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It's the singer, not the song: a critical investigation into perceptions of the benefits of singing in daily life

Dissertation submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of Chester for the degree of MA by Louise Elaine Carney Hall

December 2014

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to consider how people feel about singing, particularly but not exclusively if they do not identify themselves specifically as singers. Any benefits of singing that were perceived or experienced by a group of adults are described, and consideration is given to whether measurement or monitoring of these benefits is necessary or helpful. The review of literature is based on answering the following key questions: Why is singing important? Where is singing situated culturally in contemporary British society? Does this have any bearing on how adults feel about singing both individually and chorally, as part of a group? Consideration is given to the evidence supporting a range of claimed benefits of singing and the location of singing in a postmodern, neo-liberal culture is discussed. Finally, the results of a small-scale ethnographic survey and focus group session are detailed and interrogated. This investigation concludes that singing is perceived by many as being of social, cultural and emotional significance which may have wider implications for health and education policy. Implications for further research include creating research models which might interrogate further the emotional impact of singing and how that impacts on other activities.

Introduction

“Voice is an integral part of our being and living. Either in speaking or singing, using voice is a way of allowing one’s thoughts, feelings and emotions to be expressed and communicated.” (Chong, 2010, p. 120)

“Unlike many human attainments where a high degree of excellence must be reached before rewards can be received, singing offers rewards for everyone who attempts it.” (Mann, 1836, cited in Saunders, Varvarigou and Welch, p. 69)

Our use of voice is integral to how we feel about ourselves as human beings. Babies and infants experiment with vocalisations constantly (Pelaez, Virues-Ortega and Gewirtz, 2011, p. 33), imitating and reproducing the sounds they hear around them, particularly from their caregivers. They take great joy from producing a wide variety of sounds and will respond to music and song spontaneously, for example by improvising movements or by joining in with the tune. Common sense may suggest that parents and other caregivers are usually happy and confident to positively reinforce these behaviours by dancing or singing along with their small child. Ilari (2009) suggests that “singing to babies has generally been interpreted as a natural caregiving behavior (sic)” (p. 22) and Trevarthen and Aitken (2001) highlight that infants will respond, particularly to their mother’s voice, with “synchronous rhythmic patterns of vocalisations, body movements and gestures to match or complement the musical/poetic feelings expressed by the mother” (p. 12). This suggests that singing, or at least melodic vocalisation, is an intrinsic part of being human, an activity “whose value and purpose is observed in cultures throughout the world” (Saunders, Varvarigou and Welch, 2010, p. 69). Ethnomusicologists also assert that singing is related to human speech, language and intelligence (Kirsh, Van Leer, Phero, Xie and Khosla, 2013), thus elevating singing to a potentially more influential, meaningful place in our culture.

We accept, and sometimes celebrate, that singing is part of the human condition, yet, individually, many of us are reluctant to sing. One of the participants in the focus group, a mother of three young children, highlights the way that singing tugs at us as adults, even though we may not see ourselves as singers; yet singing seems to occur naturally for children:

I only sing on my own or with the children but I remember playing that (singing) game and singing and singing and singing all the time and that was all I ever did and all I ever wanted to do. In fact at toddler group this morning one of the children at the very end as we were tidying up was making up a song she was

just...literally singing what she was doing. She was kicking a ball and so she was singing about kicking a ball and I was talking to my mum: I said, "I remember doing that!" I remember just singing everything that you were doing throughout the day. It's in children I think as well, isn't it? It's just sort of there.

(D, p. 64 of this document)

Literature Review

This instinct to sing has been explored by a number of commentators, including, notably, Gardner, who described musical intelligence as one of the original seven (1993), now nine (1999), modalities which characterise human intelligence. Music, it seems, has an ability to reach into many facets of the human condition, be that in a learning or a working environment, or in intra- and interpersonal relationships. Some of these aspects are explored in more detail in this paper. Stollery and McPhee, writing from an educational perspective, state that "there might seem to be a self-evident connection between language and music: the whole history of song supports this" (2002, p. 97). They go on to highlight the "obvious" connection between music and mathematics, between music and bodily or kinaesthetic intelligence and claim an overt link between music and social skills. It is the aim of this paper not only to look beyond the confines of the school curriculum, but also to focus more specifically on how *singing* has an effect, rather than music in general. This is because, in the words of another of the focus group participants: "*A lot of joy in life comes from song and singing.*" (N, p. 77)

In her 2010 article discussing Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences, Holding states that "developmental psychologists agree that one of the earliest talents to emerge in the developing child is musical" (p. 197). She also highlights Gardner's observation that, "except among children whose parents create musical opportunities for them (e.g., private lessons, participation in ensembles), for most children 'there is little further musical development after the school years begin'" (p. 197). This may shed light on why, as we grow towards adulthood, people on the whole do not sing or participate in high quality music-making. In a wide-ranging survey of participation in music events in England in 2005-06, the Arts Council found that "the majority of the English adult population have no encounters with the professional music sector...(and)...those taking part in musical activities represent a very small minority" (Chan, Goldthorpe, Keaney and Eskala, 2008, p. 9). We are surrounded by music and singing in our everyday lives: on the radio, piped into public areas, as the basis for a myriad number of television shows. We also, as a nation, choose to spend much of our leisure time going to concerts and gigs to hear people sing: in 2012, over 13 million people attended music concerts, with over 3 million visiting festivals (The Statistics Portal). In the focus group session,

one of the participants, who identified herself as a non-singer, said: *"I do sing when there's an event of any sort. I do like to sing with a lot of other people. Cos then I'm drowned out and I do enjoy it. I can sing louder!"* (V, p. 62) It therefore seems strange that, once school days are finished, many people forego opportunities to sing.

In contrast to this apparent reluctance to participate in music, a number of studies have emphasised the benefits of singing in adults (Anshel and Kipper, 1988; Bailey and Davidson, 2003; Teater and Baldwin, 2014). Kirsh et al. cite Clift and Hancox's assertion that singing in a choir promotes physical, emotional, social and spiritual health in adults, highlighting the "six 'generative mechanisms' by which singing affects well-being and health: positive affect, focused attention, deep breathing, social support, cognitive stimulation, and regular commitment" (2013, p. 786.e27). In a similar study Livesey, Morrison, Clift and Camic assert that "...there are multiple benefits to health and wellbeing from choral singing as perceived by amateur choral singers" (2012, p. 22). They state furthermore that: "...choral singing could make an increasingly important contribution to the promotion of public mental health" (p. 22). A study of the Glasgow 'Call That Singing' project (CTS) reported that the adult participants described singing as a means of "combating the potentially negative effects of ageing, along with the debilitating effects of bereavement, widowhood, declining health and isolation" (Hillman, 2002, p. 170). One of the members of the focus group described how an elderly friend with dementia *"was singing all the the words to (the) songs"* (V, p. 66) when a singing group visited the care home. Indeed, the Alzheimer's Society supports a programme entitled 'Singing for the brain' where singing is described on their webpage as "not only an enjoyable activity, it can also provide a way for people with dementia, along with their carers, to express themselves and socialise with others in a fun and supportive group" (www.alzheimers.org.uk, 2014). There is obviously a desire for singing provision for these vulnerable groups, underpinned by research (Livesey et al., 2012, Hillman, 2011) that suggests that singing is beneficial, and therefore important. Yet can it be said that singing is important for its own sake, or do we have to show that singing is a means of stimulating other benefits, such as relaxation and social inclusion?

A 2011 survey undertaken by English Heritage submitted that the average age of people actively participating in singing was 43.3 years (Davies, 2011), which suggests that, after school years, adults may return to singing in a more formalised setting. McQueen and Varvarigou (2010) list a number of interesting reasons why adults return to musical engagement in general:

Personal motivations, such as self-expression, a need for achievement,

enjoyment and self-confidence and the use of leisure time; musical motivations, such as love of music, performing for oneself and others, learning more about music; social motivations, such as meeting new people and being with friends and having a sense of belonging; psychological motivations, such as pleasure, mood regulation and relaxation; spirituality, a term often used by music participants with an intention to express a 'sense of timelessness.' (p. 163)

The benefits of participatory singing therefore seem many, but it should be noted that most of these assertions are difficult to measure and, more importantly, it is almost impossible to separate 'singing' from other activities that might have impacted upon the reported benefits. Is singing, or any musical activity, any different, for example, from attending a drama group or an art class? Is there something intrinsically positive (and different) about singing or is it to do with having a shared experience within a recognised cultural context? This is not easily answered and lies at the heart of much of the recent research in this area (e.g. Welch, 2010; Stacy, Brittain and Kerr, 2002) which tries to validate singing as having a specific impact on learners and/or participants. This study does not propose necessarily to be able to provide answers but hopes to clarify some of the thornier areas of tension between what singing does for us and why we need to measure it.

The significant claims for the benefits of singing should perhaps be set in a wider educational context where Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills) found "the scarcity of good singing in secondary schools ... (was a) significant barrier to pupils' better musical progress" (2012, p. 4). The National Plan for Music (2011) states that "music education is patchy across the country" (p. 7) and challenges schools to "ensure every child sings regularly and that choirs are available" (p. 11). The Plan recognises the value of music "in its contribution to enjoyment and enrichment, for its social benefits, for those who engage in music seriously as well as for fun" (p. 9). Importantly, for the purposes of this study, the Plan notes that "high quality music education enables participation in, and enjoyment of, music, as well as underpinning excellence and professionalism for those who choose not to pursue a career in music" (p. 9). The same report states that "children's involvement in music engages and re-engages pupils, increasing their self-esteem, and maximising their progress in education and not just in music" (p. 42). It is difficult to match this aspiration, however, to the current expectation in schools that every aspect of an individual pupil's progress must be monitored, measured and reproduced in a standardised way in order to adhere to the school's evaluation plan. 'Enjoyment' is not easily measurable and certainly is not a characteristic which sits comfortably within the current neoliberal educational context of targets and competition.

It may follow that adult participants should also experience similar benefits to those alluded to in the National Plan for Music, particularly in the areas of “personal and social development, including self reliance, confidence, self-esteem, sense of achievement and ability to relate to others” (p. 42). Other studies (Hallam, 2009; Welch 2011) support the idea that music has wider benefits for participants. For example, Hallam reports the following advantages:

Participating in musical groups promotes friendships with like-minded people; self-confidence; social skills; social networking; a sense of belonging; team work; self-discipline; a sense of accomplishment; co-operation; responsibility; commitment; mutual support; bonding to meet group goals; increased concentration and provides an outlet for relaxation (p. 2)

Welch (2011) lists the physical, psychological, social, musical and educational benefits of singing in particular. Although his study focused on singing for adolescents, many of the benefits can apply to all ages, including: improvement in respiratory and cardiac function; neurological functioning; intra- and inter-personal communication; singing as a cathartic activity; an enhanced sense of social inclusion; realisation of musical potential; creation of an individual musical repertoire (pp.1-2). Welch concludes the article by saying that:

Singing is important because it builds self-confidence, promotes self-esteem, always engages the emotions, promotes social inclusion, supports social skill development, and enables young people of different ages and abilities to come together successfully to create something special in the arts (p. 2)

This is a key statement with regard to the research undertaken for this study. The vast majority of participants used language which similarly describes a positive feeling related to singing, whether that be in an informal or formal setting. Further investigation of the literature reveals a variety of studies which describe the generalised improved sense of well-being experienced by singers. This has led to a number of projects being funded by government and charitable organisations, such as the Glasgow CTS scheme and the Alzheimer’s Society, both organisations whose work supports older adults or those with additional needs. In America, the Chorus Impact Study found that “adults who sing in choruses are remarkably good citizens” and “children who sing in choruses have academic success and valuable life skills” (2009, p. 5). It is not surprising, therefore, that government agencies such as Ofsted are interested in how singing impacts upon learning and other areas and it is striking how much literature has been recently published attributing a wide variety of social, educational and psychological benefits to singing.

It is important to note, however, that not everyone agrees that singing is a wholly enjoyable or positive experience. Indeed, Chong (2010) found that attitudes of non-vocalists towards singing were not entirely positive and concluded that, although it is a fair assumption that singing can bring positive effects for some, singing can also provoke self-consciousness and a lack of self-expression. This is a vital observation because any music professional will bring their own positive bias to a study looking at responses to music. Chong states that “it is assumed that singing...brings positive and therapeutic effects for everyone. However, results...suggest that for some people, singing can be a personal and revealing experience” (2010, p. 123). Some possible reasons and responses to this will be explored further in this study.

As detailed above, there is a range of research into the benefits of singing and it is instructive to investigate some of these further through interrogation of the available literature.

Physical benefits

Respiratory and cardiac function

Welch (2011) suggests that, as singing is an aerobic activity, it can be hypothesised that the efficiency of the body’s cardiovascular system will be improved after singing sessions. In an article in the Nursing Standard (2010), it was stated that “a marked physical difference” was reported by 81% of participants in a singing programme designed for patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. A study by Lord et al. (2010) further found that all participants found that taking part in the singing session helped them feel better physically. One of the first comments made in the focus group discussion was to do with breathing:

C: *(Singing) is a physical exercise as well which also helps lift you.*

V: *You breathe more.*

C: *You should do!*

(p. 63)

Interestingly, Lord et al. report that the singing programme sessions “did not improve measures of breathing control, functional exercise capacity or recovery time” as expected and further research is needed to investigate why the perception of improvement is different to the measurable outcomes. One possibility is that the psychological benefits of taking part in a singing group (as hinted at in the conversation clip reported above) have a direct impact on a

general feeling of wellbeing. As Lord et al. report, “a patient's experience of their illness will be affected by a range of psychosocial factors in addition to their physical condition” (p. 41).

Livesey et al. report that participants in their study perceived improvements in breathing and other aspects of their physical health “achieved through the gentle physical exertion and breathing techniques involved in singing” (p. 21). Attention is also drawn to how singing may contribute to a sense of flow, such as described by Csikszentmihalyi (cited in Livesey et al., p. 20), which contributes to a sense of physical and mental well-being. This links to the hypothesis that it may not be *singing* that causes this improved sense of wellbeing, but that singing acts as an effective catalyst to promote this feeling.

Neurological functioning

Recent research has begun to investigate at a biological level how music, and singing in particular, affects neurological function, especially when the brain has suffered trauma or deterioration (McNab, 2010; Cohen, 2011; Gick, 2011; Oostendorp and Montel, 2014). These studies seem to support the widely-held view (among educators, choir members and musicians, for example) that singing enhances learning and helps create new neurological pathways, e.g. when memorising or recalling information. Oostendorp and Montel suggest that:

Through singing, elderly adults with (Alzheimer's) are capable of encoding and retrieving new information, despite severe memory loss. These findings...may support that singing can activate preserved brain areas involved in learning and memory and that the use of singing is a benefit (2014, p. 983)

Van de Winckel, Feys, De Weerdts and Dom found “a beneficial effect of cognition using a music-based exercise programme in a group of patients with moderate to severe dementia” (2004, p. 253). Singing appears to have a particularly therapeutic effect. In a 2006 study designed to assess the impact of singing on distressed dementia patients, Barnetta and Petocz found that “familiar group singing positively affects the mood and social behaviour of residents with dementia experiencing sundowning, affirming the valuable role music therapists play in facilitating quality aged care” (p. 2). ‘Sundowning’ is defined as “increased arousal or impairment during the late afternoon or evening hours that occur in people with dementia” (p. 2). It is reasonable to suggest that this measurable response in impaired adults may manifest differently, but credibly, in adults not affected by dementia. Livesey et al. report an improvement in confidence and self-esteem, as well as benefits resulting from distraction from

worry (2012, p. 17). It may be that non-impaired adults experience a positive mood change and an enhanced sense of social cohesion or belonging when engaged in singing as evidenced in the dementia studies.

