



Constructing a grounded theory of parents' musical engagement with their premature baby and emerging parental identity in a neonatal unit (NU)

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Background:

Scholarship highlights the need to further examine and better understand and foster the process of becoming a parent to a premature baby in the neonatal context to support the critical development of the parent- infant relationship (McKechnie, Pridham & Tluczek, 2014; Whittingham et al., 2014; Gibbs et al, 2016).

Primary Research Question:

- How does parents' musical engagement with their baby contribute to parental identity across the NU journey?

Method:

A multi-site study across a tertiary neonatal service, with purposive and theoretical sampling approaches applied. In-depth interviews with nine parents of a premature baby across varying time points across their NU admission took place. Data collection and analysis was influenced by Constructive Grounded Theory methodology (Charmaz, 2014).



Figure 1. Central theoretical category: Baby's responsiveness influencing parents' musical engagement

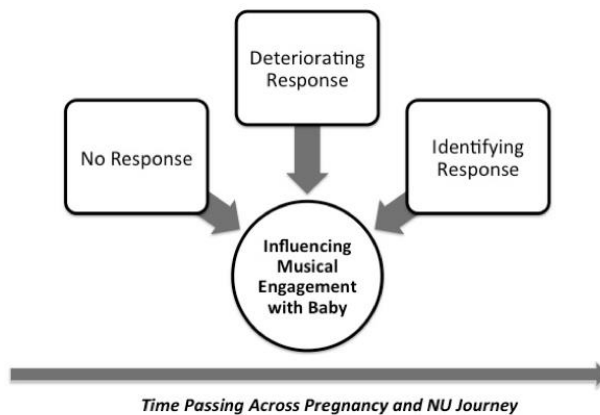
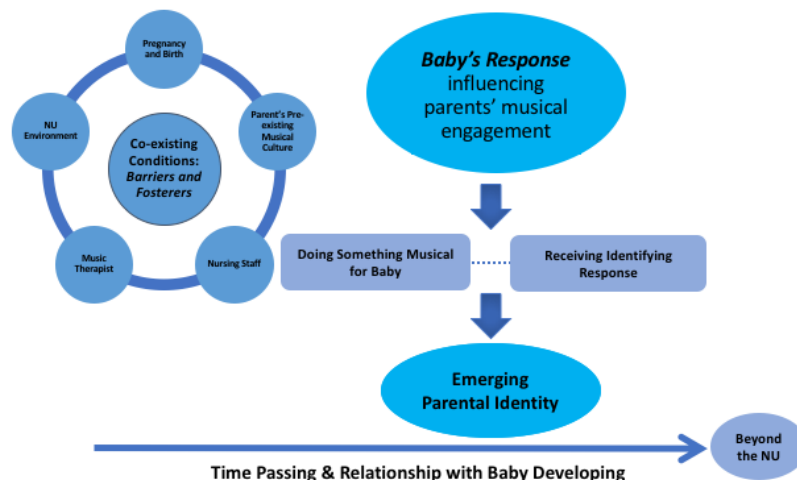


Figure 2. Final substantive grounded theory



Results:

Findings in the form of a substantive grounded theory illuminated the contribution of parents' musical engagement on their sense of parental identity in the NU. Specifically, *the significance of their baby's level and type of response during musical interactions in influencing parents' capacity to engage in musical dialogue with their baby emerged.* Specific conditions that acted as both barriers and fosters in parents' musical engagement across a high-risk pregnancy and NU admission also emerged.

"In terms of using my voice, I find that reflects on me, the person I am...the freedom to break out in song, it gives me the freedom to now, as her Mum, to tell her 'I am your Mum and I am here' "(Lilly)

Significance to Allied Health Practice:

Highlighting importance of parents' opportunities to engage in musical opportunities with their preterm baby to support the developing parent- infant relationship, while also foster the developing parent role and parental coping in the NU.