



**THE ROLE OF MUSIC IN
THE CONSTRUCTION OF
INDIVIDUALS'
NARRATIVE IDENTITIES**

The Role of Music in the Construction of Individuals' Narrative Identities

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Abstract

Many people listen to music on a daily basis. Adolescents and young adults, especially, spend a good amount of their time listening to music. This means that they might use music as a way to crystallize certain moments and specific experiences in their identity narrations. Through music, past life experiences are elaborated and adapted to the current context in order to deliver to the self and others a coherent and meaningful story. That is why, this research is set out to explore the role of music in the construction of young adults' narrative identities by looking at the way they perceive the (changing) role of music in their lives up until their current age. Therefore, it is expected that music is used as an 'ordering scheme' to give coherence and unity to one's identity narration and serves both as a self-reflection tool and as a means to convey a message to the broader socio-cultural environment. In order to examine such intimate processes of memory recollection and identity work, friends and a family member were interviewed. It was revealed that most of them did use music as a temporal container to order the narration of their identity and, within such structure, technology constituted the red thread that characterized and influenced their habits in listening to music and changed participants' approaches to music experiences. Such experiences are tied up to specific memories of crucial events – or 'turning points' – that the respondents found relevant and therefore narrated while being interviewed. Starting from their pre-teens years, through their adolescence, up until their current age, their experiences with music changed according to their age and, in most cases, corresponded to a deeper understanding and awareness of who they were and their place in the social world. In some cases, respondents found in music an instrument to grant their identity either a sense of continuity or transformation. In some other cases, music sparked imaginative practices that allowed some participants to mold and/or escape their identity work. Music, in sum, can be considered as a helpful instrument that contributes to the performance of the choreographies of the lives of the individuals interviewed.

KEYWORDS: *memory, music, narrative identity, self-reflection, socio-cultural context, young adults*

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Introduction

“Becoming what one is is a creative act comparable with creating a work of art.”

(Storr, 1992, p.153)¹

Music occupies a fundamental role in people’s everyday lives and has always been one of the most prominent leisure activities in an individual’s life (Zentner, Grandjean, & Scherer, 2008). Rentfrow & Gosling (2003) empirically demonstrated that individuals listen to music for approximately 14% of their waking lives, almost the same amount they spend watching television and half of the time they spend engaging in conversations. A beautiful holiday, a sad breakup, lonely moments, a joyful party, an important decisional moment are often accompanied by a soundtrack that represents the best what we feel. Over the past years, thanks to technological developments, the chance to listen to music whenever and wherever we want has dramatically increased. iPhones, iPods and Mp3s can be brought with us all the time, facilitating the access to personal music experiences and their connections with specific moments and events of our lives.

In many studies, music is often described as a device for self-reflexivity contributing to the production of self-identity over time (DeNora, 1999; Negus, 2012a; Negus, 2012b; Van Dijck, 2006). In this way, music connects private and emotional experiences of self-identity to personal stories inscribed within cultural narratives (Bolderman & Reijnders, 2017). Music seems “to elicit within us not so much a memory as an inner psychic constellation laden with images, feelings and bodily acuties” (Bollas as quoted in Keightley & Pickering, 2006, p.153). This is the power of music: it resides in the way it allows individuals to map their autobiographical and emotional accounts on to individual and cultural narratives, connecting the individuals’ sense of the self to the larger community (Van Dijk, 2006). Individual identities are often narrated in form of stories that constitute a framework for the presentation of the self to self and others (DeNora, 1999)

When listening to music, intimate memories are fostered and experiences are transferred from a physical to a virtual time and place (DeNora, 1999). It is almost like looking at a picture of when we were children: the power of that image is the same that music has. It evokes memories and experiences of those times and serves to the projection of our identity in a coherent manner, perpetuating it in the present and arranging it for the future (DeNora, 1999; Keightley & Pickering, 2006).

Some people tend to give a unitary and coherent account of a developing and changing identity over time through narrations of their self. Within those narratives, music can be an important building

¹ Storr, A. (1992). *Music and the Mind*, Harper Collins, London and New York.

block. In fact, locating oneself in time and space through the use of music means that musical experiences function as a compass needle that orientates individuals in forming their personal stories. Therefore, some people use music to bind together past and present events, which acquire significance in their current identity (Ruud, 1997). In other words, some people are emotionally attached to a certain type of music they listened to because it better described the experiences they were living at that point in time. When listening to that music in the present times, they re-evoked and recollect the experiences they had back then, and by interpreting and adapting them to who they are now, they give such experiences a relevant meaning in building their current identity (Singer, 2004)

This cognitive process of identity narration requires a certain psychological maturity that generally begins during early adolescence, starting from an age ranging from 10 to 13 years old (Habermans & Bluck, 2000; McAdams, 2008; McAdams & McLean, 2013; McLean, 2005; McLean, 2008; Ter Bogt, Mulder, Raaijmakers, & Nic Gabhainn, 2010). At this age, subjects start to feel the need to create a thematically unified account of their many fragmented identities (McAdams & McLean, 2013). The process consists of the narration of their lives in terms of stories, which internalize the reconstructed past, the significance of the present and the imagined future (Bauer, McAdams, & Pals, 2008). During adolescence, moreover, people start to decide which music to listen to and start forming a taste about what they like to listen (McAdams, 2008). Their music preferences also function as a way of building ties with their peers and of finding a place in the social context (Raviv, Bar-Tal, Raviv, & Ben-Horin, 1996; Schwartz & Fouts, 2003). Growing up, some individuals collect new experiences and might narrate them as part of their identities, while using music to crystallize such events in their lifetime.

Young adults, aged approximately between 20 and 35, are said to experience an ‘age of instability’ due to identity exploration, challenging decision-making, feelings of uncertainty (McLean, 2008; Pasupathi & Hoyt, 2009; Petry, 2002). Therefore, during this turning lifetime, narratives keep on developing and add perspectives and happenings of the current age. At this stage, the role of musical experience in the construction of a narrative identity cannot be ignored, especially in a time in which more than 60% of teenagers and young adults listen to music (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010). This said music can be considered to be, at least for some young adults, a prominent part of their lives, and it seems relevant to look at how young adults use music in forming their narrative identity.

To explore this topic, the main research question of this thesis reads: ‘How do young adults perceive the (changing) role of music in their lives from their early teens until their current age?’ The research question is outlined to study how young adults’ perception of music has changed throughout

their lives and how these possible changes in music preferences mirrored the changing perception of their identity. Looking at how young adults produce stories and accounts about their lives through music grants the chance to give coherence to the manifold of changes they have experienced and are still experiencing nowadays. Due to its qualitative character, the research will be conducted by means of in-depth semi-structured interviews, during which young adults will be invited to share significant experiences and events that they connect to music. In order to facilitate the investigation of such a personal and intimate topic and guarantee the depth level of the interview, acquaintances, friends and family members will be interviewed (Reijnders, 2016).

The meaning-making process and identity development stem from researches conducted by McLean (2005; 2008) McLean & Pratt (2006) and Pals (2006) which look at the necessity of young adults to make sense of their changing identity by narrating stories about their self in order to give a semblance of cohesion and unity to themselves and others. The work of this research is theoretically relevant because it *combines* two perspectives, one on narrative identity and one on individuals' uses of music. In fact, in this research music is treated as an instrument for narrative identity work, framing the discourse of narrative identity and the changing perception of music in relation to life events that occurred in teenage years and current age of young adults. As McLean affirms (2008), this allows the present research to explore the ways individuals change their self and maintain or alter the way they perceive music throughout life experiences they have been living. This aims at showing the ability of young adults to construct narratives that evolve and change according to different life ages and the ability to make sense of such happenings in a coherent story (Singer, 2004).

Every time people elaborate on their identities, researchers can understand and demonstrate that through the arrangement of a togetherness of stories, some people have the chance to get to know their self and the surrounding world, by constructing and extrapolating meaning from such narratives (Singer, 2004). What this research adds to this perspective is the way it looks at patterns in young individuals' life narration, conceived as a *choreography* of young adults' lives performed through the use of music: age is the frame that encloses people's experiences and to which people refer when giving meaning and consistency to their music preferences. As Singer points out (2004): 'biological and cognitive changes, role demands of particular life stages, historical and cohort influences all conspire to make any individual's narrative fluid and evolving in progress' (p.445). Without music, such choreography could not be staged: in this research, music is what young adults employ to give sense to the story of their self to others. This research tries to provide insights into self-identity narration by looking at music as one of the cornerstones of such process in which young adults

engage. This adds reflections on the features of identity narration through the use of music and how this tool is used in the production of such accounts.

In order to explore the way people narrate the choreography of their lives in relation to music, this research will be divided into four main parts. The first one will provide a theoretical overview of the concept of narrative identity and its relation to music uses. The second part will explain how the research has been practically carried out and how the data have been analyzed. The following part includes the analysis of the data and the recurring motifs that have been identifying when interpreting interviews. Finally, the concluding section will elucidate and reflect upon the findings and the way they contribute to answering the main research question, what are the contributions of this study, its limitations and suggestions for further research.

Theoretical Framework

This section will elucidate the main theoretical concepts that are at the basis of this research. To do so, the concept of music and narrative identity will be explained in order to better position the role of music in the construction of individuals' narrative identities. When listening to music, cognitive, emotional and self-reflexive processes take place. Through music, people give meaning to themselves and their surroundings by telling stories and recollecting what they have experienced. The first sub-section clarifies the role of music in constructing individuals' identity; the second sub-section deals more in-depth with the narration of identity: the emergence of post-modern theories and of narrative identity which leads to the final section that is devoted to the use of music in the construction of self-narratives.

Individuals and Music: Mapping Self-Identity

Music is present in every culture and plays an important role in many people's daily lives (Zentner et al., 2008). Even though music is inscribed in many people's lives, it is rather hard to provide the term with a clear definition. In fact, there are no clear demarcations of what the term includes (Cross & Morley, 2008). A dictionary definition seems partial and not able to embrace the multitude of nuances of the term, considering that the definition of music varies over time and across cultures. Trying to give this nebulous term a more general definition, Cross & Morley (2008) state that music, just like language, is a communicative system which functions both at a phonological and meaning level. This means that music is composed by separate sound entities included within a system which create an output, a harmony or melody with a specific pattern, that has an implication on individual's emotions and feelings. These emotive attributes have always been recognized, since Aristotle's times, as major music effects (Zentner et al., 2008).