It is difficult, however, to separate out *how* singing might provoke these evidently positive responses from other possible reasons, such as meeting like-minded friends, working together on a challenging task, or performing something well.

Social benefits

Livesey et al. found that members of a choir commented that “singing provide(s) a regular social opportunity” (2012, p. 3) and this sense of belonging to a group runs throughout other research (Chong, 2010, p. 123; Welch, 2011, p. 2; Gick, 2011, p. 178). In their review of the ‘Celebration Choir’, a singing group established for patients with neurological disorders, Fogg and Talmage identify the social benefits of singing as being particularly important:

Social and rehabilitation goals overlap within CeleBRation Choir sessions. Vocal exercises and song singing are used to address the social, communication and physical needs of participants in the CeleBRation Choir. There are challenges in meeting the needs of a mixed group, but also opportunities to focus on strengths, enjoyment and group support.

(2012, p. 265)

Moore (2009) suggests that music as a shared experience is “largely determined by sociocultural context” (p. 280) and this is an important principle to remember when looking at any social benefits of singing. Participants in music or singing need to know what to expect and what behaviour is acceptable within the culture. A good example of this, examined in the Moore study, is to contrast the songs and singing that occur in an African American Baptist church and those in an Anglican church. Moore proposes that African American participants learn the message of the gospel “through the linkage of song, dance and instrumental accompaniment performed simultaneously in the service” (p. 280) which she suggests is derived from West African roots. This is a very social and demonstrative form of music-making. In contrast, an Anglican service is more formalised, with less opportunity for spontaneous song or movement. A member of either group might not feel comfortable in the contrasting setting because of a lack of understanding of the sociocultural norms.

Livesey et al. report that “singers commented that choirs enabled them to make social contacts, enabling connections with similar people” (2012, p. 15), quoting one study participant who said “(it provides a) sense of community, a sense of *we*” (p. 17). Singing appears to enable to bond, to build communities, to establish a sense of belonging (Chong, 2010; Saunders, Varvarigou and Welch, 2010).

A number of the participants in this study spoke of the social and, by extension, spiritual benefits of singing in a large group, often when identifying with others, such as at a concert, a sports event or a religious gathering. There was a sense that participatory singing prompted and reinforced a distinct feeling of community, even communion, with others.

Gick even implies that singing might be associated with lower mortality over time, as the number of social connections is increased (2011, p. 178). This could be described as social capital, which is reported as being related to positive mental health (Livesey et al., 2012, p. 20). As identified by Livesey et al., “(the) benefits of choral singing...such as building social networks and making bonds with all types of people may contribute to mental health by increasing support and community” (p. 20). It remains difficult to isolate singing as being the definitive factor, however, rather than any other social activity.

Musical benefits

The musical benefits of singing are in many ways self-evident. Singing is, by definition, music. Yet it is worth examining this assertion in a little more detail and in the context of this study: does simply the act of singing enhance our musical understanding, or do we already need a sense of musical understanding or musicianship before we can sing?

According to Welch, “singing...fosters our intellectual engagement with music” (2011, p. 2). Through singing, we start to understand musical structure and phrasing, as well as developing an individual musical repertoire, which will inevitably inform and develop our understanding of our social and cultural group. The participants in Livesey et al.’s study describe how singing provides an intellectual challenge and reveal how stimulating it is to be introduced to new music (2012, p. 17).

Nordoff and Robbins (cited in Chong, 2010, p. 121) talk of the “music child” who responds spontaneously to music both vocally and bodily. This instinctive response often gets conditioned by the child’s sociocultural experience and the child becomes more inhibited. Ilari even cites some scholars’ (Custodero, 2006; Trehub, 2001, 2002) suggestions that “mothers

are musical mentors who appear to be biologically programmed to interact musically with their children” (2009, p. 34). It seems a shame that this instinctive and powerful response to singing is not necessarily encouraged or supported as we progress towards adulthood, as evidenced by the afore-mentioned Arts Council survey.

Howard Goodall’s clarion call to the nation’s schools to “get the singing habit” (2007) also addressed the way that singing had “slipped off the edge” in schools and he stated furthermore that “singing is the best possible gateway for a life of engagement with music and for learning to play a musical instrument”. This call formed part of the launch of ‘Sing Up’, the then Labour government’s flagship singing programme for primary schools, which aimed to “raise the status of singing and increase opportunities for children throughout the country to enjoy singing as part of their everyday lives, in and out of school” (www.singup.org). Furthermore, their website states Sing Up’s belief that “all children have a right to good quality singing provision, to deepen their understanding of music and singing, bolster curriculum learning, and develop lasting tools to express themselves with confidence.” This reflects Ofsted’s belief (as evidenced above) that music bolsters self-esteem but importantly places singing firmly in a musical context, rather than focusing on other perceived benefits. After 5 years of central funding, the change of government required Sing Up to move to a membership model, which inevitably limits access to those schools who are prepared to pay. As political priorities change, singing in schools has had once again to fight for recognition and funding in order to justify teachers’ time and effort.

Educational benefits

There has been a lot of attention paid in the media over recent years to the so-called ‘Mozart Effect’, whereby exposing babies (from the early stages of pregnancy) to classical music is said to have a positive impact on the child’s cognitive development. Martens reports that “recent evidence hints towards positive effects from music on fetal development and learning...(although) the evidence towards increasing infant IQ with music is mostly anecdotal” (2013, p. 74). It is tempting, as has been seen in other areas, to attribute extra benefits to singing and music, where perhaps an increased sense of well-being should be enough.

Wetter, Koerner and Schwanninger (2009) state that “on an anatomical level, it has been shown that musicians, compared to non-musicians, tend to have (at least relatively) enlarged structures in certain areas of the brain” (p. 365). Two further studies (Chan, Ho and Cheung, 1998; Ho, Cheung and Chan, 2003) suggest that this physiological change might impact upon cognitive function. Schellenberg (2004; 2006) conducted two studies which seemed to imply

that musical training increased the IQ levels of students. Wetter et al. set out to challenge this hypothesis and found that the duration of musical training was important and that “the notion that being engaged with music is associated with general cognitive or intellectual functions” (p. 372).

Welch (2011) and Hallam (2009) both highlight the potential educational benefits of school students using singing as a learning tool, with Hallam even asserting that “there is a consistent relationship between active engagement in music and general attainment” (p. 2). Minick, Homan, Biggs, Rasinski and Dedrick (2008) assert that singing can have a beneficial impact on reading and a more recent study highlights the positive impact that singing has on language learning (Ludke, Ferreira and Overy, 2014). This latter paper found evidence that suggested that “a ‘listen and sing’ learning method can facilitate verbatim memory for spoken language phrases” (p. 41). Welch (2005) goes so far as to assert that “singing is a key musical activity that involves both music and language...(and can promote) language skill development because singing involves both ‘musical’ centres in the brain and also ‘language’ centres.” The Chorus Impact Survey reported that “61% (of parents) say their child’s academic performance overall improved after he or she became a member of a choir” (p. 12). There seems to be widespread acceptance that singing is a useful educational tool.

Saunders, Varvarigou and Welch (2010) suggest that such benefits arise because singing is a whole-brain activity which not only engages musical understanding but also promotes wider engagement with the social, cultural and historical aspects of learning (p. 79). Sing Up goes further, claiming that “singing enhances learning retention, language development, listening skills and concentration” (www.singup.org). It seems self-evident that singing is a useful educational tool, but I would suggest that this same evidence indicates that singing (and music in a more general sense) should not be ‘hijacked’ for its supposedly educational impact: there is plenty room to enjoy singing for what it *is*, not necessarily for what it *does*.

For adults, who are usually outside or beyond an educational setting, these benefits may manifest themselves in different ways: for example, improved recall of events or details when singing or listening to song; enhanced ability to learn words for a play or other performance; or increased facility to perform other cognitive tasks because of improved concentration levels. This may be particularly significant for older adults whose cognitive function may be slowing or to those affected by dementia. I return, however, to my previous point that these benefits are probably less significant to the singer than to the researcher: a singing adult is not likely to ask themselves, ‘*Am I learning?*’; rather, ‘*Am I enjoying singing?*’

Psychological benefits

The psychological benefits of singing may be many and complex. Bailey and Davidson's study on amateur group singing as a therapeutic instrument concludes that "participation in choral singing has emotional, social and cognitive benefits. Taken together these features of the choral singing experience contribute to the holistic health or overall well-being of the participants" (2003, p. 27). This same study cites Trevarthen's assertion that shared musicality is therapeutic because "it attunes to the essential efforts that the mind makes to regulate the body in both its inner processes and in its purposeful engagements with the objects of the world" (2003, p. 31). There is, indeed, a vast array of research concerned with music psychology, music therapy and psychobiology that this paper can only touch upon, but it seems clear that singing in particular stimulates both an immediate and a long-lasting psychological impact. When talking specifically about singing, one of the focus group participants stated the following: *"I think music has the ability to bypass normal sort of reasoning processes. Somehow it actually evokes something that's deeper within us, something really deep down in our psyche, in our being"* (N, p. 65). This quote from an enthusiastic but untrained singer reflects Bailey and Davidson's observation that "the singing voice has become a vehicle to express what is worthwhile within themselves" (p. 29).

Clift, Hancox, Morrison, Hess, Kreutz and Stewart (2010) report that:

a range of small scale qualitative studies using ethnographic, interview and focus group techniques with diverse samples have shown that singers commonly report a wide range of social, psychological, spiritual and health benefits associated with singing (e.g. Bailey and Davidson 2005; Silber 2005) (p. 20).

Such studies reveal a number of common themes, briefly explored below, which helped define the focus for research for this paper.

Singing and communication

Welch states that "healthy singing enables us to maximise our potential to communicate with others" (2011, p. 2), while Chong reports that "singing is considered to provide a shared ground for common experience and emotions" (2010, p. 123). Ilari's focused study of three mothers and their infants concludes that "music experience helps facilitate a sense of belonging in the earliest years of life" (2009, p. 34). Salgado (cited in Welch, 2005, p. 251)

suggests that communicating emotion effectively is at the heart of a successful sung performance: in other words, the singer imparts the emotion, not the song.

A sense that singing stimulates a sense of community or belonging recurs in several studies (e.g. Teater and Baldwin 2014; Bailey and Davidson 2003) and this was reflected in both the research questionnaires and the focus group discussion. The Chorus Impact Study describes adult choir members as “remarkably good citizens” (2009, p. 7), reporting that choral singers are “significantly more philanthropic, civic-minded, and supportive of the arts” (2009, p. 7) and are also “better team players and team members in a variety of other contexts” (2009, p. 10). Welch identifies singing as a “form of group identification and social bonding” (2005, p. 254), indicating company songs as an example. This is manifested today by TV programme’s such as Gareth Malone’s ‘The Choir’ (BBC), which brings people from all departments and seniorities within a company to sing together. One of the focus group pointed out that this ability of song to bring together can also be used for negative purposes:

I guess thinking about the power...of communal singing as well, (it) can be used for the wrong purposes, can't (it)? I'm thinking of Hitler and his rallies and getting the... Nazi youth to sing. They were consolidating themselves for a purpose but not a good purpose. He used (the) power of song (N, p. 74)

Welch also calls attention to the way that “regular singing activities can communicate a sense of pattern, order and systematic contrast to the working day and week” (2005, p. 254). This is often used in schools to indicate transition times within a lesson or to frame other activities, such as assemblies. Custodero (2006) found that songs were used more often than expected within families to delineate different times of the day, e.g. bath or bed time. There is a hint in the findings of this particular study that the parents involved didn’t necessarily know that they were using song in this way: it came naturally and easily. In the words of Welch, “to sing is to communicate - singing as communication” (2005, p. 255).

Singing and emotion

According to Chong’s 2010 study, “self-expression” was the most frequently identified source of satisfaction, for those participants who enjoyed singing. Other research cited by Chong (Baker, Wigram and Gold, 1997; Turry, 1999; Smith, 2006) highlights the intensity of feelings that singing can stimulate and Welch notes that “even less skilled singers may sing alone and to themselves, either as an accompaniment to another activity (such as showering,

housework, driving, deskwork, gardening) or just for its own sake” (2005, p. 251). The focus group mentioned singing in the car, or whilst doing other daily activities: “*I sing most days but in the privacy of my own home... I tend to put on some music in the kitchen and just sing along*” (D, p. 61). The car and the kitchen were also mentioned a number of times in the questionnaires as places people liked to sing. These are places where people feel safe, warm, comforted. This links to Welch’s identification of singing being inextricably linked with emotion and self: “When provided with an appropriately nurturing environment, developing singers are likely to increase their range of vocal behaviours, improve their self-image, and generally feel better” (2005, p. 251). Ruud further describes how “song lyrics and larger musical narratives became an arena for training in emotional tolerance and in ability to contain complex and difficult emotions” (1997, p. 92). This profound emotional response seems to be specifically linked to singing, rather than to music in general and many of the questionnaire respondents mentioned an emotional reaction, using words such as *uplifting*, *energised*, and *inspired*.

Welch talks of the voice being “a key component of who we are; its use reflects our mood and general psychological well-being, communicated to ourselves as well as to others” (2011, p. 2). It is suggested that singing can stimulate feelings, sometimes in an unexpected way, and recent studies (Hillman, 2002; Batt-Rawden, 2010; Clift and Morrison 2011) emphasise this. Batt-Rawden states that music has a unique capacity “to engender emotional release or to help individuals to break out of anxiety, or for achieving particular emotional states, often includes ‘peak events’ or experiences in the stories of their developing commitment to music” (2010, p. 302). As reviewed in the literature, music, and singing in particular, plays an important role in the way people express themselves in their daily lives.

Batt-Rawden’s description of music as a means of emotional release echoes other recent studies (Chong, 2010; Welch, 2011; Clift and Morrison, 2011). Singing is often perceived as a cathartic activity which provides an outlet for feelings (Welch, 2011; Livesey et al., 2012) and a number of studies report that participants declare positive changes in mood after singing (Bailey and Davidson, 2003; Silber, 2005; Livesey et al., 2012). One of the questionnaire respondents expressed it thus: “*Whenever I am tired or feeling low, my mood is immediately lifted after a choir rehearsal. (I feel) energised and uplifted.*” Indeed, as evidenced later, the words ‘happy’ and ‘uplifted’ (or their synonyms) were mentioned frequently: 33 times in the 33 questionnaires submitted for this study.

Welch relates that, after fourteen weeks of twice-weekly singing and speaking lessons, participants reported “a significant reduction in stress levels (related to both physical and cognitive stress” (2005, p. 251) and Ruud’s earlier study emphasises singing’s facility to

process difficult or complex emotions thus, by implication, reducing stress (1997). In Livesey et al.'s study, singing is again described both as "thrilling, exhilarating" and as a way of counteracting or processing negative feelings (2012, p. 17).

