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The Adult Non-Singer: Connection, Context and Culture

by

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ABSTRACT

Singing is usually an enjoyable activity but not to those who have labeled themselves as non-singers. Through the use of narrative inquiry, this study examines the phenomenon of the adult non-singer in Canadian society. The researcher's teaching experience involving adult non-singers and the dearth of academic research prompted an interest in this topic. Two research questions were proposed: 1) why are there adults who have designated themselves as non-singers? 2) is it possible for this label to be reversed through a positive singing experience?

Twelve participants, including men and women of different ethnic background and age, participated in eight sessions. The participants were initially asked various questions about their childhood singing experiences and their personal views on singing. The remainder of the sessions was spent in vocal production. The sessions were transcribed and, along with related literature, spoke to the issues in the research questions.

The research, through the participants' narratives, offered three reasons as to why there are adults who designate as non-singers: 1) the encountering of a negative childhood experience with singing at school; 2) the encountering of a negative childhood experience with singing at home; 3) the acceptance of a normative concept of singer. The research found that the possibility of reversing the label of non-singer through a positive singing experience was inconclusive. The majority of the participants in the study changed their perception of self as non-singer to self as singer. Nevertheless, a minority of participants continued to view themselves as non-singers despite the positive experience with singing.

Implications for music educators were drawn from the themes of the participants' narratives as a conclusion to the study. These themes included awareness of the: 1) impact of negative encounters on students; 2) effect of cultural assumptions on the classroom; 3) understanding that students are at different points on the musical spectrum; 4) need to support non-singers in the education system.

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Preface

Devastating, humiliating, embarrassing. These do not seem the applicable words to use when talking about singing. Nevertheless, they were used by the participants in this research study to describe their past encounters with singing. Cheri and Sydney, both health care providers, when speaking of their elementary school encounters with singing described them as humiliating and dreadful experiences. Marjorie, an urban planner, described her elementary music teacher as the wicked witch of the west. Gilbert, Tony, Nancy, and Ameeta, all professionals in their individual fields, reminisce that negative encounters with family members are still affecting their confidence in their own singing ability. Sara (a pseudonym), a young instrumentalist, has refrained from singing in the last ten years because of a comment made about her singing ability by a secondary teacher. Ed, a retired educator, claims that he was not from a musical family. This perceived lack of musicality was reinforced in his church school when his teacher chose someone else to perform solo sections when he showed interest in such a musical endeavor. Helen, Cathie, and Cheryl, career women, have not sung in decades because of derogatory comments aimed at their singing abilities by educators. These twelve adults now regard themselves as adult non-singers.

For most people, singing is seen as a pleasurable experience in which one is free to express a range of emotions through vocal sound. When one thinks of singing it is usually in a positive context. It brings to mind images of a release of energy and emotion. According to Bunch and Vaughn (2004), "Singing is fun, joyful, imaginative, exciting, and satisfying." The American Academy of Teachers of Singing list several reasons why

people should sing: " . . . singing widens culture through providing insight into the thoughts and feelings of other peoples; it releases pent-up emotions; it develops self-confidence and a more forceful, vital and poised personality; and it gives pleasure to one's self and friends" (Christy, 1975). Orlanda Cook (2004) states that all human beings have natural singing abilities that are an integral and important part of each stage of the individual's life. She continues by addressing the fact that small children sing when they are expressing the full range of emotions from frustration to elation in a variety of physical surroundings (Cook, 2004). Singing is generally viewed as an extension of our being, something as natural to our species as walking and talking. It is an extension of self, a revelation of the inner nature. The outpouring of vocal sound is often part of daily life and helps in creating a community and a culture.

Given this large list of benefits, it may seem incongruous that there are individuals in Western society who describe their singing experience as dreadful, intimidating, scary, degrading, and agonizing. These individuals would be mortified if asked to sing alone in a public setting and would avoid such situations. Self identified non-singers are present in a variety of age groups but for the context of this study, the focus is on adults who claim to be non-singers. The adult non-singer is defined as an adult who believes he or she does not have the physical capacity or coordination to succeed in the simplest of musical tasks such as the matching of a single pitch with another singer or an instrument. The adult non-singer is more likely to explain this lack of skill as a genetic aberration rather than as a deficit in his/her educational experience.