Many researches showed that music's universal appeal lies in the emotional rewards that it offers: music, in fact, does not only present great entertainment values, but it also provides individuals with tools for mood and emotion management and regulation, self-regulation and modulation, stimulation of focus and concentration, recollection of musical memories of the self and others, and aide memoire (DeNora, 1999; DeNora, 2000; North, Hargreaves, & O'Neill, 2000). Furthermore, music is regarded to be an important part of our collective cultural memory and identity: people are personally and emotionally connected to certain songs, but also need to share their feelings and preferences with those surrounding them (Van Dijck, 2006). In other words, music enhances the creation of ties with the broader social reality by evoking distinct and personal emotional responses in which members of a certain social group recognize themselves (Van Dijck, 2006).

Music can, therefore, be considered as a medium that mediates between personal and social identities and contributes to the connection "between an emotional and private experience of self-identity and already existing cultural discourses" (Bolderman & Reijnders, 2017, p.168). This means that music-related practices enable people to map their personal and private stories onto those of other individuals and broader cultural narratives in relation to the socio-cultural context (Bolderman & Reijnders, 2017; Van Dijck, 2006).

As DeNora points out (1999), music can be used either for the self-conscious articulation listeners want to achieve while managing their moods, or as a medium for a self-reflexive process of constructing who one is. The latter signals music's power to arise affective links with other things, people, places, events and so on, in relation to self-identity (Bolderman, 2018; DeNora, 1999). Music equips actors with supportive material "to elaborate, to fill out and fill in to themselves and to others, [...] subjective stances and identities" (DeNora, 1999, p. 54). Under this light, music enriches people's everyday lives by enhancing peoples' understanding and communication of their emotions, tied up to private happenings and larger social issues, complementing aesthetic experiences that establish relations among social actors in society (Hesmondhalgh, 2013).

Aesthetic experience is the combination of aesthetic perception – namely subjective and uncontrolled behaviors and reactions – and aesthetic reaction (Madsen, Brittin, & Capperella-Sheldon, 1993). In this sense, aesthetic experience is composed by an emotional part – the aesthetic perception – and a more intellectual response – the aesthetic reaction, which is modified throughout time. In order for the aesthetic experience of music to take place, perceptual, cognitive and emotional responses have to come into existence (Brattico, Brigitte Bogert, & Jacobsen, 2013). Specifically, there can be identified two main outcomes of musical aesthetic experience: aesthetic emotions more connected to the affective processes and thus to aesthetic perception, and aesthetic judgements and preferences linked to evaluative and cognitive processes included in the aesthetic reaction (Brattico et al., 2013). Therefore, aesthetic experience comprehends, to a certain degree, a form of aesthetic reflexivity of the individual, in which the self emerges as a result of its agility to move through the crowded and impersonal bundle of human conditions, looking for balance and congruence (DeNora, 1999).

In this context, the self finds the chance to construct its (aesthetic) identity through music, by mapping and presenting the self to others through the process of telling a story. In this way, music is used as a device to generate past, present and future identity in a coherent manner (DeNora, 1999). In fact, narrating personal experiences through stories hints at the way in which human temporality is used in narrative discourses (Negus, 2012b). Thus, individuals use music as a means to comprehend

themselves and the surrounding world by telling stories of themselves to others (Negus, 2012a). This brings to the topic of how identity is constructed through narration: the stories people tell, their narratives mirror what their selves are made of (Pasupathi & Hoyt, 2009)

Identity and its Narration

“[...] for myself I have no other reality if the one I give shape to. How do I do it? By constructing myself.” (Pirandello, 1926)²

Before dealing directly with the definition and the implications of the concept of narrative identity, I will firstly look at the more general definition of identity and the origins of the term narrative identity.

According to Stryker & Burke (2000), among the many traditions of research on identity, there can be found three distinct usages of the concept. Firstly, identity is used to refer to the culture of people and its peculiar characteristics. Secondly, identity indicates the common denominator among groups or community members. Finally, identity is also used to indicate the way individuals give meaning to themselves and how are those meanings attached to the manifold of roles that individuals enact in contemporary societies. The latter will be the focus of this research. In fact, this section will specifically touch upon the study of personal identity which is manifested in individuals narrations of personal stories (Polkinghorne, 1996). Stories exist in people’s lives and are usually told by subjects about their own actions to themselves or to others, stories told by others and those retained by their cultures.

In a continuously evolving post-modern western society, in which different performances have to meet the obligations of the social surroundings, the need to tell a coherent and consistent account of one’s identity has become more prominent especially when people are confronted with multiple and conflicting stories (McAdams, 2008; Polkinghorne, 1996). The process of identity formation assumes here a more reflexive character, where people become conscious of the process taking place (DeNora, 1999). However, it has not always been this way. In earlier times, for instance, people could assimilate and incorporate their identities within cultural narratives that provided them with answers to their identity (Polkinghorne, 1996). People could define themselves according to the theme of serving God’s will in whatever social role was considered to be assigned to them, and directions were given on how to deal with bodily changes and urges. However, when cultures undergo periods of transition or are quickly changing, a unified story is no longer prominent. This became

²[...] per me stesso io non ho altra realtà se non nella forma che riesco a darmi. E come? Ma costruendomi, appunto. (Pirandello L., 1926. *Uno, Nessuno e Centomila*)

particularly evident starting from the second half of the 20th century when many social movements gave voice to the stories of those social groups which, until that point, were considered to be oppressed or marginalized. A wider range of narratives started to develop and was added to the predominant one of that age (Best, 2007). From this moment on, grand or metanarratives narratives - described as global and totalizing cultural narratives that explain human knowledge and experience - started to crumble down as a result of the elaboration of postmodern theories.

In *La Condition postmoderne* (1979)³ Lyotard stated that the disillusioned postmodern man does not rely on metanarratives anymore (Browning, 2000). Instead, self-legitimizing narratives – or micronarratives – which do not claim universal truth and are restricted to a specific domain, started to replace grand narratives for: ‘there is no reason, only reasons’ (Lyotard as quoted in Featherstone, 1998, p.209; Browning, 2000). Following this perspective, identity appears as subjective and highly dependent on how individuals perceive themselves in relation to others and to their self (Coupland, 2007). There is no longer a universal definition in which people can recognize themselves in; instead, identity is context dependent and always in flux: it is defined as a process, an object in perpetual making under the influence of historical, cultural and social contexts. Therefore, identity work becomes more challenging because it is constructed through ongoing interactions and are meant to build an explanatory account of who we are in relation to the self and others (Coupland, 2007). Among the multiple and conflicting stories, subjects have to define their place by developing their own stories in order to cope with the self and socio-cultural surroundings (Polkinghorne, 1996):

“The self by its reflexive form announces itself as a conscious organism which is what it is only so far as it can pass from its own system into those of others, and can thus, in passing, occupy both its own system and that into which is passing... The organism, by occupying the attitudes of others, can occupy its own attitude in the role of the other.” (Mead quoted in Ezzy, 1998, p.241)

Mead is recognized to be one of the fathers of the concept of narrative identity (Ezzy, 1998). He referred to identity as multiple, changeable and socially constructed, but coexisting in the self, which comprehends experiences into a unified and coherent manner (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). The sense of coherence and continuity is the product of the symbolic reconstruction of the past in the present. In other words, the self becomes a temporal unity in which past and future are located in the present through the narrative process of the self (Ezzy, 1998). Thus, the sense of continuity of the self is given by narratives that develop and change throughout life by creating a narrative whole that connects already lived past, the perceived present and future (McAdams, 1996). Following post-modern view

³ Lyotard, J-F. (1979). *La Condition Postmoderne: Rapport sur le Savoir*. Paris

on identity, the self is therefore seen as fluid and changeable and constructed by an individual in relation to its socio-cultural surroundings (Ezzy, 1998). Identities are then in a continuous process of making, apparently chaotic and open-ended, simply because it is impossible to predict our future. However, as Goffman pointed out (1959), individuals have the chance to evaluate their motives to enact certain identities basing their evaluation on the efficacy of the story told, and eventually modify or substitute that story according to the socio-cultural context (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010).

In sum, identity in this research is found in the capacity of certain individuals to keep a narrative going (McAdams, 1996). Living immersed in narratives means that subjects reason and reflect upon the meaning of past actions and situate themselves in the midst of several stories that are not completed yet (McAdams, 1996).

In the first decade of the 21st century, the narrative approach to identity has become more prominent (McAdams, 2008). This approach has been incorporated into many disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, communication studies and psychology (McAdams, 2008). Narrative identity is defined as the human development and the construction of a personal narrative across life that gives meaning and integrates the different and varied parts of individual's experiences (Hammack, 2008).

Narrative identity "refers to an individual's internalized, evolving, and integrative story of the self [...] [which] serve to situate them within the complex ecology [of society]" (McAdams, 2008, p.242). Narrating an identity means that individuals are akin to playwright narrative work, aiming to give coherence to their experiences by organizing them into a script (Goffman, 1959, McAdams, 2008). Constructing and formulating a life-story identity allows people to give a semblance of unity and purpose to their lives, in an effort to create a meaningful product (McAdams, 2008).

Creating a life-story entails that the story needs to be told to people around us. Often such stories are told according to the person to whom people are interacting with and depend on the exposure to the larger socio-cultural context (Pasupathi & Hoyt, 2009). Therefore, narrative identity is constructed by an individual in interaction and in dialogue with other people (Ezzy, 1998). In fact, narrative identities are not purely individual productions but are considered to be shaped by the social, cultural and historical contexts that exist between the storyteller and the interlocutor (Pasupathi & Hoyt, 2009). In other words, the plots of narrative identities are formed in a complex interaction between events, imagination, significant other, routines and habits, and the way people tell their stories (McAdams, 2008).

Identity work begins when subjects capture their actions and experiences and accommodate them within an internal coherent story that at core involve intentions, beliefs and goals (Baumeister & Newman, 1994). People engage in narrative work because, according to Somers (1994) and

Polkinghorne (1996), there are four fundamental features which respond to individuals' specific needs: 1) relationality of parts, 2) causal emplotment, 3) selective appropriation and 4) temporality. Life events are related to each other when they are turned into episodes and integrated within a chronological sequence. This is achieved through causal emplotment whose purpose is to primarily translate events into episodes and to give meaning and significance to these. During emplotment, moreover, some episodes that are thematically connected are selected and given historical and relational relevance. Hence, emplotment is a fundamental aspect of narrativity because by putting episodes in order, it permits the construction of a network of inter and intra relationships, making narrative identity both relational and processual. The adequate causality of episodes makes stories coherent (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). Stories that develop in temporally and spatially pathways render a person's trajectory unite. Therefore, personal vicissitudes are organized over time in order to explain how one event is related or led to the following (McAdams, 2001). This process allows for a coherent and understandable account of identity which develops and builds up over time (McAdams & McLean, 2013). In sum, emplotment is about giving 'historicity and relationality' to life-changing events that characterized one's life phase and left a footprint in one's identity.

