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I have a voice but I just can't sing: a narrative investigation of singing and social anxiety

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The purpose of this study was to investigate adult singing anxieties arising within the context of a music methods course. Participants were three female elementary education majors who reported suffering from anxiety related to singing. Anxiety toward singing was evidenced through observations and participants' descriptions of cognitive, somatic, behavioral, and affective symptoms. Several themes emerged from data collected over a 10-week period through participant journals, interviews, and field texts. Singing anxiety only seemed to arise within a social context, where participants seemed concerned with the possibility that they would be personally evaluated by others. The self-presentational theory of social anxiety was supported by these cases. All participants traced the roots of their anxiety to negative experiences in a school music program. Music teachers and family members seemed to have the greatest influence in shaping their beliefs about singing ability and singer identity.

Introduction

Singing is an integral component of teaching music at the elementary level. Therefore, elementary music methods and fundamentals courses for preservice elementary teachers (called *generalists* hereafter) devote a substantial portion of class time to singing (Gauthier & McCrary, 1999; Frego & Abril, 2003). Objectives in these courses and related textbooks often focus on the development of vocal and song-teaching skills, with the hope that singing will be integrated in the classroom (e.g., Lewis, 2001; Anderson & Lawrence, 2004). However, anxieties toward music-making in general, and singing in particular, can prevent these objectives from being achieved. Generalists lacking musical skills and understanding may be ill-prepared to provide their students with music instruction.

Preservice and inservice generalists have been found to be more apprehensive about teaching music than most other school subjects (Mills, 1989; Jeanneret, 1997). Research has found a connection between a teacher's confidence level and the incorporation of musical activities in the classroom (Barry, 1992). Furthermore, a

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teacher's level of competence with a particular subject can serve as a predictor of student learning (Cassidy, 1990). It may be that generalists' perceptions of musical competence have an affect on their instructional decisions to sing or not to sing in the classroom.

Several factors may contribute to the formation of attitudes toward music and its role in the elementary curriculum. Studies support the claim that past music experiences have an affect on an individual's attitude toward music (Gifford, 1993), involvement with music (Bowles, 1991), and desire to teach music (Lundin & Sandberg, 2001). Richards (1999) found that positive or negative musical experiences are often associated with school music. Apfelstadt (1989) reported that generalists, with positive singing experiences in grade school, or whose immediate family members were involved with music, expressed more positive attitudes toward singing. Generalists' experiences with school music have been found to have a positive relationship with their value for music and its role in the classroom (Barry, 1992). Abril and Gault (2005) found a positive relationship between attitude toward past school music experience and value for music instruction in the school curriculum. The aforementioned studies support the notion that past experiences with music serve as predictors of future attitudes and beliefs about music.

Asmus (1986) examined children's beliefs about success and failure in music. He found that they attribute success or failure in music to talent more than to effort. Females were found to make more of these ability attributions than males. This belief, thought to become more pronounced in older individuals, can potentially lead to complaisant students, who believe they were not born to sing or play an instrument. Generalists' musical development in a methods or fundamentals course might be hampered by these notions.

In a survey of preservice primary teachers' beliefs about talent versus training in relation to singing, 51% of respondents believed they could become 'good' singers with training and 70% believed they could make some improvements (Richards, 1999). Attitudes and beliefs about singing and general musical ability have been found to remain fairly stable, even after taking courses in music fundamentals and/or methods (Gifford, 1993; Richards, 1999). These studies suggest that a substantial portion of generalists believe singing cannot be learned, and a methods course may have no affect on these views. The belief that musical ability cannot be improved through education could plausibly lead to anxiety in participating in a music methods course.

Anxiety

Leary and Kowalski (1995) assert that anxiety entails four distinct experiences reflecting cognitive, somatic, behavioral, and affective symptoms. People who suffer from anxiety are apt to think about or dwell upon the action or phenomenon causing anxiety. They are also likely to experience somatic symptoms such as heart rate increases, palpitations, hives, sweaty palms, dry mouth and the like. These

individuals often act to escape from the anxiety-causing experience over extended periods of time. Finally, the experience may cause unpleasant feelings, such as depression, anger, or loneliness. An extreme state of anxiety toward some phenomenon is classified as a phobia. This type of anxiety is thought to be 'out of proportion with to the degree of threat that is really present . . . [and] the intense feelings of anxiety cannot be reasoned away' (Leary & Kowalski, 1995, p. 11).

