Specialist adolescent musicians’ role models: Whom do they admire and why?
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ABSTRACT

Background
Previous research into adolescents’ musical role models has shown that young people are more likely to identify a celebrity figure as their role model due to their image and perceived fame (e.g., Duck, 1990; Bronnick & Swallow, 1999), than because of their perceived ability within a specific field. The little research that has been conducted within the musical domain has also found similar findings (see, for instance, Raviv, Bar-Tal, Raviv & Ben-Horin, 1996; Ivaldi & O’Neill, 2008, 2010). Ivaldi and O’Neill’s studies were based on a typical sample of adolescents, where few were engaged with playing a musical instrument. The current study builds on this previous work by looking at the role models of young talented musicians that came from more specialist music environments.

Aim
The aim of the study was to see who specialist adolescents admired as their role models and why, as well as exploring the extent to which the adolescents believed they could become, and wanted to become, like the role model they identified.

Method
107 young musicians, aged 13–19, took part in a questionnaire study, and were drawn from two specialist musical environments: Conservatoire students (n = 59) who attended a music conservatoire junior department every week and were receiving specialist tuition, and county level students (n = 48) drawn from two local music services that were engaged in weekly rehearsals and activities. The adolescents were asked exactly the same questions as in Ivaldi and O’Neill’s (2008, 2010) studies about who they admired as a musician (i.e., someone famous, teacher, friend or family member) and the reasons why (e.g., because he/she is talented, because he/she works hard). Adolescents also rated how much they wanted to become like their role model (aspirations), and how much they thought they could become like their role model (attainability).

Results
Overall, the adolescents admired both famous figures (54.7%) and non-famous figures (teachers – 24.5%; friends – 12.3%; and family members – 8.5%). Conservatoire students were more likely to identify a non-famous figure than the county level students. Where adolescents had identified someone famous, this was most likely to be an instrumental player, rather than a singer or song writer/composer. Given this finding, and the fact that Ivaldi and O’Neill’s (2008, 2010) previous studies identified 91.7% of adolescents admiring famous figures, the current sample identified more non-celebrity figures, and more relevant famous figures. For the conservatoire students in particular, elite performers and teachers – who would not be known by the majority of adolescents – were identified, thus indicating a specialist knowledge and level of exposure to relevant musical figures.

REFERENCES