Upon preliminary investigation, I discovered that there was a dearth of academic research conducted in this particular area. John Blacking (1973) in his work with the

Venda people in South Africa, Patrick Freer (2006) in his narrative on his personal negative choral experience, and Susan Knight (2002) with her investigation into adult non-singers in the Maritimes have all forged a path in this direction. Nevertheless, there was room for expansion with Canadian adults. I was particularly intrigued by Susan Knight's study of the adult non-singers. Her inquiry began because she encountered parents of her elementary music students who claimed to be non-singers. This same phenomenon occurred in my teaching career and the idea was intriguing that there were adults who supported their own children's musical development while denying their own ability. There remains a need for in-depth research into how musical norms develop and how these cultural norms favorably or adversely affect individual members of society. Thus, this research is important in music, ethnomusicology, and music education, while being specifically relevant to the field of choral music education. It will be beneficial for choral music educators dealing with children experiencing difficulty with singing in the classroom, choral conductors working with community ensembles in which there may be inhibited singers, as well as vocal pedagogues looking for current research about the non-singer.

From a personal view, this concept of a non-singer in Canadian society has been a part of my own musical experiences both in childhood and in teaching. Reflecting through an analytical framework, I realize that I have engaged with this topic consistently throughout my own musical development, the development of my students, and the development of community members with whom I worked.

My Childhood Experience with the Concept of Non-Singer

Throughout my childhood and adolescence, I was an instrumentalist. I was fortunate to have parents with the insight to insist that I take piano lessons for many years as well as flute lessons during my final years of secondary school. My mother always encouraged me to sing, and at Sunday School Christmas services I could be heard singing overtop the organ accompaniment of my mother. Those experiences are remembered as positive. I could navigate through the pitches and rhythms with relative ease and so received accolades from members of the congregation. Nevertheless, I was self-conscious about my voice and never pursued solo singing opportunities. I enjoyed congregational singing but never officially pursued singing past that point. My mother encouraged me to be part of the elementary school choir but I enjoyed playing outside with the boys too much to want to be stuck inside with the girls for one lunch hour per week. Still, the desire to sing was part of my being even though it was never formally pursued. In my adolescent years, when left alone in my house, I would inevitably go to the piano and accompany myself singing. I would sing the entire time my parents were absent but upon their arrival home, I would stop singing and just continue playing piano. I recall singing musical theatre tunes, interspersed with popular tunes from both the 1970's and 1980's. This memory is mixed with a tinge of puzzlement as to why I never pursued singing when it provided both an emotional release and sense of joy. Puzzlement aside, I found my identity as an instrumentalist and not as a singer.

I was very involved in the school concert band program throughout junior and senior high school. I was principal flutist in both the concert band and wind ensemble. I took private flute lessons while continuing piano studies. The choral room at my school,

however, was a foreign place to me during those formative years. In my opinion, those singers who had the audacity to call themselves musicians, were not in the same realm as the instrumentalists. This sentiment was reinforced by the negative interactions between the choral teacher and our esteemed band director. Concerts were always separate and there was no collaboration for touring or competitive festival events. There were students who were able to bridge the choral and instrumental void but I looked at them with disdain. However, one day in my grade twelve year, I become one of them.

The divisive wall between my choral and instrumental world began to crumble when a friend (a trumpet player who bridged the instrumental/choral void with ease) asked if I would be interested in playing piano for the vocal jazz ensemble. This was an intriguing offer as it afforded me the chance to peer into the choral music world while still being able to identify as an instrumentalist. To the chagrin of my stalwart band colleagues, I crossed the threshold into the choral world. I soon became immersed in vocal pedagogy: vocalizes, vocal warm-ups, harmony, tuning, and diction. I remember enjoying listening and learning about these new concepts but from a safe distance behind the piano. After a trip to Quebec City with the vocal jazz ensemble, I decided to join the vocalists on the bus on the journey home. Upon hearing me sing, one of the sopranos in the group turned to me and said, "Colleen, you have a nice voice. You should have been singing with us instead of being stuck behind the piano." I remember that my reaction came in the form of an excuse; I said I was much more of an asset behind the piano than behind a microphone.

This refusal to identify as a singer continued to the post-secondary level. However, the college that I chose to attend for my first two years had a very well

established choral but not instrumental program. I knew that being part of the choir was a large social component of this school, so I decided to audition. With my heart beating rapidly, I stepped inside the instructor's small office for my audition. He began by asking about my musical background. I proudly told him about my instrumental accomplishments. Just before singing the prepared audition piece, he said to me, "Colleen, take a few steps forward as you are back in the corner." I realized that throughout the audition, I had inadvertently moved as far away from him as possible. I was still very self-conscious about my voice as this was one of the first times in my life when I had sung by myself for someone whom I did not know and with whom I did not have a trusting relationship.

I successfully auditioned for the choir, took private voice lessons throughout my university career, and sang in college, university and semi-professional choirs for numerous years. I soon took on the identity of singer as well as instrumentalist and was comfortable in both musical worlds. I have continued to be involved with vocal and instrumental music throughout my secondary and post-secondary teaching career.