However, according to the British philosopher and literary critic Strawson (2015)⁴, the reflexive process of self-knowledge comes in disconnected bits and it seems unnecessary and difficult to comprise different experiences into a comprehensive story. The convergence of past, present and future into a narration cannot give a sense of completeness and unity to life because life itself is composed by separated fragments. Or at least, not everyone gives meaning to their life in the form of a story and narrates it as such. Following Strawson then, life as a narrative cannot be considered as a generalizable human condition. In fact, he claims that narrative identity does not play any significant role in accounting how a person experiences the world because the unity that the narration of a life-story gives to the self is merely fictitious. Therefore, advocating that narrative identity provides unity and coherence to life experiences seems to deny the dynamic flow of the manifold of personalities that co-exists in individuals. Under this light, the risk is that, by narrating one's self, a person is so busy with translating past episodes into engaging stories that they drift away from self-understanding and their true, authentic self (Strawson, 2004). Reminiscences of the past are untrustworthy, and self-knowledge is inscribed into the '[ac]knowledge of self-ignorance'. Nevertheless, considering that events in life have at least a semblance of a sequence for most people, it seems hard to deny the existence of a storied identity. What is important to acknowledge, according to Strawson, is that for some people it is crucial to see and tell their identity as an organized series of events, whereas for

⁴ <https://aeon.co/essays/let-s-ditch-the-dangerous-idea-that-life-is-a-story>

others, life and its experiences are just ‘things that happen’. In this scenario, this research looks at narrative identity not only as a way of self-representation but also as an important tool for self-understanding, which do not necessarily correspond to the ‘inauthentic’ elaboration of self-identity to which Strawson alludes. In fact, when looking at the memory work behind the narration of one's identity, we should not only consider the story told in terms of authenticity of accounts, since memory is always “selective, revised, added to and reshaped over time” (Keightley & Pickering, 2006, p.153), especially when communicated to the wider social environment and presented under the form of a story. Clearly, while considering the concept of narrative identity is crucial to keep in mind that narrative identity is not a process that everybody recognizes as theirs and cannot, therefore, be generalized.

Music and Narrative Identity

There are many different focuses of narrative theory, including psychotherapy, gender studies, mid-life development, personality change, emotion regulations, ethnic identity, political orientation, self-regulation (Adler et al., 2017). However, for the sake of this research, it will be looked into the articulation of narrative identities through the use of music, especially looking at how people use music to make sense of their self and narrate their identity to others.

People usually work implicitly on their narrative identities; however, they have at their disposal a wide range of external inputs to act upon their consciousness (McAdams & McLean, 2013). In fact, some activities, such as listening to music can render the self-work more explicit. Individuals try to monitor, organize and revise their life stories through such tool. Music, under this light, is a facilitator for identity construction, which is used in periods of identity change resulting from significant life-changing moments, happenings or symbolic watersheds (McAdams, 1996; Ter Bogt et al., 2010).

People use music as a device that helps them to give meaning to what they have been experiencing throughout their lives. Constructing their identities over time, individuals use music to crystallize certain moments or specific experiences in their life stories (Frith, 1996). It is in fact through music, as Frith (1996) points out, that people articulate themselves in a process of self-understanding: “Making music isn’t a way of expressing ideas; it is a way of living them” (Frith, 1996, p.111).

Listening to music is not only an activity that serves self-reflective purposes, but has also a *strong social character*. People listen and talk about music in different settings, especially when meeting new people and, in many cases, music preferences are a way of establishing social bonds (Bakagiannis & Tarrant, 2006; Boer et al., 2011). Music preferences also convey information that is

non-musical and is therefore more related to the personality of an individual person (Bakagiannis & Tarrant, 2006; Delsing, Ter Bogt, Engels, & Meeus, 2008). Preferences, therefore, send a message to the outside social world about individual's traits of personality communicating such value-expressive attitudes to other social actors (Boer et al., 2011). When people have similar music preferences it means that they share some common ground: they probably share the same values, listen to the same music when going out and have some similar personality traits. This is why, in this research, music preferences are considered as a way of expressing the personality and the values of listeners. Similarities in values increase social attraction and the chance to share same experiences.

There seems to be a general agreement that the process of formation of a life story comes into being during adolescence (Habermans & Bluck, 2000; McAdams, 2008; McAdams & McLean, 2013; McLean, 2005; McLean, 2008; Ter Bogt et al., 2010). At this age, people commit to the explore their self-identity and are concerned about the construction of a life story. They therefore begin to code past occurrences and reason about the influences that such happenings have in their current lives (Pasupathi & Hoyt, 2009). Furthermore, during adolescence cognitive developments take place and grant the development of the self and of a certain psychological maturity (Habermans & Bluck, 2000; McLean, 2005). In this context, thus, teenagers have the need to define and affirm themselves within wider socio-cultural contexts in which they establish new relationships, such as family, school, and work (McLean, 2005; McLean & Pratt, 2006). Making connections between their experiences incipits also autobiographical reasoning, by allowing teens to relate their music preferences to issues of self-identity, self-perceptions, values, images and beliefs (McLean, 2008; Schwartz & Fouts, 2003).

During adolescence, music works as a vehicle to find connections with others (Schwartz & Fouts, 2003). Music is important for adolescents because through it, they can share with their peers typical adolescence developmental issues that mostly regard conflicting emotions, disruptive feelings. Hence, the role of music is two-folded: while shaping their individual identity, teens look for membership in peer groups, which will influence their lives.

Given the transitional character of adolescence, teens tend to look for guidance in their social group in which they share, among other things, also music preferences whose expressive function is to define the values the group agrees upon, unifying attitudes and behaviors (Raviv et al., 1996). In this context, listening to music therefore constitutes an activity that 'provides a basis of self-expression, the construction of self-identity, the achievement of independence, and intimacy' also in relation to others (Raviv et al., 1996, p.633). In this way, music provides a place where to find control and stability in the midst of complex emotions and feelings.

Music is therefore used by individuals to facilitate their identity construction: music influences individuals through sounds, lyrics and ideas and enables them to identify with either the images

recalled by the lyrics and/or with the artist's style and presentation (Ter Bogt et al., 2010). The music or the singer(s) that perform their favorite music – which represents a form of guidance - are likely to become objects of idolization, defined by Stramaglia (2010) as "affective objects that enchant the eyes and drag souls" (p.22). The *idolization* activities comprehend listening to music with peers, collecting CDs, attending concerts (Raviv et al., 1996). Idols, in this sense, are points of references for teens who look up to them as owners of knowledge and as those who can understand them intimately. Engaging in such activities with peers enhances the feeling of belonging to and inclusion in a group, contributing to the formation process of individuals' identity. This process entails the feeling of being loved, of feeling important and of worth (Stramaglia, 2010).

According to Raviv et al. (1996), it seems that during adolescence the idolization reaches its intensity peak. This occurs because adolescents are trying to establish their self-identity and independence and, at the same time, try to be part of a group. To be part of a group means that its members share interests, goals, values and want to distance and distinguish themselves from the adult world. The phenomenon of idolization gradually disappears by the age of 16-17, after teens have more or less established their identity and are more or less aware of their aims and interests (Raviv et al., 1996). This shift is also due to the importance that now is given to short-term goals such as their school achievements and to long-term goals which include future planning. Moreover, grown-up teenagers are not that dependent on their peer group anymore and tend to be more self-reflective and aware of who they are as individuals in relation to themselves and others (Raviv et al., 1996). Furthermore, young adulthood is also a turbulent period and time of instability because the project of identity construction is still a work in progress: many changes occur during this age and they are all an integral part of the exploration of their selves (McLean, 2008).

According to Schwarts and Fouts (2003) adolescents and young adults spend over 10.000 hours listening to music: surely, the fact that during the most critical years of identity research and formation, people spend a significant amount of their time listening to music shows a connection of the importance of music in the process of identity formation of adolescents and young adults (Ruud, 1997). In other words, music seems to ensure for its listeners a sense of self-uniqueness commitment to find a place in society and a sense of continuity over time (Pasupathi & Hoyt, 2009).

Therefore, listening and talking about music is not just a reflection of self-identity but it is also a way of constituting and performing one's identity (Ruud, 1997). This means that subjects' interpretative activity and meaning-making is made coherent through time and space by the use of music. This assumption entails that musical experience may characterize specific moments of one's life, becoming a 'marker' of important events or incidents of one's life. In this way, music functions as an instrument that individuals use to support and organize their identity: through the retrieval of

experiences that had a significant impact on their life, people provide new meanings, purposes, values and significance to their self (Ruud, 1997). Under this light, music becomes a 'life soundtrack' that aids locating incidents in time and space, by giving credibility to the identity people narrate (Ruud, 1997). Therefore, musical experiences are referential mediums that link specific sounds to a peculiar private life world. People narrate their stories connecting to a scene that is reminded to them by the music they played during those moments (DeNora, 2000; Ruud, 1997).

By studying life as a togetherness of episodes with their special soundtracks used as a way to give meaning to personal identities, we can look at narrative identity as a musical composition, where the notes are important events in one's life and the composition is like the story people narrate about themselves through the use of music. The way people have used music throughout their lives gives an indication of how music has been approached to throughout the choreography of their life.

Research Question and Expectations

Music is one of the ways people use to articulate and narrate the choreography of their lives. In other words, musical experiences become a marker that highlights specific intimate and private moments that help individuals staging their identity for the audience: music contributes to locating the self in time and space by giving credibility and coherence to their storied identity (DeNora, 2000; Ruud, 1997). Thus, music is a means that aids some people to map and present their identity to others and find their place in the wider socio-cultural context (DeNora, 1999; Frith, 1996; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Negus, 2012a; Negus, 2012b; Van Dijck, 2006). Therefore, identity is considered to be the capacity to keep a narrative going, and within such narrative, a coherence and a 'script-like' temporal order and unity aim at producing a meaningful product (Goffman, 1959; McAdams, 1996). From such theoretical considerations, the research question follows the lines of inquiry in order to analyze the perception of music of young adults, and reads: 'How do young adults perceive the (changing) role of music in their lives from their early teens until their current age?' and leads to some possible expectations.

Firstly, following the theoretical reflections just presented, listening to music is expected to be used as a device to generate past, present and future identity through the narration of a story. This means that through the narration of their identity, individuals are expected to use music as a way of re-ordering their identity and give it a coherent semblance. In other words, I expect to find that, when people listen to a song that marked a specific time of their life, they recollect such memories and re-live the feelings they felt at that point, by giving continuity to their emotions and the perception of their identity. Music would work as a *referential medium* for one's experiences, considering the turbulent period of young adulthood and the challenges of constructing one's identity in this period (DeNora, 2000; McLean, 2008; Ruud, 1997). Secondly, it has been elucidated in the theory chapter that music has both a self-reflective purpose and a strong social character (Bakagiannis & Tarrant, 2006; Delsing et al., 2008; DeNora, 1999). From these considerations, I expect that some respondents will use music for managing their moods, to discover their self and to convey specific information to the outside social environment. This means, that their musical preferences will also convey some features that are not entirely music related but reflect more the personality of the individuals and the values they believe in. I expect that this contributes to one's inclusion in a group and the establishment of his or her self-identity.

