in a long list of musical projects embracing many styles and genres. He recognized original music may not generate income, and may actually cost money for the artist to create and perform. At this early career stage, Derek recognized the importance of paying work along with the compelling nature of original composition. "I'm not starving and I'm not under danger of living on the streets or anything else, but my personal projects would be very nice and very rewarding when I have the money."

Composition also served as an auxiliary rather than central artistic activity for Tommy. He worked a demanding fulltime administrative job in an artist development firm and used music to relax and remain personally creative. Surrounded by creative people in his day job inspired his own artistic efforts and further refined his knowledge and skills. He said, "When I sit down and start writing I can still write. David and I went to our rehearsal space last night and sat there for three or four hours and wrote." He continued, "it's also just a stress relief for me." Tommy valued the creative outlet as both a songwriter and a player and created collaboratively with his band mates. The creative process offsets life and job stresses for Tommy:

My way of dealing with the weight of things is being able to go into a cement room and turn my guitar up as loud as I can. I'll pay 60 bucks a month with seven other guys to have that. I need to have that even if nothing comes of those creative moments, just to be able to make noise and think about that for a minute is invaluable.

### **Summary**

Composition and songwriting emerged as a central element in the enactment and expression of a core artistic identity. Some artists discovered a calling to focus on original work, while others included original composition in a larger mix of musical activities. I described several highly individualized approaches young artists adopted to realize a drive to create original music, linking this expression with enactment of an artistic identity.

A limited market exists for original work in its early stages, requiring young artists to make lifestyle adjustments to enable time and energy for creative composition in a broader and frequently changing mix of career elements. Young artists also developed uniquely personal solutions to balance and sustain their creative efforts. Artists reflected on their experience and goals, adaption and action, and elements of personal, artistic, and professional identities, the processes of making progress toward satisfactory solutions to these dilemmas appear in the next section.

### **Merging Identities: Personal, Artistic, and Professional**

I feel like [my identity is] always going to be changing, you know, but I always feel good about this one [composer] and I'll tweak this one a little bit.

—Kyle

Identity expression in work forms a key element of many emerging adult lives (Arnett, 2004). Personal and artistic identity merged to enhance self-fulfillment in work for young artists, blending with an emerging professional identity. Young artists used elements of all three identities alone and together to refine and develop their career paths.

Kyle's self-directed transformation over the 2 years since he completed college illustrated the merging of multiple, related identities with his efforts to seek financial sustainability. He recognized the continually evolving and multifaceted nature of his identities, working consciously to incorporate his musical identity with his core identity. Kyle's musical identity evolved over the year in both substantial and subtle ways. Recognizing his talent and ease with learning and playing popular music, Kyle quickly found success in the freelance gigging scene. After he proved his ability to make a living performing music, his first goal, he discerned the emerging importance of his composer identity, and reorganized his professional life to accommodate this creative identity more effectively.

Kyle began teaching piano, while retaining and continuing to develop his connections in the freelance performance scene. Teaching removed some financial pressures as he discovered new talents and interests in education. Teaching also allowed him to reduce freelance work and provided an opportunity for greater selectivity in gigging. This allowed him time to form several small bands of like-minded artists interested in creating new work in a variety of styles. He began writing for these groups and also encouraging his collaborators to write new music. These new groups performed regularly regardless of financial opportunities, simply for the joy of playing together and realizing new ideas. Kyle successfully and continually refined his artist identity and

artistic goals along with his financial viability, following his passion and motivation to engage in meaningful artistic work adjusting work proportions accordingly.

Kyle hoped to inspire other people to listen to or play music pushing in new artistic directions. He spoke passionately and specifically about composing as both a decision he made and an identity he embraced:

It was a personal decision to be a composer and that was an identity that I decided to take. So I feel good when I do it and I feel bad when I don't. Focusing on that has a lot to do with how I'm feeling about myself.

Kyle merged his artistic and personal identities, developing work options to support his core identity.

The creation of original music emerged as a primary artistic focus for Bryan as well. Like Kyle, Bryan also found considerable success in the freelance gigging market but longed for opportunities to create original work. Bryan's circumstances and goals challenged him to pursue his artistic goals within a sustainable lifestyle. Kyle and Bryan focused on the creation of original music as the driving force in their artistic lives. This desire to create original music took precedence over more lucrative, but less satisfying cover work. Kyle expressed determination to reorganize his musical work to accommodate this growing need to create:

I wanted to do something on my own. I want to build it; I want to go for it, because if I don't go for it I'd rather die trying to do my own thing. I want to be up there with my own bands and want to create my own thing. I don't want to be a sideman, I want to have my own thing. Then I could be creative and have my mind focused on being creative and working that creative muscle all the time because that's what suffered by doing all the bands all the time.

While identity evolution appeared organic for Kyle and Bryan, others found the path more challenging. Close alignment between personal, artistic, and professional identity appear natural to some artists but caused others to doubt their abilities or experience anxiety over achieving their goals. Anthony expressed apprehension about his artistic identity:

Am I really a guitar player? Did someone just tell me that? And I said sure? Six or seven years ago and I just never got off the bandwagon? You start seeing things like, 'I don't know why I'm doing this.' I don't know why I do this particular thing that I'm supposed to be good at but I'm not, and I'm not really enjoying it, was doing it because I thought I had earned some sort of performance merit in order to have the self esteem that I never really earned because I didn't get that performance merit because I didn't really know why I was doing it. That's a scary closet to open and turn on the light right away. I guess I'm not!