I have related my story because I believe that my reluctance to accept a singer identity helps me to understand the conflict felt by self-proclaimed adult non-singers. I have lived through those heart pounding, self-conscious moments. Singers, who have been singing since childhood, cannot relate to such experiences. I understand those who are self-conscious about their own voices and doubt their own innate vocal ability. I can relate to feelings of discomfort when singled out in a crowd, fear that my singing will draw unwanted attention, and shame related to my own voice. I also believe my experience allowed me to be open to the concept of the time needed to form a singing

identity. This identity can be from instrumentalist to singer, educator to singer, or non-singer to singer. One becomes a singer with time, dedication, and patience. There is a certain empathy that goes with travelers that follow the same path and struggle with the same issues. Thinking back to my childhood experience helped me to understand how one could self-designate as a non-singer. I received positive feedback about my vocal endeavors but still thought myself as non-singer. It seems quite logical that someone who received no musical support or was involved with a negative singing experience could identify as a non-singer.

My Teaching Experience with the Concept of Non-Singer

In my early years as a music educator, I did not consider myself an advocate for the reluctant singer but I assumed that role unconsciously. In my first year of teaching, my goal was to conduct highly competitive ensembles comprised of elite musicians. I enjoyed working with the elite musicians but I found that I encountered the most joy in enabling those who harbored doubts about their singing voice. For example, I often received thanks for helping individuals find their voice. This comment puzzled me at first because my initial reaction was to remind them that they had always had their voice. I had assumed that if they were in my choral or music theatre program, that they saw themselves as singers. However, because of my own experience, I remembered that I did not identify as a singer even when auditioning for a college choir. Within the context of those experiences, I proceeded to address these students as singers, and encourage them as I had been encouraged. I was simply allowing my students to release their own voice as I had been allowed to release mine. Without a personal knowledge surrounding this concept, I may not have positively engaged the reluctant singer in the singing process.

Having had the opportunity to reflect on my own path, I realize that it was a slow, natural progression for me to take on the role of encourager. This research topic then becomes personally relevant as it condenses my teaching philosophy about music education.

Research Questions

The overall intent of this research may be summarized in two major questions.

1. Why are there adults who have designated themselves as non-singers?
2. Is it possible for this label to be reversed through a positive singing experience?

In order to answer these questions, this study is divided in three sections. In the first section the idea of culture in relation to the customs, beliefs and practices surrounding the concept of adult non-singer is discussed. Methodology, literature review and a definition of terms is included. The second section consists of the concept of context, or the circumstances that form the environment within which something exists. In addition, the path on which the participants journeyed throughout the study is also examined. The third section consist of the connections of the study within itself and to the outside world. Answers to the research questions and possible conclusions for music educators are shared in this final segment.

Theoretical Background

Hermeneutics - the interpretative study of lived experience combined with phenomenology - the descriptive, reflective, and analytical study of lived experience in the attempt to enrich lived experience by delving into its meaning, seemed the most fitting methodology. In hermeneutic phenomenology, lived experiences are absolutely essential and valid as research data (Sokolowski, 2001; van Manen, 1990). Max van Manen describes the role of lived experience as, ". . . the starting point and the end point

of phenomenological research. The aim is to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence . . ." (van Manen, 1990, p. 16). In my adult non-singer research, lived experience formed the core of the data. The data lends itself to being presented as a description of past, present and future involvement with singing through the stories of the participants. Van Manen states that, "A good description is structured in a way so that the structure of a lived experience is revealed to us in such a fashion that we are now able to grasp the nature and significance of this experience in a hitherto unseen way" (van Manen, 1990, p. 39). The purpose of a phenomenological research project is to develop a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon while transcending the particularities that make them subject to thematic analysis and criticism. My research will reinforce the idea that individual experiences may indeed be general societal experiences (van Manen, 1990). Dilthey agrees with this concept of shared experiences being valid in a research methodology when he writes that, "Lived experiences are related to each other like motifs in the andante of a symphony" (Dilthey, 1985, p. 26).

This methodology refutes other methodologies that remove the contribution made by the research participant. When a research methodology ignores individual voices, the research becomes an abstraction that does not relate to the real world situation (van Manen, 1990). Jean-Jacques Rousseau agreed that abstract theorizing should not distract from seeing the person participating in the research. He summarized this argument by mentioning the fact that the heart often provides surer insight than reason. Rousseau also went so far as to suggest in his writing that heartless knowledge, so abstracted from the lived experience, is dead knowledge (Rousseau, 1969).