Social anxiety is a fear that arises as a result of a particular social situation. It is evoked by the real or imagined concern that others are evaluating you (Holt *et al*., 1992). The fear of singing in a classroom may be explained by the self-presentational theory of social anxiety, as described by Schlenker and Leary (1982). They assert that anxiety arises from one's motivation to make a desirable impression on another individual or group of people. The level of anxiety arising within the individual is related to the subjective probability that the behavior is likely to occur as desired. In other words, an individual's anxiety is proportional to their perceived level of control over a given situation. For example, if a generalist believes he or she is capable of controlling the vocal mechanism while singing, in a manner acceptable to others, the less likely he or she is to suffer from anxiety when asked to do so in a social setting.

Extant music research supports the case that performance anxiety is heightened when it occurs within a social context. The presence of authorities such as educators or individuals in the peer group can increase anxiety (Hamann, 1982; LeBlanc, 1994). Further, the mere knowledge that someone might be evaluating a performance has been shown to raise anxiety levels in musicians (Brotons, 1994). Research has shown that performing in front of peers causes significantly more anxiety in high school students than doing so alone, or even for authority figures (LeBlanc *et al*., 1997). Richards (1999) found that 95% of preservice generalists sampled, agreed they would be willing to sing along with the radio or a recording, as long as they were alone. Not surprisingly, 80% of participants indicated they would not enjoy teaching a song to their peers. This implies that the social dimension of singing causes the anxiety, not the behavior itself.

The sense that anxiety arises as a result of being out of control over a situation has also been reported to happen in music performance. Senyshyn and O'Neil (2001) conducted in-depth interviews with seven undergraduate students before and immediately after their music recitals. Researchers found that undergraduate musicians associated anxiety with negative performance variables that were out of their control. Many participants described the anxiety as an extraneous entity that occupied a position of power over their musical skills and abilities. Furthermore, anxiety seemed to be exacerbated by the self-perpetuating view of uncontrollability. A certain level of anxiety has been found to be beneficial yet the perceived loss of control can be detrimental (Kokotsaki & Davidson, 2003). Ryan (2004) found that sixth-grade girls were more likely to self-report being nervous about performing in a piano recital than were boys.

Many studies have examined performance anxiety in musicians yet few have studied the nature and roots of anxiety in generalists. Generalists may not attribute musical ability to hard work or practice; therefore, it is plausible they feel incapable of improving their musical skills in a university course. As such, they may suffer from anxiety surrounding music making or teaching music, which in turn, might affect their own students' musical experiences in the future.

The primary purpose of this study was to examine singing anxieties that result from experiences in an elementary music methods course for non-music majors. Specific questions guiding the study included: What is the nature of participants' singing anxiety? What do they attribute as the cause of their musical/singing anxiety? What are their feelings and beliefs surrounding music and singing, and how were those shaped by their lived experience?

Procedures

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe a narrative approach to inquiry as utilizing the stories of people's lived experiences as a way to shed light on a particular phenomenon. These stories are reconstructed memories, shared, interpreted, and reinterpreted by both participant and researcher. This approach to research effectively captures the way in which people view, understand, and make sense of their experiences. Research questions guiding this study seemed to be most effectively examined through narrative inquiry because of the need to construct understanding of the present through participants' reflections and reconstructions of the past. Stories shared by participants could shed light on their current perceptions and feelings. The cases presented here are not meant to be generalized to some larger population; they are presented as a way of better understanding people's views of singing and the situations that contributed to their feelings of anxiety. The findings may serve to support extant research or provide a springboard for discussing possible transfers to other contexts or situations.

Participants

Participants were recruited from an elementary music methods course taught at a large midwestern university in the United States. This course was a requirement for graduation and state teacher licensure. All but one of the students enrolled in the course were female. On the initial class meeting, I asked them to complete a survey to determine the extent of their musical experiences and abilities. One open-ended question asked them to describe anything they would like the instructor to know. As was typical in my experience teaching these courses, a portion of students claimed they had little or no musical talent or ability. Of these students, three expressed serious concerns regarding taking this course because of their fear of singing and general lack of musical ability. These women agreed to serve as participants in the study that unfolded over the period of 10 weeks.

