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).

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.