It may be argued that phenomenological research has little practical critical value because it does not contain far reaching generalizations; it does not use quantifiable statistics or quantifiable comparisons in research results; it does not appear to be academically rigorous; and it does not include a great deal of formality in its writing style. Hermeneutic phenomenology involves us in a personal way. It broadens the horizons of normal existential landscape and it allows thematic analysis without losing the humanness of the individual story (van Manen, 1990). Barthes speaks in favor of a need for several different methodological perspectives:

> Some people speak of method greedily, demandingly; what they want in work is method; to them it never seems rigorous enough, formal enough. Method becomes Law . . . . the invariable fact is that a work which constantly proclaims its will-to-method is ultimately sterile . . . . no surer way to kill a piece of research and send it to join the great scrap heap of abandoned projects than Method (Barthes, 1986, p. 318).

I chose to merge both hermeneutic phenomenology and narrative methodology for the adult non-singer topic. Both methodologies include the essence and validity of lived experience as both a personal and social phenomenon. An experience, even though it is individual, is always in relation to surrounding influences. (Dewey, 1922). The participant's stories were looked at through the lens of narrative inquiry methodology. It was through each individual story that insight was gained into the participants' lived experience.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state,

> For us, narrative is the best way of representing and understanding experience. Experience is what we study, and we study it narratively because narrative thinking is a key form of experience and a key way of writing and thinking about it (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 18).

Narrative allows us to understand and represent experience because experience happens narratively. How we make sense of the world happens through narrative and so to embrace this methodology will illuminate the very way we think about experience. Through the writings of these two authors, I was encouraged to delve into my participants' singing experience by looking inward (emotional state), outward (environmental situation), backward (temporal state), and forward (temporal state). By looking at each experience simultaneously through these four ways, I was able to deeply embrace their experiences in a meaningful way.

As a researcher, my voice is part of my data. It is not more important than the voices of the participants but is intermingled. My own story, analyzed inward, outward, backward, and forward, has become overtly and covertly intertwined with the participants' stories. How I asked questions, what I focused on in the lessons, how I encouraged one style of singing instead of another were all a result of my own personal experience with singing. By framing the writing of this research in narrative inquiry, I was able to let myself as well as my participants have a voice. I believe that hearing the researcher's voice is vital in the writing of narrative. Clandinin and Connelly concur by saying,

> This telling of ourselves, this meeting of ourselves in the past through inquiry, makes clear that as inquirers, we, too, are part of the parade. We are not merely

> objective inquirers, people on the high road . . . . We need to remake ourselves as well as offer up research understandings that could lead to a better world" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 61).

Narrative thinking draws the reader away from the notion that there is a single, correct, and one true view of the world, to the notion that experience is multifaceted. Within a narrative way of thinking, the concept of certainty is not central because experiences and people are rarely in the same temporal spot, emotional state, or environmental situation. To try to decipher truth is never central in narrative writing (Johnson, 1987). The central contribution of narrative inquiry is " . . . more often intended to be the creation of a new sense of meaning and significance with respect to the research topic than it is to yield a set of knowledge claims that might incrementally add to knowledge in the field" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 42).

Inquiry stresses the idea of temporality: any event or person comes with a past and an implied future. My participants, with all of their lived experiences, did not come into the research without a past nor do they leave without a future. They have lived before the research and will continue to live after my dissertation is completed.

In narrative inquiry, the concept of cause and effect is not seen as a basis for actions. Actions are expressions of individual's narrative history and that history, combined with a sense of future, is the fundamental reason for action. For example, in narrative inquiry, a student's performance on an achievement test is seen as a result of every experience that the child has lived through and not just an indicator of his or her cognitive level. "In narrative thinking, interpretations of events can always be otherwise. There is a sense of tentativeness, usually expressed as a kind of uncertainty, about an

event's meaning" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 31). However, there is real strength in the lack of certainty because it allows the opportunity to re-story experiences of the past or re-story research once it has been completed (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The person in context is the most important component of the research while the concept of applying universal ideals is not a large consideration. Narrative thinkers look for themes that may be applied to a larger society but do not claim these as universal truths for all people and all time. The ability, upon completion of a research topic, to present a concept that may be applied universally is of prime interest to other thinkers and methodologies (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Johnson, 1987).

The use of narrative methodology as a research tool has become recognized by the academic community over the past several decades. This fact is illustrated in the increase of journal articles written for scholarly publications in all disciplines including anthropology, psychology, psychiatry, and education (Clandinin & Connely, 2000). Narrative inquiry is grounded in the past work of dominant educational researchers (Bateson,1994; Czarniawska, 1997; Coles,1989; Dewey,1922; Dewey,1958; Dewey,1961; Geertz; 1988; Johnson,1987; MacIntyre,1981; Polkinghorne, 1988) and continues to be a prime research methodology. The reason it is gaining status in academic circles is because is the entire field of research is changing. According to Geertz (1988), he sees a " . . . change in the world, change in inquiry, change in the inquirer, change in the point of view, and change in the outcomes of the research" (Geertz, 1988, p.4). Such changes demand a restructuring of how research is thought about and how the result are portrayed. This restructuring calls for, " . . . showing how particular events and unique occasions, an encounter here, a development there, can be woven together with a variety

of facts and a battery of interpretations to produce a sense of how things go, have been going, and are likely to go" (Geertz, 1988, p. 2-3). This is what narrative inquiry has to offer the academy; it offers a different view on facts and interpretations in response to a demand for change in the research community and the wider population.