Data collection

Data were collected through three structured interviews, participant journals, and field texts (which included observations of participants in the classroom setting, details of informal conversations, email correspondences, and my interpretations of events). The initial interview questions were developed as informed by my knowledge of the research literature and personal experiences teaching students who suffered from self-reported singing anxiety. Questions served to guide each interview but were not asked in the same order or in exactly the same manner for each participant. Subsequent interview questions were drafted in response to participant-specific issues that arose in prior interviews or journal entries. I sought to establish rapport with participants by beginning each interview with casual conversation, which gradually centered on matters under investigation. To ascertain the trustworthiness of my interpretations, participants were periodically provided with copies of the field texts to read and comment upon. Their comments and suggestions were considered, and occasionally helped to reshape my interpretations of events, stories, or situations. Triangulation was achieved by cross-referencing the field text, journals, and interview transcripts.

Analysis

Data were analyzed by studying the unabridged interview transcripts and participants' writings, as well as my field texts. Responses were then categorized according to their ability to shed light on the various focus issues. At that point, patterns and relationships began to emerge from the data, both within and among participants. Results are presented as individual narrative cases, after which they are discussed collectively.

Results and interpretations

Melissa

Melissa often arrived to class early, engaging herself in conversation with peers who were members of the same elementary education cohort. Twenty-two years old at the time of this investigation, Melissa was one year shy of graduation. On the initial class survey, she reported having 'no ear for music' and admitted being 'uncomfortable singing.' Upon being informed she would be required to teach her peers to sing a song as a part of the course, she claimed to become 'physically ill' and 'uncomfortable.'

Part of the anxiety this assignment caused for her seemed to arise from her inability to determine expectations. She said, 'I just don't know what we should sound like when we sing. Are we supposed to sing like Britney Spears [pop singer]? Or like those people I hear singing in this building [referring to students practicing in the music school]?' Melissa assumed that singing in a formal setting, such as a music school,

was something an individual did by trade or training, not something everyone could do. She explained: 'Professional singers know how to sing by using their high-pitched voices. It is not in my voice to do it. We [she and her peers] are not singers.' Without the ability to know what others expected of her, she was unable to control the impression she desired to make on others. She seemed a bit relieved once I described the expectations and pragmatic uses of singing in the elementary school classroom. Nonetheless, she claimed to continue feeling uncomfortable singing in class, and was 'horrified to have to sing' by herself.

Whenever Melissa sang in the classroom, she seemed to be in a heightened state of self-awareness. She often sang with a grin on her face, occasionally looking side-to-side, as if vigilant of her peers. Discussions with Melissa supported my observations. She said she felt self-conscious whenever the class sang, and was always wondering whether she would be asked to sing alone—the thought of which was enough to produce 'butterflies in [her] stomach.' This was her first time singing in a formal class setting since she was 10 years old.

A series of self-reinforcing experiences in Melissa's childhood contributed to the anxiety she experienced as a university student. She described these experiences:

> As a child I never measured up when I would open my mouth to sing (or try to at least). What made it worse was that my younger sister had a beautiful voice . . . she was always singing around the house and getting praised . . . I was constantly compared to her . . . My family used to tell me I wasn't as good a singer as she was . . . and my brother was much worse than that when referring to my voice . . . to make things worse I was also compared to my poor singing mother who even admitted she was terrible.

Members of her family discouraged her from singing and never attempted to help her improve; rather, they provided a summative judgment of her ability in reference to others.

School music experiences generally conjured up negative memories for Melissa. One 'memorable' event would have a strong impact on her beliefs about singing:

> When I was in sixth-grade we had the option of being in the choir. I wanted to be in [it] so badly—I thought I might be picked despite what my family said about me. For the audition, the teacher went around the room, knelt by each person, and took notes . . . I was terrified as he came to me because I knew it was all or nothing (I remember my heart thumping so loudly) . . . Well, I didn't make the cut . . . and what made it worse was that all my friends did. I was devastated! I quit singing after that because I figured all these people must be right about me—my music teacher was the music expert! That really shattered my musical self-image. Since then I've felt pretty incapable.