Anthony continued to identify as a musician but performed music less frequently than he anticipated at graduation due to his fulltime career in the technology sector of the music industry.

Other artists faced similar challenges. Ashley reflected on discrepancies between her current work and her musical identity. While she loved performing, she said, "I think I'm more of a music teacher right now than I am a performer, and I want to be performing more." She felt conflicted within performing options as well: "I wish I was in theater but I don't know that's what I wish I was doing full time. But I think my favorite type of performing is still in the songwriting world." Ashley struggled with describing herself as a professional musician, never considering the term seriously. "I think about

my friends in New York who are definitely professional musicians, but it may not be what they do 90% or even 50% of the time. Maybe it's just the way the person feels about it?" Less than one year after graduation, Ashley continued to explore her artistic identity and options within music.

Inversely, Derek expressed a straightforward perspective on his musical identity: "This is going to sound incredibly pompous but the musical part of what I do is never much of a challenge. It is just what I do. I play guitar. I'm going to do it and do it well." Derek described musicians as, "by nature, just strange and quirky people you know, myself included," who "dive into situations with an adaptive and open quality about [us], which I think is very valuable." Quirkiness, confidence, and originality frame Derek's personal, professional, and artistic identities. Derek created opportunities for choices and creativity by establishing himself in a fulltime career in educational administration. His strong work ethic and curious, ambitious nature helped him evolve his identities.

Riann realized the emergence of a professional artistic identity early, through teaching and performing, defining herself as a professional musician during her second year in college. She taught and performed for pay, discovering she offered a significant level of expertise to share with others. "I think that really changed things for me. I realized that I really did know what I was talking about. And I realized I am a professional, and I do know what I'm doing." Performance opportunities helped Riann toward claiming a professional identity after graduation, interacting with "professors or other musicians, much older and more experienced than [me]. I didn't realize how much I would really be peers with these people and that I could hang with the best of them."

Jared appreciated the struggle of developing a music career, while supporting himself with a day job. He managed a busy performing career but defined “professional” as someone working exclusively in music. “I won’t consider myself technically a ‘professional’ until [I] quit my job as a barista. I can’t wait for that day when I can say I’m just a drummer.” Working as a barista continued to define a significant part of his identity, competing with his musical identity.

Unlike Jared, Alyssa chose to limit her work in music by choice, combining work as a professional musician with other occupational choices. She believed gigging as a professional does not necessarily mean full-time work. “People can have another job and they’re still a professional musician. I can still call myself a professional musician.” Alyssa reconciled her artistic goals and lifestyle needs outside of music while focusing her musical performance activities:

For a little time out of college, I wasn’t (satisfied). I thought, I went to school for this; I want to do this. As I’ve gotten older, I’ve come to the conclusion of don’t put yourself in a place where other people think you should be. You need to be comfortable with where you’re at, and what you want to do in life. And who cares what other people think? So that’s where I’m at right now.

Alyssa continues to map out aspects of her personal and professional life. However, she feels comfortable with her artist/professional identity choices.

Mike’s experiences as a performer, and his deep reflections on the art of music, changed his perceptions of the field. “‘Musician’ is almost kind of a servant role to me. It’s very much like being an actor...rather than a writer.” True artistry links directly and profoundly with the creative aspects of composition for Mike. He enacted his artist

identity by prioritizing time and creative energy for composition without regard for income or renown.

Merging and enacting identities required balancing artistic ambitions and drive with managing financial sustainability, presenting challenges in the context of work/life balance for early career musicians. Requiring both analytical and reflective processes, young artists generally employed a proactive approach to reconciling the desire to find a balanced lifestyle with creative expression. Whether through incremental adjustments or a radical change of direction, young artists often modified and adapted career and lifestyle decisions to suit their evolving needs.

### **Summary**

I explored the personal and artistic developmental experiences of young musical performers from childhood into the first few years after college. All participants entered and completed college intending musical performance as a career. However, 12 of the 15 participants shifted their artistic focus toward original creative expression as composers and songwriters. Most continued to perform as well as write music, but many described their increased passion for creative expression within or outside their performance work.

As participants illustrated in this chapter, the creative process takes many forms in popular music. Early career musicians created and shared their music iteratively within a known circle of colleagues and within similar communities. They engage continuously in a creative process, seeking to enact and express their artistic and creative identities. The creative process remained, however, not a closed loop, but a systemic process occurring between an individual and “a sociocultural context” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p. 23). To analyze these connections and integrations between composers and the larger

context, I describe the emergence of creativity theory and then adopt contemporary creativity theories described by Csikszentmihalyi (1997) and Gardner (1993), two of the leading researchers in the field of creativity to analyze the experience of young artists in expressing their artistic identities.

### **Creativity Theory and Artistic Identity**

A systems approach to creativity theory applies to the findings of this study, including a childhood attraction to the domain of music, learning the languages of music, the importance of family and mentor support, and the roles of networks of well-connected individuals. I define and then describe the nature of the domain and then the field in music, illustrating each with examples relevant to understanding young artists next.