A number of questionnaire respondents specified the reduction of stress as a direct benefit of singing (11 utterances) although, interestingly, the focus group only described the emotional exhilaration of singing, not the potential calming effect it can have.

It is tempting, therefore, to extrapolate from this that singing is an entirely positive experience which could or should be promoted as a cure-all for the nation's emotional and spiritual needs. Livesey et al. point out, however, that only two large-scale epidemiological studies have been carried out - in Sweden and Finland - which examined participation in choral activities in relation to population health outcomes. Neither found evidence of significant relationships (Bygren, Konlaan and Johanssen, 1996; Hyypä and Mäki, 2001). Smaller scale studies (as identified by Livesey et al.) suggest higher levels of positive feelings and lower levels of negative mood compared to listening to music (e.g., Kreutz, Bongard, Rohrmann, Hodapp and Grebe, 2004) and Livesey et al.'s paper also cites a number of studies (Bailey and Davidson, 2002, 2005; Cohen, Perlstein, Chapline, Kelly, Firth and Simmens, 2006; Silber, 2005) which report that "singing has (...) been found to reduce perceived levels of anxiety and depression, boost perceived confidence, improve subjective self-esteem, provide a sense of achievement and increase a sense of self-control" (2012, p. 12). Livesey et al. conclude that "singing may benefit mental and physical health through having a beneficial effect on mood, by eliciting positive mood states or aiding the processing of negative emotions through catharsis" (2012, p. 21). These are significant claims; clearly this is an area which merits closer examination.

The focus group discussion elicited a couple of interesting links to with mood change. One participant related that operatic music provoked conflicting emotions for her as, although she loved listening to it, it also reminded her of her deceased husband. Another recounted her dislike of the group The Carpenters, which reminded her of her parents arguing in her childhood: "*There's a flip side (of emotional response to song)...it can...evoke bad memories as well*" (D, p. 65). Almost all of the research participants mentioned an emotional response to singing and song: it is clear that singing touches something at the emotional core of human beings.

Singing and spirituality

Chong notes that the spiritual meaning of singing was a “primary cause for enjoyment” (2010, p. 123) for a number of research participants. The relationship between spirituality and singing is explored in a number of studies, including Lipe (2002) and Moore (2009). In a paper exploring the creation and effect of gospel music on singers, Moore attests that “in the performance ministry of the music, people who unite in belief and in Spirit gather together, thus creating a religious identity and assisting each other in understanding who they are and what they can accomplish...” (2009, p. 279) This powerful statement is supported by Chong, who notes from Lipe (2002) that “music (can be) viewed not just as a pedagogical strategy, but also as a manifestation of spirituality and a spiritual practice when sung in the times of hardship and distress.” (2010, p. 123). Furthermore, Lipe asserts that “as individuals engage with music, abstract concepts such as hope, meaning and purpose are made concrete in the person’s lived experience, opening up paths to growth and healing” (2002, p. 233). There is a distinctive sense of belonging that seems to be highlighted when singing has a more obviously spiritual dimension, such as in church, but which can also be felt when singing alone. This is particularly evident in Moore’s study, where one participant boldly states: “Those words we’re singing, we’ve lived them” (2009, p. 294). Singing gospel offered her an opportunity to express her spirituality and her sense of shared culture and experience.

Livesey et al. (2012) agree that singers’ spiritual health is enhanced while Wills (2011) describes singing as way of experiencing spiritual transcendence both individually and collectively. Wills highlights the importance of this spiritual experience for primary-age children and argues that a music event “engages its participants holistically, be they the creators, the performers or the listeners” (2011, p. 39). A number of the participants in Livesey et al.’s study described how singing provided a sense of “spirituality and transcendence from the ordinary and mundane routines of daily life. For example: ‘the beauty of the music fills me with enthusiasm and elevates me above normality’” (2012, p. 18).

The focus group discussion touched upon the spiritual aspect of singing in a number of ways. At one point, singing was talked of as a way of “*tapping into... another dimension in people’s lives*” (N, p. 7), a theme that was returned to by another participant who recalled singing at a Christian festival while struggling emotionally:

We were suddenly singing and the words meant so much for me. I...was aware (of) the tears streaming down my face and I knew I would never be alone...It was...an emotional release which all all those voices around me

had taken me (to). (V, p. 74)

If the definition of spirituality is to do with transformation or transcendence of self, it is evident that singing fulfils this characterisation.

Singing and socio-cultural groups

The sense that singing provides the opportunity for self-expression, for sharing common experiences and emotions and for enhancing spiritual understanding permeates much of the literature. Welch (2011) speaks of “an enhanced sense of social inclusion” and further states that “singing with others enhances the possibilities of empathic relationships with those around us” (p. 2), while Chong declares that “singing can improve the mutuality of the communication between people, creating a joint sense of vitality” (2010, p. 123). In a small-scale study looking at singers’ well-being, Grape, Sandgren, Hansson, Ericson and Theorell found that amateur singers used singing lessons “as a means of self-actualisation and self-expression as a way to release emotional tensions” (2003, p. 71). This was in contrast to a comparative group of professional singers, who did not express similar responses and were more concerned with their physical or technical achievements.

Welch (2005) describes how a singer communicates intrapersonally, revealing vocal quality, emotional state and aspects of personal identity. At the same time, there is interpersonal communication with the listener, who perceives the standard of the music, interprets the emotion and feels part of a social or cultural group. This sense of being ‘at one’ with others in a socio-cultural context was returned to repeatedly throughout the focus group discussion:

Makes you feel like you’re part of something else. That you’re one with a lot of other people (N, p. 63)

You were suddenly aware of this cinema mostly full of children who’d got adults with them who were all singing (V, p. 67)

(Singing) does bring people together, doesn’t it? (N, p. 69)

Custodero (2006) explores this in detail, investigating how music, particularly song, influenced the cultural identities of ten New York families with young children. The study suggests that singing has a profoundly important role to play in each family’s cultural identity, reflected by the repertoire (e.g. songs from the parents’ homeland), by the routine (e.g. songs at bedtime)

and by the many examples of parents and children improvising songs during the day to accompany mundane tasks. Singing, both as an intra- and interpersonal activity evidently existed in this context, but it is interesting to try to situate this in the broader socio-cultural community. A number of the questionnaire respondents expressed positive feelings towards singing, but didn't necessarily belong to any kind of choral group or sing in any formalised way. Some commentators suggest that this might be because of negative childhood labels or by other cultural learning experiences (Saunders, Varvarigou and Welch, 2010): "I can't sing. As a singist I am not a success. I am saddest when I sing. So are those who hear me. They are sadder even than I am." ('Artemus Ward's Lecture,' cited in Saunders, Varvarigou and Welch, 2010, p. 69).

Commentary

It seems therefore that the literature supports the hypothesis that singing is an important anthropological, cultural practice that sits, comfortably or otherwise, within many aspects of human existence. Within contemporary terms of reference, however, it is difficult to evaluate. Should we encourage people to sing because of non-singing reasons, such as improved self-esteem or a broader sense of social inclusion? Or is singing worth doing for its own sake? Welch concludes that "children's singing abilities and attitudes are socially and culturally located, subject to developmental processes and sensitive to educational experiences" (2010, p. 27). It follows that adult perceptions of singing are equally socially and culturally located and this requires further examination.

Singing was once fundamentally grounded in community, whether that be in school, church or at work. Consider, for example, the folk song tradition that meant almost every town in Britain had songs that everyone knew, passed down from generation to generation. The nursery rhyme 'Wind the bobbin up,' for example, has cultural significance to me as someone born in a Lancashire cotton mill town. My grandma taught me the rhyme and explained what the bobbin was and why we would 'wind it up'. My children, however, know the rhyme, but it has no cultural resonance for them. Until perhaps the middle of the 20th century, it was common in Lancashire to pass on dialect songs through the generations, but the advent of recording technology and the dispersment of families has meant that these songs are now part of history (Waugh, 1983). As society has evolved, communities have become more fragmented and the tradition of passing down songs, although not yet extinct, has not been maintained. Another musical example might be how brass bands have evolved over generations. Originally created to provide a means of social bonding in the northern mining

communities, members of the brass bands of Victorian Britain had little or no musical background and played for and from a shared sense of community. Herbert and Sarkissian explain it thus:

Working people had more leisure time, and employers were concerned that this would lead to social unrest, so they readily acquiesced to requests from their workers that they act as guarantors for loans to buy instruments in order to form a brass band carrying the company name. (1997, p. 167)

In another study, Herbert states that “as early as the 1880s, there were sure signs of the reassertion of social divisions forcing brass bands into the uneasy, ambiguous middle ground between art and popular culture” (2000, p. 10). This disconnect echoes the findings both of my study and in the literature around singing, in that it highlights the awkward place that music participation inhabits in our culture. Modern brass bands, although still rooted in mainly (ex-) mining communities, are populated by competent, enthusiastic musicians, who measure their skills in nationwide competitions or in public performances. Equally, singing in modern society tends to be a competitive act or a performance. As a nation, we may be losing, just like the brass bands, our traditional link to our community through music - in this case, song.

Postmodernism and folkloricism

According to Rosenau (2001) postmodernism seeks to investigate “how we know what we know, how we should think about individual endeavour and collective aspirations, whether progress is meaningful and how it should be sought” (p. 1). This definition reflects some of the comments from the questionnaires and focus group data for this study, so it is instructive to examine further the tenets of postmodernism. Does singing, and the way that contemporary society views singing, sit comfortably within the accepted definitions of postmodernism or do we need to accept a more folkloristic, preservationist attitude to where singing is located culturally? There may, of course, be no answer to this, other than, as previously indicated, that singing occupies a multitude of places in our culture, in our education and in our society in general.

Rosenau (2001, p. 8) speaks of postmodernists attempting to “locate” meaning, rather than “discovering” - a rather nuanced difference which highlights the difficulties of defining and utilising post-modern theory. Essentially, the post-modernist model rejects the empirical, rational-logical and objective, preferring instead the intuitive, individualistic and subjective (Touraine, 2005). Rosenau suggests that postmodernist social scientists aspire to “speak for

those who have never been the subject (active, human), but who are rather so often assumed to be objects (observed, studied)” (2001, p. 173). This assertion echoes the awkwardness described above where research (Hallam 2009; Welch 2010, 2011) has sought to define singing and its role, especially within education, as something measurable, whereas discussions around singing and how it makes individuals feel centre around intuitive, instinctive responses.

Woods cites Deleuze and Guattari’s description of postmodernism as a ‘rhizome’:

This is the lateral root structure of certain plants, and (this) metaphor describes how all social and cultural activities in postmodernism are dispersed, divergent and acentred systems or structures. This contrasts with the organised, hierarchical, ‘trunk-and-branch’ structure of modernism. (1999, p. 6)

This chimes markedly with the examples above of local, culturally rooted music-making becoming separated from their origins and perhaps, therefore, losing resonance. The danger, clearly, is that such a cultural uncoupling, could result in a lack of depth of understanding, leading to, according to Jameson, an “effacement of a personal, unique style and a sense of history itself, and their replacement by pastiche...and nostalgia, thereby instituting a celebration of surfaces which denies the hermeneutics of depth” (1991, pp. 64-5). This is a criticism often aimed at television programmes such as the X Factor (ITV), which skate on the surface of popular culture, never seeking to investigate or explore any aspect of the music other than its popularity. In contrast, some commentators see postmodernism’s “schizophrenic subjectivity and...celebration of depthlessness and surface” (Woods, 1999, p. 168) as an opportunity to site new cultural identities or purposes, such as the role of the media (McRobbie, as cited in Woods, 1999, p. 168) and how popular culture can empower individuals (Grossberg, 1989). Singing seems to be an intrinsic part of popular culture and in that sense must form part of our cultural identity, yet postmodernism might reject much of our singing heritage as it is too ‘high brow’, too codified, too constrained by accepted social practices. Once again we return to this essential awkwardness of where singing is situated: if postmodernism is a rejection of what has gone before, in particular the rules and practices established and developed since the Enlightenment (Woods, 1999), then music and singing belong firmly in the modernist camp. Yet popular music strives to resist ‘high’ art forms, challenging established formats and operating from the fringes of the cultural establishment (Woods, 1999, p. 171). Citing Strinati, Woods suggests that reggae, rap, house and hip-hop all manifest postmodern traits:

With collage, pastiche and quotation, with the mixing of styles which remain musically distinctive, with the random and selective pasting together of different musics and styles, with the rejection of divisions between serious and fun music, and with the attack on the notion of rock as serious artistic music which merits the high cultural accolade of the respectful concert - a trend started by punk. (1999, p. 172)

With the exception of house, these musical genres rely upon language to deliver their musical, cultural or socio-political message. Punk, for example, was a direct attack on the pretensions of the progressive rock bands, who aspired to high intellect and serious art (Woods, 1999, p. 173). From a philosophical perspective, the punk movement deconstructed popular music and “ransacked postwar subcultures for the purposes of recycling and reusing them in a celebration of surfaces, styles and artifice” (Woods, 1999, p. 173). Yet once punk itself became part of the dominant culture, it can no longer easily be classed as postmodern.

Kant, an Enlightenment philosopher and therefore evidently not a postmodernist thinker, described music as the ‘language of emotions’ and thus not a major influence on culture, which he considered to be grounded in logic and reason, not feelings (cited in Bowie, 1992, p. 73). Yet it is language which gives us as human beings the facility to criticise, to comment, to ransack or, alternatively, to explain, to persuade, to express emotion and this, I suggest, is an essential part of human culture. If music is the ‘language of emotions’, singing gives that language voice.

This expression of singing as a conduit for emotion was especially apparent in the focus group session for the study where the participants spoke of how singing made them feel throughout the course of their lives:

There are great memories in singing. Music has a huge potential for evoking things from the past. (N, p. 64)

Music has the ability to bypass normal..reasoning processes. Somehow it.. evokes something that’s...really deep down in our psyche, in our being. (N, p. 65)

(There’s) a feeling of belonging. (C, p. 74)

None of the above powerful responses to how the participants feel about singing are easily measurable in terms of a hierarchical, observational model which could indicate progress over

a specified period of time. In a school context, an Ofsted outstanding lesson could be exemplified thus:

Outstanding teaching and learning – a definition

(Smith, 2013)

This clearly complies with the modernist model of removing the subjective and individual, while emphasising the objective and empirical as a means of measuring success. In order to be valued within an educational context, therefore, it could be argued that modern advocates of singing have turned to other measures to justify including singing in learning: improving language (Welch, 2005); developing other learning skills (Anvari, Trainor, Woodside and Levy, 2002); promoting health and well-being (Grape et al., 2003; Clift, Hancox et al., 2010, Livesey et al., 2012); stimulating creativity (Odena, 2012). Although these factors are important and, to some extent, are convincing to the classroom practitioner, the adults in this study hardly referred to singing in these terms, other than, for example, to say that singing can “(help) you remember words” (C, p. 71) and how songs can help rote-learning (V, p. 72). In the questionnaires, singing as educational tool was only mentioned twice, whereas there were 55 references to do with an emotional or spiritual response to song.