In addition to reinforcing suspicions about her singing ability, there was a social dimension to this narrative. Melissa felt as if she had been 'punished for [her] lack of musical ability,' by not being permitted to become a part of the social group. As a result, she felt socially isolated, as all her friends participated and she was 'left out [and] lonely.' Leary and Kowalski (1995) assert that social anxiety is an emotion involved in the avoidance of being rejected.

Melissa attributed the ability to sing to a natural 'gift' or 'talent,' whereas other musical skills could be learned. She explained:

> I didn't realize you could be taught to sing. I just thought you were born with it . . . you can teach me to move my hands—like for piano you walk through the steps and practice [she moves her hands up and down as if she were at a keyboard]. I know that because I took piano lessons—I can do that. But singing is just not the same. You can't really see or feel your voice. How can you teach it?

Melissa's level of anxiety seemed to be dependent on the context in which singing occurred. Singing alone posed no problems; she often sang 'in the shower' or 'in the car.' The presence of others, however, affected her desire to sing. She was keenly aware of her audience:

> I think I'll be able to do it in the classroom when I'm a teacher because I want to work with real little ones . . . When my nieces were young I would sing songs with them and enjoyed it. Now that they're older I no longer sing with them because I feel uncomfortable—I am just so self-conscious. They are old enough to judge, so I just avoid the situation . . . I hate to think of singing in front of the [university] class.

In the last week of the course, as she prepared for her song-teaching project, I asked her to describe how she felt about having to sing. She summed up her views:

> It is helpful that we are singing a lot in class and aren't being judged as we do it. But I just know I can't sing and feel I can't get better at it. It is already in me. I know you tell me that I can sing on pitch—you showed me when we worked together here—but I have a hard time believing that . . . It would have to go over years and times I've been told that I can't. It's not going to happen in this class. I hear what you are saying but it has little effect on me. I have a voice, I can talk and even speak in front of others with no problem, but I just can't sing.

Melanie

At the age of 21, Melanie was a confident and gregarious student. She regularly engaged in classroom discussions, often surfaced as the leader in small group work, and enthusiastically participated in music-making activities. Judging from those behaviors, I was puzzled by her self-reported claim of suffering from singing anxiety. On the initial classroom survey, she indicated to be 'very nervous about having to sing in class.'

Overall, Melanie had a positive attitude toward music. She claimed to listen to music as a stress reliever and as a way to positively enhance her moods. While she enjoyed singing along with music, she admitted, 'I only sing along with my music when it's playing real loud . . . I don't want to hear myself.' As a child, she and her siblings were encouraged to participate in musical activities. Her mother and father used to 'sing around the house and encourage' their kids to 'sing along.' She recalled enjoying those experiences because 'they were so much fun.' She later added that it was different from other experiences singing because she was not being evaluated.

Melanie had no memory of anyone ever commenting upon or providing her with feedback regarding her singing as a young child.

It was in early adolescence that she became aware of what she described as a 'lack of musical ability.' Her first memory of someone judging her singing happened as a fifth-grader auditioning for the school choir. In many ways, her story resembled Melissa's. She described her experience:

> I really wanted to sing in my school choir but we had to try out . . . I remember that I went into the room to sing for the two music teachers who were sitting at a desk with clipboards . . . after I sang something—I don't even remember what it was—I kinda knew I didn't do well. I just remember them cutting me off and saying 'thank you'—like the old cliché. I remember the day they posted the list on the board with all the parts and people's names. I ran up to the sheet—there were a lot of people already there—and my friend said 'you're not there.' I was heartbroken . . . it really hurt my self-esteem regarding my musical ability . . . Of course I wanted to be in the group with my friends too. That was the first time I ever even thought of being judged in music. After all those years, I am going to be judged again, and I'm pretty stressed about it.

She joined the band in high school but recalls struggling to keep pace with her peers. She says, 'playing music was one of the hardest things I've ever tried to do. I cried and cried because I couldn't keep up. I just couldn't get the beat and play the rhythms. I struggled so much.' Singing has proven as challenging a skill. Of her singing at present, she said, 'When the [recorded] music stops, I realize I must be tone deaf or something because I can't sing—the sound is awful! I would love to get better but don't know what to do with my voice . . . I think it's hopeless.' Her lack of successful experiences making music has contributed to her anxiety surrounding singing in the methods course.