Canadian Historical and Current Contribution to Concept of Non-Singer

Singing settled into its role in Canadian culture as a result of views and practices held by the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant Church in the 1700's. Even though singing was encouraged within these denominations, its main purpose was to enhance the worship service. Restrictions were placed on who could sing, choice of repertoire, and performance style, because of the limited nature of the purpose of singing. Since Canadian culture was dominated at that time by Western religious ideals, singing was imbued with a sense of dutifulness, worthiness, and seriousness that was seen in the church ideology of the time (Green & Vogan, 1991; Mark & Gary, 1992). From such Western ideals grew a multitude of assumptions and beliefs surrounding the concept of singing, the essence of singing, and who should engage in singing. Pascale (2005) describes such assumptions as,

> . . . subtle nuances, such as valuing the high, lilting soprano voice over the alto. It is connected to various philosophies and strongly held convictions, such as improving vocal performance through the mastery of musical literacy, and even exclusionary practices, such as selecting out the 'better singers' and suggesting that others refrain from singing at all.

One of the most profound consequences of such cultural assumptions has been the

development of a limited perception of singing. Such assumptions, " . . . effectively narrow the scope of our perceptions, our language, our philosophy, and our teaching practices in the domain of singing . . ." (Pascale, 2005). The influence of cultural assumptions may be seen in the work of numerous researchers both in music education and ethnography (Blacking,1973; Blacking, 1984; Feld,1984; Messenger,1958; Oehrle, 1990). These researchers have found that how a culture historically views singing continues to have a long term effect. For example, in Pascale's (2005) research, one woman considered herself a singer in her native country but did not consider herself a singer when she moved to a new country. This was because there was a different socially constructed definition of singer in each of the countries. In Canada, the cultural assumption of a restricted and daunting standard lays the foundation for the current application of the term non-singer to a large number of societal members.

The influence of such cultural assumptions may be seen in how music education has been viewed throughout Canadian history. Singing was limited to a specific purpose, style, and level of singer in the early church. It stands to reason that music education would follow the same principles since the education system was founded by the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant Church. Since singing was restricted, the assumption was then made that not everyone was worthy to study it. This can be seen in the numerous conservatories and private music ensembles that were established for those deemed to possess musical ability (Green & Vogan, 1991). This assumption affected the development of music education as music became to be viewed as an elite subject not necessarily for all students. As a result, the inclusion of music and singing in the education system was seen as inconsequential. A brief look at the history of Canadian

music education will illustrate how the particular cultural assumptions concerning singing have perpetuated the self-designation of non-singers in this country.

Inconsistency in vocal programs across Canada is part of Canada's history. Green and Vogan (1991) in, Music Education in Canada: A Historical Account, state that music education has never held a permanent nor prominent place in the formal education system in Canada. Music instruction has always been at the mercy of financial constraints of school districts and the migration of teachers. Even in the province of Nova Scotia, where singing and music is a part of the heritage, music instruction has been seen as a frill that could be sacrificed in time of need. This is illustrated in the following observation: "In fact, when the [local school] board found themselves in financial difficulties in the early 1880's, they decided to abolish the position of teacher of music . . . " (Green & Vogan, pg 27). Music was always considered an important subject in educational rhetoric but it was rarely given the financial backing or prestige that was needed to make it a continuous, viable course in the public education system. Even in 1888, David Allison, chief superintendent of education in Nova Scotia stated, "The important subject of music cannot be said to be on a satisfactory footing in our schools nor indeed to have ever been so" (Green & Vogan, pg 28). Looking specifically at how vocal music has fit into music education in Canada, one can look back to legislation implemented by the first school superintendent of Canada West (present day Ontario), Egerton Ryerson. Ryerson prescribed vocal music as a subject in the Common School Act of 1846, " . . . yet this official endorsement in a document . . . did not guarantee its implementation" (Green & Vogan, pg 50). Vocal music never established a permanent place in the education system because of its tenuous position in the overall curriculum.