Singing (or indeed other artistic endeavours) as a means of conveying knowledge or adding other 'useful' skills is a theme explored by a number of postmodernist philosophers (e.g., Lyotard, Derrida, Baudrillard) who challenge the right of the state or other institutions to "monopolise the privilege of legitimation" (Woods, 1999, p. 22). Such utilitarianism is highlighted by Lyotard:

The question (overt or implied) now asked by the professionalist student, the State, or institutions of higher education is no longer 'Is it true?' but 'What use is it?' In the context of the mercantilization of knowledge, more often than not this question is equivalent to: 'Is it saleable?' and in the context of power-growth: 'Is it efficient?'

(from *Postmodern Condition*, p. 51, cited in Woods, 1999, p. 22)

The postmodern interpretation of rejecting constraints and embracing a more free-flowing, naturalistic approach to studying singing is tempting as a research model, but by sidelining or ignoring the 'measurable outcomes' from singing, are we in danger of consigning singing once more to a 'nice' activity to do every once in a while that has no intrinsic value? Folklorists would argue that singing has a particularly special place in our culture. Cohane and Goldstein describe the "ethnography of singing" (1996, p. 425) when discussing nineteenth century Irish ballads, reporting that "songs communicate meanings that are determined largely by their performance in particular social situations" (1996, p. 425). This belief that singing is rooted in place and culture is reinforced by a number of studies (Russell, 2001; Åkesson, 2012; Viljoen, 2013). Åkesson describes the folk songs of Sweden as "strands of living tradition and revival" (2012), while Russell argues that music, especially song, that is rooted in community creates a form of 'cultural grammar', defined thus:

a set of guidelines or rules that define what individuals within a society, community, or group have to know, produce, predict, interpret or evaluate within a given setting or social group in order to participate appropriately (2001, p. 197)

This sense of a singing culture is important for this study, as it appears that much of contemporary singing is centred around performance: see, for example, the high ratings for television shows such as 'X Factor', 'Last Choir Standing' (BBC) or the various BBC programmes fronted by Gareth Malone. This performance-based, entertainment focus is highlighted by a participant in the focus group, who acknowledges that the act of singing can have an unexpected impact:

It does bring people together doesn't it? These TV programmes that Gareth Malone has: The Choir...Kids who would think it was pretty uncool to sing normally. He put them all together and they were absolutely bowled over. But actually it changes almost the whole atmosphere of their life. (N, p. 69)

There is an impression here that contemporary British society has become somewhat distanced from its cultural roots through song and again there exists a tension between what we should preserve as culturally important, as perhaps a folklorist perspective would dictate, and what we should allow to flourish, regardless of its 'importance'. One of the focus group participants recognised this historical importance in local culture:

A lot of...local history and keeping traditions alive have been songs. We used to do that: there used to be the local folk singer who would sing about things that happened in the village and they carried on in for generations. (N, p. 67)

It was acknowledged, however, that this tradition is dying out: "*I suppose modern technology has replaced that to a degree (although) there are folk singers still around*" (N, p. 67).

It would seem, therefore, from the literature that singing holds an important place in contemporary society, but it is unclear where it is situated culturally. Recent research has determined a number of unexpected benefits of both choral and individual singing and educationalists have utilised this to promote singing as educational tool. Research for this study sought to investigate whether these conclusions in the literature are reflected in the attitudes and expectations of a group of adults who, on the whole, do not identify themselves as singers.

Methodology

As previously discussed, singing occupies a central place in modern life, yet a lot of contemporary research seems focussed on how singing impacts upon other aspects of life or education, not on how it makes the (putative) singer feel. As a teacher who delivers in a variety of settings to a very broad group of participants, I am interested in how adults in particular perceive singing, both as an active and a passive activity. This study aims to identify the reasons why people sing and how they perceive the act of singing.

Ethics

A short questionnaire (pro-forma appended) was distributed to a range of adults and a small group was invited to talk part in a focussed discussion on their experience and reflections on singing. As it was possible that this discussion could reveal difficult memories for some, or prompt unexpectedly emotional responses, a venue known to the group was chosen for the meeting and all participants knew that they were able to withdraw or choose not to answer a question at any point. It was understood and acknowledged that any detail that referred to in the study would be anonymous.

Approach and potential difficulties

I adopted an ethnographic approach to the research, drawing on Wolcott's three pillars of ethnographic enquiry: experiencing, enquiring and examining. Frake defines ethnography as "a theory of cultural behaviour in a particular society" (as cited by Wolcott, 1999, p. 36), which neatly describes a framework for this study. I sought to find out *how* people feel when they sing and from that consider whether there is something in modern culture that provokes or stimulates these feelings. Spradley and McCurdy advise that "it takes a very skilled person with a high degree of self-awareness to study a cultural scene he has already acquired" (as cited by Wolcott, 1999, p. 37) and I am aware that my closeness to the subject and the participants could impact upon my observations and conclusions. This paper does not purport to be an ethnographic *study*, however, merely one which has used ethnographic *techniques* to collect data, an approach that Wolcott extols (1999). By using this means, I hope to explore some of the reasons why we, as adults in contemporary British society, like to sing and what barriers there may be in place that prevent us from singing (and why this may be).

Experiencing

Wolcott ascribes the label of 'non-participant participant observer' to researchers who "make no effort to hide what they are doing or to deny their presence" (1999, p. 48). This accurately describes my role when distributing the questionnaires. Most of the participants knew me directly either socially or professionally (as their singing leader, for example, or as their child's teacher), so it must be acknowledged that there may be some bias towards providing me, as a researcher, with the responses that the participants thought I would like to read. A minority of respondents had no social or professional link to me, however, and those responses remained similar to the larger group. Although the research group was small (33 respondents), I conclude that the responses were honest and lacking in bias. Indeed, a number of

participants provided a substantial amount of detail in their responses as they had prior knowledge of the study, so I surmise that my role of 'non-participant participant observer' helped to stimulate more thoughtful comments.

During the focus group session, my role was as a 'participant observer', although I endeavoured, as per Wolcott's advice, to become "only as involved as necessary to obtain whatever information is sought" (1999, p. 48). This meant that I gently steered the conversation back towards singing when the subject matter threatened to veer off course, and I occasionally asked questions to stimulate discussion. This follows Wolcott's directive to "weigh what must be gained, and at what risk or cost, by acting more naturally, by becoming more involved, and by approaching the research setting more informally or casually" (1999, p. 49). My aim was to encourage a stimulating, reflective conversation about singing in an informal, supportive setting. This meant that I was still adhering to Wolcott's premise of *interviewing* and *direct observation* (1999, p. 204), but was able to avoid the potential pitfalls highlighted by Wolcott: individuals dominating conversations, deference, lack of turn-taking (1999, p. 205).

Mellor further describes this research approach as *reflexive*, citing Etherington:

Reflexivity encourages us to explore our own construction of identity in relation to the data, our participants and ourselves and provides a bridge between our internal and external worlds. (2013, p. 182)

As Mellor explains, this approach acknowledges the potential effect that the researcher may have on the participants and vice versa (2013, p. 182). It is important to recognise one's own constructs and respond *reflexively* to the conversation as needed.

Enquiring

The two types of data collection for this study can be described as *questionnaire* (as opposed to the more formal structure of a *survey*) and *semi-structured interview*. The focus group (or semi-structured interview) consisted of 4 adults, all known to me, and all members of the local church, who were invited to talk about singing with me one afternoon. The conversation lasted approximately 40 minutes (full transcription appended). No explicit focus or direction was given to the group either before or during the discussion, although all the participants were aware of my field of interest and were themselves interested in talking about the effect singing had had on their lives. The questions asked within the discussion were primarily the same as

those in the questionnaire, although occasionally more detail or clarification was requested. For example, “Do you think that there is something special about communal singing?” in response to conversation about when people sing (question 4 in the questionnaire). I attempted, as far as possible, not to intervene or interfere without becoming entirely detached from the process and therefore risking that the participants would feel ‘observed’ and, as Wolcott warns, “put on an act” (1999, p. 49). My aim, as discussed above, was to stimulate discussion and also to remind the participants that my role there was as a researcher.

Examining

As described in the first part of this paper, there is a substantial body of research available on the merits of singing. Closer examination of the studies reveals that much of the research is dedicated to proving factors about singing that are not necessarily directly to do with singing itself. For example, the educational benefits or the improvements in health could be attributed to psychosocial factors to do with working together with like-minded people, not necessarily singing specifically. The research for this paper suggests that there is a distinct emotional response to singing that is difficult to attribute to any other factor and it is perhaps this emotional reaction that prompts the secondary benefits discussed above.

Research procedure

33 questionnaires were completed by a diverse group of participants between 18 and 84 years of age. Three open-ended questions elicited interesting responses for the purposes of this study:

Question 4: When you sing, how does it make you feel?

Question 5: Do you think that singing can alter your mood (positively or negatively)?

Question 6: Is there anything that you feel prevents you from singing?

The raw data were analysed by dividing the statements (105 in total) into positive and negative groups then allocating each utterance into one of five categories, a technique analogous to that described by Mellor (1999). Similar to Mellor, who described these groupings as “categories of construct” in her 2013 paper on singing, health and well-being as a group process, the category titles were: *Musical* where reference was made to musical knowledge; *Emotional* including mood, emotion or the self; *Psychosocial* where mention was made of any aspect of singing together as a group; *Physical* when physical reactions were described; *Spiritual* including reference to responses beyond the physical. For this study, Mellor’s

'expression' category was replaced by 'emotional' as I considered that this described the responses more accurately and also reflected the research focus more precisely.

The five categories are presented in Table 1, with characteristic examples shown, the full data being in the Appendix from p. 56.

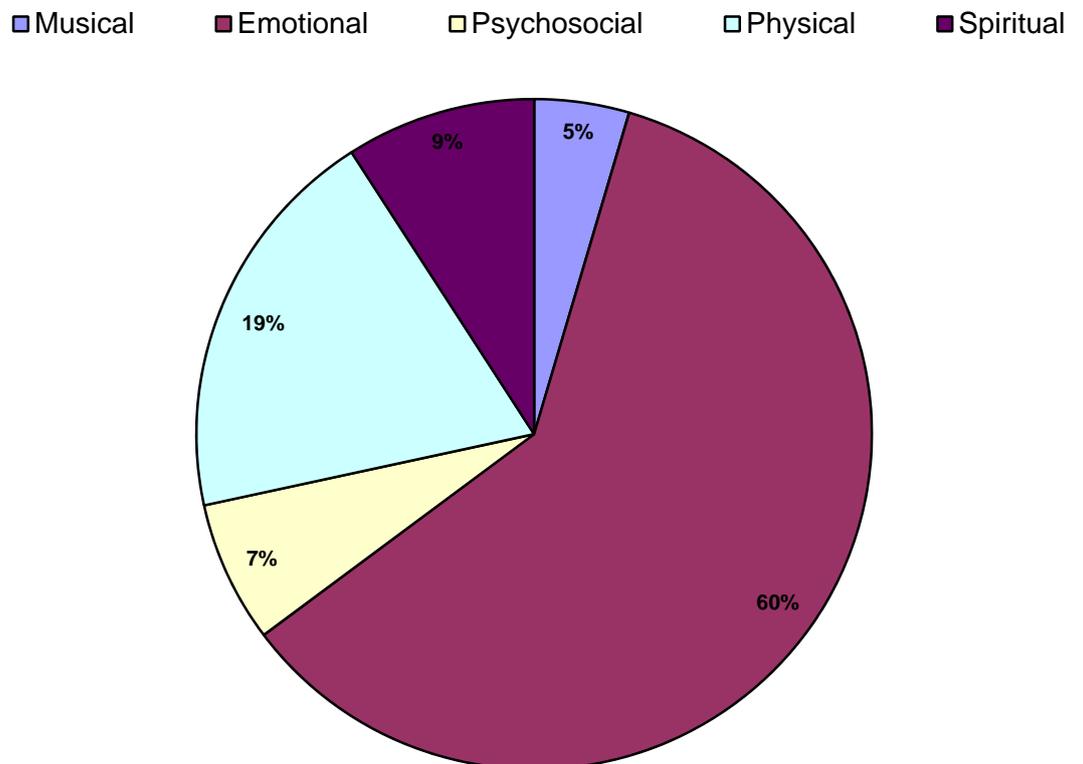
Table 1: Adult perceptions of singing (positive statements)

Category	Characteristic responses	Examples
Musical	Responses which referred to any aspect of musical knowledge	When it all comes together it's like one voice (I get) caught up in the music
Emotional	Responses which referred to mood, emotion or self	Reflection - puts things in perspective Feel 'stronger', more able to cope Elated Relieves tension & makes one feel lighter/happier Emotionally loose, unwound, mellow Intellectually stimulated, challenged, inspired Uplifted Happier Nostalgic Inspired to act Brave Positive Enhances all emotions Sense of achievement
Psychosocial	Responses which referred to the sense of being together in a singing group	Part of the music Singing with a group can change your mood instantly Particularly enjoy worship as part of a shared experience I love to sing with others, when I feel really part of what we are doing
Physical	Responses which referred to physical responses	Energising yet relaxing Cathartic Helps breathing Wonderful release at the end of a day working
Spiritual	Responses which referred to the spiritual nature of songs and singing	It's like a prayer Sense of freedom Takes you outside, away from all else Enables me to express my spirituality Blessed

Additionally, there was one mention of singing being a valuable educational tool, which did not fall easily into any of the above groupings.

The above information can be also be represented thus:

Figure 1:



It is striking that most respondents talk about singing in emotional terms, with words like ‘uplifting’ and ‘happy’ recurring multiple times. It could even be argued that the two responses in the ‘musical’ category (“*When it all comes together it’s like one voice; (I get) caught up in the music*”) could be re-allocated to ‘psychosocial’, thus removing any mention of music at all: an interesting, unexpected observation in a study about singing. This tendency to discuss singing in emotional terms was echoed by all the participants in the focus group session:

I think that singing on (my) own...to a tape uplifts me...If I’m down...or upset for any reason...I can be uplifted (V, p. 63)

(Singing) is exhilarating with an orchestra (C, p. 63)

I cannot hear ‘All in the April Evening’ without going back (to that time) and picturing the scene, seeing the sea shimmering in the distance...(There was) a very powerful and evocative memory in that song (N, p. 64)

(There’s) the emotion that comes from other people singing as well (D, p. 68)

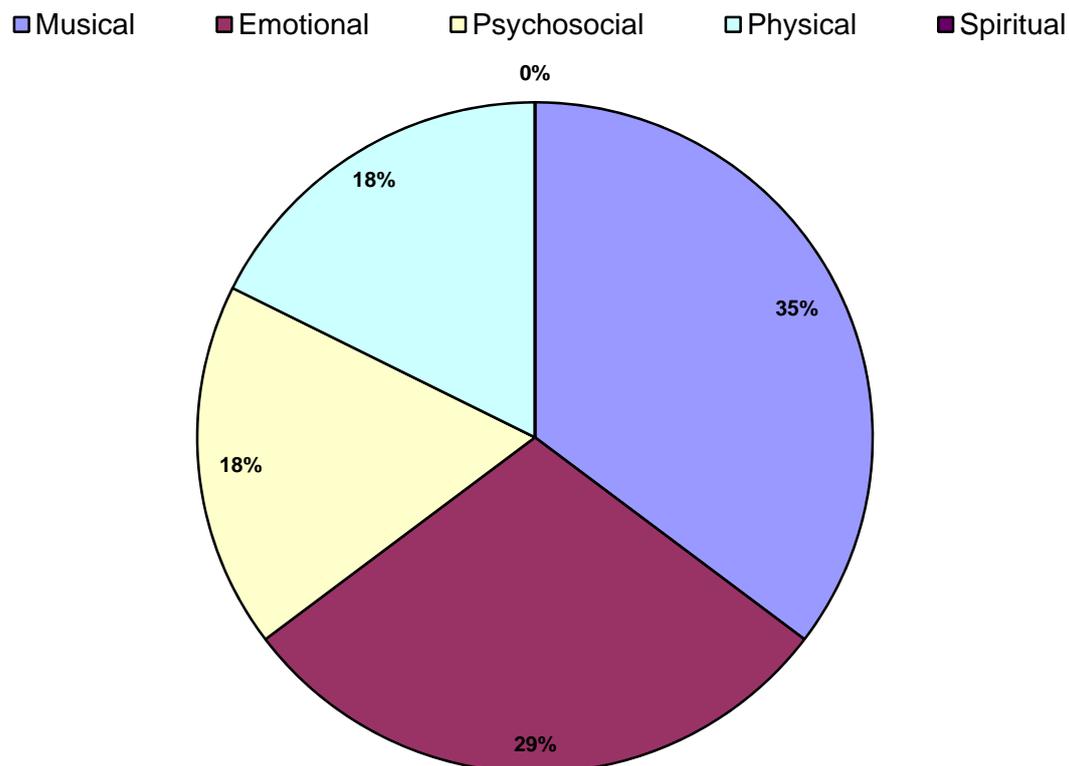
Mellor (2013) reported similar findings, with 'expression' (emotion) and 'psychosocial' far surpassing the other categories. Chong's research also found that, of the 88.3% of (90) participants who articulated a positive response to the question 'Do you enjoy singing?', 64% (58) referred directly an emotional reaction (2010, p. 121). This suggests that, although recent research has concentrated on the educational or health benefits of singing, those who sing are really interested in how it makes them feel emotionally and how it enables them to meet others in a socially beneficial way, not necessarily on what other benefits may be ascribed.