Methodology

In order to investigate how young adults perceive the (changing) role of music from their early teens until their current age, the most suitable way is qualitative approach. Qualitative research sets out to examine social practices and phenomena by shedding light on individual experiences in order to understand how people interpret their social world (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Human experience is a complex and manifold object of study, ever-changing in an ongoing flow where new meanings are continuously emerging. (Bryman, 2012; Polkinghorne, 2005). Inquiring about individuals' experiences deals with the description and clarification of the dynamics of an experience as it is lived by the subjects (Polkinghorne, 2005). In this research, qualitative design gives the opportunity to look at the social world of the people involved by analyzing how people give meaning to their experiences through music. In this way, the role of music is analyzed against young adults' associations between music and lived experiences, which contribute to the building of an individual's narrative identity.

To explore how young adults perceived the role of music in their lives starting from their teens and how they are currently perceiving it, semi-structured in-depth interviews will be conducted (Bryman, 2012). This will ensure that during the interviews similar topics will be discussed and enough space will be provided to the respondents to elaborate and narrate their own stories (Bolderman, 2018; Bryman, 2012; Polkinghorne, 2005). The main purpose of the interviews is to provide different accounts on individual's perceptions and experiences while listening to music in their teens and in their current age, and how those contributed to the formation of their narrative identity (Polkinghorne, 2005). Relying on interviews for this research gives the opportunity to explore the different ways young adults experienced music during a specific time in their lives and how that music contributed to the construction of their identity both at that time and now. The use of semi-structured interviews ensures that respondents are all subjected to the same set of questions which explores a specific topic and allows the interviewees to recall information when asked to recollect memories (Louise BARRIBALL & WHILE, 1994). In this way, semi-structured interviews resemble more an everyday conversation between two people, where detailed and rich accounts are elaborated in loco and explored through follow up questions (Rapley, 2001). Exploring how respondents elaborate and organize their music memories thus results more similar to the way they structure their daily interactions, than the elaboration of a complete story of how their musical taste evolved (Louise BARRIBALL & WHILE, 1994). This exploration is set out to gain more information about the topic in question. During some interviews, respondents were proposed to listen to an (old) song so that their impressions on the spot could have been recorded. However, none of them agreed to do so, thinking that would create an uncomfortable situation.

In order to investigate the intimate changing role of music throughout young individuals' lives, a certain level of trust, intimacy and ease is needed between the interviewer and the respondent, so that the latter feels free to share thoughts and feelings with the interviewer (Reijnders, 2016). The aim of the interviews is not about the authentic rendering of music preferences memories, but it concerns more a direct engagement with participants' self-narrations that provide the chance to approach identity narration as embedded in its socio-cultural networks that change over time and space (Somers, 1994).

The analysis of the data is done by paying particular attention to the interview narratives, looking at how a story is told. This means that the story is analyzed by giving it a temporal order looking for recurring narrative themes. Themes are found through the use of thematic analysis which addresses the recurrent motifs found in the stories young adults told about their (changing) perception of music throughout their life, by highlighting the way they used and perceived music in different ages of their lives (Bolderman, 2018; Bryman, 2012). Narrative analysis consists of the analysis of the way a narrative is told and its time and space (Bolderman, 2018). In other words, it looks at how people refer to their self in connection to the use of music, the terms they use to describe experiences, events and life moments in relation to music.

Sample

The sample includes eleven young adults aged between 22 to 34-year-old (Petry, 2002). The respondents included 3 males and 8 females. To overcome possible issues of uncomfortable and unfruitful interview situations, the choice has been made to interview acquaintances, friends and relatives with whom a certain level of trust can be assumed (Reijnders, 2016). This contributed to the creation of an immediate and natural conversational flow and supported the creation of a comfortable atmosphere, where the interpersonal relationship between the interviewee and interviewer favored reciprocal trust and openness (Blichfeldt & Heldbjerg, 2011). Nonetheless, even though the interviews were set up in these terms, I noticed that, for some respondents, the act of recording and the fact that they knew they were interviewed for an academic research influenced the way they answered to some intimate questions, being more reluctant or timid to share particularly intimate episodes of their lives.

Since I know people who live in The Netherlands who are either Dutch or from other European countries, and my family and a consistent group of friends are living in Italy or in other European countries, the respondents come from either The Netherlands, Italy or other European countries. Dutch and Italian young adults residing in The Netherlands are currently attending university, they are highly educated and have been interviewed in person. Family members and other acquaintances

are Italian, French and Cuban-Spanish and are either lower or higher educated and were interviewed via Skype or FaceTime since the research was physically written and conducted in The Netherlands. An attempt was made to conduct interviews in a quiet and familiar environment – either at their home or in a café, where respondents felt comfortable to share their thoughts and experiences about intimate events and episodes of their lives connected to the use of music (Reijnders, 2016). Skype or FaceTime interviews were conducted during a convenient time for the respondents, when they were at home or in a quiet environment.

| Respondent | Gender | Age | Level of education | Occupation | Place of residence |
|----------------------|---------------|------------|---------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|
| Italian friend 1 | Female | 23 | Bachelor | Student | The Netherlands |
| Italian friend 2 | Male | 24 | High school | Student and worker | Italy |
| Family member | Female | 34 | Bachelor | Professional | Italy |
| Italian friend 3 | Male | 23 | Bachelor | Student | Italy |
| Italian friend 4 | Female | 24 | High school | Worker | Italy |
| Italian friend 5 | Female | 22 | Bachelor | Student | Italy |
| French friend | Female | 23 | Bachelor | Student and worker | France |
| Italian friend 6 | Female | 23 | Bachelor | Student | The Netherlands |
| Cuban-Spanish friend | Female | 23 | Bachelor | Worker | Germany |
| Italian friend 7 | Female | 24 | Bachelor | Student | France |
| Dutch friend | Male | 22 | Bachelor | Student and worker | The Netherlands |

Table 1 – Respondents' information: gender, age, highest level of education obtained, occupation and place of residence (Appendix 1)

Interviewing friends and acquaintances brought two advantages. First of all, the researcher had the opportunity to choose the respondents who have a particular connection with music and listen to it often. This would be far more difficult to assess in relation to strangers, since there would be the need to start a relationship from scratch, getting to know their habits and establishing a good level of trust with them (Blichfeldt & Heldbjerg, 2011). Secondly, this type of interview builds upon previous knowledge of the participants, which helped to draw a more complete and nuanced portrait of individuals' experiences (Blichfeldt & Heldbjerg, 2011). However, there are also downfalls of this, especially concerning the role of the researcher, who needs to be aware of her position and try to reduce any possible influence on the participants during the process of interviewing (McConnell-Henry et al., 2010). Moreover, since the sample of this research is restricted to a specific group of people, it is rather difficult to generalize such subjective results, therefore compromising the external validity of the final conclusions (Bryman, 2012).

Operationalization

Concepts elaborated in the theory section need to be operationalized, meaning that concepts from an abstract level reach a more empirical level (Bryman, 2012). Through operationalization, there is the chance to describe a specific social phenomenon and to explore what has been described in the theoretical framework chapter.

The research question sets out to explore young adults' changing perception of music from their teens until their current age. This means that young adults might have been listening to music and connect it to a peculiar phase, scene or life event of their teens – notably the age when people start listening to music and constructing their identity – how that is related to their identity of that time and their current identity. The same is done in order to investigate what their current music preferences are and to what they are connected to. People might change their music preferences over time and this can occur for a wide variety of reasons, which this research will try to elucidate. In fact, possible changes in music preferences might signal and reflect life changes (Rentfrow & Gosling, 2003). Such changes, consequently, might also influence the perception that a person has about him or herself now and the way he or she tells his or her stories.

Following this line of inquiry, the interview guideline has been developed and, for the sake of clarity and collection of unitary data, it has been divided into two main sections. After the personal introduction of the interviewee, people were invited to talk about how often they listen to music so that it can be demonstrated that the people interviewed listen or have been listening to music on a regular base.

In the first part, people are asked to talk about their first favorite music and are invited to explore the reasons why they enjoyed that music specifically and why that music was relevant to them at that point of their life. In this way, during the conversation, people will elucidate also their use of music in a specific time of their lives. The term 'specific time' refers to a scene, a happening, an experience that the respondents connect to a certain type of music they have listened to. When people give an account on the way they used music in their teens, this will help to understand how meaning-making process of a certain experience has been fostered by or connected to music in that period.

The second part of the interview is then arranged in order to delve into the current music preferences of the respondents. This implies the investigation of respondents' current favorite music, the possible changes of preferences that have occurred since their teens and how these preferences mirrored their personal and identity changes that might have influenced and might be still influencing who they are now. In order to assure to collect relevant data for this research, narrative prompts will

be used so that individuals will focus on the narration of one specific life experience (Adler et al., 2017). This is translated into deepening questions regarding these episodes, which start from more general questions (what happened, when and where) to more precise questions about who was involved and what was the interviewee thinking and feeling (Adler et al., 2017).

To sum up, the interview guide aspires at gaining deeper and diverse insights into individuals' perception and use of music. Exploring which music they listened to when they were teens, what music they are listening now and how music is used to give sense to their identity in time and space are the main topics that are addressed in the interview guide and that will be then analyzed.

Methods of Analysis

Narrative and thematic analysis are the methods chosen to analyze the data gathered during the interviews. In fact, next to thematic analysis, attention is paid to the construction of the story narrated in relation to music preferences evolution during teenage years and current time and how such preferences have changed over time.

Thematic analysis is used to gather data across a number of cases and look for recurring motifs, which will be intended as repetitions of topics found in the interviews, their similarities and differences (Riessman, 2005; Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Narrative analysis refers to the study of storied accounts that people give about themselves through the description of particular events or episodes that affected them (Bryman, 2012). The focus is mostly on how people make sense of what happened to them and the way people perceive the coherence and continuity of their lives, attempting to understand the wider socio-cultural context they live in (Bryman, 2012). Narrative analysis allows the researcher, in this case, to take into account the overall temporal structure of the stories told during the interviews (Bolderman, 2018). Moreover, narrative analysis, as Bryman points out (2012), can be applied to interview transcripts in order to 'uncover the stories' the interviewees are telling (p.582). Hence, stories can emerge from questions that are not necessarily narrative, but that aim at giving an insightful account on life experiences of the participants by eliciting interviewee's reconstructed accounts of events and contexts.

