

‘Identitation’ – Researching identity processes of professional singers from a discourse-theoretical perspective

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ABSTRACT

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The discussion in this article focuses on the use of discourse theory in research on identity formation in professional education. Michel Foucault’s works and ideas inspire researchers to work with concepts like discursive space, governmentality and technologies of the self, to explore social and cultural processes involved in identity formation. Within a discourse-theoretical perspective, identity formation is understood as an ever-evolving process, where individuals at any time embody multiple identities in response to patterns of power-relations among individuals and institutions. Identitation is suggested as a new term for the processes of being, having and seeking identity/identities. These ideas are illustrated by findings from a study of professional singers within classical, pop and jazz music, respectively.

Keywords: identitation, discourse analytic research, Foucault, professional singers

Introduction

The focus of this article is on how discourse theory can be used to conduct research on identity formation in professional education. Discourse analytic research is a systematic investigation into the mechanisms behind characteristic demands, norms and rules, with the purpose of unfolding that which is typical, normal and taken for granted in human practices. Michel Foucault (1926-1984) has inspired the developing of conceptual tools to uncover such taken-for-granted “truths” about individuals and society. Research based on Foucault’s ideas can help to reveal how individuals are shaped and formatted by power-relations in everyday life as well as in organized practices, for example when students enter a music institution to study the art of singing (Schei & Krüger 2008).

The interrelationship between professional discourses in different music genres and the construction of vocal identities can be examined on different levels. Empirical examples in this article are drawn from a study of young, professional singers within classical, pop and jazz music, respectively (Schei 2007).

In the present article, the neologism *identitation* is employed to designate the processes of *being*, *having* and *seeking* identity/identities (ibid.). The concept of “identitation” can be considered a contribution to the field of identity formation research on the individual level. In a Foucauldian perspective, identity is considered a continuously developing process, not a stable set of characteristics or “traits” (Foucault 1972). Individual, developing “selves” are subjectively realized by agents within an ever-evolving social structure (Burr 2001, Feld 1990, 1988, Finnegan 1989, 1997, Frith 2002, 1997, Geertz 2000, Hall 1996, 1997, 2002).

The concept of identitation has arisen through analysis of the referred empirical study, using Michel Foucault’s discourse theoretical perspective and his ideas on power-relations, discursive space, subject positions offered to the subject in the discourse, and technologies of the self, understood as a subject’s self-censorship to adjust to the discourse. These concepts will be outlined and used in this article.

Discourse analysis

One of the purposes of discourse analysis is to map and separate discourses and analyze the components of the different discourses to see the power-relations between them. The mapping consists of a deconstruction of the subjects’ taken-for-granted opinions, relations and habits, the discursive practice, to become aware of how the underlying authority of a discourse works, and to disclose how the rules of the discourse make the subjects act in accordance with tacit norms. The analysis seeks to draw attention to and analyze how the ever-present, constructive and productive discursive power works and infiltrates the subjects’ thoughts and practices. The productive power of reality involves more than the conceptual significance of language use in authentic communicative contexts. When using discourse theory and Foucault, attention is drawn to the unfolding of the underlying play between different discourses that fight for the power of definition. The “in-between” knowledge of this play can be uncovered by studying the actions taken place, how the subjects speak and act, and by studying the genealogy of a practice, meaning the study of where the discourse has its origin. This is achieved by disclosing social activities and questioning why individuals, groups, organisations and governments are constituted the way they are, and how they maintain their practices the way they do.

Discourse analysis is increasingly being applied to music education (Thompson 2002). But using Foucauldian concepts like “discursive space”, “governmentality”, “technologies of the self” and “subject positions” (Foucault 1972, 1980, 1988, 1999) to analyze and understand vocal identity and performers’ identity formation is still rather unusual. These concepts have, however, been used and refined by other researchers, most importantly

Michel Dean (2006), Stuart Hall (2002), Marianne Winther Jørgensen (2002) and Marianne Winther Jørgensen & Louise Phillips (1999), Thorolf Krüger (1998), Monika Nerland (2003), Tia De Nora (2005) and Nikolas Rose (1997).