A small number of respondents described personal barriers to singing (in response to Question 6: Is there anything that you feel prevents you from singing?) These raw data - 17 utterances in total - were also divided into the five categories. The full responses are appended from p. 56.

Table 2: Barriers to singing (negative statements)

Category	Characteristic responses	Examples
Musical	Responses which referred to any aspect of musical knowledge	Dreadful, hopeless singing voice Other musical interests have taken priority I can't sing in tune Frustrated when pitched too high (Poor repertoire) Frustrated when I don't get the timing right
Emotional	Responses which referred to mood, emotion or self	Embarrassed Terrified and inadequate Self-conscious
Psychosocial	Responses which referred to the sense of being together in a singing group	In front of a room full of children - (I feel) pretty rubbish! I have an untrained voice which struggles to fit in with other singers The presence of other people I don't know well
Physical	Responses which referred to physical responses	Sore throat Over-use of voice Voice very thin due to ENT problems Tinnitus
Spiritual	Responses which referred to the spiritual nature of songs and singing	

Figure 2:



Supplementary to this, there were two mentions of not having enough time to sing: this was not included in any of the above categories.

Although there were fewer utterances that could be attributed, this small amount of data suggests that the very reasons that some people enjoy singing and think of it positively, i.e. emotional release and social bonding, can be viewed negatively by others. This again reflects the post-modern view of contemporary society, where an activity, in this case singing, which was once embedded into community culture, is now experienced in parallel to daily life, rather than as an accepted part of it. Just as miners no longer all play in brass bands, yet brass band playing remains a popular pursuit in mining communities and beyond, singing has become something that people choose to do in their spare time, rather than being part of everyone's daily life.

Alternatively, Chong reports that the negative responses to 'Do you enjoy singing?' elicited a different category of replies, mainly focused on the perceived sound of the participants' voice: "Some of the statements included descriptions of their voice as 'hideous', 'flat', 'shaky', 'out of pitch', 'inaudible' and 'terrible'" (2010, p. 122). Chong also notes that some participants were uncomfortable singing with others and that singing was not perceived "as a natural act" (2010, p. 123), suggesting that "fear of singing the wrong notes or sounding 'bad' can inhibit one from singing, and early experience of criticisms from teachers or other significant figures can trigger

fear of receiving negative judgements about one's singing" (p. 123). This fear of singing the wrong notes echoes an anecdote shared in 'Bluebirds and Crows' (2002), a collection of essays about singing:

'As a child, I loved to sing. I sang all the time. One day the music teacher at school had us all sing for her by ourselves, and she divided us up into two groups - the Bluebirds and the Crows. I was a crow. Well, I grew up on a farm and I knew what crows sounded like. I haven't sung since. But I guess that before I die, I want to learn how to sing.' Interview with 86-year-old applicant who wanted to join a new community choir. (Welch, 2002, p. 4, citing L. Mack 1979)

Saunders, Varvarigou and Welch report a similar experience:

Then in Grade 6 age 11+...I stood up to sing and she told me to sit down, that I couldn't sing. Well I was devastated...I'm sure I wanted to cry. Of course you came home, it was no good telling your parents at the time that something like this had happened to you...And she was such a powerful person in the community...It stayed with me for so long. It was so degrading at the time. Even in high school, if there was anything to do with music, I hated music...I didn't learn it. I couldn't learn it, as I thought...I'm sure that (incident) affected it, in a lot of ways...maybe she just didn't have the knowledge and it didn't come to her - 'I'm doing something that's going to affect this child for most of her life'. That's probably the way it was. (p. 69, 2010, citing Knight, 2010)

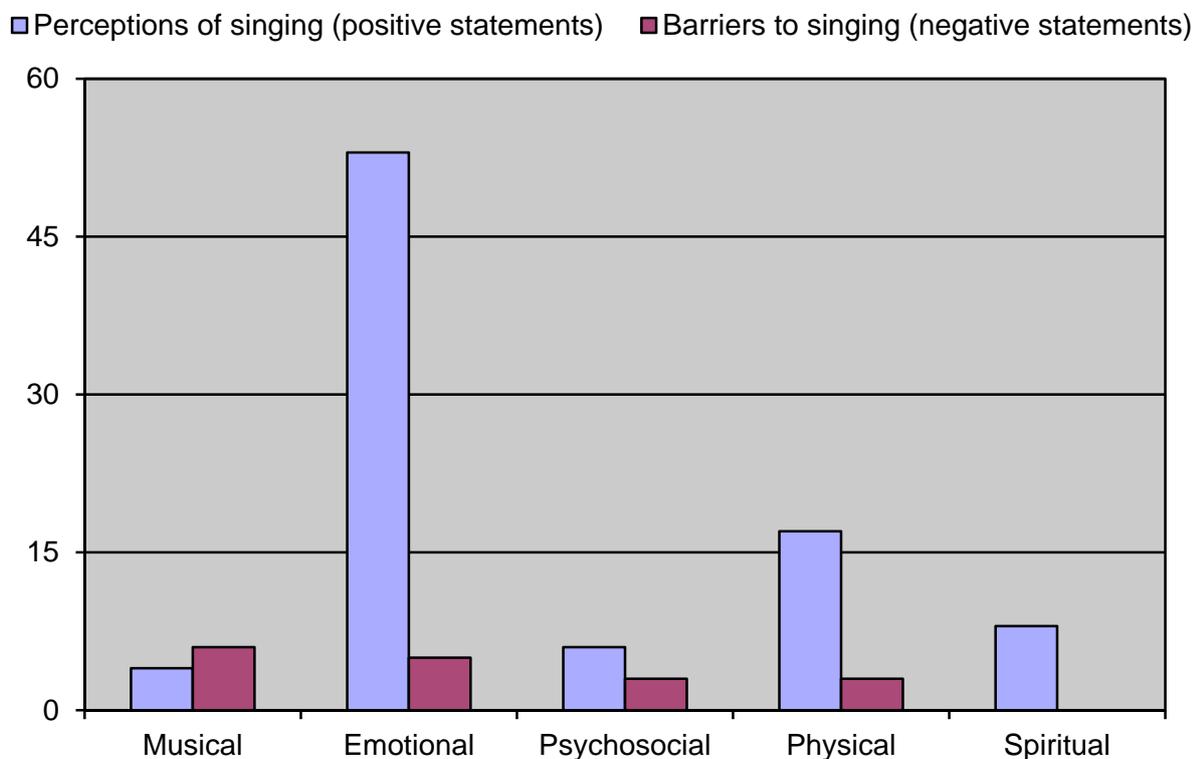
These examples aptly illustrate the emotional toll a negative attitude towards singing can have and perhaps also exemplifies how singing is (or was) situated primarily in an education setting and does/did not arise easily out of everyday modern life. Saunders, Varvarigou and Welch describe this as a paradox, when one is surrounded by singing, but not necessarily part of it (2010, p. 69). They also highlight the fact that "singing behaviours are subject to developmental processes in which individual potential is shaped (nurtured and/or hindered) by learning experiences within the culture" (2010, p. 70). Where singing is situated is clearly important, and the comments of a teacher or care-giver have perhaps more impact than realised.

It is possible that the cultural position of singing is changing, however, with the advent of aforementioned prime time television shows focussed on singing and the constant stream of

pop and rock music that surrounds us, but the establishment (and maintenance) of a singing culture in schools probably continues to have the most influence on children’s perception of their singing voice. This perception, as illustrated above, can last a life long.

When presented as a chart illustrating the positive and negative statements that were elicited from the questionnaires, the importance of emotion and the emotional response to singing is clear:

Figure 3:



Of the 105 utterances collected from the data, 58, or 55%, mentioned an emotional response. If those that alluded to a spiritual feeling are included (8), this increases to 60%. This corresponds to Chong’s findings: 64% emotional response; 72.2% if mention of spirituality is included (2010, p. 121). Other research supports the hypothesis that choral singing, in particular, provokes an emotional response and this is usually regarded positively (Clift and Morrison, 2011; Livesey et al., 2012; Mellor, 2013).

A visual representation of these questionnaire responses is possible by creating a word cloud, or ‘wordle’, as illustrated below (fig. 4). This tool is useful for preliminary analysis, where

used, rather than extracted data as in figure 4, but the clouds are interesting to examine as an adjunct to the data.

An interesting observation from the data is that a number of participants talk about singing on their own, whether that be in the shower, the car or the kitchen. 8.2% (7/90) of the participants in Chong's study reported that they enjoyed singing on their own, citing embarrassment of self-consciousness as a reason for not singing with or in front of others (2010, p. 122).

One of the members of the focus group sings occasionally in a choir, but identifies herself primarily as a lone singer, returning to her domestic life when describing her own singing:

I can't imagine not hearing music and singing...If (I'm) feeling down or (I) feel that there's too much going on, too many things to think about...I start to do some jobs and have some music on and sing...It just feels like, oh yeah, I can do it - it'll be ok. It's uplifting. (D, p. 78)

Others talk of singing in the car (V, p. 61) or whilst ironing (C, p.61), emphasising how singing is a normal part of their everyday lives, used as a way to alleviate boredom or to cope with difficult emotions.

The vast majority of recent studies focus on choral singing (Clift and Morrison, 2011; Welch, 2010, 2011; Miller, 2013), but it seems that some, maybe many, people sing regularly without choosing to do so publicly or as part of a group. Does this mean that, contrary to my previous assertion, that singing *does* remain culturally embedded in society, just differently so? Lyotard, as cited by Woods (1999, pp. 20-23), identifies this smaller-scale aspect of culture as '*petites histoires*' or 'micronarratives', arguing that modern society is no longer shaped by '*grandes histoires*' epitomised by the Enlightenment. These 'metanarratives', it is argued, should be avoided as they manifest control of the individual by the power of the establishment, be that the state, religion or other authority (Woods, 1999). Singing, as evidenced here and in the literature, is a singular activity which has cultural and social resonance across a community. It has the potential to alter an individual's emotional state and can also impact across socio-cultural groups.

The aforementioned popularity of television song contests such as the X Factor (ITV) suggest that people both enjoy watching 'ordinary' people perform (as opposed to trained singers) and the continued success of this programme in particular suggests that there are many people in Britain who believe that they are good solo singers, at least until judged differently.

Interestingly, one of the most successful groups from this programme, One Direction, appeared on the original programme as individual singers and were persuaded by the judges to sing together. Their subsequent worldwide acclaim might suggest that group singing, at least in this context, is more successful.

Baudrillard, cited in Woods (1999, pp. 26-28), characterises this current tendency towards watching others perform, or learn to perform, as 'simulation' or 'hyperreality', where hyperreality is "the state where distinctions between objects and their representations are dissolved, and one is left with only simulacra" (Woods, 1999, p. 27). In the context of this paper, much of the singing that is heard on the radio, seen on television or even experienced live at a gig is simulated or altered to a greater or lesser extent. Mistakes are eliminated, notes are modified, sounds are created digitally. This separates us from the ordinary, everyday singing exemplified by research for this study and perhaps explains some respondents' reluctance to participate in regular singing: if what we see or hear is 'perfect', how can we hope to achieve it? One of the questionnaire respondents exemplifies this tension thus, in answer to question 5, 'Do you think that singing can alter your mood (positively or negatively)?':

Yes. Singing to terrible pop songs, very badly, with no-one else around makes you feel great. However, in front of a room full of children when you can't sing - pretty rubbish!

Contemporary culture has perhaps elevated any type of singing in public into 'performance' and this unfortunately inhibits the more 'natural' singing that used to be evident in society. One of the themes identified by the focus group was the apparent change in the attitude of men to singing. Reference was made to the male voice choirs from Wales and Lancashire and how prevalent these used to be, and how, again, performance is more important than participation:

D: You used to hear (Welsh male choirs)...but you didn't ever hear... women's choirs - it was all male voice choirs...(while) at this time it seems a bit more of a feminine thing

V: And yet there are boy bands

N: Yes, but it's a bit uncool for men to sing. Maybe that's a fashion thing or a cultural thing

(p. 76)

In a recent newspaper article, the community choir leader Chris Samuel suggests the following reason for the lack of men singing in choirs:

If you want men to sing they need to sing songs that are relevant to them, and in places in which they feel comfortable. My own damascene conversion came when I toured with Australia's Spooky Men's Chorale who sing about about power tools, adaptors, beards and male warrior fantasies (as well as Abba covers in Viking helmets). (Samuel, 2013)

He further proposes that sea shanties and drinking songs should be a regular part of a choir's repertoire, as well as rehearsing in the pub and having "occasional, magnificent adventures" (Samuel, 2013). This suggests that, in contrast to this paper's hypothesis, it is the *song* that is of primary importance, not the *singer*. However, as both the literature and the data for this study suggest, I would counter that it is the cultural *positioning* of singing that impacts the most upon the individual's choice of whether, when and where to sing. The repertoire comes from this situating. Although a singing group specifically set up for men as detailed above might be successful, it is not reflective of how singing is perceived in society in general and so will be limited in scope and impact in socio-cultural terms.