In the case of this research, the narrative analysis will contribute to preventing the fragmentation of the data (Bolderman, 2018; Bryman, 2012). Narrative analysis, in fact, provides explanatory knowledge of the reasons behind participants' behavior through their accounts put into sequential order, which grant temporality and plot to the stories about the evolution of participants' musical preferences (Floersch, Longhofer, Kranke, & Townsend, 2010; Polkinghorne, 1995).

Firstly the data were analyzed using ATLAS.ti and were assigned to open codes, which have been grouped into a first set of categories, and have been eventually narrowed down and grouped under more abstract units that refer back to the concepts of the theoretical framework (Floersch et al., 2010). In other words, recurring motifs and themes emerged and have been related according to theory previously presented in order to better understand the role of music in the construction of individuals' narrative identity.

The data are analyzed using narrative analysis as a frame. That is to say that the data have been divided into chronological periods that the respondents spontaneously touched upon during the narration of the evolution of their musical preferences. This type of division arranges the data in chronological order according to what people talked about during the interviews and grants the chance to understand the meaning people gave to their experiences and specific episodes in their lives (Frith, 1996). Therefore, the way people have listened to music throughout their lives up until their current age shows the way music has been used to construct and perform one's identity (Ruud, 1997). That is why the data is divided into three moments that show the narratives of people's music preferences that emerged as common periods experienced by the respondents: (1) pre-teens – first approaches to music, (2) teen years and (3) contemporary age. Within these narrative categories, recurrent motifs are explored in relation to the way people used music to express themselves and how their music preferences evolved. It is important to remind that each respondent narrated their own unique version of the evolution of music preferences and that these have been influenced by a series of personal experiences respondents went through in their lives.

The first narrative section looks at the respondents' first approaches to music during their childhood and pre-teens years, and it reports the earliest musical memories that respondents could retrieve. The second section considers the adolescent years of respondents. This part is divided into inward and outward perspectives: the experiences of self-identity in relation to the self and others (Bolderman & Reijnders, 2017; Van Dijck, 2006). This means that, during adolescence most respondents started to use music, both as a tool for mood regulation, self-reflection aesthetic experience and also as a way to be included in peer groups, using music as a signal to others of the values they stand for (Boer et al., 2001; DeNora 1999; 2000; Raviv, Bar-Tal, Raviv, & Ben-Horin, 1996; Schwartz & Fouts, 2003). Finally, the last section – contemporary age – addresses the respondents' contemporary music preferences and their current uses of music.

Analysis

In this chapter, the main findings will be presented. Following the lines of analysis presented in the methodology chapter, every sub-section will be devoted to the description of each of the three narrative phases that have been individualized, namely pre-teens, teens and contemporary age. Within each section, narrative motifs are presented as recurrent patterns distinguished while analyzing the data: the first section presents the recollection of memories that the interviewees retrieved from their childhood. For the second section on teen years, different music experiences were described and grouped according to adolescence's self-discovery and social inclusion focuses. The last part, which describes the current music preferences of respondents, reports the story interviewees told about their current musical choices and the way they narrate their preferences in order to give continuity with their previous self and/or to demarcate a radical transformation and change from previous years.

Within these three phases, following *respondents-based memory lines*, technology is certainly the red thread that characterizes their accounts. All interviewees own a device that allows them to stream and listen to music on a daily basis. Throughout the interviews it had been possible to witness how technological changes have influenced respondents' habits of listening to music, considering that they were all born between the 80s and 90s. Some started with recording on cassettes' tapes and listening to the radio. MTV was one of the most popular programs of those years, that broadcasted international music that otherwise would not have reached the country of origin of the respondents. Afterwards, CDs came out and portable CD readers made it possible for people to listen to music with headphones wherever they would bring them. In the 2000s, the advent and the use of Internet opened the doors to a completely new musical universe and to a way of doing music research that respondents never experienced before. From a wide range of musical proposals, they can now choose what matches better their moods, share music with their friends and discover new genres. YouTube and Spotify are one of the most used music platforms where to stream music and (re)search for new one.

The use of social media and digital platforms made it possible for the respondents, in this case, to have a more direct access to music during every moment of their day. Now it is a question of knowing what type of music you want to listen in a specific moment and better expresses who you are in that moment. This is found throughout almost all interviews, where interviewees affirmed that they listen to music every day for at least a couple of hours, depending on what they are doing and how they are feeling. Therefore, technology provides tools with which people can increase and augment their abilities to communicate both to their self and to others who they are, what they like and the values they believe in (Raviv et al., 1996). By adapting their habits of listening to music to

such technological developments, we can conclude that for at least most of the respondents, technology had an impact on the way they have related to music and the way they relate such music to their self (Hawisher, Selfe, Moraski, & Pearson, 2004). This shows that for these young adults technological developments changed radically the way they access and make use of music. When surfing the net to find music, there are chances to get to know other music genres and learn to appreciate them. Moreover, another trait of the Internet that cannot be put aside is continuous exchange with other users: this constitutes a way of negotiating one's identity in relation to the digital community.

When analyzing the data, it is necessary to keep in mind that the accounts here reported are the results of autobiographical memories, namely reconstructions of life events participants described while being interviewed (Adler et al., 2017). By synthesizing past events, respondents tried to reconstruct episodic memories in a coherent story of personal development over time (McAdams & McLean, 2013). The recollection of intimate and emotional events from their past serves the purpose to give meaning to their self and reveal meaningful moments of their lives that left a footprint in the process of identity construction (Thorne, 2000). Memories, therefore, conceived as recollection of specific emotional events from one's past, are an extremely complex and sensitive matter to treat because they represent the way people (re)construct the meanings of emotional events through self-reflection, compare them with other experiences and engage in a constant negotiation with other social actors, including the interviewer herself (Thorne, 2000). As Bluck (2003) points out 'self-continuity through adulthood is maintained by the interdependent relation of self and autobiographical memory' (p.114), which indicates that memories and stories that respondents told during the interviews were highly dependent on the context and the relationship they had with the interviewer that, as a consequence, affected the way they elaborated their storied music experiences in that specific moment. The meanings participants attach now to their younger selves memories are elaborated according to the image of the self they want to convey.

I Pre-teens – first approaches to music

In this section, the main recurrent motifs of the pre-teens period will be presented. Most of the respondents could remember their first approaches to music and connected them to their pre-teens years. In general, most respondents could remember and recount specific moments in which they approached music as kids.

They tended to associate music with holidays with their parents, playing moments with friends and the songs they learned in kindergarten. Therefore the stories most of the respondents told about their first approaches to music referred mainly to the most known social environments, such as their

families and school friends, in other words, their comfort zones. Respondents also reported that they started listening to their first favorite music because it was popular at school and among their friends. They all referred to this type of music as 'popular', 'commercial' and 'trendy'. Following their friends' preferences is the first sign of wanting to be part of a peer group and be accepted as worthy members (Stramaglia, 2010). Around 10 and 11 years old, many respondents started to focus their attention on one singer or band that was particularly popular among their peers. These preferences often included 'commercial' or pop music that other people around them were listening to. Hence, family members and friends had a strong influence on the respondents' first preferences. In other words, the music they were more in contact with on a daily basis was not something they independently chose to listen, but it was music that was simply being listened to at home or at school.

Moreover, at this age, music was associated by two Italian friends (1, 4) with episodes of early socialization, corresponding to when they started attending dancing or singing classes:

"I was attending dance classes around 2000s and I like listening to it (music) on TV and then replicate the dance moves or invent them with one of my friends of that time" (Italian friend 4, female)

"[...] I was part of a chorus [...] I started going because my neighbor was going there [...] we were all children and we all went there" (Italian friend 1, female)

In these two examples, dancing and singing is now narrated as one of the major activities that these two respondents engaged with in order to bond with their peers. In the first example, dancing is also described as a way to set creativity free and invent dance move with friends. Another respondent associated dancing at friends' birthday parties as moments of serendipity and freedom of expression.. Careless dancing and singing out loud were ways of releasing all their energy and to make new friends: for the first time they were accessing and getting to know a broader social reality besides their school friends and family members.

Considering that all the interviewees spent their childhood between the late 80s and 90s, they all witnessed technological developments in their music consumption during those years. When recollecting their memories about it, some respondents mentioned buying cassettes and CDs and for the first time listening to music with mp3s, which also made it easier to share their favorite music with friends. These changes brought some of the respondents in their younger years to approach music in a different way: the more accessible music became in their daily lives, the more chances they had to exchange and share music with others and starting to engage music in their identity work in relation to their self and to others. Not only such devices technologically evolved, but also the use of mass media in relation to music underwent some transformations. Besides the radio, television became a

fundamental media for music listening. For the first time, people could also watch their favorite music on TV and see their favorite singers sing and dance their songs.

“The real transformation, one of the principal changes had been the change from radio to music video clips, so with MTV [...] It was a great innovation because, besides the radio, you were looking forward to seeing your favorite song on TV and see your idol that danced and sang your song. MTV became something you couldn't do without [...]” (Family member, female)

For the family member, the advent of MTV amplified the effect and influence that music personalities had on her life. She particularly highlights the fact that she could *watch* her favorite singers and feel closer to them. In a way, watching them dancing and being like her made her change the way she approached music and MTV became a revolutionary medium for her. In fact, generally, more children could have access to the music world and children at this young age, when exposed to such TV programs, do not only relate to them but also *cognize* and particularly enjoy them (Raviv et al., 1996). When kids particularly sympathize with music stars, the process of idolization takes place, as Raviv et al. pointed out (1996). In other words, a personality from the music world becomes a model to be imitated and admired:

“[they represented] my dreams and my desires, like the ideal guys! (laughs) The perfect guy, the guy you want to have, a prohibited dream, something unreachable, but just the fact that you're listening to them and crying while listening to their songs would make them feel closer” (Family member, female)

It is exactly the ‘closer feeling’ that she mentions that is amplified by the advent of MTV. The combination between watching video clips and being fond of a singer or a band is, as Raviv et al. point out (1996), the beginning of the process of idolization (between 10 and 11 years old) which reaches its peak during adolescence, and will be explored in the following section.

To sum up, the relation of some respondents to music during their pre-teens age is generally described as highly influenced by family members and friends who constitute the comfort zone for some of children-self of the respondents, who fatigued to see music more than a playful moment. Moreover, for some respondents MTV had a strong impact on their approach to music, amplifying its emotional effects. When growing older, most of the respondents’ interest in and use of music is described in a process of slowly detachment from the music that their family members listened to at home and felt freer and more confident in exploring new music with their peer group.