Meanings of ‘discourse’

Foucault’s project was to study how history and culture shape individuals, institutions, science and the objects that are considered normal and natural. He was especially concerned with why people think and act as they do, how we are constructed as subjects and how subjects obtain knowledge about themselves. His concepts can function to clarify how vocal performers, subjects and curricula are shaped and moulded by *power* embedded both inside and outside of the music institutions, media, performing arenas and individuals. According to Foucault, power is not something held by a person or a government; it is constituted by relations *between* people, relations that structure thoughts and actions. Foucault’s concern is to uncover and understand power of ideological, cultural, economic and practical-material character, respectively.

In this article a discourse will be regarded as a technical term for the power-relations that make people within the same field think, act, speak and sing in ways that are to some extent predictable. For a researcher, and here; a music researcher, it is the relationships that are interesting: how a professional singer relates to the music, the genre, his/her own practice, the material artefacts in the room where s/he practices, the audience, the media and the institutions, and not least, how s/he talks about her/his thoughts and actions. The how-questions can reveal power-relations and hence show how individuals perceive and value their own subject-positions. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* Foucault writes:

Whenever one can describe, between a number of statements, such a system of dispersion, whenever, between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices, one can define a regularity (an order, correlations, positions and functionings, transformations), we will say, for the sake of convenience, that we are dealing with a discursive formation – thus avoiding words that are already overladen with conditions and consequences, and in any case inadequate to the task of designating such a dispersion, such as “science”, “ideology”, “theory”, or “domain of objectivity”. (Foucault 1972:38)

Foucault uses the concepts *discursive space* or *discursive formations* to explain the power-relations that cause people to regulate their actions in certain ways. This means that he is not simply analyzing the individuals and how they relate to each other but is also seeking

to reveal how something has become what it is, and how it maintains itself as it does. It is the system of rules that underlies the production of concepts that Foucault focuses on (Schaanning 1997:191).

In applying a Foucauldian approach to the study of singers' construction of vocal identity; it is interesting to consider how categories, ideals and rules are used by the singers themselves when they speak about what a "real" singer is. The classical informant in the referred study said, when he talked generally about singers in other genres than his own, that he believed a *jazz* singer had to be really first-class to dare label him/herself a jazz singer. The jazz singer, on the other hand, said she would never dare to sing a classical song in front of an audience. The pop singer, finally, would like to sing jazz, but considered the genre so challenging that she would have to practice for years before daring to let a jazz piece over her lips. The discourses that rule these three singers are powerful because it makes them think, act and speak without questioning why the vocal ideals within the three genres must be followed.

To uncover discourses is challenging, since the many different and active discourses in a given space disguise themselves as that which is considered self-evidently normal, true and correct. By focusing on the individual level it is possible, nevertheless, to understand a discourse as an individual's "truth-patterns", what the individual takes for granted; in short their habits of thought and life-world interpretation. For the individual this truth-pattern functions as a structuring framework for action, thought and style. There will always be several discourses circulating within a field. The researcher analyzes what discourses govern the individual and what the consequences are. When Luciano Pavarotti, Shirley Horn, Aretha Franklin, Umm Kulthum and Bjørk perform their art, their performances are important not only as vocal art. They are representing a certain style, but they are also representing the cultural framework, with all its rules and regulating truths about the correct vocal expressions within different styles. When there is no need to question a certain stylistic vocal expression, the discourse reveals itself as exactly that which is universally agreed upon. On the institutional level, the discourses are disguised as that which governs an institution's curricula, norms and rules.