If we accept that singing has an impact upon both the individual and the wider community, is it possible to ascribe this to singing specifically? It could be argued, for example, that dance is situated similarly in contemporary culture, particularly with the advent of primetime television shows such as 'Strictly Come Dancing'. This phenomenon, like The X Factor or Last Choir Standing where singing is concerned, has led to increased participation in dance classes across the United Kingdom. Over 4 million adults, for example, are thought to take part in a dancing activity (not ballet or fitness-related), according to the English Heritage Taking Part Survey (Davies, 2011, p. 18). This contrasts with the almost 1.7 million who regularly sing (Davies, 2011, p. 18).

Dance also, of course, has deep cultural roots. The tango, for example, has its origins in South America but is now part of wider western culture (Salmon, 1977), which has no aesthetic or intellectual link to the *suburbios* of Buenos Aires. Similar to the solo singer, the lone dancer can only express so much without requiring the support of others. It is impossible, for example, to perform the modern version of the tango without a partner, as the aim of the dance is to portray seduction. Interestingly, Samuel suggests that the tango might originally have been performed by lone men who were bemoaning their solitary state away from their families

(1977, p. 860): contemporary culture has lost sight of this sense of “men alone, desperate, frustrated and full of nostalgia for the established life that they no longer had” (1977, p. 860). This echoes the shifting cultural position of brass bands as discussed above and illustrates again how our postmodernist society has fragmented and dispersed aspects of our cultural heritage.

In addition to this, Arts Council England, under the same Labour government that championed singing through the Sing Up initiative, published a document which details the apparent benefits of dance, including “physical and mental...personal and social...(and) educational” (Department of Culture, Media and Sport, 2006, p. 4). Clearly the utilitarian approach was prevalent in the arts world at this time. Recent Arts Council research directly addresses the difficulty of measuring the ‘value’ of the arts in general and it is encouraging to read that there is a desire to create a “new cohesion” to research in this area (Arts Council England, 2014, p. 26). It seems that separate areas of the arts world have spent a considerable amount of research effort in justifying themselves when perhaps a more cohesive, collective approach would be more beneficial.

Conclusion

Singing is evidently an important activity, individually, collectively and culturally. Livesey et al. report that “the sense of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation in the (singers’) comments...reflects the experience of engaging in something meaningful” (2012, p. 21) and also propose that “choral singing may provide cognitive, cerebral stimulation, providing the ideal environment for flow experiences to occur” (2012, p. 22). The literature and the data for this study suggest that singing with a group of others is enjoyable for a number of factors, including emotional and social support, the opportunity to work alongside like-minded peers and the satisfaction of creating good music. This suggests that one of the most important factors when researching singing as an activity is to determine whether the data allude to individual or choral singing.

Singing alone seems to be an activity that accompanies everyday acts, such as driving or doing household tasks. The act of singing energises, reinvigorates or, in contrast, relaxes. This solo aspect of singing differentiates it from other activities, as it is possible to sing whilst doing almost any other task, unlike, for example, dance, which requires focus and concentration.

Singing arises naturally also in the parent/child relationship and is observed in the play and learning behaviour of young children (Ilari, 2009; Chong, 2010). Ilari states that:

'Motherese', proto-conversations, lullabies, adult songs, play songs, nursery rhymes, and other musical forms seem to bring mother and child closer. Through musical interactions, babies and mothers communicate and share affection, modulate mood and behaviors, learn implicit aspects of culture and gender, and build shared repertoires. (2009, p. 34)

This natural, seemingly spontaneous singing relationship changes as we progress through childhood. Singing becomes more transactional: for example, a song is used as an educational tool, or a song is prepared to perform and be judged or appraised. Welch's longitudinal research study of the Sing Up programme suggests that children become less positive about singing as they grow older (2010), and the influence and attitudes of peers becomes increasingly paramount.

Once at school, singing becomes part of the wider arts and learning culture, so I would suggest that it is more difficult to differentiate it from other cultural activities. Arts Council England acknowledge this difficulty when attempting to measure the value of the arts as a whole:

We lack longitudinal studies of the health benefits of participation in the arts, and comparative studies of the effects of participation in the arts, as opposed to, say, participation in sport. We cannot demonstrate why the arts are unique in what they do. (2014, p. 3)

If it is challenging to design comparative studies between such ostensibly different activities as art and sport, it is not surprising that research that might illustrate singing's unique ability to promote, say, health and social benefits, is problematic. This absence of a theoretical model has been confronted to some extent by recent studies (Welch, 2010; Livesey et al., 2012; Mellor, 2013) which have investigated diverse groups of singers, exploring perceptions of singing and impact on health and well-being. Yet there remains a tension between how singing is perceived culturally and how it is in actuality.

Singing is a musical, educational, emotional activity that resonates in different ways. There appear to be multiple benefits to health and wellbeing from choral singing and many of the positive aspects of singing could have wider community impacts, such as involving the elderly or the socially excluded. It must be acknowledged, however, that these perceived benefits are not exclusive to singing and we need to be careful not to ascribe too elevated a position to the act of singing, when other arts activities could fulfil the same requirements. Its unique place in

human culture, however, is because we can (nearly) all sing: if we have a voice, we sing. We, the singers, bring our educational, musical and cultural experience to the song, but, most importantly, we bring our emotional life too: "*Maybe we should be a...nation of singers...I think it would change our world*" (N, p. 77)

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Appendices

Appendix 1
Questionnaire

“It’s the singer, not the song: a critical investigation into perceptions of the benefits of singing in daily life.”

As part of my Masters degree, I am undertaking research into how participating in singing is perceived by adults. It would be really helpful if you could answer the questions below (adding detail if you wish) and either return the form to school or email me (contact details below). Any adult may complete the questionnaire - please copy and return as needed.

Your name and details will never be revealed. I will anonymise any data I use and will notify you if I use direct quotations if I have your contact details. There is, however, no necessity to complete your personal details if you do not wish to share them. It is also useful for me in case I want to ask any further questions but, again, nothing you say will be used without your permission and even then your identity will not be revealed.

I have attached the formal participation form and consent for your information and reference.

Many thanks

(contact details inserted here)

.....

Name:

Contact number:

Contact email:

Please tick as appropriate:

Gender:	Male	<input type="checkbox"/>	Female	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Age group:	18-24	<input type="checkbox"/>	45-54	<input type="checkbox"/>	75-84	<input type="checkbox"/>
	25-34	<input type="checkbox"/>	55-64	<input type="checkbox"/>	85 and over	<input type="checkbox"/>
	35-44	<input type="checkbox"/>	65-74	<input type="checkbox"/>		

1 Do you take part in any kind of singing activity in your daily life?

YES Please continue to next question

NO Please write a little bit about why you don't take part in any singing activities

Please go on to question 3

2 What kind of singing activities do you take part in? (Please tick as many as apply)

As member of a choir

As part of work Job

As member of a band

At church

With family/friends

At a sports event

At a concert or event

As a student

Other

3 How often, on average, do you actively participate in a singing activity?

Never

Monthly

Daily

Only on special occasions
(e.g. weddings)

Weekly

4 When you sing, how does it make you feel?

5 Do you think that singing can alter your mood (positively or negatively)? If you would like to share any example of this, please do so.

6 Is there anything that you feel prevents you from singing? These might be physical, psychological or emotional factors relating to previous experience of singing, for example.

Are you happy for me to contact you about this research if needed?

NO

YES

Preferred mode of contact: phone/email/face to face/any

Thank you for taking part in this research. Please contact me if you have any questions.

Appendix 2
Questionnaire Data

Completed questionnaires: 33

Gender

Male	10	Female	23
------	----	--------	----

Age group

18-24	3
25-34	3
35-44	4
45-54	7
55-64	4
65-74	11
75-84	1
85 & over	0

Daily singing activity?

Yes	21
No	12

Reasons for no

no tone to voice

sung in choirs until age 60 then took up flute

tone deaf

limited time; was in choirs at school; enjoy singing with children daily

don't enjoy singing with others; can't sing; only sing on own in car

always at work; no time

would rather play instrument; find it difficult to control voice

no time/opportunity

Types of singing activity

Choir member		9
Band member		1
With family/friends		5
At a concert or event		7
At church		14
At a sports event		1
As a student		1
As part of work	Singer	1
	Teacher	1
Other	Housework/at home	4
	In car	4
	On own	1
	With a 'singing for the brain' group	1
	Conducting choir	1

Singing frequency

Never	2
Daily	9
Weekly	14
Monthly	1
Only on special occasions	4
No response	3

How does singing make you feel?

Happy /makes me smile/good/joyous/better/great	21
Uplifted/exhilarated/energised/elated/free/inspired	12
Good stress-buster/emotionally mellow/relaxed/cathartic	11
Great educational too/intellectually stimulated	2
Part of a whole/sense of togetherness/part of the music	5
Helps breathing	1
Sense of achievement	1
Reminiscent/reflection/nostalgic/spiritual	6

Frustrated/inadequate	3	
Terrified	1	
Vulnerable/embarrassed		2

Can singing alter mood (positively or negatively)?

Yes	24
No	1
Both	8

Makes you feel better 13

Self-conscious	2
Affects emotions	6
Enhances/influences mood	3
Takes you 'outside'	1
Shared experience	4
Deep breathing	1

Factors that inhibit singing

Poor singing voice	6
Vocal difficulties	3
Hearing problems	1
Complicated songs	2
Lack of time	4
Other people /shyness	2
Told can't sing	1

Appendix 3

Questionnaire Data: Categories

Musical

Responses which referred to any aspect of musical knowledge

When it all comes together it's like one voice

Emotional

Responses which referred to mood, emotion or self

Reflection - puts things in perspective

Feel 'stronger', more able to cope

Elated

Relieves tension & makes one feel lighter/happier

Even depressing music can make you feel better if you sing along

Joyous

Emotionally loose, unwound, mellow

Intellectually stimulated, challenged, inspired

Uplifted

Happier

Emotional work-out

Makes me smile

Reminiscent

Pleasure

After a tiring day at work, the last thing I want to do is go to a choir practice, but I always find it lifts me up and makes me happy

Nostalgic

Helps put things in perspective

Inspired to act

Brave

Positive

Enhances all emotions

Psychosocial

Responses which referred to the sense of being together in a singing group

Part of the music

Sometimes one doesn't feel like going to choral rehearsal but afterwards I am glad I have gone.

Singing with a group can change your mood instantly

Particularly enjoy worship as part of a shared experience

I love to sing with others, when I feel really part of what we are doing

Physical

Responses which referred to physical responses

Relaxation

Energising yet relaxing

Sense of achievement

Cathartic

Good stress-buster

Helps breathing

Exhilarated

Energised

Once caught up in the music, the stress quickly dissipates

Deep breathing when you sing makes you feel good

Takes away the stress of everyday life

Helps to alleviate stress

Wonderful release at the end of a day working

Spiritual

Responses which referred to the spiritual nature of songs and singing

It's like a prayer

Sense of freedom

Takes you outside, away from all else

Enables me to express my spirituality

Appendix 3

Focus group discussion transcript (verbatim)

Date: Tuesday 22nd July 2014

C My name is _____. I give permission for Louise Hall to use what I say in today's discussion for the purposes of her MA research. I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet.

V My name is _____. I give permission for Louise Hall to use what I say in today's discussion for the purposes of her MA research. I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet.

N My name is _____. I give permission for Louise Hall to use what I say in today's discussion for the purposes of her MA research. I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet.

D My name is _____. I give permission for Louise Hall to use what I say in today's discussion for the purposes of her MA research. I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet.

L Perhaps we could talk about what kind of singing activities any of you are involved in sort of either formally or informally. When do you sing?

D I sing most days but usually in the privacy of my own home. Both with the children, especially E who's 22 months old and have done with each of the children. I tend to put some music on in the kitchen and just sing along to that either when the children have gone to bed or throughout the day time. But then I've also sung with the church choir as well.

V I sing every day. I sing all the time in the car. I can't sing but I sing along to tapes. I sing particularly the chapel CDs and other CDs that are... I do listen to music on its own sometimes just music but I do sing along then as well as in church which I love but I have to say I can't sing for other people to listen to.

C I sing at home sometimes it depends I often do it when I'm ironing I make a loud noise so I have to be careful with that and I sing in church with everyone else I sing solos from time to time.

V Beautifully I have to add.

C Thank you.

N I sing mostly along with the congregation at church services. Sometimes I sing in the car same as V to worship tapes and things like that. The very first time I sang...Do you want to hear this?

L Yeah please

N The very first time I remember singing was actually the first time I sang was probably Sunday School or something like that but I remember singing at the cinema on a Saturday morning

V Oh yes I did too!

N Yes. It was congregational singing and it was we used to sing all sorts of things. That was my first sort of memory of actually singing in a big group and it was a lot of fun

V You've sparked my memory because sixpence every Saturday morning matinee performance I used to go and we'd sing along to doesn't matter whether it was Tarzan and we sang. I also sing when I go to anything like concerts or... Not football matches - I don't go there. I do sing when there's an event of any sort. I do like to sing with a lot of other people. Cos then I'm drowned out and I do enjoy it. I can sing louder.

C Sing along with the last night of the proms

V Oh yes

N we went a few weeks ago to, not Peckforton

L Cholmondley?

N Cholmondley, that's right.

L So do you think that there is something special about communal singing then?

N Makes you feel like you're part of something else. That you're one with a lot of other people.

Murmurs of agreement

V I think that singing on your own anyway, like to a tape uplifts me. And if I'm down for any reason or upset for any reason and I turn it on I can be uplifted

C Yes. It is a physical exercise as well which also helps to lift you

V You breathe more

C You should do

V Well I do

C I'm finding it more difficult as I get older. No seriously, I can't sing long phrases any more. I just can't do it.

N But you've sung professionally, haven't you?

C No, no only as an amateur, but I sang with professionals. I sang with professionals in an opera group. I've sung in choirs

N What's special about that? Is there something special about being part of a group?

C Oh yes I mean the rehearsals are great fun, great fun. I sang in chorus then I got a few small parts. It's good actually I never knew I enjoyed performing particularly on my own on a stage you know doing a part. I thought I'd get too terrified to even do it but actually although you're terrified, it is exhilarating with an orchestra and all those people out there you can't really see them but you know they're there. I loved it. I did it for several years.

V I've just remembered. I used to do tap-dancing and ballet from 5 to 11. we used to do a show twice a year and we used to sing. Oh we did 'Over the Rainbow' once and things like that and I remember singing with all the other little things tap-dancing as well as singing. I'd forgotten all about that.

C We've always sung in school though. I always went to schools that had singing which was always good. I can remember doing a little show when I was about 5. I don't remember much at all you know from that age: "Wilhelmina is plump and round" We did little actions and we had little Dutch caps on. We didn't have clogs on of course - we had plimsolls. But it's funny isn't it how things come back?

D It's funny cos as you're saying about your first memory of music. I can remember I must have only been 3 at most cos we still lived in Wolverhampton. Playing tapes and dancing and singing and pretending to be a pop star. And I couldn't sing and I can't sing and I can't hold a tune and things. I like singing as part of a group and that's why it's mainly in the kitchen I only sing on my own or with the children but I remember playing that game and singing and singing and singing all the time and that was all I ever did and all I ever wanted to do. In fact at toddler group this morning one of the children at the very end as we were tidying up was making up a song she was just singing literally singing what she was doing She was kicking a ball and so she was singing about kicking a ball and I was talking to my mum I said I remember doing that I remember just singing everything that you were doing throughout the day. It's in children I think as well isn't it? It's just sort of there.