II. Teens

Teenage years are years of physical, psychological and emotional changes and individuals witness the need of defining their uniqueness and individuality and to commit to a certain 'place' in society, resulting in a period of great significance for the development of identity in relation to the self and the others (Delsing et al., 2008; McAdams, 1996; Pasupathi & Hoyt, 2009). Connected to the formation of identity, the emergence of a storied self or narrative identity is typical of adolescence (Habermans & Bluck, 2000; McAdams, 2008; McAdams & McLean, 2013; McLean, 2005; McLean, 2008; Ter Bogt et al., 2010). Since the period of adolescence presents, on the one hand the beginning of the self-reflection process and, on the other, represents the need to be included in a group by giving a semblance of the self to the surrounding social environment (McAdams & McLean, 2013; Pasupathi & Hoyt, 2009; Raviv et al., 1996; Ter Bogt et al., 2010). This section will focus on the inward reflection about the self and the presentation of the self to the outside world in relation to music and their possible correlations and differences. In other words, when the participants were teenagers listened to music and were personally and emotionally connected to it, but also needed to share their feelings and preferences with other people around them (Van Dijck, 2006). During this age, some of the respondents told stories about important emotional experiences which concerned many 'first time experiences' that constituted for most of the respondents crucial events that laid foundations to the development of their identity and relationships with others.

II-b. Self-reflection – who am I?

During adolescence, music is considered to be a disposable tool that allows the elaboration and construction of one's identity (DeNora, 1999). Listening to a specific type of music at this age aims at elaborating and understanding personal values connected to the self (Boer et al., 2011). Music is therefore an instrument that facilitates identity construction and crystallizes significant moments and watersheds that have shaped one's identity (McAdams, 1996; Ter Bogt et al., 2010).

Many respondents referred to their early adolescence (between 13 and 16 years old) as a period where mixed and contrasting feelings coexisted in them, as one of the respondents pointed out:

"[...]during like the first years of adolescence sometimes you have weird feelings and emotions and whatever, so I remember that I when I was a little bit sad or confused [...]" (Italian friend 5, female)

Throughout the first years of adolescence, because of such 'confused feelings', music could provide stability and control of complex emotional states the respondents were experiencing (Delsing et al., 2008; Raviv et al., 1996). In this period, many interviewees were listening to music that made them feel empowered, energetic and independent: these emotions were perceived as their first steps

into the 'grown-up world'. Their first experiences abroad without their parents, holidays with friends and their first friend group made them feel ready to experience the world on their own.

Another recurrent motif found in the interviews is the use of music to amplify and dramatize the complex feelings teens were experiencing: sad feelings, first experiences with love, group acceptance and inclusion. Often connected to disappointing events of idealized love stories, music was almost like a 'companion' when having to deal with such issues alone:

"[...] you need to sing that song and feel that somebody else is feeling like you do [...] everybody experienced this period and so you don't feel alone anymore, you feel sadder, but at least you don't feel alone." (Italian friend 4, female)

Under this light music is used for this respondent with a consolatory scope, to manage emotions and deal with them (DeNora, 1999; DeNora, 2000; Raviv et al., 1996). Most of respondents then worked with music to deepen their emotions and find a solution to a destabilizing state that brought them to experience feelings they did not know how to cope with initially. These actions symbolize the beginning of self-awareness, where teenagers know what works for them in certain moments and what they need in order to overcome difficulties. The development of such awareness also emerged across interviews. Most of the respondents, in fact, initiated a path of music research in these years. They started looking for some songs and music genres they did not know: music research entailed, in other words, a research within them, their feelings and who they were:

"[...] I was curious and was interested in deepening my knowledge [...] and I found [...] Bjork, the singer. [...] She was different from the others [...] her music in those moments would unlock the 'me' who cared less about stereotypes, the me that not everybody understood and knew, but that I had inside me anyway. [...] I think I had been wearing a mask, in a way [...]" (Family member, female)

Thus, music was considered by this respondent more as a 'private' or 'intimate' thing, a moment in which she would close up in herself and reflect about her state of emotions and release them through the use of music (DeNora, 1999; DeNora, 2000; Frith, 1996). Moreover, according to some other interviewees, this process helped them to unmask their true self, a different one that they performed outside the walls of their bedroom (Goffman, 1959). One of the respondents referred to a process of self-psycho-analysis that helped her reflecting upon the way music fully reflected traits of her personality. She mentioned that every feeling she was experiencing was mirrored in her playlists and could find a way to better understand who she was and make sense of the experiences she was living. Therefore, for some respondents, music was a moment of deep self-reflection that gave the chance to understand who they were and become more self-conscious.

As a consequence of this process of self-discovery, during the last years of adolescence, respondents increasingly presented themselves as agents who were more aware of their musical preferences and musical knowledge and therefore more connected to the building of their self-identity (Pasupathi & Hoyt, 2009). The discovery and the partial acceptance that people have different and conflicting identities co-existing in one which leads to contrasting feelings, is one of the most relevant facts that have been reported by many respondents. The acceptance of multi-faced identities and personalities is probably linked to a different attitude that participants had towards life: more enthusiasm, fun, freedom and lightheartedness. Respondents, at this point, as Raviv et al. (1996) point out, seem to have found a place in their inner world and a new awareness through a more or less established self-identity and definition of their aims and interests. For some respondents, the initiation of music research corresponded to the beginning of their self-discovery, and through it they came to an increasing awareness of their self-identity and a clearer positioning among others.

II-c. Outward focus – being part of a group

During the years of early adolescence, it is essential for teenagers to affirm themselves outside their family context and define their role in the wider socio-cultural context by establishing new friendships and be included in a group (McLean, 2005; McLean & Pratt, 2006). As described in all the interviews, respondents' preferences and music listening habits were closely connected to the most popular music among their friends. This exemplifies, especially during adolescence, some respondents used music as a tool to position themselves in the social context, to construct a new role for themselves to perform among their peers:

“[...] when I was in middle school I wanted to be part of a group, you know, to feel like you belong to a group of people and that they like you, they think you're cool. And listening to 'cool' music according to other people was something, yeah, something I was doing quite a lot as well.” (French friend, female)

“[...] the fact that you were 'no one', that nobody knew you, and then you enter the group of people [...] and you start listening to a certain kind of music, and you feel part of the group [...]” (Italian friend 3, male)

Being part of a group, as clearly stated by these respondents (French friend, Italian friend 3), was fundamental. Inclusion passed also through the music people listened to and the values they attached to it when performing their identities (Ruud, 1997; Van Dijk 2006). Through the use of music in a group, new meanings and purposes are expressed and given significance to (Ruud, 1997). Turning from 'no one' and becoming 'cool' is associated, by these two respondents, to the music that

they started to listen to in order to be included and feel part of a group. In order to crystallize and uniform their behavior to one model, idols became important points of references, enhancing the feeling of belonging and contributing to identity formation in a social context (Raviv et al., 1996). Idols are also part of activities that people share with their group of friends, like listening to music together, dressing up like them, collecting CDs and attending their concerts (Raviv et al., 1996), as one of the respondents highlighted:

“[...] I started experiencing this kind of music with my friends. And I started being really connected to Avril Lavigne and that was [...] the phase when you basically need to be, like, average for getting to know people. And Avril Lavigne was my icon. More than music, she was really an icon. [...] It was like really a worship for me, so I started like, changing the way I was dressing [...]” (Italian friend 6, female)

In the case of this respondent, music became of secondary importance. The strong connection with the character personified by the singer, the worship and the imitation of her behavior are all traits that Raviv et al (1996) described in their research. Having an idol gave her not only the needed guidance in the construction of her identity, but also shaped her identity according to the idol's one. Here, even though the respondent reported that she felt really connected to Avril Lavigne and she felt she could express herself better when listening to her, she now retrospectively realizes that it was a moment in which she needed to be accepted by her peers.

The process of idolization was intensified by the independent use of technological tools of most teenagers. In the first years of the 2000s, the advent of the Internet made it easier to search for information about some of the respondents' favorite singer or band, getting to know what was going on in their private lives and identify even more with them. Furthermore, as some respondents pointed out, the advent of the Internet and the chance to download and stream from the computer opened the doors to a whole new musical universe for some respondents. Platforms for music streaming such as YouTube and software to download music started to become more and more popular among teens and surely increased the chances teenagers could find explore the music world at their disposal and find what matched with their emotional, psychological and social needs.

Later in their adolescence, respondents reported a growing awareness of their musical preferences and a growing agency in choosing the music they liked. Many of them, in this period, switched preferences because they reached a certain level of self-articulation and were more aware of their emotional needs and therefore became less dependent on their friend group.

III. Contemporary age

Respondents are now all young adults. Feeling grown up from the adolescence period is certainly a recurring feeling among the interviewees. However it is important to keep in mind that even though the fluctuating emotional states of adolescence seem surpassed, this age is defined by McLean (2008) as an 'age of instability' because their identity exploration is still occurring. In fact, during this period young adults will have to face multiple and complex problems related to challenging decision-making and feelings of uncertainty and self-doubt (McLean, 2008). To confirm this, many participants described turbulent moments, new challenges, which brought anxiety and instability: moving abroad, setting high standards for their studies results, making decisions for their future carriers. In these occasions, their music choice reflected their needs for mood management: some of them listened to songs that matched their feelings to better release them and, others listened to songs that could tranquil them (DeNora, 1999; DeNora, 2000).

This shows the full agency people narrated to have. They now choose the music they like and they want to listen to; this is why they tend to listen to many different styles and genres: they do not conform anymore to their group of friends' musical preferences, but they listen to what they feel like listening. Even though, most of the respondents affirmed that they are now choosing their music independently, they still refer to their (new) friends or group of reference:

"[...] my musical preferences have changed according to the people I met, periods I have lived [...]. So, my music changes according to the periods I face and experience." (Italian friend 4, female)

As this respondent indicates, even though most respondents claimed to be independent in the choice of their music, they are still influenced in their music discovery by the people they spend time with. Furthermore, half of the respondents had some experiences abroad and came into contact with different and diverse cultures which made them enlarge their music palette and gave them the chance to approach new music genres that were before unknown. In other words, their identity work is highly dependent on the cultural and social contexts that the respondents experienced (Coupland, 2007):

"[...] I was living with this girl [...] very international [...] and I started meeting all her friends and every time they would come to our house, they would put [...] this type of music that I never listened to and I would start asking: What is this? Who is this? [...] and they kind of opened, you know, my range [...]" (Spanish-Cuban friend, female)

These experiences strengthen the tendency of this respondent to be more 'flexible' with her musical preferences. Be versatile, here, is intended as the ability to enjoy both 'pop' or 'commercial' music and also other type of more 'engaged' music:

“[...] I listen to independent music [...] I like it because it makes me feel probably different from everyone else a[...] and it makes me feel open-minded, too. [...] but I also listen to commercial music [...] I'm just having fun and not caring about other people. [...] I'm happy that I can enjoy both actually!” (French friend, female)

Appreciating different music genres and therefore having a more varied musical repertoire is often defined in sociology with the term ‘omnivorousness’. A relatively broad taste in music includes genres that space from highbrow, to pop to independent music (van Eijck & Lievens, 2008). Liking both independent and more exclusive music, and more commercial and pop music is also reflected in the heterogeneous social network that these two respondents have. In fact, appreciating different musical genres means that, as these two interviewees affirmed (Spanish-Cuban friend, French friend) they are able to sympathize with multiple and diversified groups of people who enjoy different kinds of music and, therefore, have a more open-minded attitude towards other music genres which, in turn, gives the chance to socialize with different people and peer groups.