Analytic tools

It is relevant to consider some tools for the analytic process before we deal with the empirical material. *Governmentality* (from French: *gouvernementalité*) is a concept that refers to all the techniques and mechanisms that regulate and mould an individual, which means that it also applies on a social level. Through this concept it is possible to study how the individual regulates him/herself. This concept has led to interesting research in the fields of sociology, economy, history of ideas and the humanities. According to Mitchell Dean

First, the work it has produced could be regarded as forming a new sub-discipline within the social sciences and humanities (Gane and Johnson 1993), one concerned with the manner in which we govern, or what is sometimes referred to as the 'how'

of governing. It asks questions concerned with how we govern and how we are governed, and with the relation between the government of ourselves, the government of others, and the government of the state. (Dean 2006:2)

Governmentality, therefore, refers to the subtle mechanisms in a culture that make certain knowledge so trustful that individuals implement this knowledge and are disciplined by it. Foucault argues that power is embedded in control systems, habituations and exclusions, so-called organized practices. This is what governs and constructs individuals in their social life (Popkewitz & Brennan 1998:20ff). Dean (2006:18) refers to this as “*regimes of practices or regimes of government*”. These regimes are the practices that mould truth and knowledge. It is not power in the sense of force that is the issue, but power-relations, which means the network that is created, developed and active between people. “And what then is the relation between authorities and those who are subject to them – priest/parishioner; doctor/patient, manager/employee, therapist/patient...?” (Rose 1997:132).

Power is written into the specific way an individual talks and how the receiver of the information reacts. Power operates in the relations between people and the relation is actually the power. Foucault’s concern is how power operates, how rules are made, how categories have become normal. Power-relations can be understood when researchers identify the patterns of for example an interviewees answers. Another example is when a professional singer accepts the critiques published in the media, letting him/herself be governed and regulated by the power that places journalists in a position to evaluate and characterize.

A further important concept developed by Foucault is *technology of the self*, which may be understood as a disciplinary technique that the individual applies to him/herself in order to be more competent. It includes the mechanisms by which an individual governs him/herself; how s/he practically, mentally and concretely exercises self-discipline and self-censorship. Singers who rehearse are practicing self-technologies. All scale exercises, the daily work to improve sound, timbre, technical skills and performance can be seen as self-technologies. According to Foucault,

Technologies of the Self permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conducts and ways of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection and immortality. (Foucault 1988:18)

Such practices are constituted when a person submits to the discursive logic that constructs an individual’s perceptions of what is normal, true and correct.

An example of a self-technology is apparent in the demands the male classical singer in the referred study makes of himself in order to improve his vocal skills. He describes, as shown later in this article, how he postures his body, how he breathes and how he concentrates on himself in order to sing a single line perfectly according to the norms of correct classical singing. Self-technologies inscribe ideals as to what makes an individual

experience good or bad or worth striving for. The self-technologies are a product of the culture (De Nora 2005) and they are therefore practices that surpass the individual. It is the culture that leads the individual to adopt a self-technology. Although not developed by the individual him/herself, it may still be explored, moulded and shaped by the individual within the frame of the ruling discourses in the field.

Self-technologies can be described as small, transparent rooms within the individuals' thought patterns related to their own practices (Schei 2007). In lived life such patterns of thought are so dense and complex that it is difficult to separate one self-technology from another. To analyze how individuals organize their own practices systematically through concrete thoughts and actions is a way to find out what it is that governs and shapes the individual. The way an individual chooses to maintain a practice, will clarify his/her identity. Self-technologies are a product of discourses, and this means that self-technologies constitute the substance of the discourse. We can map discourses if we have made clear some of the self-technologies, because the self-technologies are the content of the discourses that the individual is governed by. What the informant conveys as meaningful *is* in fact the discourse. Interpretation of the self-technologies is preferably done in relation to the above-mentioned concept of governmentality. Individuals act as if not being ruled, but the important issue for the researcher is to reveal norms, conventions and ideals that belong to the individual's taken for granted standards and habits.

