SIREN SONG?:
A LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF CALLING AND ABILITY (MIS)PERCEPTION IN MUSICIANS’ CAREERS

Given the tremendous riskiness of pursuing a professional career in music, why do so many young people forge ahead in pursuit of their dreams? The present study examines this seemingly irrational career choice by exploring the relationship between young musicians’ calling toward music, the degree to which they overestimate their own musical ability, and career outcomes over time. Analyses are based upon a 7-year, 5-wave longitudinal study of 531 talented high school musicians who progressed from high school to college to early career during the study. Results show that the higher musicians’ calling, the greater their overestimation of their own musical abilities, controlling for actual ability. Cross-sectional analyses show that calling is associated with stronger intentions to pursue a professional music career path, controlling for actual ability. Longitudinal analyses show that a higher sense of calling is associated with actual pursuit of a professional music career path over the course of 7 years, controlling for actual ability. Overestimation of ability partially mediates the relationship between calling and professional music career path intentions and pursuit. Calling, therefore, plays a critical role in driving people to pursue extraordinarily challenging career paths both directly and through fostering overestimation of ability. These results have implications for theory and research on the nature and consequences of calling, factors that relate to the accuracy of ability self-perceptions, and effective career decision-making.