### **A Systems Approach to Creativity and Young Musicians**

Embedded within the broader culture, the domain of music contains the written, aural, structural, instrument-specific, emotional, and interpretive languages of music. The findings showed how young artists found a natural attraction to music in childhood, often providing opportunities to begin learning the domain languages as a child (Csiksentmihalyi, 1996). Early interest in music correlated with the importance of learning and using the domain languages as soon as possible (Csiksentmihalyi, 1996). These languages became part of young musicians' working vocabularies, learned through both formal training and informal jam sessions in basements and garages. Parental and mentor support and resources helped expose aspiring artists to musical concepts and methods, providing a foundation for later learning. Csikszentmihalyi (1996) also reinforced findings showing the importance of developing networks of relationships with key individuals within the domain and the field.

The languages of the music domain connected closely with the workings of the field of music. In systems creativity theory, the field represents the recognized experts and gatekeepers of the domain (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Until approximately the past 10 years, discrete gatekeepers controlled and facilitated the acceptance of new creative works and innovative approaches. Along with mentors, talent buyers, record labels, producers, publishers, concert bookers, and others in the music industry dominated the discovery and marketing of new talent. The Internet diffused the gatekeeping role in the new music economy, expanding and democratizing access. Participants building careers today share access and control of many formerly inaccessible gatekeeping activities. Recording, releasing, and marketing albums independently, using the Internet to distribute new artistic products widely, often circumvents the traditional methods. Six of the participants raised money for recording albums of original music using Internet fundraising platforms.

Csikszentmihalyi (1996) identified seven elements of fields necessary to support creative outcomes. I show how these elements related to the experiences of young artists. The first element, training, remains vital for the development of musical talent from an early age (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Exposure to music and access to the means of developing talents and interests proved foundational. Training and education provides the process for learning and practicing the language of the musical domain. Facility with the domain languages serves as a prerequisite for true creative development of the domain (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996).

The second element, creating high expectations, whether from family, formal education (schools and teachers), or society in general, further supported creative

development. Many young artists received support from family, teachers, mentors, and colleagues, reinforcing high expectations. Csiksentmihalyi cautioned overly high expectations lowers self-esteem and motivation, while low or no expectations elevate self-esteem, encouraging careful balance of expectations to support self-esteem (Csiksentmihalyi, 1996).

Resources serve as the third element. Resources include money, access to opportunities, time, and/or education. Adequate resources play an important role in realizing creative potential of young artists, however a shortage of resources may spur motivation (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Many young artists acquired and effectively managed resources to support their creative aspirations. For example, student loan debt spurred Riann and Derek into fulltime employment outside of music, enabling time and financial resources to develop creative work.

Older, experienced mentors provide the fourth element of the field, providing validation, encouragement, and access to the field and domain (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Mentors identified potential, nurtured the individual, and often introduced him/her to the field through hiring or by sponsoring performances. Bryan's experience with an influential but informal mentor illustrates this natural process. Bryan's mentor recognized Bryan's potential, worked closely with him to develop his instrumental and musical skills, and eventually hired Bryan to play with his band. Former instructors hired Riann to perform with them, validating her skills and professionalism and reinforcing her artistic identity. As the systems view of creativity relates, access to and validation by the field remain critical to effecting creative change in the domain. Mentor relationships

proved instrumental in advancing Riann's and Bryan's careers and strengthening identity enactment (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996).

The fifth element, hope, becomes critical when recognizing the challenges of creating a sustainable practice in music. Earlier, I identified many of these issues and shared the proactive solutions created by early career artists. Hope became self-defined as they examined and reflected on desires, options, and lifestyle choices and then enacted conscious choices. Young artists located and created opportunities for artistic expression within the domain both as performers and composers (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Mentors and others within an individual's professional networks helped provide entry into existing opportunities. Other opportunities required research, networking, and an active entrepreneurial perspective.

Young artists invented proactive solutions to allow them to practice their craft. For example, many young artists wrote and recorded albums of original work, providing opportunities to practice the 6<sup>th</sup> element, the artistic and business elements of the music industry. As composer/performers, publicly released recordings subjected their music to critique and praise outside their insular audiences, and required a degree of marketing savvy for promotion.

Intrinsic and extrinsic rewards comprise the seventh means of connecting with the field. Artistic identity appeared grounded in the intrinsic rewards these young artists find in performing and creating music. Many young artists demonstrated a growing sense of awareness in realizing great passion and personal creative rewards, achieving balance in a sustainable artistic practice. Kyle acknowledged his growing desire to compose songs, "that I can contribute to the world, a legacy." To pursue this creative goal, he adjusted his

performing career and added a teaching practice to support time needed to compose along with a sustainable lifestyle. Young artists recognized the importance of creative expression and a balanced lifestyle, making strategic moves and compromises to pursue their arts as an expression of a core artistic identity.

### **Summary**

A systemic approach to creativity provides a deeper and richer perspective on the requirements and products of creative work. Many aspects of the sociocultural context described by Csikszentmihaly (1996) and Gardner (1993) played out in the experiences of early career young artists. Understanding the interactive nature of balancing personal ambition, lifestyle balance and the desire to engage in creative endeavors provides a useful context for creative people at all levels in artistic expression in any field. Balancing the macro view of the field and domain of music with the internal identity development of the young artists entering the music industry provides insight regarding developmental processes of forming and enacting an artistic identity. In the final chapter I summarize findings, describe implications for the field, and recommend areas for further research.