Studying professional singers

The study referred to in this article focused on identification by analyzing three professional singers' experiences of and reactions to perceived demands in their professional lives. A male classical singer, a female pop, and a female jazz singer were asked about their thoughts on becoming and being singers, in order to examine how education and experience shapes self-understanding, self-confidence and motivation to enter the musical stage. They had all received their musical education at international institutions of high standing, and classified themselves as belonging to one of the three genres already mentioned. The following fundamental question guided the research:

What demands and standards do professional singers encounter in classical, pop and jazz fields, and how are these demands integrated and expressed in the identities of the vocal performers?

Taking a Foucauldian perspective on the empirical material and the analytic process, the central question becomes what lies behind or underneath the demands perceived by individuals or groups. This perspective attempts to disclose the way individuals are ruled by both internal and external forces, through embedded norms and rules. What are the

demands related to quality and perfection that structure the singers' practices? How are they governed by cultural norms embedded in vocal ideals, voice genres, educational concerns, conceptions of normality and common sense? What possibilities and limitations do they experience with regard to independent vocal expression and creation in the fields of classical, pop and jazz singing? What challenges does the stage pose? Foucault's theory of the relationship between power and knowledge (1972) has led me to explore why singers tend to regulate their vocal styles, their vocal expressions and their thoughts about voice, body and manner of speaking as if *the truth* was written on the wall, pointing out what is right and what is wrong.

How can identity be sketched from interview statements?

The most challenging question, when doing an interview-based discourse analysis, is how to read individual identity out of verbal empirical data. Hidden in an interview statement lies the subject's signifying practices. When an informant expresses something of importance in an interview, s/he actually verbalizes the discourse by which s/he is ruled, by making use of the vocabulary and the narratives offered in the discourse. What the subject finds meaningful and reasonable, is what s/he will choose to put into words. The discourse is what the subject states as significant. The substantial and material aspects of the discourse will always be embedded in what s/he thinks and how s/he conveys it. Therefore, a statement does not only carry the meaning of spoken words, but also the cultural artifacts in the space that s/he speaks from. The discursive logic will regulate her/his manner of speaking about practice. The regulating and constructive function of spoken statements has constitutive impact on identity formation. Analyzing discourses from the statements of professional singers can bring forth valuable insight in how they perform and negotiate their identities within experienced spaces of possible actions.

The discursive formation is what the researcher tries to reveal by grouping and interpreting the interview statements, because the weave of discourses that operates through the subject constitutes the discursive logic that makes her/him act in accordance with the discourse. The researcher's knowledge of the field is also of importance for what is being presented as results. In the referred study the researcher was trained as a classical singer, and had also done fieldwork studying the singers on stage and backstage.

Analytic strategies

Both culture and space are premises for understanding identity formation, the complexity of individuals as unconsciously being part of culture, and consciously relating to culture. Foucault considers "space", the field in which the individuals mould their thoughts and actions, to be crucial for understanding the individuals' actions and their self-understanding. Every individual is positioning him/herself vis-à-vis other individuals and the material artefacts within the field. Therefore the individual must be analyzed and understood in

connection to other individuals. The researcher must pay attention to what the individual considers meaningful in his or her cultural context. The material aspect includes all the artefacts that the individual is governed by in the discourse, not only the concrete and material space and the things with which the individual surrounds him/herself with, but also the physical body, including voice and sound, clothes, hair style and stage performance, and how this affect thoughts, actions, talk and song.

Together these aspects constitute the dynamic complexity that is explored by analyzing interview statements, though a specific focus on the discursive logic articulated by the interviewees. When the focus is on identity formation, a map of active discourses is needed in order to enable understanding of what it is possible and impossible for the individual to think, to value and to do within a certain space. To frame the discursive space, possibilities are reduced by identifying what is *not* in the discourse, in order to obtain an unambiguous understanding of the components of the discourse (Jørgensen & Phillips 1999:37, 69).

