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The Impact of Infertility on Female Vocalist Identity

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BACKGROUND

- Connection between voice, body and psyche (Harrison, 2014; Welch, 2005)
- Infertility and gender identity (Gotlib, 2016; Whiteford & Gonzales, 1995)
- Gender and musical identity (Green, 1997; Dibben, 2002)
- Effects of fertility treatments on the female voice (Curtis, 2017)

PURPOSE OF STUDY

To aid in destigmatizing the phenomenon of infertility within the fields of vocal health, vocal performance, and vocal pedagogy, by raising awareness of the impact that infertility may have on female singers' identities.

RESEARCH QUESTION

Given the proven relationship between the body, psyche, and voice, I wished to explore whether experiencing the phenomenon of infertility impacts female singer identity and, if so, in what capacity?

METHOD

Method:

- Three one-hour, semi-structured interviews

Population:

- Women actively involved in singing through solo, choral, pedagogical, and therapeutic mediums ($n=2$)

IMPACT OF INFERTILITY

Psychological, emotional, and social:

- Grief, shame, and stigma
- Relief, complex emotions
- Life course disruption

Physical:

- Fertility testing
- Assisted reproductive technologies

RESULTS

Perceived Impacts of Infertility (Jillian*):

Personal:

- “Potential [Motherhood] identity” (Loftus & Namaste, 2011, p. 36)
- “Not being able to create a family...which includes a child...not being able to succeed with that has not made me fully the person that I could be.”

Professional:

- “The timbre of my unique voice was different. It was- it wasn't me.”
- “Not really being able to...create music and make music that was genuine because it wasn't coming from a genuine place.”

Life course:

- Continuing with ARTs impacts financial, professional, and personal aspects of Jillian's life

Perceived Impacts of Infertility (Michelle*):

Personal:

- “I wouldn't call myself infertile. I would call myself somebody who has been fertile and then dealt with infertility and then maybe dealt with fertility and then, and then it's just in this place right now which is really happy that I don't have children (laughs).”

Professional:

- “creatively, yeah, I've birthed a lot of, like, fabulous stuff...and still things are...there's incubation going on right now. Gestation is happening...and it's like I'm full with that”

Life Course:

- “I like my self-focus, I like being self-absorbed.”
- “I admire my friends who have kids who are also able to have incredibly full lives as parents, as partners, as, um, creative beings...I have friends who...work full time and like, they have- they do all this stuff and they still feed themselves, their souls, and they still are good parents, and like, I don't think I could do that (laughing).”

CONCLUSIONS

- the uniqueness and complexity of the phenomenon of infertility
- A diagnosis of infertility may impact the life course of a singer both positively and negatively, from personal and professional perspectives
- Extensive opportunities for comprehensive research lie within the fields of vocal health, pedagogy, and performance in relation to infertility

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