Moreover, the ability to listen to different music genres and the fact that those are considered to be representative of the different aspects of one's personality reflects the fact that in this post-modern age identity is in constant flux and multi-faceted and appears in a perpetual state of making (Coupland, 2007; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010), as this respondent pointed out:

“[...] "I can contradict myself, I'm large, I contain multitudes" and that's the, an aphorism that I really enjoy because it's really me, and music allows you to do this [...] I can enjoy [...] music that covers every part of yourself. It's something that embraces all, actually. So, as I told you, I really have a lot of faces like a diamond [...]” (Italian friend 6, female)

She emphasizes that her multi-layered identity is reflected in the different types of music she enjoys listening. Embracing the different aspects of who she is allows her to embrace different types of music. In this sense, music works as a sort of ‘identity card’, in which the different bits of her identity can be fully expressed and have a semblance of coherence.

Overall, young adults in their current age are certainly more aware of which music they enjoy and which music helps them to regulate their feelings. Music now is seen as an instrument that helps them undertake new paths of discovery of their selves in relation to their identity and others. Music preferences evolution is perceived as a sort of acceptance and synthesis of who they were and who they are now, a relevant part of their identity work.

III-b. Continuity vs transformation: Uses of music related to narrative work

A recurring narrative motif that all respondents discussed is the continuative or transformative impact that music had in relation to the elaboration of their identity over time. Music represented for some respondents a way to, on the one hand, reconstruct their changed self and, on the other, to re-affirm their self-continuity. Throughout their lives, respondents incurred in specific events that changed their perspectives on their self. Events that represent a substantial change are defined by McLean & Pratt (2006) as 'turning points'. Turning points are memories of the process of self-development and seem to provide individuals with a deeper self-understanding, emphasizing self-reflection. Turning points are used to construct convincing narratives and give explanations of 'how the past gave birth to the present, and how the present may now pave the way for the future' (McAdams, 1996, p. 311). Giving continuity to such turning moments ensures that individuals would incorporate and synthesize these changes as representations of their enduring selves (McAdams, 1996). A radical or sudden transformation following an event is often felt as an important transformation of the self. In general, memories of turning and key moments of one's life are crucial in the current age because they narrate the context of life narratives (McAdams, 1996). Such memories help to frame a person's life choreography by highlighting meaningful moments in the continuative or transformative story. Therefore, music can be perceived as either a nutshell containing a continuative version of the self or as a sign of a perceived symbolic watershed and radical change.

In some cases, interviewees did not experience a radical change in their preferences or still like listening to the music they listened to when teenagers.

"[...] if I think about my taste about music [...] I would say that no, my taste didn't change. Because I have like my favorite songs and I listen almost all the time to those [...]" (Italian friend 5, female)

The idea of continuity expressed by this respondent highlights how she engaged in narrative work, aiming at giving coherence and continuity to her personal experiences which form part of her identity. Furthermore, some other respondents keep on listening to the music they have been listening in previous years as a monitor and aide memoir for their memory work (DeNora, 1999; DeNora, 2000). Re-listening to songs that characterized a certain phase or relevant moments of one's life brings back the feelings that a person experienced at that time. Such memory work brings back to life both positive and negative experiences to which a person is affectively connected (McLean, 2008). Memories are therefore important as a reminder of the positive and fun moments, with a more nostalgic and melancholic note on the side (Frith, 1996). Nostalgia and melancholy are in fact quite present in some interviews, where people described episodes and moments they lived as enjoyable

and are considered to be particularly representative of their life path for what they felt and experienced:

“[...] And, sometimes also, if you, your memory, your brain won't bring back these images to you until you listen to this song, so.. It's a bit like, yeah! It's nice to have something, like, stimuli or, like, something, that reveal memories in your mind. Memories that you like and that you don't want to forget, and maybe in your daily life if you don't have these small reminders, you won't really think of it.” (French friend, female)

According to this respondent, memories are reminders of turning points in her life narrative. Crucial memories re-emerge when listening to music that, in her case, are connected to moments she enjoyed and left a footprint in her identity work. Through the musical reminder she can then reconstruct her experiences and make them consistent with her identity narration. Other respondents listen to songs they used to listen to when younger with their friends. In this instance, music becomes the 'glue' of different personal memories, so that people can re-experience individual and intimate feelings together with a larger group of friends. This often happens in occasion of parties with old friends with whom the person has many experiences in common. In this sense, music solidifies and recalls memories; it becomes a 'container for temporal structure of past circumstances' (DeNora, 1999, p.49). For this respondent, in fact, re-listening to a particular song brings back the emotional patterns of what the respondent had experienced, by helping the respondent to structure and inform her current experience. Music, in short, is used to provide these respondents with a grip on their memories, they can elaborate on and adapt them to the circumstances they are currently living: it is like re-opening an old photo album and remembering what happened at that moment and how we felt when that picture was shot.

On the other hand, music helps some respondents to symbolize changes in their identity. In many cases respondents referred to the music they liked when younger as a mistake they made along their evolving path of music taste:

“[...] I remember I was 15 and I was listening to this horrible, horrible band that [...] And I was listening to this horrible music [...]” (Cuban-Spanish friend, female)

Many interviewees distanced themselves from their previous music preferences looking at them as a closed chapter of their lives. As McLean claims (2008), young adults might narrate their self in terms of change because they are in constant search for new possibilities of development, integrating past and new experiences. Those who referred to their changed and transformed self, did it with the intention to show a positive transformation, an evolution. By telling stories of their

childhood and adolescence, they particularly highlighted some experiences that, according to them, promoted their positive evolution. They conceive themselves more independent and with a higher self-knowledge and awareness, looking for a balance between who they are and the music that they listen to. In this sense, they certainly feel that their musical preferences changed in accordance to their emotional and psychological needs, connected also to their age:

“[...] lately my music taste is developing again in another direction [...] I'm a bit done with the person I was, and that also reflects in the music I listen to, the kind of person I am [...]” (Dutch friend, male)

As this respondent emphasizes, his music preferences accompanied him in the choice of transformation and accommodates his need of such transformation. In fact, he was looking for another direction in his life and his music preferences changed with it, helping him to turn from the ‘person he was before’ to the person he wants to be now and in the near future. In the case of another respondent, this swift is also marked by the search for music that has a deeper meaning, whose lyrics deal with more social and political themes.

“[...] so I think that I changed in this way: growing up I matured and I'm not looking for music that has enjoyable formal elements, but I'm much more interested in the substance of a thing.” (Italian friend 2, male)

He associates his music preferences change with an evolution from the superficiality of the previous years, where music counted more as a background during social occasions, to the more careful attention to the message contained in the song. Rap, in his case, is one of the most listened music genres by respondents, because it touches upon relevant societal issues with honesty and a pungent critical eye. In order to better understand the meaning of their songs, some respondents turned to music sung in their mother tongue or that relates more directly to their own culture. Music, in this sense, is used to feel more connected to the culture of origin if far away from home, and to feel strong emotions that mirror their stronger social and political stance.

III-c. Imaginative practices: respondents' own reality

Imaginative practices are described as the “creative capacity to experience the world in a certain way, in the form of images” (Lennon, 2015, p.11). Living images are expressive means and sources for our emotional responses (Lennon, 2015). These images give shape to how we experience the world, assembling what is present and what is not, requiring capacity of invention and discovery (Lennon, 2015). When people listen to music, different mental states, feelings and emotions are brought together through the experience of a song or melody (Bolderman, 2018). In this sense, then, music can spark imaginative practices. This was evident when analyzing the data for this research. Some of

the respondents affirmed they imagine something when listening to music. According to one respondent, the work of imagination is about day-dreaming situations that she wished had happened. For another respondent, imaginative worlds are constant elements when listening to music and pertain to the way she lives and deals with her reality:

“When I start wondering with my mind, I'm not here anymore, I detach myself completely [...] I go away from here, I think I am in a different situation [...] at the end if I didn't have music and imagination, it would be a very sad and flat life. [...] The effect of my imagination is so strong when I listen to music.” (Italian friend 4, female)

When listening to music, imaginative practices are sparkled and are used as an instrument to deal with reality. In other words, when this respondent faces issues that cause preoccupations and worries, music is the medium through which she can approach an imaginary world, where shelter can be found. Imaginative practices are conceived as a way to step out from their ordinary lives and get immersed in a different realm, where images are evoked and processed (Negus, 2012b). In this fashion other respondents reported that, every now and then, they try to escape their identity and the constructions around it, to find release in a boundaryless imaginative world. Here the subject is fully conscious of itself, it critically distances itself from what is conceived as reality and produces something ‘other-than-present’ and experiences it (Ricoeur, 1994). Imaginative practices, in this case, offers a sort of ‘oceanic experience’, during which imagination allows to create mental constructions based on what is not present (Bolderman & Reijnders, 2017).

In other cases, imaginative practices bring some respondents to find a way to go back to their real self and make sense of what happened in real life by molding and re-ordering what seemed initially chaotic and obscure (Negus, 2012b). As one respondent narrated, she uses music as a way to reflect on herself, to close herself up from the outside world and re-order her experiences and make sense of what happened to her, looking for a balancing act in her identity work. Creating mental constructions means that she made an effort to reconcile her past, present and future self through the use of imagination. The internalization of who she wants to be is manifested when imagining with music. In this case, music prompts the experiential side of imagination, which aims at responding to and coping with reality by imagining their self in a certain situation (Bolderman, 2018). In other words, this kind of imaginative practices helped some respondents to mold their life narratives into one coherent whole. Creating a story about what they imagine when listening to music is a fertile ground for the development and the narration of their self.

This said, it is possible to distinguish two types of imaginative practices in relation to one's identity: on the one hand, some respondents used imaginative practices to mold different sides of their

identity and create a coherent identity narration. On the other, imaginative practices serve a more escapist scope, meaning that every now and then some respondents try to escape their identity, their constructed selves and isolate themselves in a world where they can give voice to their most intimate and inner thoughts. This imaginative process has been internalized and has become such a habit for some of the interviewees to the extent that they all manifested their frustration when forgetting their iPods or headphones at home.

Imaginative practices become thus a way to change one's life narrative: by escaping and/or molding one's identity in the process of its construction shows the layered development of one's identity which does not necessarily mean that people only try to construct a unified account of their identity but also sometimes need to escape such process through the use of music and musical imaginative practices.