A potential pitfall for the researcher is the fact that the interviewee and his/her personal story may come to be seen as more important than the patterns revealed in what is said and how it is said. The story may interfere with the researcher's ability to discern the discourses that the interviewee is governed by, the discourses that can be revealed by analyzing the presuppositions, practices and worldview that made the story possible and natural. If the researcher is dazzled by the fascinating story, it may be difficult to grasp the subtle mechanisms that constitute the walls of the discourse, the border to other discourses. Discourses are regular statements and habits, and the discourses are constructing the individual through the ways s/he thinks and speaks about him/herself. It is when these regularities are identified by the researcher that identity can be traced. To avoid being hypnotized by the interviewees' stories, the informants are "decentred" in this kind of research. This means that neither they as persons nor their concrete experiences are central in the study, but rather the patterns through which the informants unfold their actions, their choices and their values.

This perspective does not take any truths for granted. Even the researcher is governed by discourses. When doing discourse analysis, the researcher becomes a discursive agent and a co-constructor of the discourse that is being analyzed. It is crucial to be critical and reflective. The researcher must be aware of the fact that s/he is an important part of the study, and even more importantly, of the results. S/he must be aware of the fact that s/he has blind spots that make certain things invisible during the analytic process. In this perspective nothing can be outside the discourse.

The awareness room – a self-technology

The singers' space is "the vocal cultural room" (Schei 2007:39). This space holds the singer, the songs, the vocal ideals, the repertoire, the genres, the accompanying instruments and musicians, the curricula, the institutional buildings, and the media critiques. In total;

this space of action is constituted by all signifying artifacts that influence the singers' appraisal of him/herself as a singer. Mapping the singers' subject positions in the vocal cultural room is central to research on professional identity construction.

The following extract from the analysis of the classical informant is an example that illustrates how to register and delimit a self-technology. A self-technology is a strategic practice that an individual does "in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection and immortality," as Foucault puts it (1988:18). It is a task for the researcher to give names to the different self-technologies that can be outlined from the empirical material. "The awareness room", which follows, is a metaphor in terms of which this self-technology is described. Descriptions of self-technologies must be seen as attempts to articulate the various components in an individual's patterns of thoughts. When the informant articulates what he *does*, the researcher can get a glimpse of how he structures his thoughts and how he works determinedly towards a certain goal.

The purpose of showing the following analysis is to point out that there are a range of components in the informant's practices that can be identified and so generate knowledge. There are specific elements that will be highlighted, through a systematic search for regularities in the informant's manner of speaking about daily warm-up and voice training. For example, the following quote from the classical informant contains a great deal of information on different levels:

There have been a lot of things now, but I try to have one spell a day where I, in a way, concentrate on myself. This means that I try to find connections, small coherences in my body, like warm-up exercises, to feel the circulation and the energy in my body. Because lately I have been a bit stiff in my hips, they have been locked; I have not been able to breathe purposefully and so on. Well, but it is all about getting back to ground zero, in a way, and singing a little at that zero point. I like that, being there and feeling that now it is working well and my voice is an extension of the fact that my body is ok. – And then I sing some of the repertoire. It depends. (Classical informant)

The classical informant is talking about how his practice has a purpose and how he concentrates on himself, meaning his body awareness. This quote reveals a technology that makes him do certain exercises that regulates his body and emotions in order to feel good and healthy in his voice and his body. Since he has experienced what works, this technology, or this specific approach to voice and body, has become a part of his daily routine.

The awareness technology epitomizes the classical informant's particular approach to himself. It implies a special approach to daily practice, including a consciousness of tension and relaxation and an attitude to breath and technique that enables him to describe in detail what it means to concentrate on himself. The way he reflects upon these phenomena indicates that there has been a long period of learning with lots of exercises, and trial and error. He spent a great deal of time in front of a mirror before it became necessary and natural to have "one spell a day" of concentration. He has experienced that this is essential if his voice and body are to function and obey.