## Chapter 8: On Becoming and Being a Creative Artist:

## Summary, Implications and, Recommendations

The pattern of adapt—learn—survive is increasingly common across the workforce.

—Bennett & Freer (2012)

I examined the lives of 15 young, aspiring professional popular music artists as they transitioned from music college into professional adult life. Talented, creative, thoughtful, reflective, and ambitious in varying degrees, they shared personal insights into the surprises, challenges, and joys of this significant life passage. Their stories reinforced some expectations about young artists and this life stage and provided a number of unexpected outcomes. Their openness, candor, and willingness to share struggles and accomplishments proved critical to achieving meaningful results in this study. During the interview, participants frequently remarked about how the process helped them examine their personal choices and feelings about the transition.

My findings revealed the effects of early exposure to the arts and the artists' early realization of a desire to engage expression of artistic identity, including support from individuals and educational experiences. Participants experienced emerging and merging identities as they transitioned into professional life and they dealt with financial considerations as they explored and developed ways their artistry drove life choices.

I examined the formation and enactment of artistic identity and how artists strove to achieve a sustainable artistic practice. Participants varied in the way they set goals and solved these challenges. Although trained to work as jobbing musicians, artistic expression and life balance became recurring themes throughout my study. The majority

of participants discovered a deep artistic core and sought ways to optimize life balance and realize artistic fulfillment.

Designing and leading a balanced lifestyle had different meanings for young artists. Many artists described life balance in terms of making time for artistic creativity, while others defined balance traditionally as making time for a variety of work, play, and family activities. Burland and Davidson (2002) recognized the importance of self-awareness and regulation among musicians to achieve a balanced life, while recognizing how easily music became melded with the whole person. This study confirms their findings and also identifies ways young artists accomplish this balance.

My study confirmed a need for entrepreneurial awareness in young artists. Institutions educating musicians have recognized the importance of entrepreneurship for 21<sup>st</sup> century young musicians (Beckman, 2007; Beeching, 2012; Kubacki & Croft, 2005). Increasingly, music colleges and conservatories have added courses and special programs in entrepreneurship or business, recognizing talent alone is insufficient for success (Beeching, 2010; Cutler, 2009; Cordell, 2011; Eastman Institute for Music Leadership, 2012; Manhattan School of Music Center for Entrepreneurship, 2012; University of Colorado-Boulder Entrepreneurship Center for Music, n.d.; Woelfel, 2009). Music curricula in higher education demands intellectual and musical rigor within a regimented system while rarely expecting individual initiative or innovation, core requirements for building a successful career in the arts (Beckman, 2010).

In many ways, traditional and contemporary music education remains misaligned with career realities. While entrepreneurship per se did not emerge as a strong theme among young artists, they clearly demonstrated an entrepreneurial approach to career

building. Among young artists, those who exhibited a proactive, creative, and interconnected approach to developing a distinctive artistic voice while building a sustainable career seem most comfortable with life directions and progress at early stages.

Financial issues in music careers rarely receive more than a brief mention in studies on musician career development (Creech et al., 2008; MacNamara, Holmes, & Collins, 2006). More recently, Bennett (2012) acknowledged financial challenges and studied solutions in greater detail. My findings add to transition and early career studies by recognizing the distinct financial challenges and providing analysis of some solutions self-designed by young artists. I next describe the implications of my findings for practice and then recommend ways to support young artists in their transition to professional careers.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

The primary themes in the study revolved around the formation of artistic identity, transitioning from college into professional life, managing financial challenges, and ultimately, becoming and being a creative artist by aligning artistic expression with life balance. This section describes these themes followed by recommendations.

#### **Artistic/Creative Identities**

Artists formed musical identities early in life, and their passion for artistic expression continued into adulthood. Some grew up in artistic families and others lacked this influence, but all artists recognized the important role of parents and families who supported their growing interest in music. Early support ranged from emotional support alone to the capacity to provide resources for lessons, instruments, and other enrichment.

Often, a range of mentors including teachers, former teachers, more experienced band mates, and other colleagues played crucial roles in developing interests and skills along with recognizing and nurturing innate talents. None of these results proves surprising alone. However, while some artists composed occasionally as children or adolescents, the vivid blossoming of artistic originality and the powerful urge to pursue it after graduation remained a striking finding in this study.

Providing opportunities and support for young artists to explore creating (not just re-creating) music from childhood on could help nurture a potentially hidden creative urge. Developing skills in musical performance requires commitment over time and can become the sole emphasis of training. Music education at all levels recognizes the benefits of composition and improvisation but could emphasize and encourage those skills more. Educating parents, mentors, and teachers to encourage creative exploration outside of rules and technique could open creative opportunities.