The singing itself was not the cause of her anxiety; it was the knowledge that she would be formally judged, based on her ability to sing. She explained:

> I have always been a straight 'A' student and I fear that my problems with music are going to seriously affect my grade in this class. I have major anxiety over not being able to do well on any of our projects or assignments that involve making music, especially singing. It all seems so overwhelming because I know that no matter what I do or how hard I try I won't be able to do it. It's not like another course where I can study and know the material better.

The mere thought of singing before her peers and in front of someone evaluating her for a grade was enough to produce 'sweaty palms.' It seemed to be a combination of factors affecting Melanie. First off, she believed that she had no control in being able to sing. This was compounded by the fact that a 'musical expert' would evaluate her singing and a grade would be assigned. I suspect that the 'peer group' was less of a contributing factor for Melanie than it was for Melissa.

She shared her thoughts on musical ability:

> The ability to make music is something that comes to you when you are really young . . . you just have it or you don't. It's not like other subjects in school because those you can work at and get better. I think sports and music are the same in that

> way—it's an inborn thing. I think teachers can help people with talent get better but if you don't have the raw materials they can't do much for you.

Toward the end of the term, before her song-teaching assignment, I asked Melanie to describe the things she was doing to prepare. She described this process:

> I get all worked up about it and get pretty frustrated because I don't think I'm getting any better. I sing all the time in class . . . and do it more at home; I've even had a friend listen to me and give me a few comments. A few of the things I've learned in class have helped, but it's still a mystery how to get my voice to sound better. I try so hard. I'm using the rubric [created to guide students in the methods course] to ensure I cover all my bases with the assignment. That helps a little because there are certain things I know I can do, like memorize the words . . . it lets me rest a little easier.

Joan

Joan was clearly the oldest student in the class. I never asked her to reveal her age but I estimated she was in her mid- to upper-fifties. As a mother of three and grandmother of two, she was enrolled at the university to live out her 'dream' of becoming an elementary school teacher. She enrolled in the music methods course, which she described as her 'greatest obstacle in the curriculum,' in the last term before her graduation. Joan admittedly postponed enrollment as long as possible and even contacted her advisor to inquire about the possibility of exemption from the course.

In anticipation of the course requirements, she sought information from peers who had already completed the course. Once they informed her that singing was required, she began to experience somatic symptoms of anxiety: 'I spent a few restless nights just thinking about it over and over.' Of the first class meeting, she said, 'I went to the restroom right before class and was so embarrassed. I had hives all over my neck. I was so worried we would have to sing or something.' On several occasions, when the class was singing, I noticed red splotches on her neck, and her eyes fixated on the ground.

The thought of making music was what incited discomfort in Joan. She explained:

> I like music. It is just that I don't want to perform it—I just don't enjoy it. Well, it's really that I don't feel comfortable doing in front of others. I don't like to sing out loud. It's been so long since I've done it. But I do enjoy listening to my granddaughter sing. I enjoy watching her perform because I feel she is sharing a part of herself with me. I'm just not willing to do the same.

When Joan occasionally attempts to sing, she is 'surprised to feel and hear [her] own voice.' It is as if her voice exists separate from her self.

On the open-ended section of the initial class survey, Joan wrote, 'I just don't have much musical talent so I get *very* nervous if I have to sing.' She reinforced these beliefs in her writings and our conversations. I asked her to describe what it takes to be able to sing. She believes one must first be able to discriminate between singing

and talking. (I engaged her in some discrimination activities and she was able to distinguish between the two with perfect accuracy.) She also said, '[you must] match pitch exactly as you hear it' but quickly added that she could not do it because 'it's not inside' her. About singing, she said, 'I just don't know how to relate to the notes and what to do to make my voice sing . . . it's really a big mystery.' She attributes her lack of singing ability to the anxiety, which has kept her from 'developing as a singer.' This last comment implies that she views singing as a learned skill.

However, she revealed a different position when describing her view on singing identities: 'We are taught that there are singers and non-singers. I definitely associate with the non-singer. I have just about my entire life—except when I was real young.' When she was a young girl, she enjoyed singing because she was unable to recognize those differing roles. Believing she lacked 'musical talent,' Joan was convinced she was incapable of singing.