This self-technology reflects what the singer actually does in order to be more competent, as well as with what kind of words he labels his practice. The awareness room can be understood as a meeting point in which he meets his own thoughts about voice and body, a site in which to empty the mind of other thoughts. It is a private room, a place to collect energy. According to the singer "(...) it is all about finding back to ground zero." The self-technology is a way to embody the voice. In this room the classical informant meets his voice and body as an *instrument*. He can juggle with the voice as a subject or as an object. When he sings out his exercises, his voice is embodied. But when he speaks of what he must do to produce the sound, he lifts both voice and body to an objective level and treats the instrument as an object to be moulded. It is this systematic concentration that accentuates the process of working with his instrument. The self-technology helps him to move forward.

Although concerned about the informant's work on his body, this technology is labelled "the awareness room". That is because body consciousness and concrete work on the body is precisely the focus of awareness. Practice is also thinking work. This self-technology shows how thinking is unfolded when concentration is given a direction.

The singer finds that his body functions better when he has worked with the stiffness in his hips, for example. His knowledge of the vocal instrument has taught him that he cannot maintain a good breathing technique if his hips are locked. So he tries different strategies and he does not stop until "the voice is an extension of the fact that my body is ok." Adapting an active attitude he can gain energy from this self-technology.

The classical informant's pragmatic attitude to voice and body is evident in the way he objectifies the instrument. He can speak unaffectedly of being "a bit stiff in [his] hips", as if the instrument was a lump of clay to mould, without feelings and moods. This is a way of speaking about the body that is also common among other professionals who use the body as a performing instrument, for instance dancers. The fact that the instrument *is* the body, enables him to look upon it as an object, and therefore to speak more neutrally about it. This kind of attitude is reasonable when the end product is dependent upon minor variations in timbre.

The quote also reveals that the singer knows what works. Voice and body will with the help of specific exercises that he has practiced and repeated day after day, year after year – return to what he calls the zero point. He is in a habit of practicing in a certain way, and the habit has been internalized in his body as an action pattern, a natural way of practicing his work. This is not a tribute of individual capacity, it is professionalism. Using the Foucauldian tool self-technology, it is possible to reveal a hidden level in the discourse, namely how the informant structures his daily work on body and voice and how he articulates it.

Finally he says "and then I sing some of the repertoire. It depends." This adds interesting information for the researcher. It is evident that the most important thing for the singer is the fact that the technical exercises function in preparing the body to sing. Such warm-up exercises are requirements of good singing, according to his judgement. Thus, it is less important to practice the song than to make sure that "the body is ok".

This is an example of the kind and the quantity of information that may lie hidden in a single quotation. By analysing interview statements as shown in the example, it is possible to uncover countless self-technologies. In the analysis of the classical informant it has been possible to find self-technologies regarding why he finds the art of singing meaningful, how he disciplines himself when he practices techniques in order to obtain the correct classical timbre, how he speaks about good and bad music, and what his ideals are.

Results from the study of the informants' different self-technologies show that it is the self-technologies that first and foremost reveal how an individual constructs his/her identity. Patterns of behaviour and manners of speaking and singing are different representations of discourses, while the self-technologies are effects of the discourses that make the individual act within the discourse. This means that the self-technologies are more important to investigate than the discourses when individual identity formation is the research area. The strategies through which the individual constructs his/her practice, will be experienced as the "right" thing to do, because the subject positions are offered to the individual *in* the discourse. The critical knowledge about construction of professional identity is available right here, in the subjects' self-positioning, the short- and long-term practice strategies, and the practical realisations of thought.

'Identitation'

The study of professional singers revealed a need for a concept to grasp the ever-evolving construction of identity as both unconscious and known to the subject, dependent upon the subject's position in the discourse. The neologism *identitation* was chosen to designate the ongoing, unfinished and complex processes that create, confirm and renew a person's identities. Identitation is so a concept for the process of *being, having* and *seeking* identity/identities. By practicing self-technologies, singers *identitate* (Schei 2007:182).