### **Transitioning into Professional Life**

The transition out of college and into professional life, one of life's major transitions, presents challenges and opportunities for young artists (Bridges, 2004; Arnett, 2004). The participants identified challenges consistent with previous studies, such as a lack of paying work, competition, and self-doubts, often exacerbated by the tenuous nature of freelance portfolio careers (Burland & Davidson, 2002; Creech et al., 2008; MacNamara, Holmes, & Collins, 2006). While graduates must ultimately learn and adapt on their own, support systems and institutions can help prepare individuals for future realities. Identifying and diversifying musical and nonmusical skill sets in preparation for creating a sustainable life in music proves beneficial. Some graduate preparation

could include tangible skill building in financial management, job seeking, networking, and time management, but less tangible skills and personal awareness including lifestyle expectations and needs and self-assessments (including grit and values, for example) could support self-efficacy in next steps.

After a lifetime as a student, many participants noted the sudden, often shocking finality marked by graduation. Ongoing support from colleges after graduation could prove very helpful in supporting new graduates. Embedding expectations and resources throughout the curriculum could also help lessen the shock of graduation. Providing opportunities for alumni to interact with current students could also help bridge the graduation gap.

The importance of initiating professional work (performing, teaching, recording, etc.) prior to graduation proved one of the most important recommendations from my study. This study showed young artists who started professional work prior to graduation demonstrated a clear advantage over those who waited, providing strong models for current music students to emulate. Internships or self-generated work should be encouraged and built into curriculum or expectations whenever possible.

### **Managing Financial Challenges**

With student loan debt at all time highs and an ongoing tight jobs outlook, new college graduates face many potential financial challenges (Chopra, 2013). Entering into a freelance portfolio career can aggravate the challenges. However most participants assessed their financial situation along with their lifestyle needs and took proactive steps to find workable solutions. Starting professional work prior to graduation, as mentioned above, not only helps assuage financial issues as a student (teaching and performing

generally pays much better than minimum wage work), but early professional work experiences also help test the waters while still within the safety net of school, where instructors and mentors can provide contacts and advice, for example. Parents could provide explicit practice in adult financial matters such as tax filing and budgeting, reinforced by opportunities provided by colleges.

### **On Becoming and Being a Creative Artist**

Artistic identity, formed early, merged with personal and professional identities as participants matured personally and artistically. Opportunities and challenges inherent in aligning artistic expression and life balance formed a central theme in the study.

Acknowledging the normalcy of the challenges, recognizing personal lifestyle needs, and developing an entrepreneurial approach created opportunities and helped to develop self-efficacy for artists. Recognizing the community elements and connections necessary for personal artistic growth brings individual artists together with the key stakeholders, tastemakers, and gatekeepers of the field, and ultimately addresses the roles of artists in society. Music college career centers and faculty can work to embed values and opportunities with skill building and attitude awareness, connecting often with the music community and larger societal structures

### **Additional Recommendations**

Prior to this study, my colleagues and I primarily worked with students while they attended college as students. The Career Development office began increasing alumni services during the time of my study, reinforcing the importance of robust alumni support programming. Working together to link curriculum for current students and alumni services for graduates, college leaders have increased innovative programming and

implemented assessment measures. We continue to merge ongoing quantitative survey data with qualitative data, each enriching the other, to help tailor programming and approaches to student advising. While the results of this study could lead to many additional recommendations for individuals and higher education institutions, I want to focus primarily on introducing two options, one immediately applicable and the other as a potential future study.

The results of this study have already impacted the content and delivery of curriculum in my career preparation course for graduating young artists. I developed a personal portfolio career model to explore the relationships between artistic and financial sustainability. Expanding the model as a career development tool provides an opportunity for reflection, helping young artists assess their work and work-related activities in relation to personal standards for artistic and financial balance.

I based the second recommendation for individual artists on the systems model of creativity from Chapter 7 (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). A systems approach to career awareness provides context in understanding the role of creatives in the music field/domain and the larger society. While connections to community appear throughout this study via colleagues, networks, and mentors, a full analysis of community connections remained outside the scope of this study. Broadening the view within the larger framework of the music industry could provide important additional context. I briefly introduce this concept under potential future research below.

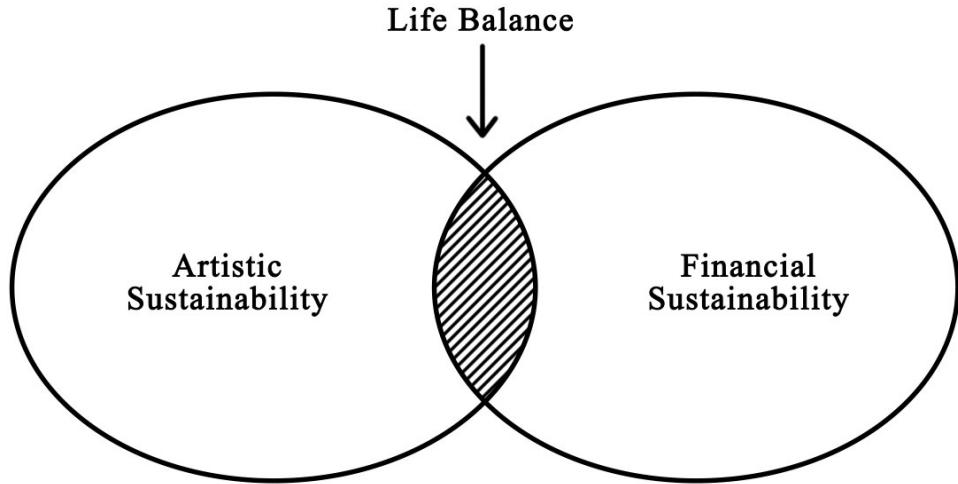
### **Personal Portfolio Career Model**

Historically, musicians have built careers around multiple streams of income and a variety of musical and non-musical activities: a portfolio career. Young artists

demonstrated how the enactment of artistic/personal identity coincides with the goals of creating artistic sustainability balanced by financial sustainability. The proportions between artistic and financial stability vary with personal preferences, opportunities, and goals, and shift continually. The personal portfolio career model also addresses frequently expressed concerns for life balance and provides tools for advising and curriculum.