Susan Knight (2002) in her work with non-singers in Canada's Maritime provinces, found the phenomenon of the non-singer to be intertwined in these same cultural assumptions. She found this specifically in her interaction with parents and community members. She reported being dismayed yet not surprised that such a trend was evident. This was due to the lack of singing opportunities in the education system as well as the cultural assumption that singing was restricted to those who could perform and possessed an innate musical ability. When one looks to other academic sources, one will find a culturally restrictive definition of singer and singing. According to the Canadian Oxford Dictionary, a singer "delivers songs as a trained or professional singer" (Barber, 2004). This idea of a standard of excellence is seen in most credible dictionaries and online dictionary sources.

Other information sources (especially that of the internet) shows an acknowledgement that our musical culture still holds fast to historical assumptions. In searching for an image of singer on the internet, pictures of professional singers were retrieved. This lack of images of common citizens engaging in singing perpetuates the idea that singing is restricted to those who can perform at a certain level. Candid comments made on radio and television broadcasts about an individual's ability to sing are common and accepted as part of many reality shows. Many of my participants echoed the same sentiment toward singing. For example, Cathie stated, "I don't know what it is [in our society] but unless you think you are Celine Dion, you're not going to sing."

Certainly, cultural attitudes change at a glacial pace and we can observe that

historical cultural assumptions from Canada's past are still a part of Canada's present.

Methodology

How I found the participants

To find participants, I placed posters at the university campus, emailed my community choir members, and informed my friends and family of the study (Appendix A). Most of the participants came to the study through word of mouth or personal invitation.

Several people contacted me about participating but not all inquirers were chosen. Upon their request to be a part of this study, I sent a letter with a list of questions to ascertain if they truly did self-designate as an adult non-singer (Appendix B).

Once the participants had answered affirmatively to four out of the five questions in the second set of questions, they were sent a letter of consent (Appendix C) stating that they had been chosen to be part of the project. They were assured in this email that they would not be expected to sing in a public venue at any time throughout the research. Once approval was given to the scope of the study, an ethics consent form was given to each participant to be read and signed (Appendix D). The ethics consent form explained the purpose of the study, requirements of each session, risks and benefits to the participant, and maintenance of the provided information. The participants were given the option to refuse or accept audio and video recording for the sessions. They were also given the option to use a pseudonym or remain anonymous in the formal written portion of the research.

Chosen participants were both male and female, who had different ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds, and spanned wide range of adult age groups. Cultural, religious, and childhood upbringing were looked at in order to assess why subjects had deemed themselves unmusical. These factors were considered in order to not limit the results of the study to be gender, cultural, or religious specific.

Structure of the Sessions

The time commitment for participants was eight sessions, beginning in November 2007 and ending in March 2008. The first session was a 60-minute group introduction explaining the background and rationale behind the research. The second session was a 60-minute private session in which the participants talked about their own musical experience. I inquired into their childhood experience with singing; how those experiences affected singing activity as an adult; their comfort level with singing in a public setting; if they were resentful that singing had not been part of their lives; and if they felt they had the physical capability to sing (Appendix E).

Sessions three through eight were private sessions for all participants. They took the form of singing lessons. The rationale behind having the participants sing for the majority of the sessions was to answer the second of the two research questions. The question of reversing the self-designation of non-singer through positive engagement with singing could only be answered by having the participants sing. Six singing sessions were deemed to be sufficient to expose the participants to a positive engagement with singing while being manageable for both the participants and myself.

During these six sessions, the participants were introduced to breathing and relaxation exercises; pitch-discrimination exercises; listening exercises; tonal analysis;

self-analysis of own voice; analysis of kinesthetic response to singing; and rhythm exercises (Appendix F). Content was based on resources developed by Bunch and Vaughn (2004), Cohen (1976), and Davis (1998) combined with my own personal vocal training and experience as a singer and teacher. Participants had the opportunity to refuse any exercise or to stop the voice lesson at any time. Each of these sessions was videotaped. The video camera was placed on the bookshelf in an inconspicuous spot. I turned the camera on at the beginning of the session and then only returned to it in order to facilitate the participant's change of position. The camera was turned off after the participants exited. The participants were informed that each session would be videotaped for the express purposes of this study.

At the beginning of Session Three and the end of Session Eight, the participants took a musical skills assessment test. The purpose of this assessment was to determine if perception, and not physical capability, was the main reason behind self-designation as a non-singer. The participants were asked to draw out a melodic contour to *Rain, Rain, Go Away* and *Ring Around the Rosie*, clap out the rhythm of the tune of *Jingle Bells*, sing *Happy Birthday*, and match pitches between C4 and Bb4. For assessing drawing the melodic contour in *Rain, Rain, Go Away* and *Ring Around the Rosie*, I counted the number of notes in each piece. I then evaluated whether the participant had assessed properly whether the pitch stayed the same, was higher or was lower. For the rhythmic exercise of clapping out the melodic line of *Jingle Bells*, I assessed duration of the rhythmic notation for accuracy. If a particular rhythm was missed, they did not receive a point.For the singing of *Happy Birthday*, I counted the number of intervals in the piece. I then assessed whether the distance between intervals the participant sang were accurate.