Identitation in the sense of *being* identity is unconscious; the individual acts spontaneously, naturally and pre-reflectively. Presence in one's own life cannot be objectified in self-understanding. Being is a state of non-reflection, implying no need to know that one knows. Being one's identity is to be part of the flock. When voice and body are used without self-awareness, it is an opportunity for the researcher to see the individual from the anthropological perspective, as part of, and representative of the specific culture. This means that it is also possible to see what regulates the individual, because s/he will normally act in accordance with the norms of that culture. It is usually only when norms are broken that the individual realises the existence of norms.

Identitation in the sense of *having* identity, on the other hand, requires that the individual puts him/herself on stage. It implies action, representation, positioning and awareness of one's person as an object of appraisal. Having identity is about knowing that an audience

is crucial for self-confidence. To have identity is to practice strategies of representation; it is to be aware of one's subject position, the location offered in the discourse, and hence, the position from where others view oneself. A focus on this perspective of identification in discourse analysis will highlight how an informant puts her/himself on stage and what implications it has. The following quote from the female pop informant accordingly illustrates the focus on how she estimates her audience, plans her performance:

I don't bother to sing a song without a specific punch line. That's my main rule. The song doesn't have to be either raw, or rocking, but there must be something that, well I don't know, something that goes directly into the soul of the audience. There must have been something that enthralled me when I heard it the first time. I don't know why, at least a special way of using the voice, a technical skill that I immediately fell for when I heard it. Yes, so I say to myself: Wow, I am going to do this too! (Pop informant)

To learn about identification from this statement, it is necessary to become aware of how the informant imagines the response from an audience and why this is important for her.

Identification in the sense of *seeking* involves actions directed towards potential future subject positions, actions that express the individual's dreams and plans, the direction life should take, and how one wants to be regarded. The pop informant expresses explicitly what moves her forward; she is inspired by dreams and works hard to reach her goals.

The results of the study indicate that genre is critical for vocal identification in structuring the discursive rooms where singers' professionalism is confirmed and negotiated. As mentioned Foucault uses the term *discursive space* when he speaks of the power-relations where individuals interact. Although these discursive spaces change over time, they continue to structure the conventions that delimit the range of possibilities within which a subject has to position him/herself, and hence structure identification. In the case of singers, subject positions are offered through the circulating discourses of the vocal cultural room, the cultural space where singers develop, interact and perform their art.

The study also reveals that the singers can actively influence their lives as professional singers if they acknowledge the normative pressures exerted by institutions, curricula, media, colleagues and audiences. Through reflecting on their own practice and identification, they may actively choose goals, strategies and self-technologies within the vocal cultural room. Such awareness of choice may lead to playful, critical and bold identification, and thereby contribute to the development and change of the dominant vocal discourses. When singers, through identification, come to embody the dominant cultural norms, this represents a canalization of cultural power, which means that identification must be understood as a continuous, life-long process, always moving and changing.

‘Identitation’ and singing

To be a professional singer means to have your body as a work site, your body as a tool and your body as a communication channel in creating and transmitting vocal art. The vocal instrument may be the most special of all musical instruments because the instrument is part of a perceptive, pulsating body, vibrant with thoughts and feelings. When a singer is determined and aware of what s/he wants to obtain, s/he will work systematically with certain strategies to reach the goals. By doing so, s/he is constantly changing in accordance with what s/he finds to be strategically right. Being aware of this is being aware of vocal identitation.