Five weeks into the project, I convinced her to sing with me in the privacy of my office. I sat at the piano and played an accompaniment to a simple children's song. Although reluctant, she was able to sing on pitch. Every time she was successful, I brought it to her attention but she seemed doubtful of my assessment. It seemed as if she was unable to listen and evaluate her own singing. She was, however, able to identify when I was singing on or off pitch.

After our first interview, I asked her to begin thinking about the possible causes for her anxiety. In her journal, she wrote about a particular event that happened in fifth-grade. This watershed moment helped to solidify her musical identity:

> On several occasions my choir had to perform in church, so the teacher spent many hours rehearsing before hand . . . I remember the teacher and the event in vivid detail. My music teacher, Sister Bertha, is still at the front of my mind after all of these years . . . One day, as we were singing in the classroom, she got very angry because she heard some wrong notes . . . I thought she might have a heart attack she was so upset . . . yelling at the top of her lungs . . . she stopped the entire group because she heard someone off pitch. She moved around the room putting her ear close to each of our mouths. She seemed quite determined to find the offender who messed up. I never wanted to take the chance that she would get me . . . I thought if she would go to that much trouble to find one wrong note coming from somewhere, she would easily go to the same length to never let me into the church again, or worse, tell my parents. I was always a good student in everything except music. I just didn't want to let anyone down.

Although the teacher had never specifically pinpointed her, Joan did not want to take the risk, thinking she would disappoint her teacher, parents, or peers. As the teacher approached, she decided to solve the problem by mouthing the words. She said, 'It was from that moment on that I stopped singing. A few weeks later I quit the choir.' She sums up the experience, saying, 'It was that bad experience that has stifled me. Since then I haven't developed or grown in music. I don't think teachers realize the great impact they have.' She said she feels 'musically illiterate today' because she was told she was 'no good.' I asked her if someone had ever criticized her singing. She thought about it, and conceded, 'It was just the feeling I got.'

Joan occasionally found herself in situations where she was expected to sing. She claimed to 'survive' by mouthing the words at church, on birthdays, and in school. She said, 'When my girlfriends would get together to sing Beatles songs, I just wouldn't join them. In fact, I would make excuses that I had to do something else.' She claimed that 'no one seemed to notice or care for that matter.' In high school, she enrolled in a guitar class, but when she was told she would have to sing, she quit. These avoidance behaviors, which are signs of anxiety, resulted in many missed musical opportunities in Joan's life.

It was not until her first child was born that she would sing again. In her role as a mother, she felt singing was essential. She said, 'My mother used to sing in the house all the time so when I had my children, it seemed like I should sing to them. Singing was a way for me to express how I felt toward them. They seemed to enjoy it and were comforted by it.' The model provided by her mother served to influence her interactions with her children. Although she was engaged in a behavior she claimed caused her anxiety, singing to a baby did not. When others were present and when her children grew older, she avoided singing once again. As was the case with Melissa and Melanie, Joan's anxiety seemed arise when she perceived others might be evaluating her—formally or informally.

In the last week of the methods course, Joan taught her peers a song. I asked her how she approached the experience:

> I must say I was nervous but I kept remembering the many times you stated as a matter of fact that everyone with the ability to speak and hear could sing. You taught us to impart those values on our students by doing and not talking about it. You modeled and I thought about how I too served a model to my own children. You even proved to me that I could do it when you were at the piano. You didn't seem to do it to make me feel good. At some point, right before I had to get up and teach my song, I realized I could do it.

Conclusions and implications

Nature of anxiety

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the nature and roots of adult singing anxieties in the context of an elementary methods course. Based on interviews with and observations of Melissa, Melanie and Joan, they each seemed to experience cognitive, somatic, behavioral, and/or affective symptoms of anxiety (Leary & Kowalski, 1995). While I was able to observe somatic symptoms in Joan and Melissa, I was unable to confirm Melanie's anxiety through observations. Joan was the only one who exhibited or described all four distinct symptoms. It may be that one can experience some degree of anxiety surrounding a phenomenon without experiencing all four symptoms.