If the intervals were not accurate, they did not receive a point. Pitch matching was marked based on the participant matching the given pitches sung by me. The pitches sung were C4, G4, Bb4, F4, and D4.

After the skills assessment test, I used the same initial singing lesson with all participants in order to gain knowledge of their comfort level with singing as well as their point on the musical spectrum. This third session for all of the participants consisted of vocalizing with the aid of a kazoo, matching and recognizing pitches, and singing two and three note songs.

To introduce the concept of vocal production, I asked the participants to vocalize in a limited range with the help of a kazoo. Humming into the kazoo did not carry any negative connotations, so the non-singers did not feel intimidated about vocalizing with the aid of this instrument. I implemented the kazoo as an opening precursor to singing because simply to ask them to sing seemed a very large hurdle. The kazoo allowed the participants to make a vocal sound that was separate from their preconceived concept of singing. Singing through the kazoo also allowed them to laugh, as the sound on this instrument was not a pleasing sound. Laughing together relieved some of their tension. After the kazoo exercise, we engaged in matching pitches. We began with an exercise in which they would hum a pitch and then I would match that pitch. This exercise allowed them to vocalize in their most comfortable range and did not stress them to match a given pitch. Once they grew familiar with this exercise, I added the dimension of pitch recognition. They were responsible for telling me if I was matching or not by simply putting their thumb up for matching and down for not matching. After there was some comfort with this exercise, I encouraged them to match my hummed pitch. I would try to

stay within the range in which they had sung. If they experienced some difficulty with this exercise, I would return to having them hum pitches which I would match. Upon mastering the first three exercises, I introduced intervallic movement. I introduced movement between the fifth and third degree of the scale in a key that was comfortable for their range. I introduced Curwen hand signs as a kinesthetic reminder of the given interval. Once the participant could maneuver between two intervals with ease, I taught them three-note songs such as *Rain, Rain, Go Away,* and *Bye Baby Bunting* with the aid of Curwen hand signs.

In order to create a program that would benefit each non-singer in this study, I assessed each participant's level after this initial singing session. I then tailored each subsequent session to the individual participant through what I ascertained as the best method. Even though exercises and repertoire were shared between participants, there were always specific exercises or pieces that I brought in for the particular singer. Repertoire including *What a Friend We Have in Jesus, Soak up the Sun, Better Far to Live and Die* (Pirates of Penzance), *Song of the Mira, This Land is Your Land,* and *Ring around the Rosie* was shared among the participants but in combination with specific pieces that fit with the individual's range, vocal sound, and personality. By developing individualized programs, each session was suited to the taste, skill, and comfort level of the individual participant. The manifestation of the individualized programming was a portion of the participants working on pitch matching for subsequent sessions while different participants worked on folk tunes, religious hymns, or classical repertoire. There was never any insinuation of comparison during the sessions; there was an acceptance of their point on the musical spectrum by both the participants and myself.

At the beginning and the end of the sessions, participants were asked to take a short musical skill assessment test. This information was to be used only to compare beginning and ending skill level of the individual and not to be used to compare skill level between participants. This test comprised of singing *Happy Birthday* (starting on a pitch of their choice), clapping the rhythm of the tune of *Jingle Bells*, matching pitches between C4 and C5 (on the scientific pitch notation system), drawing out the melodic contour of *Rain, Rain, Go Away* and *Ring around the Rosie*, and deciphering the written notation of *The First Noel*. This same short musical test was administered at the end of the eight sessions with the results used to analyze their musical status both upon entering and leaving the research (Appendix G).

In the Session Eight, the participants were asked to respond to similar questions that had been posed to them in Session Two. The rationale for asking similar questions was to gauge any change in perception that may have occurred during our time together. These questions were asked of the participant aurally in the final session as well as sent by email. They were sent by email to encourage further reflection. One additional question was asked in the email. This question was how they would re-write their singing story in light of what they had discovered through the study. The participants sent the responses back by email within three weeks of culmination of their final session (Appendix H).

Definition of Terms

The first set of definitions presented here are common societal descriptions of the terms. These definitions are a compilation of definitions from dictionaries and musical resources (Barber, 2004; Latham, 2002; Sadie, 2001). The second set of definitions is my set of proposed definitions, based on literature and personal experience in the singing

field. The third set of definitions are the descriptions made by the participants. Although the definitions by the participants are based on limited musical knowledge, they reveal preconceived notions of such terminology. These preconceived notions, in turn, influence their perception of themselves. An awareness of all three viewpoints of the terminology is important as it alleviates misunderstanding the outcome of the research.