L So do you think that there is something intrinsic about us as human beings that sort of...

D That makes you just want to sing. Yes I do.

N There are great memories in singing, Music has a huge potential for evoking things from the past. when we were at, we had a youth club of teenagers, young teenagers. We used to go over to (...) for the week's camp. One of the things we had to do every year: there was a tea shop above the Post Office and we had our last night's fish and chip supper in this tea shop but it became a tradition before we had our fish and chips to sing for the people around the Post Office and the tea shop and we always used to sing "All in the April Evening". I mean these days you'd be singing some modern stuff but we sang the anthem "All in the April Evening" and every year they asked us to sing that for them and I cannot hear now "All in the April Evening" without going back to (...) and picturing the scene seeing the sea shimmering in the distance and so on. A very powerful and evocative memory in that song.

L Why do you think that might be?

N I think music has the ability to bypass normal sort of reasoning processes. Somehow it actually evokes something that's deeper within us something really deep down in our psyche, in our being.

C I still have a problem listening to opera

N Do you?

C Cos that was something P and I did a lot. We went to Covent Garden, the London Colosseum, Glyndebourne, all over the place. So some things are still tricky but I'm making myself I think don't be silly you can do this and I've got DVDs as well: for me wonderful operas and I can do those but if I listen then that's a different thing because I want to join in and that makes it I don't know somehow more emotional for me but I love it, I just love that sort of music

D It's funny isn't it cos there's a flip side as well. Cos if there's any sort of music I don't like: I don't like Country and Western and I don't like The Carpenters. That's because of memories of my childhood and my parents arguing - it's what my dad used to listen to. I always used to find I liked sort of pop, happy music and they're quite depressing, aren't they? Low sort of tones to them, kind of thing. And I always think that if anybody, particularly when I was about 20 years old, said "Do you like this by The Carpenters?" I'd think "Don't play it! Don't play it!" I think as well cos they're the sort of songs that go over and over in your mind aren't they? So there's the flip side of it as well: when it can, like you say, evoke bad memories as well; all those emotions, like you say, with it as well.

L So it's about an emotional response not necessarily a positive response. It's that just clicking into say an emotional core like Nic was saying something deeper.

D I wouldn't particularly link a certain song to a certain incident - it was just the feelings of that time kind of thing; a depressing sort of theme to it.

C Going back to Country and Western: I went to the younger of my brothers' funeral. I hadn't seen him for years and they played Country and Western music. And that was a whole part of him of course that I never knew. Strange. And I thought well this is strange.

N Growing up in the 60s, of course, with pop music, it's almost natural to sing you'd hear things on the radio as it was in those days. particularly when the Beatles came along it was a totally different type of music. It's music you just cannot help but sing to it and you know even today say if there's a tune that sparks up on the radio again it takes me back to that time. my claim to fame is not many people know this that me and a guy called _____ at school were the original Everly Brothers tribute band and we used to go round to, er, to sort of, the working men's clubs as it was in those days doing Everly Brothers stuff and now I could probably sing all the Everly Brothers songs at the drop of a hat. And that's another thing about a song it stays with you. You forget prose, you forget other things but actually once words are into a song, somehow you can't forget them, can you?

D Even a song like S put on some 80s music the other week at home and we were laughing and saying do you remember this? And you think I didn't really know this song then all of a sudden you'd be listening and you start singing along to it and you think I didn't pay any attention to it at the time.

L And, sort of, with older people who are sometimes getting...losing quite a lot of their of active memory. Then playing songs that reactivates and that's very interesting.

V That's exactly what happened on Sunday this week when I took Auntie. And _____ in particular is quite senile. You can smile and speak to her - lovely lady who's the friend of my aunt. You know, they don't hold proper conversations but they have a group called Three's Company - a male voice and 2 female voices _____ and they sang all the songs obviously of people who were 90 and 80 going right back: war etc, prewar and _____ was singing all the words and it wasn't just mouthing cos she wouldn't but she was singing all the words to these songs. And Auntie was remembering them but she wasn't singing because she was a bit depressed about my aunt. But the older people in the wheelchairs and so on some of them were singing these words They must be 90, 80, 70 these people and they were singing these words not loudly but you could see that they see that they were singing the actual words, so it is there.

C My friend's husband has dementia. A few years ago I said oh they love singing. Have you tried music and singing? Yes _____, but when they keep singing the same thing over and over for the rest of the day it's a bit trying.

V It must be trying but they loved this.

C There are groups aren't there?

V These were dedicated to going a lot to older groups because they know. They know the value of music to them. And even though things were going on around them and it wasn't the same sort of captive audience like at a concert or anything it still was important you know to them. Actually it was totally enjoyable. Even though we were in our little corner under a broly talking to them about family it mattered that they were singing these songs.

N A lot of sort of local history and keeping traditions alive have been songs we used to do that there used to be the local folk singer who would sing about things that happened in the village and they carried on in for generations.

L Do you think that still exists to any extent?

N I don't know I suppose modern technology has replaced that to a degree. There are folk singers still around.

V My 6 year old granddaughter can sing every song from Frozen. Every song.

D Es not far behind her

V Honestly I went to see Frozen with my 2 grandchildren (...) When these songs came on you know I've forgotten them "Let it go" that's right. You suddenly were aware of this cinema mostly full of children who'd got adults with them were all singing with this you know and apparently they now have a singalong film - I've never heard of it before. But they are specifically...

N Mamma Mia

D And that's a huge thing

C Even men who don't admit to liking it actually know all the tunes

D And again that's a communal thing. It's done specifically to get them singing together, isn't it?

V I'm thrilled to bits that this Frozen film has gone world wide cos it's based on a Norwegian folk tale. They're coming out with these names and I'm thinking oh great then I won't have any difficulty explaining our Norwegian heritage. It's absolutely super.

C I enjoy singing to older people. I am an older person. I'm probably older than some of the congregation/of the audience.

V C you wouldn't believe it.

C I know. Of course not. But I've done it. I did it actually last month. And I've done it in previous years. My friend runs 2 days of sessions for older people. They come at half ten and have a coffee and they do flower arranging whatever whatever. Somebody talks to them or shows them slides and then I've sung a few times and it gives me a chance to sing the older songs you know that I used to know. And of course the Sound of Music was a great blessing. No I really enjoy that. Gives me a chance to sort of let off steam a bit. I really enjoy it.

D It is funny though cos I have thought several times about when you go somewhere and hear live music then it doesn't seem to matter what kind of music it is because you just you get real pleasure don't you from seeing other people singing as well and that's something I always find really interesting. You might go to a show that's not perhaps not the type of music you would choose to listen to at home but because you're there you're captivated by it almost aren't you?

C Yes the colour, the movement, the lights.

D The emotion that comes from other people singing as well.

V There's nothing more wonderful than having the experience of being in a live audience. You can watch a recording and so on but when you've been there, there is something different. I don't know what it is.

D If it's a concert or a show or you know a whole theatre production. It doesn't matter what kind it is you can swept along with the emotions.

V You've been there and you were there and you're part of it, as it were, albeit passive in that sense.

N It does bring people together doesn't it? These TV programmes that Gareth Malone has: The Choir.

C Oh wonderful.

N A load of kids first of all. Kids who would think it pretty uncool to sing normally. He put them all together and they were absolutely bowled over. But actually it changes almost the whole atmosphere of their life. And then he's done it with companies and all sorts.

L Why do you think that might be?

C I think we like to sing, if we're really honest. I think we do like to sing.

N It's tapping into kind of another dimension in people's lives. You know we live in a very material world normally and I think singing and music is from another dimension almost. It almost gives us an experience of another world and I think for those kids, those deprived kids in that school: number 1 it gave them a worth that they were valued that they could sing and number 2 it gave them a platform I guess as well and number 3 they were part of something bigger than themselves.

C A sense of achievement.

V It's done internationally isn't it? I have seen, I've been to 3 now. Uganda has got a school which was a music school as soon as you say that you think of our elitist music schools where people who are, who can and do play music and so on. These children are from poor backgrounds and they come over by sponsorship and so on and so forth. but they have wonderful dreams of what they can do when in fact they've got nothing but this music and singing together has taken them to you know England and wherever else they go and you can see them standing there sometimes singing in English, a lot in their own language and their lives are alright you know they are actually living a real life. It's wonderful. And to know that somebody somewhere is actually helping them through an education just because they're from a poor background and teaching them singing. It's wonderful, absolutely wonderful.

N One of, is it Coca Cola's greatest advert was "I'd like to teach the world to sing". That captured the imagination of people didn't it? And I think if I remember the advert is started off with one person singing and then people joining in.

L You've talked a lot about positive aspects of singing and listening to singing. Have any of you had any experience when you've either been asked to sing or had to sing where it's not necessarily been positive?

C Yes, singing exams. I failed Grade 8.

V Oh C.

C No seriously the very first one I went up to the royal whatever it is behind the Albert Hall and there were all these children running around playing their flutes, tuning their fiddles that was ooh you know. I'd only been singing a short time you know, learning to sing a short time and of course these professors that take the exams don't suffer fools gladly and I remember he played a chord, said sing the middle one I don't want to hear you singing the other notes he said loudly. Things like that. I came out of there worse than I went in I did actually pass as I say until I got Grade 8 but that was partly because it was too difficult to get to the pianist often enough with work and children. And because she lived a long way away it was my first singing tutor's daughter who lived in Wimbledon and I lived in Leightonstone so he drove us there. So you can imagine I didn't have enough rehearsal and then after that I didn't continue because I was expecting Neil. And then I didn't sing for a while at all actually so that was terrifying

V Did you think that failing the exam actually made you feel I don't want to do it again?

C No no no no no. I didn't enjoy the exams. Because after not liking it there I went to somebody's house. Well if you've got a biggish voice as you learn to sing it gets bigger and you know that everyone around can hear you so that's also a bit traumatic. No I passed them all except Grade 8. That was 4 5 6 7. So that was horrible.

N Just thinking about that question. I've never been in that situation but I think our experiences will colour the type of music we do sing. I was thinking about Jewish music particularly. A lot of it is in minor keys and very sad because of the centuries out of their homeland and been treated so badly but that's actually surfaced in the type of songs they

sing: very mournful and sad. There's a verse in the bible, in the Old Testament, when the Jews were in captivity in Babylon: "How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?"

V And then Boney M gets hold of it and sings "By the waters of Babylon". And all of a sudden the whole world is singing scripture and singing what these people you know.

C They like the tune. They didn't really know what they were singing.

V I'm sure they didn't C but it resonated somewhere. Because it actually hit the charts.

D Like you say you're singing the words, aren't you? I grew up that sort of era as a child and we had that album. In fact my dad I think thought I was a child genius because I could tell him what song was coming on next. He didn't realise it was because we'd played it so continuously. So what's next? And I'd tell him and he'd go, "That's right! That's right!" But even so my family weren't Christians at that time but we grew up singing that and sort of the words like we said before stay with you don't they and you start to think oh so now I get that where that's come from.

C I think that music helps you to remember words. I found opera helped, you know, singing. I found I could remember the words better than if somebody said learn this part and speak it.

D That's why we sing with the children as well a lot of the time. That's why they enjoy singing, don't they? It's easy for them to practise sounds and words.

V That's why children's choruses have always been a teaching medium. You know, "Matthew, Mark, Luke and John". If you sing that to a tune the children sing it and sing it and sing it. And then yeah I was reading Don Carson and he was saying when he was a child at Sunday School and he's a professor now probably 70s a high professor of theology and Greek and so on. And he was saying he knew the names of the patriarchs - you know the 12 patriarchs of Israel - and the disciples of Jesus without a shadow of doubt all his life because he sang them in a chorus at Sunday School and they stuck. And later on in life when he took it up he suddenly realised he had this wealth of knowledge from singing choruses.

C I like the little ones like "Jesus wants us for a sunbeam".

N You think of how all those songs last as well. I'm thinking of nursery rhymes. Ring a ring of roses was all about the Black Death, wasn't it? And yet how many centuries later the kids are still singing it.

V And we're still singing it.

D You hear stories of people who've been isolated for many years but they're the kind of things that keep them going, aren't they? Those songs they learnt when they were children .

L Well some of the songs from the oppression in South Africa - that's what springs to mind. A lot of the African anthems that come out of that struggle.

V What about the Negro spirituals that's a whole wealth of... and they even had in them they were giving secret messages to people: if you go tonight there's nobody on guard and they were singing a spiritual about going to heaven over the waters I think. I didn't know that for a long time when I knew it I thought it's amazing what people can do with music.

L (I think) Oh yes about 28 minutes

N Can we carry on?

L About 2 minutes.

N We're only just getting warmed up

V Well you know. Sorry. It's probably totally out of kilter. You know when I was a youngster growing up George VI was an icon, a role model . I wasn't a Christian we didn't go to church oh I went to Sunday School occasionally and when he died and his funeral and they played what's his favourite hymn? Liverpool sing it - it's just gone from my head

D You'll never walk alone?

V You'll never walk alone His favourite hymn. They sing at remembrance every year now and I'll never sing that without having in my mind this picture of George VI in black seeing his daughter Elizabeth off I mean It didn't make a lot of impact then but now I remember it.

N Abide with me?

V Abide with me - that's the one. And it was his very sad. And they sang it at his funeral. Of course they were showing him. That's the picture I've got, you know. And I just thought it was so sad I think that was when it was before my mother died and so on so to me that was the first understanding of death and you know cos he died before she came back and they were showing this picture we didn't have a television or anything I just saw these pictures So for me "Abide with me" takes me back to that memory, you know.

C That can happen.

N Some of the big memories I suppose of singing in a group is singing in huge groups. When you're at some of these big bible groups, 5000 people singing together is something really very very special isn't it. Your own voice you can't hear.

V You can't hear - and you're so glad you can't.

D You can sing as loud as you want!

N There is something hugely powerful about it.

V Very very emotive, or emotional I don't know what adjective but very very emotional. I remember the time I was going through my 3 and half years of battle and I was at Spring Harvest Skegness and we were suddenly singing and the words meant so much for me. I suddenly was aware the tears were streaming down my face and I knew I would never be alone and it was just an emotional release which all those voices around me had taken me you know.

N I guess thinking about the power of sort of communal singing as well can be used for the wrong purposes, can't they? I'm thinking of Hitler and his rallies and getting the youth, the Nazi youth to sing. They were consolidating themselves for a purpose but not a good purpose. He used power of song.

C The feeling of belonging.

N Yes, that's right.

V Do you know what? You know they showed a programme about North Korea and this special university that they've got. Elitist, very elitist. It's the only time they'd shown a group of these young men, all men and they were singing songs of their homeland, North Korea and they were singing and marching and it made me think immediately of the Nazi war years and this was this was this year. Earlier this year. And I thought, it just made me think of the way you can influence minds by singing political words in you know just what's the word...indoctrinating, absolute indoctrination.

C Well the Americans army marched to certain types of music if you could call it music. It's rhythmical.

V Trampling out, trampling out - the Grapes of Wrath wasn't it? Oh yeah. Do you remember?

N Was it?

V For somebody who can't sing, does sing because she likes to sing, especially when there's 5000 people around me. I think it's so worth it.

N That's another thing. If you can't sort of bang on the right note normally. If you're singing on your own and the tune is out when you're with people actually you zone into them don't you. You probably do sing in tune when you're singing with a lot of people.