For these three participants, singing anxiety only arose within a social context. Each participant seemed threatened by the possibility of being evaluated on her ability to sing. Melanie seemed most concerned with the formal evaluation of her

singing, which would result in a letter grade. Joan and Melissa reported anxiety in the presence of anyone who might judge their singing. Joan described singing as an intimate reflection of one's self, which might have made her feel vulnerable and exposed in the presence of others. The likelihood of being evaluated both formally (instructor) and informally (peers) seemed to account for feelings of anxiety. The self-presentational theory of social anxiety (Schlenker & Leary, 1982) was supported by this study because anxiety arose from the subjective probability that they would be able to behave in the manner they perceived to be desired by others. The lack of control over the vocal mechanism likely compounded the problem.

Music instructors might observe their students for any signs of anxiety. In identifying these emotions, instructors can plan experiences such that they do not exacerbate the problem. Instructors of methods course might provide students with multiple opportunities to sing in large groups without directing evaluations toward any one person. Personalized assessments might be best provided during individualized singing instruction rather than in social contexts. Informal assessments of a formative nature might help reinforce the notion that singing is a learned behavior, and help students improve their skills. These strategies might serve to decrease feelings of anxiety in some. Future research might examine the effects of various classroom settings on generalists' anxiety toward singing.

Roots

Previous research has demonstrated a strong relationship between school music experiences and attitudes toward music (Gifford, 1993) and singing (Apfelstadt, 1989). This seemed to be the case in the current study as well. All participants pinpointed a specific incident in from their school music experiences, which they related to current singing anxiety. Interestingly, all of these negative school music experiences occurred during early adolescence. This is the time in which students are often provided with the choice to participate in selective school music ensembles. The underlying wisdom may be that children at this age are better prepared for summative judgments. It seems clear from the cases described herein that the emotional impact of these experience can have lasting effects on individuals. As the 'experts,' music teacher opinions or judgments may have a great impact on students. Experiences that have a strong emotional impact are thought to have the best chance of remaining in the memory (Lundin & Sandberg, 2001).

Family was also a contributing factor in participants' attitudes and behaviors regarding singing. Although Melissa's immediate family members sang at home, they contributed in shaping her negative attitudes and anxiety toward singing. This contradicts Apfelstadt's (1989) finding that generalists whose family members were involved with music expressed positive attitudes toward singing. In contrast, Joan fondly recalled her mother singing around the house when she was a child. That maternal model served to positively influence Joan's musical behaviors when she had

children of her own. Melanie's parents were musical and encouraged their children to engage with music, yet this had little effect on her beliefs and attitudes about music. Parents that model singing have differing degrees and types of effects on their children's musical attitudes and behaviors.

Beliefs

Prior research has reported that children attribute success or failure in music to innate qualities such as talent (Asmus, 1986). Participants in the current study also attributed success in music to innate characteristics. Initially, all three participants claimed that singing was something possessed from within. They described singing as a 'mystery,' something 'you can't see or feel,' and coming from 'inside.' This might explain why they found it difficult to believe that singing could be learned. The abstract nature of singing might have made it difficult for them to believe it could be learned or developed through physical efforts. Melissa believed that singing was different from playing an instrument because the latter could be learned. Melanie seemed to equate playing and singing; plausibly as a result of her difficulties both singing and playing an instrument. Joan was not as consistent in her description of musical ability. Initially she implied that singing could be learned but later contradicted herself. At the end of the project, she seemed to realize that she could improve her singing ability.

There are several implications for music teaching and learning. Teachers might consider using rubrics to help guide students in developing their singing voices. This can also serve to clearly delineate expectations. Melanie claimed the rubric provided in the methods course relieved some of her anxiety because she could control certain criteria. To make the singing less 'mysterious,' teachers may consider using visual representations of pitch, such as hand signs or drawings. These strategies might help students focus their attentions on various aspects of the singing process and gain a greater sense of control.

Music educators help students build skills, conceptual understanding, and attitudes. However, teachers that propel the notion that singing ability is an inborn trait, which should be reserved for the talented few, may end up contributing to a society in which self-identified 'non-singers' experience singing anxiety and choose not to participate in music. Once those beliefs are solidified, they become difficult (Richards, 1999) but not impossible to modify. Being judged by those who are knowledgeable (adults, peers, music teachers) serves to produce anxiety in some individuals. While teachers should not coddle students, they might use caution when assessing students' singing—especially during the vulnerable period of adolescence. Assessment should focus on ways of helping students improve rather than assigning judgment. It would be prudent for music educators to instill in their students the notion that musical ability can be improved through practice and concerted efforts.

Notes on contributor

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