The vocal instrument is not limited to a certain part of the body. It is not the vocal chords alone that produce the sound and constitute the voice as an instrument. The vocal chords are dependent upon the breath, the muscles and the body posture. The sound, a timbre, is not only influenced by technique, but also by the singer’s feelings, especially those related to self-respect and relationship to others. When the voice becomes a professional instrument, the singer becomes acutely aware of this instrument. The instrument includes the whole body and its quality depends on the singer’s concentration and energy on producing the sound and focusing on details, such as difficult technical challenges, stylistically correct vocal expressions and text and melody interpretation. Important knowledge about the discourse is available when studying how the singer regulates her/his thoughts and manner of speaking about the vocal cultural field and what s/he believes is expected of her/him. In addition to the instrument, there is the audience, which means that the professional singer is aware that s/he is being evaluated. The decision to be a professional singer is a choice, and in choosing the stage, the singer also chooses to be seen and heard. This may seem obvious, but there are implications embedded in the role of being a professional artist that outsiders are unaware of. Although personal choice singers are concerned and may be worried about whether the audience likes what it hears or not, whether it judges the performance stylistically correct or not (Schei 1998).

Statements from the three informants from the referred study (Schei 2007) illustrate that it is impossible to distinguish the vocal instrument as an object separate from emotions. The singer’s taken for granted understanding of the audience will, whether true or not, express itself *as* identitation through the singer’s strategies, and be recognizable in the singer’s self-understanding, preparations and performance. According to the female jazz informant, who says “(...) in a way you are being evaluated all the time, so it is just as if every concert is like an exam, with lots of judgements” (J3-54L), we learn that she disciplines herself in accordance with what she experience are the norms of good singing.

Whether trying to fit in or rebel, singers search for vocal strategies based on their experiences. In this way they sense to protect themselves from failure, and from being rejected or made ridiculous. The register of emotion becomes a compass that helps the singers conduct the performance. Feelings like shame, anxiety and stage fright must be seen as self-disciplinary regulation of the performance according to ideals, norms and rules in the discourse.

The male classical informant had been a singer and guitarist in a pop band as a teenager. Later, when studying at an institution of higher music education, he often doubted his value as a classical singer. In interview he said: "(...) I was worried whether I was worthy to be a music student or not." (K1-55T). A statement like this illustrates institutional power (Schei & Krüger 2008).

The female pop informant knows precisely how she must sing and what she must do to be a popular and attractive pop singer. "The rules of the game" are implicit in this quotation: "... you cannot freak totally out and honestly believe that you will sell a lot of CDs at the record stores, you know." (P1-34G).

Statements made by the informants are saturated with information about their experiences and thoughts about being seen, heard and judged as singers. In different ways they describe how perceived demands, which are often more or less arbitrary conventions and cultural norms, function as truths that they must adjust their vocal styles and expressions to. For these informants professionalism is certainly more than voice production; singing is a complex team effort involving the audience. The expression is continually moulded through the singers' negotiations with themselves in interaction with their cultural surroundings, which include the audience, the perceived authorities and norms, and physical surroundings like the concert venue, the temperature and the artefacts in the room. All these aspects influence the singers' identification.

Concluding remarks

The Foucauldian discourse-theoretical perspective is useful to explore why and how individuals maintain their practice and think, speak and act the way they do. The phenomenon *identity* manifests itself differently depending upon who is defining whose identity. It requires that two actors are always considered in a reflective framework: the individual who is being analyzed, and the researcher, who positions him/herself as the one with the power to articulate another's identity. In addition, when doing research applying the discourse-theoretical perspective, the structure and norms of the culture must always be seen as discursive, as must any individuals' remarks and judgements. A discursive approach reveals that an individual's identity cannot be viewed as neutral or isolated from the world.

Considering that a professional singer is an instrument, a mediator of vocal art and a person implies a complexity that needs to be grasped in order to trace the singer's professional identity. The study referred to in this article provided an opportunity to explore and construct concepts that can be used to grasp some of the complexity that lies, not only in the art of singing in itself, but also in the complexity of being the person who sings.

Research on young people's educational identification may provide insight into their motives for choosing a profession, their adjustments to different surroundings and demands, and most importantly, their expectations of themselves as professional.

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