Conclusions and Discussion

The analysis of the findings granted the chance to answer the main research question, which reads: 'How do young adults perceive the (changing) role of music in their lives from their early teens until their current age?'. Through semi-structured and in-depth interviews with acquaintances and a family member, it emerged that music functioned for them and is still functioning as a device to temporally order their life narratives and help them to give coherence and meaning to their past experiences and memories, adapting those to the current age there are living. This is clear from the 'phases division' of people's life choreographies.

In the first phase, the pre-teens phase, it emerged that music was merely conceived, for most of the respondents, as a playful moment. The first approaches to music are mainly described as the first dance classes or being part of a chorus, which mirrored the beginning of the respondents' engagement with other social actors, outside their comfort zone represented by their family and school friends. Music, at this age, was used without any specific awareness of it, but is now recognized as a medium for making the first moves into the wider social world. During this phase, the musical taste of most of the respondents was influenced by their family members' and friends' tastes.

During the teens phase, most of the respondents' memories of their 'adolescent self' refer, on the one hand, to the complex emotional state they experienced. In this case, music worked as a tool to dramatize and amplify their feelings, almost like they needed to experience such emotions on a more intensified level, to exasperate their sadness or their energy. The switch from the use of music as a playful moment to the use of music to manage emotional states and feelings shows an increasing awareness of their self and of what works in certain moments for them and what does not (McAdams & McLean, 2013; Pasupathi & Hoyt, 2009; Raviv et al., 1996; Ter Bogt et al, 2010). On the other hand, the process of the idolization initiated in the late years of the pre-teens phase has its climax during adolescence (Raviv et al., 1996; Stramaglia, 2010). In these years, the need of being part of a group and being included in it as a worthy member was, for many respondents, a crucial step that made them feel independent from their family context and feel they were entering the world of grown-ups. In this period, music is overshadowed by the importance given to the world around it, the idols, the singers, their idolization and, at the same time, the sometimes – now described as naïve – idealization of a certain group of friends.

Finally, in the contemporary age, almost all respondents narrated a growing agency and independence in the choice of their music. In fact, during their late teen years, the phenomenon of idolization started to disappear, since most of the respondents found a way to define their position in society. The search for music is now a search for their selves, trying to face the challenging age of

young adulthood characterized by crucial decision-making moments and great instability (McLean, 2008). The perceived emotional and psychological maturity many respondents talked about also represented their self-discovery and the acceptance of the many nuances of their identity. This is reflected in the flexibility -or omnivorousness – of some respondents who reported that they are now able to enjoy different music genres and ready to discover new ones, without prejudices. The fact that some of the respondents had experiences abroad helped them to expand their musical palette and manage to have a wider social network (van Eijck & Lievens, 2008). In this phase, continuity and transformation emerged as main topics addressed by many respondents. Continuity indicates the need for temporal and thematic coherence that respondents tried to provide to their identity narration. Here, music functioned as a container for past experiences and as a grip on their memories which are elaborated in order to give continuity to their past experiences (DeNora, 1999). For some other respondents, transformation is intended as a positive evolution or development from their past self – the pre-teens and teens self – to a different and ‘better’ self, learning from what they now consider as a wrong attitude or behavior working towards a more reflective and aware self that knows which direction to take for future developments.

The interviewees' elaboration of identity did not concern only the narration of the process of recollection and re-elaboration of their previous musical memories and experiences, but it was a much more layered and complex process. In fact, besides looking back at their previous experiences, respondents elaborated on their present identity by improving, molding and escaping their identity. For half of the respondents, the process of molding and/or escaping identity is made through imaginative practices. These, sparked by music, support the construction of self-identity that integrates certain past, present and future aspects or help them escape identity's social constraints and constructions by making them experience an imaginary world which indulges in boundaryless experiences. Thus, for some respondents, music prompts imaginative practices as a reconciliation of who they were, who they are now and who they will be and, for others, music stimulates them to evade their reality, by eluding their identity and avoid the stress of certain concerns.

When some respondents referred to their imaginative practices, they also manifested their frustration when forgetting their headphones at home, which would deny the chance to immerse in imaginative work. Listening to music with headphones has been mentioned as a common practice by all respondents. As a matter of fact, technology and technological developments were certainly a fil-rouge throughout the interviews. Considering the age of the respondents who were all born between the 80s and the later 90s, some of them referred to the use of cassettes when they were children, others when talking about their early adolescence referred to the CDs, CD readers and the first mp3s. When

describing their late adolescence, some interviewees mentioned the advent of the internet and the possibility to download and stream music. Finally, when considering their current age, they all mentioned, in a way or another, the fact that now they use the internet to listen to music on a daily basis, especially following the creation of digital media and media platforms such as Spotify and YouTube. Technological developments brought in with them also new ways of searching for music: during the late 90s, television and programs such as MTV broadcasted music videos of the new artists and the radio aired the most popular songs. Nowadays, however, the young adults interviewed are likely to use the world wide web to explore and find their music from a much wider palette of genres that come from different cultures and parts of the world. This digital evolution certainly changed the interviewees' approach to music. Having at their disposal whenever and wherever they want all types of music which can adapt to their moods, to their needs of that specific moment or context, they can articulate their self in a more defined way by using music more often as an instrument to construct and work on their identity.

It would be interesting to investigate and research in the future how the consequences of the current technologies and further technological developments will change the habits of listening to music. In addition to this, it could be also relevant to take into consideration the 'retromania tendency' described by Reynolds in his book (2011)⁵, where a more 'physical' and 'human' approach to music is claimed to have become more relevant for music lovers. Physically buying records and listening to them on a turntable are some of these retro-practices. How will this tendency evolve in relation to the development of new digital ways of listening to music incorporated in our everyday lives?

Furthermore, this research design would also suit a research carried out with a different sample, such as elderly people, and it would allow more explorations in their perception of music throughout their lives and how that contributed to their narrative identity development and what is their relationship with music in their current age. One important factor that needs to be taken into account in the case of pursuing such research is the complexity of memory. Its many nuances and layers might constitute a limitation when individuals are describing their experiences and the way they perceived music in their past. As previously mentioned, mnemonic processes are always a selection, reconstruction and an interpretation of what happened at that point in the past, adapted to current circumstances (Keightley & Pickering, 2006). Current circumstances can be various and of any kind, such as the context in which the interview is held, the mood of the respondent, the relationship between the interlocutor and the interviewee, the way the respondents want to present

⁵ Reynolds, S. (2011). *Retromania: Pop Music's Addiction to Its Own Past*.

their selves to the respondents. Memories are very subjective and should be treated as such, without generalization.

To conclude, these findings contribute to broaden the discourse about narrative identity investigated by McAdams (1996; 2008), McLean (2005; 2008) and Polkinghorne (1996) and enrich it with an analysis of the contribution of music in constructing young adults' identity throughout their lives, initiated by DeNora (1999; 2000), Frith (1996) and Ruud (1997) and assesses that music is a medium that helps the young adults interviewed to construct their identity. Under this light, it seems necessary to further investigate the role of music in staging people's life choreographies and, deepen our knowledge on some of the unexpected findings that emerged from this research, such as imaginative practices and the use of technology. Finally, just as in the painting of Kupka, *Piano Keys Lake* (1905) presented in the cover page, where the piano keys melt in the nuanced human figures on the lake, also music seemed to have melted with the respondents' identity narrations, becoming part of them by underpinning the continuity of their stories over time.

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Appendix 1

Overview of respondents

| Respondent | Gender | Age | Level of education | Occupation | Place of residence |
|----------------------|---------------|------------|---------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|
| Italian friend 1 | Female | 23 | Bachelor | Student | The Netherlands |
| Italian friend 2 | Male | 24 | High school | Student and worker | Italy |
| Family member | Female | 34 | Bachelor | Professional | Italy |
| Italian friend 3 | Male | 23 | Bachelor | Student | Italy |
| Italian friend 4 | Female | 24 | High school | Worker | Italy |
| Italian friend 5 | Female | 22 | Bachelor | Student | Italy |
| French friend | Female | 23 | Bachelor | Student and worker | France |
| Italian friend 6 | Female | 23 | Bachelor | Student | The Netherlands |
| Cuban-Spanish friend | Female | 23 | Bachelor | Worker | Germany |
| Italian friend 7 | Female | 24 | Bachelor | Student | France |
| Dutch friend | Male | 22 | Bachelor | Student and worker | The Netherlands |

Appendix 2

Interview guide

RQ: How do young adults perceive the (changing) role of music from their early teens until their current age?

[Ask permission for recording]

Explain what the research is about: So, I am researching how young adults perceive the (changing) role of music in their lives up until their current age. In other words, how has your perception about music changed over your life and how these (possible) changes correspond/mirror who you are now

-So, to start, could you please introduce yourself and tell how old you are, what is your background (education), what do you do for living, what kind of work you do, what are your hobbies, interests,... (short)

-How often do you listen to music?

-How did your musical preferences change over time? And how did they change? (or can stay the same)

-When did you first start to listen to music?

-What was your first favorite music/band? (Fist music fandom/ teens)

-Why was this music important/relevant to you?

-How did this music reflect your life of that time? [Favorite music/ and how that reflected in their lives (socio-cultural background)] Favorite music in their teens – what did music mean for you in your teens and how do you relate it to your own identity

-Which type of music has been important in your early 20s?

-How have your preferences changed over time? How did these reflect your life changes? And how do these changes influenced you as you are now?

How did music work for you in those moments? (was is a sense of relief, grief, happiness,...)

Could you please describe a scene, episode or specific moment in your life that stands out for a particular reason? Please describe it in details

- What happened?
- When and where?
- Who was involved?
- What were you thinking and feeling?

-Why do you think this episode stands out to you now?

-What can this scene/ music tell about you as a person?

-Would you like to add something else, maybe that you have forgotten in this interview?

Appendix 3

Narrative motifs overview:

1. Music preferences evolution following one's narration:
 - a. Pre - teens
 - b. Teens
 - i. Self-reflection
 - ii. Outward focus
 - c. Contemporary age
 - i. Transformation vs continuity
 - ii. Imaginative practices

Emerging codes from the data:

1. Music experiences
 - a. Music memories
 - i. retrieval of memories
 - ii. connection between music and specific moments of one's life
 - b. Personal involvement with musical practices
 - i. playing an instrument
 - ii. singing
 - iii. dancing
 - c. idols
2. Uses of music
 - a. Mood regulation
 - b. Imaginative practices
 - c. Aesthetic experience
3. Influences on music listening
 - a. Social environment
 - i. family, friends and acquaintances
 - ii. (local) culture
 - b. Technological developments (CDs, mp3, smartphones)
 - c. Mass media
 - i. radio

- ii. (M)TV
- iii. digital media (YouTube, Spotify,...)