Artistic and financial sustainability present two disparate but related elements in the creation of a satisfying and sustainable artistic life. While both elements prove necessary, virtually infinite combinations provide opportunities to personally tailor a constantly evolving individual portfolio career. Whether or not (or how much) to monetize art becomes a personal decision and a choice with no single answer.

Although the mixes of music work and nonmusic work vary frequently, the participants divided into roughly three groups when seeking to balance artistic and financial sustainability concerns. Life circumstances, personality, and temperament determined these groupings although musical intentions remain uniquely individual. The first group divided their time and activities fairly equally between artistic and financial sustainability activities. Riann, Derek, and Jared stabilized their careers with fulltime work, and Alyssa balanced real estate and music performance. Participants in this group emphasized the importance of financial stability in supporting their creative work. Figure 3 illustrates a typical balance of artistic and financial stability:



*Figure 3.* Life balance for Group 1.

The second group strived to keep music separate from finances. Tommy and Anthony each had fulltime jobs in the music industry while Mike worked in technology. Whether due to commitments to a nonmusic job or to avoid monetizing musical composition, participants distinguished between artistic activities and financial sustainability. Their jobs supported their musical endeavors. Separating music activities showed a conscious choice to create music without concern for marketability, providing artistic freedom. Life balance for those in group two happened at the intersection between artistic and financial sustainability, as illustrated in Figure 4.

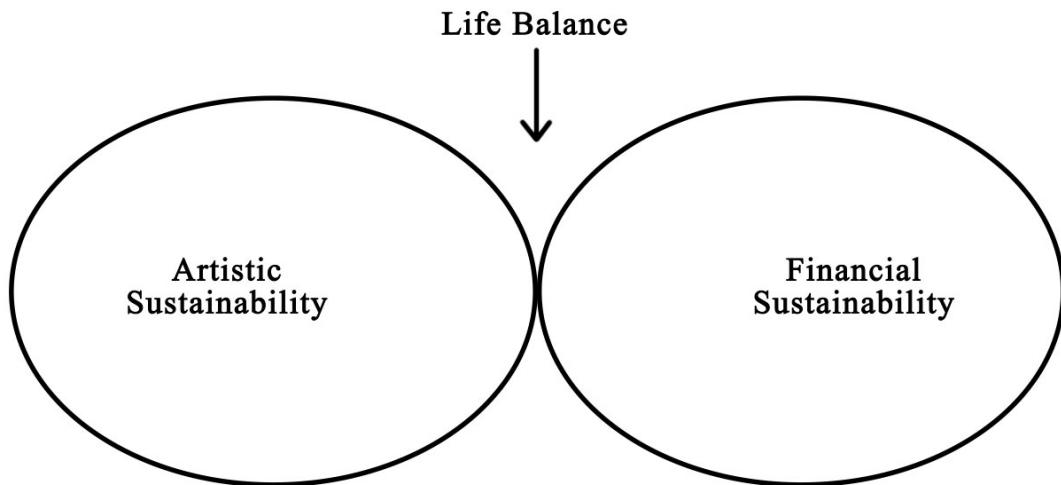
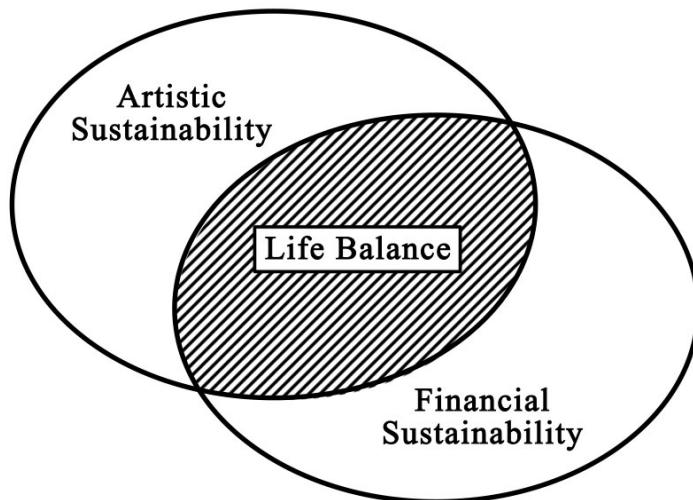


Figure 4. Life balance for Group 2.