V You know when we went to Israel? And we had that little group and we were singing and praying for the peace of Jerusalem as long as I stood by D and J. I could sing in tune and I knew I was singing in tune. And I was singing not in the low voice, but the other voice because they were both singing and I could sing with them. Cos they were there - they were singing it right.

L So you can sing?

V I enjoy singing, I really do. If I were to sing on my own I'm quite sure I hit the wrong note.

C Oh I can do that as well. You think you know the tune but you don't actually.

D But you do need that confidence, don't you? To try. It's like a confidence you get to go that bit more, a bit higher, or a bit sort of I don't know....

N And I guess the resonance of each note, the wave pattern or something must be filling the room if you're with a lot of people so maybe when your voice comes out it actually...

V Goes with that, I'm sure.

L N, do you feel that one of the difficulties is that on the whole, that women sing together more? Just as from observationally, particularly if you think about in schools, primary schools, where a lot of singing goes on? Usually you get more women singing. In a lot of church congregations - we've talked about church singing - there's very often more women. So have you ever felt that because of the timbre and tone of your voice that that's a restriction or do you just think well I'll just go for it, it doesn't matter?

N Oh well yes, I just go for it anyway whatever people think about my voice I go for it. But I do understand I think that actually community singing particularly is regarded as a bit of a not a good thing from a man's point of view. Is that it? I don't know if that's right or not. But is it sort of a turn off for men to get involved in community singing?

C I think most of the men on Gareth's Malone's things were a bit, "Ooh, I can't sing!" They sort of backed away, didn't they? He had to really encourage them.

N Maybe it's a feminine thing rather than a man thing. I don't know.

V But I in my youth as you would know I had a record player. The old sort of record player so I've got vinyls at home 33s and 78s. I've got a bulk of them about this big and they're male voice praise, accompanied and unaccompanied. The Welsh male voice praise, the this, the that and I love them and I listened and listened and listened to them and it's so uplifting to hear them. So there must have been a time when in history that male voices were you know up in Lancashire there was - the miners and the Welsh, the Welsh male voice praises are absolutely I've still got them they're still on vinyl.

D You used to hear like you say them but you didn't ever hear at that time women's choirs. It was all male voice choirs. I remember that when I was younger but like you say at this time it seems a bit more of a feminine thing.

V And yet there are boy bands.

N Yes, it's a bit uncool for men for men to sing. Maybe that's just a fashion thing or a cultural thing.

V But there are more boy bands than girl bands.

D And boy bands are more successful, aren't they as well? That's the thing. But that's because of female listeners I guess though isn't it?

N If only I'd have stuck to the Everly Brothers tribute band!

D It's not too late! It's never too late.

V That's what they say: it's never too late.

C I sang a bit of the Beatles when I was teaching and we did a sort of pantomime-y sort of thing and dug out music from various places. So that was quite fun. I had my hair greased back.

D Faye in Year 3 went to the Beatles Museum. They did about the Beatles at school here. They did about the Beatles.

C Well it was strange to me cos I was already in my 20s It was strange that some of the children don't know what we're talking about.

V Yes but the reverse is true. Sometimes you know with the young people and they talk about all these latest bands I think of the names and I think...

C Oh I don't know any of them.

V I'm way out of here. You don't even know the name of the latest group you know. It does work in reverse.

L So if you were to conclude, what, just thinking about what we've just sort of discussed, could you, could all of you simply give me an answer to: how does singing make you feel?

C Great. Good, usually. Yeah. Better.

V I think man without music is not a man. I mean man in the generic term, human beings because you can't, you need it, it's part of, I don't know spiritual side, I've no idea. But without music, life wouldn't be half worth living, would it?

N A lot of joy in life comes from song and singing and being part of something like that. I think, I think if it was compulsory in schools it would make school life a lot better as well and maybe we should be a national, a nation of singers that had got together a lot more sound, song. I think it would change our world.

Murmurs of agreement

C I agree

V I agree with you. Without music and to axe it out of school...

D I think you're right. I can't imagine not hearing music and singing. I think, to describe it: it makes me feel uplifted. It's sort of like you say if you're feeling down or you feel that there's too much going on, too many things to think about, and I start to do some jobs and have some music on and sing and it just feels like oh yeah I can do it, it'll be ok. It's uplifting I think

L Thank you all so much

Appendix 4

**RESEARCH ETHICS APPLICATION FORM
POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS / STAFF**

Return to: educationethics@chester.ac.uk
Faculty of Education and Children's Services,
University of Chester, Parkgate Road, Chester, CH1 4BJ

Section 1 - APPLICANT INFORMATION

Name of Applicant: Louise Hall

Address:

Contact details

Telephone:
Email:

SECTION 2 – PROJECT INFORMATION

Project Title: **It's the singer, not the song: a critical investigation into perceptions of the benefits of singing in daily life**
(working title)

What is the purpose of your research?	Please select one:
MASTERS DISSERTATION	X

EdD / PhD THESIS	
OTHER POSTGRADUATE	
STAFF – RESEARCH COUNCIL/OTHER EXTERNAL FUNDER	
STAFF – INDEPENDENT/NON-EXTERNALLY FUNDED	

RESEARCHER(S) AND SUPERVISOR(S)

RESEARCHER(S)

<i>SURNAME</i>	<i>FIRST NAME</i>	<i>PHONE</i>	<i>EMAIL</i>
Hall	Louise	01829 752922 07717 488352	roughground66@gmail.com

PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR(S) (*where applicable*) NOT APPLICABLE

<i>TITLE & SURNAME</i>	<i>FIRST NAME</i>	<i>PHONE</i>	<i>EMAIL</i>
Mrs Fryett	Janice	0799365184	j.fryett@chester.ac.uk

IF A STUDENT APPLICATION (MA / EdD / PhD):

Have you discussed your application with your supervisor:

YES / NO

If no, please explain why not:

Do you have a completed and signed RO1 form for your proposed study?

YES / NO

FUNDING DETAILS

NAME OF FUNDER	n/a
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PLEASE PROVIDE APPROXIMATE DATES FOR STARTING AND COMPLETING RESEARCH

			(dd/mm/y)		(dd/mm/yy)
		From:	11.06.14.	To:	25.07.14

ANTICIPATED PROJECT OUTPUTS (LIST ALL THAT APPLY):

(Eg. Thesis, journal article, conference presentation, book chapter)

Thesis

RESEARCH PROJECT PRECIS

Please include a summary of your research proposal – including topic, aims, relevant literature accessed, sample, methodology and timescale. This should clearly demonstrate your awareness of ethical issues throughout.

Having led a singing group at the beginning of this year where part of the aim of the project was to find out how/if singing affected the participants, I propose to investigate the themes raised in further detail.

The aims of the study include: looking at perceived physical and psycho-social benefits of singing in a group; considering any impact on inter- and intra-personal relationships; reflecting on any perceived impact on well-being.

Relevant literature I have studied so far includes: medical studies investigating possible links between improved respiration in patients with impaired lung function and singing (Lord et al. 2010) - it should be noted however that no participants will be from medical settings; studies on the psycho-social benefits of singing (Chong 2010); educational studies looking at pupil progress and well-being (Welch 2011); papers on how music, and singing in particular, impacts on everyday life (Kerchner and Abril 2009). My reference list (as of 30.05.14.) is attached below.

I propose to send out a short questionnaire to a range of adults and, from this, select 3 small groups to interview: those who actively participate in singing activities; those who have, for example, taken part in one of my singing courses, but don't sing regularly; non-singers. Questions will include name, age group, gender, level of participation in singing activities and perceptions about own health or sense of wellbeing in connection to singing. It will be clear that participants may, if they so choose, complete the questionnaire entirely anonymously, although it will be useful for my research to have some personal contact details so that I can form the 3 focus groups.

Some participants would need to be willing to talk to me in more depth about their personal experience of singing. As this may reveal difficult memories for some, or prompt unexpectedly emotional responses, for example when recalling a time when singing (or not singing) made them upset, I will ensure that all participants feel safe and secure prior to our conversation, partly by choosing a venue known to the group/individual and also by inviting all participants to bring along a third party for support if should so wish. I will also ensure that

they know that they can withdraw or choose not to answer a question at any point. They will understand that any detail that I refer to in my study will be anonymous. This will also be the case, of course, if any relevant medical detail is disclosed.

I propose to record free conversations with the group talking about singing and the impact it has on them as individuals and as a group. I will have a selection of themes/questions I would like to cover, but it is not essential. Data will be stored as sound files and transcribed (anonymously) for the purposes of my study.

I have attached a Participant Information Form and a Consent Form, which will be discussed with all participants before the focus group/interviews to ensure clarity of understanding.

The research will be completed by 25.07.14.

SECTION 3 - ACCESS AND APPROVALS

WILL SUBJECTS BE IDENTIFIED FROM INFORMATION HELD BY ANOTHER PARTY?

(eg. A headmaster, or a local authority)

	Y E S		NO	
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If YES please describe the arrangements you intend to make to gain access to this information including, where appropriate, which multi centre research ethics committee or local research ethics committee will be applied to. *(No more than 150 words)*

I am going to ask permission from my son's Head Teacher to either put a link on the school website to my questionnaire or to distribute hard copies to parents and teachers.

OTHER APPROVALS REQUIRED *Has permission to gain access to another location, organization etc. been obtained? (Eg Local Authorities, etc). Copies of letters of approval to be provided when available.*

	Y E S		NO		<u>NOT APPLICABLE</u>	
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(If YES, please specify from whom and attach a copy. If NO, please explain when this will be obtained.)

IS THIS PROTOCOL BEING SUBMITTED TO ANOTHER ETHICS COMMITTEE, OR HAS IT BEEN PREVIOUSLY SUBMITTED TO AN ETHICS COMMITTEE?

		<u>NO</u>		
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(If YES, please provide name and location of the ethics committee and the result of the application.)

HAVE YOU ATTACHED TO THIS APPLICATION A PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS?

		NO		(If NO, please explain.)
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HOW WILL INFORMED CONSENT BE OBTAINED/RECORDED?

<u>Signed consent form</u>		<u>Recorded verbal consent</u>	
<u>Implied by return of survey</u>		<u>Other</u> (Please specify):	

HAVE YOU ATTACHED TO THIS APPLICATION A COPY OF THE CONSENT FORM?

		NO		(If NO, please explain.)
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SECTION 4 – CONFIDENTIALITY AND DATA HANDLING

WILL THE RESEARCH INVOLVE:

▪ complete anonymity of participants	X
▪ anonymised samples or data	X
▪ de-identified samples or data	X
▪ subjects being referred to by pseudonym in any publication arising from the research?	
▪ any other method of protecting the privacy of participants? Please describe:	

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING METHODS OF ASSURING CONFIDENTIALITY OF DATA WILL BE IMPLEMENTED? Please tick all that apply.

• data to be kept in locked filing cabinets	X
• data and identifiers to be kept in separate, locked filing cabinets	
• access to computer files to be available by password only	X
• other (please describe)	

ACCESS TO DATA (Tick as many as apply)

Access by named researchers only	X	Stored at the Faculty of Education, University of Chester	
Access by people other than named researcher(s) <i>Please explain who and for what purpose:</i>		Stored at another site <i>Please explain where and for what purpose:</i>	
Other <i>Please explain:</i>			

HANDLING OF DATA

Please state how you intend to manage the data you have collected once your research has been completed.

Paperwork will be shredded.

Computer data will be deleted

SECTION 5 – MONITORING AND STANDARDS

DESCRIBE HOW THE PROJECT WILL BE MONITORED TO ASSURE ETHICAL STANDARDS ARE MAINTAINED

I have discussed possible ethical issues of confidentiality, methodology, vulnerability of participants, researcher bias with my supervisor. All documentation is regularly submitted to and checked by my supervisor and we have regular email contact and face to face meetings to ensure standards are maintained.

HAVE YOU MADE YOURSELF FAMILIAR WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE DATA PROTECTION ACT?

		NO		<i>If NO, please explain.</i>
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HAVE YOU READ THE FACULTY LONE WORKER POLICY?

		NO		<i>If NO, please explain.</i>
--	--	----	--	-------------------------------

PLEASE DESCRIBE BRIEFLY ANY PRECAUTIONS/PROCEDURES TO PROTECT THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF RESEARCHERS, PARTICIPANTS AND OTHERS ASSOCIATED WITH THE PROJECT

None anticipated.

DECLARATIONS

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT APPLICATIONS MADE BY POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS ARE SIGNED BY BOTH STUDENT AND SUPERVISOR.

- The information contained herein is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, accurate.
- I have read the University's ethics guidelines, and accept responsibility for the conduct of the procedures set out in the attached application in accordance with the guidelines, and any other condition laid down by the University and the Faculty of Education and Children's Services Ethics Committee.
- I have attempted to identify all risks related to the research that may arise in conducting this research and acknowledge my obligations and the rights of the participants.
- I and my co-investigators or supporting staff have the appropriate, experience and facilities to conduct the research set out in the attached application and to deal effectively with any emergencies and contingencies related to the research that may arise.
- **I understand that NO research work involving human participants or data can commence until FULL ethical approval has been given by the Faculty of Education Ethics Committee.**

Signed (applicant):	Date:
Louise E Hall	30.05.14.

Signed (supervisor) – where applicable *Janice L. Fryett* **Date: 30.05.14.**

Appendix 5

PARTICIPATION INFORMATION SHEET

I, Louise Hall, am writing a dissertation for my MA (Education) on the perceived benefits of singing . I am interested in when people sing, how it makes them feel and whether or not they perceive any positive effects in their daily lives. I would like to find out if early experiences of singing (for example at school) have had an impact and, specifically, if organised singing, perhaps in a choir or attending a course, is wholly positive. The aims of the study include: looking at perceived physical and psycho-social benefits of singing in a group; considering any impact on inter- and intra-personal relationships; reflecting on any perceived impact on well-being.

The research is being supervised by Janice Fryett at the University of Chester.

In this study, you will be asked to complete a short questionnaire asking about your participation in singing activities and how you feel about singing. This should take no longer than 10 minutes. I will be selecting a few people to interview further about their singing experience. This will take place before 25th July 2014 and conversations will be conducted in small groups at our mutual convenience. These conversations will be recorded and then transcribed.

You may decide to stop being a part of the research study at any time without explanation. You have the right to ask that any data you have supplied to that point be withdrawn/destroyed. You have the right to omit or refuse to answer or respond to any question that is asked of you.

There are no known risks or benefits for you in this study, although it is possible that recollection of a time when singing was difficult or very emotive in some way may prompt an unexpectedly emotional response. If this is the case, you may choose not to answer a question or not to continue with the conversation at any time.

Your name and details will never be revealed and all identifying details will be anonymised in the written paper.

The dissertation will be submitted to the University of Chester by October 2014. All personal or identifiable data will be anonymised and your specific permission will be sought for particular quotes.

For further information, please contact:

Louise Hall

Janice Fryett

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

PROJECT TITLE

It's the singer, not the song: a critical investigation into perceptions of the benefits of singing in daily life

By signing below, you are agreeing that: (1) you have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet, (2) questions about your participation in this study have been answered satisfactorily and (3) you are taking part in this research study voluntarily (without coercion)

Participant's name (printed)

Participant's signature

Date

Name of person obtaining consent

Signature of person obtaining consent