Other participants blended their artistic and financial lives almost equally. This group worked exclusively in music pursuits, and several but not participants in group 3 included some element of music teaching in their portfolio mix. Christina, Kyle, Allen, and Ashley supported themselves entirely in music, including performing and teaching in a variety of settings. Kyle continued to perform with some cover bands for financial and networking benefits while expanding his income streams by adding private and group piano students and occasional clinics and workshops. Bryan also worked exclusively in music, but only as a performer in frequently changing settings . As shown in Figure 5, this group closely blended personal life with artistic, and financial balance.



*Figure 5.* Life balance for Group 3.

Using this simple model, young artists can evaluate aspects of their career plans and aspirations for the ideal balance of artistic and financial stability optimal for their personal and creative lives. The next section describes further research opportunities, beginning by contextualizing the roles of individual artists within music industry and societal communities.

### **Future Research**

Creative artists work within a complex and interdependent music industry evolving at an accelerating pace, driven and transformed by extraordinarily rapid technological developments over the past 15-20 years. New means of creating, delivering, and distributing music altered and continues to impact the discovery of new artists, ways musicians write music and attract fans, methods fans use to acquire and listen to music, and the overall monetization and commodification of music. While this study focused on the career development of individual artists, a natural follow up could

include examination of the changing music marketplace and the impact of change on 21<sup>st</sup> century musicians. The systems approach to creativity proved highly relevant to possible future research discussed below.

### **The Old and New Music Industries: A Systems Model Approach**

The systems model of creativity presented by Csikszentmihalyi (1996) and described in Chapter 7 provides an opportunity to link individual artists with the field and domain of music, viewing artists in a broader social context. I could use this model to illustrate transitions into the music industry and the impact of these significant changes on the lives and careers of young musicians.

Hierarchical, secretive, and financially driven, in the old music industry gatekeepers, holding absolute power, selected and nurtured a few select stars. These star-makers included record labels, record producers, A & R representatives, radio stations, and those in album sales, for example. Music industry professionals controlled the impact of artists on the music domain. As the digital age developed, those gatekeeping roles became defused, and much of the traditional music industry structure has waned or even disappeared. Digital distribution, social media, and crowd funding expanded opportunities for even unknown artists. Today's artists have greater power to affect their own career trajectories but more competition and less clarity in determining appropriate and sustainable paths. Comparing and applying the findings of this study with the ever-changing realities of the music field/domain could provide additional resources for young artists determining the viability of a professional life in music and the necessary skill sets to develop.

Additional future research might involve studying different demographics of young artists. Some participants in this study moved to different parts of the country to start their careers or study music, but all young artists had roots or connections to the same Midwest area, limiting the scope of this study. Further research could examine similar groups of young artists in different locations or in different genres. For example, comparing young classical musicians with popular music musicians, musicians in different regions of the U.S. or internationally, or a more diverse group would provide additional perspectives. Studying this group after another five years could also prove useful.

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## Appendix A: Letter to Participants

Dear (name of potential participant),

For many years I have had a strong interest in helping young musicians prepare for the transitions out of college and into a sustainable professional life. My work over the years has now inspired a research study to learn more about that process from the perspective of the young musicians making this transition. I would like to invite you to participate in this study.

Participation is voluntary and involves one, in-depth interview that will last approximately 60 minutes and will take place sometime in the next 3 months. All information that you share will be held in strict confidence. Pseudonyms will be used for all names and locations to ensure that any published results will be completely anonymous. If you choose to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without affecting your relationship with the researcher or the University of St. Thomas.

There may be some risk anticipated with this study. I will ask you questions related to your personal and professional transition experiences. Answering these questions may invoke uncomfortable feelings. At any time and for any reason during the interview, you may ask for a break. Another possible risk involves the potential for breaches in confidentiality. Procedural safeguards will be put in place to help ensure confidentiality. Some benefits are also associated with your participation in this study. These may include the opportunity to discuss your experience and to contribute to a study that may help inform educational leaders in career development for musicians.

Prior to participating in this study, you will be asked to read and sign a consent form. This study was approved by the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Please contact me if you are interested in participating in this study or if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Janis Weller

[jweller@stthomas.edu](mailto:jweller@stthomas.edu)

612-432-9445

## Appendix B: Participation Script Describing the Study

Thank you for considering volunteering for this study. The purpose of this study is to explore the musician's process of transitioning out of higher education and into professional musical life. I am a doctoral candidate at the University of St. Thomas and this research study is part of my work toward a doctorate degree in educational leadership (Ed.D).

Participant interviews are an integral part of this study. By undertaking this study, I hope to provide other educators with a better understanding of this process.

The interview will take approximately 60 minutes. We will meet in a private, mutually agreed upon location. The interviews will be documented via audio recording and observation notes. You may continue with the interview responses if you need extra time and desire to continue. The results of the interviews will be analyzed to determine any patterns or commonalities among responses.

You will have an opportunity to review the transcript of your interview and make any corrections you wish to make. I will provide you with a copy of the completed research study along with personal contact information as a thank you for taking the time to participate in this research study

## Appendix C: Questions to Clarify Participant Understanding

1. What is your understanding of the purpose of this study?
2. What is your understanding of how information will be kept confidential?
3. What are the risks of participation?
4. What are your options if you feel uncomfortable answering a question?
5. What can you do if you feel uncomfortable about participating in the study?

## **How Popular Music Artists Transition Into Portfolio Careers: Identity Transformation and Professional Socialization in Emerging Adulthood**

396962-1

I am conducting a study about *the transition of young musicians out of college and into professional life*. I invite you to participate in this research. You were selected as a possible participant because *you are a musician who graduated from college within the past five years*. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Janis Weller, doctoral candidate in Educational Leadership. My advisor is Dr. Sarah Noonan.

### **Background Information:**

I am conducting a study of young popular music musicians' transition from higher education into professional performing careers. Through this study I plan to explore their identity transformation from student to professional and their socialization into the field. By undertaking this study, I hope to help inform educational leaders with a better understanding about career development for musicians.

### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things: *participate in a 60 to 90 minute one-on-one interview. The interview will be audio recorded and later transcribed. Participants will be interviewed in a mutually agreeable location. The participant will have the opportunity to review and edit the transcript of their interview.*

### **Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

The study has several risks. Some participants may find the personal nature of the project and the interview questions occasionally challenging, but every effort will be made to assure and support their anonymity with the use of pseudonyms and participation will remain completely voluntary through the study. Participants will be able to review and edit the transcript of their interview and have the option to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

The direct benefits you will receive for participating are: *the opportunity to discuss your experiences and to contribute to a study that may help inform educational leaders about career development for musicians.*

### **Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any sort of report I publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you in any way. The types of records I will create include *The letter of informed consent assures participant*

*anonymity through the use of pseudonyms and by outlining the methods of storage and disposal of documents and recordings. All documents and recordings generated during the study remain confidential. In published reports, I will take great care to avoid any information that identifies any participants in any way. All digital documents will be stored on my personal, password protected laptop computer, backup hard drive in my home office, in a personal password-protected Dropbox account, and backed up on a personal, password-protected email account.*

*These records will include recordings and transcriptions of interviews and additional hard copy documentation, including intake forms, transcriptions of the interview recordings and documents (hard copy or digital), and researcher notes and memos. All hard copies will be stored in a locked file cabinet in my home office. The recording device will be stored in a locked file cabinet in my home office. Digital recordings of the interviews will be downloaded from the recording device to my personal, password-protected laptop computer. The only individuals with access to the documents, recordings, and transcripts of this study will be me, and Dr. Sarah Noonan, my dissertation chair.*

*Six months after successful defense of my dissertation, I will delete and/or shred as appropriate, all field notes, transcriptions, memos, audio recordings, intake forms, and any other confidential materials. The remaining transcribed interviews will be stored on my password-protected laptop and back up drive in my home office. Intake forms, researcher notes, and interview transcriptions will be compiled using pseudonyms and the original forms and notes will be destroyed within 6 months of successful defense of my dissertation.*

### **Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with [any cooperating agencies or institutions] or the University of St. Thomas. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time. Should you decide to withdraw data collected about you *will not be used*. You are also free to skip any questions I may ask.

### **Contacts and Questions**

My name is Janis Weller. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at 612-432-9445. Or you may contact my advisor, Dr. Sarah Noonan at 651-962-4897. You may also contact the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-5341 with any questions or concerns.

**You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.**

### **Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to participate in the study. I am at least 18 years of age. *[If additional permissions are needed (e.g. audio or video recording, accessing private student or medical records), include these here.]*

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**Signature of Study Participant**

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**Date**

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**Print Name of Study Participant**

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**Date**

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**Signature of Researcher**

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**Date**

## Appendix E: Intake Form

**Research Participant Intake Form**

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Date of Interview \_\_\_\_\_

Transcript sent for review \_\_\_\_\_

Edits/Changes \_\_\_\_\_

Interview transcript approved by interviewee \_\_\_\_\_

NOTES

**Background questions**

1. Tell me about your life currently. What has it been like to leave college and start this phase of your life?
2. Tell me how your career has evolved over the past five years (before and since graduating).
3. How do you describe your professional goals at this point in your career?
4. Tell me about your support systems. How do others help you professionally, personally, financially?

**Identity questions**

1. Tell me about your expectations for professional life prior to graduating.
2. How do those expectations compare with your experiences since finishing school?
3. When did you begin to consider yourself a “professional musician”?
4. Tell me about your biggest challenges in moving from student to professional status.
5. Describe the different types of work you do within your profession or in other areas to sustain yourself financially.
6. What non-musical skills have you found important in managing your career?  
Describe the type of activities and the knowledge and skills needed to manage your career.

7. What personal qualities or traits have positively or negatively affected your transition out of school and into professional life?
8. How does your work affect your self-esteem and view of yourself? What is the role of music in your personal identity and life?

### **Socialization questions**

1. On a continuum from smooth to challenging, how was the transition from college to work? Give this a rating from 1- 10 and offer reasons why you assess this experience in this way.
2. Tell me about the influence of mentors in school and since graduating. Who are they and how did they help you? What types of support did they offer?
3. Tell me about your initial experiences rehearsing and performing in professional settings and compare those with your experiences in college. What differences did you experience? Looking back on your school preparation, what gaps or strengths prepared you for your current challenges and experiences?
4. How do your interactions with others affect your career?
5. Do you consider yourself entrepreneurial? How?
6. What has been your biggest surprise about the professional world since leaving college?
7. What areas of your experience may add to my understanding of your transition from school to work as a professional musician?