Societal Description of Terms

1. Musical Ability: the ability to demonstrate a high degree of technical skill on a traditional instrument in a public performance setting.

2. Singing: to utter words and vocables in musical tones with these utterances related to delivering songs as a trained professional.

3. Singing ability: the in-tune vocalization of traditional tunes and melodies. The capacity to perform utterance of words in musical tones, in what contemporary culture deems, a successful manner.

4. Musical talent: the natural, inborn capability to be able to sing at a certain level in accordance with contemporary standards.

5. Non-musical: the insufficient ability to sing to the degree contemporary culture has deemed as adequate.

6. Ability: the acquired proficiency or natural aptitude of general skill or competence.

7. Capability: the developed or natural potential to be used for a particular purpose or implementation.

8. Capacity: the individual's mental or physical ability to do or experience something.

9. Talent: an exceptional characteristic either due to natural endowment. A natural ability to do something or show exceptional ability.

Researcher's Definition of Term

The following are definitions of terms that I have redefined in order to clarify, expand upon, or deviate from, what I found as the societal view of the terminology. When working with the participants, I would refer to my definitions as the ones to be used for this particular research.

1. Musical Ability: to demonstrate basic musical skills either vocally or on an instrument. These basic musical skills may include in-tune vocal utterances, following a melodic contour, or the execution of simple rhythm in a public or private setting. Being able to display a high degree of technical efficiency is not a requirement of having musical ability.
2. Singing: vocal production. This can be related to vowels and text but can be expanded to include any vocal sound.
3. Singing ability: capacity to produce vocal utterances that conform to standard pitch expectations.
4. Musical talent: the ability to sing and play due to a number of influences. Such influences are inborn capability, home and environmental influence, cultural support and individual personality.
5. Non-musical: a term used in Western society to describe one who is seen as having insufficient innate ability to participate at even a minimum level.
6. Perception: an attitude or understanding based on what is observed or thought, to attain awareness or understanding;

7. Ability: the acquired proficiency or natural aptitude of general skill or competence.
8. Capability: developed or natural potential to be used for a particular purpose or implementation.
9. Capacity: an individual's mental or physical ability to do or experience something
10. Talent: an exceptional characteristic due either to natural endowment or development.

Participants' Description of Terms

In our first group session where I talked about the study in general, I gave each participant a copy of my definitions of the terms. In Session Three, we talked about how they would describe such terms. This discussion was essential in establishing an understanding of assumptions made surrounding these key concepts.

On Singer, Singing, and Singing Ability:

The definition of singer, singing, and singing ability for the participants revolved around two themes: the aspect of performance and the idea of a standard. The aspect of performance centred upon the notion that for one to be a singer or to be deemed as having singing ability, one needed to be capable of performing in front of an audience. This can be seen in Ameeta's definition of singing. "I think singing is also performance. Singing in front of an audience. . . . Yes, to me that's a singer. I like to sing but I'm not a singer. Delivering songs as a trained professional – yah . . . . I see a singer as one who is able to sing on their own. . . "

The idea of reaching an acceptable standard can be seen in Gilbert's account of singing. According to Gilbert, "My definition [of singing] is to be able to sing to the

extent that the person next to you will say, 'Well that person has a reasonable, decent melodic kind of voice and isn't butchering the song.' Therefore [that person] is allowed to sing because the composer isn't turning over in their grave."

On Musical Ability:

Two themes emerged when I asked what each participant felt comprised musical ability. The first was the idea that musical ability was displayed naturally through the creation of music. Cheri said, "My son has musical ability because it comes to him so naturally." Helen commented, "Doug Baker [her friend] has musical ability. He hasn't had professional training but he is a natural . . . . He doesn't have a voice like Pavarotti but a very nice voice and he can just get up there and sing." Ameeta sums it up with, " I think my son has musical ability. He can create music. To me that is huge musical talent." The second theme was that one with musical ability could move the emotions of the listener through the singer's passion and emotional connection to the music. Cathie commented that, "When I hear someone's voice that actually moves me. It is just amazing." Marjorie described this ability to move the listener by alluding to the idea that the passion for music and singing pours out of the singer. "You not only have the physical ability but you really love it and it almost pours out of you like an artesian well."

On Musical Talent:

Our discussion about musical talent became a discussion involving two concepts. These concepts were how much physical capability influenced ability to sing and how much innate ability influenced capability to sing. In terms of physical capability, there was general confusion. One segment of the participants did not believe that they possessed vocal folds that were developed enough to sing past a very limited level. They

felt that since they could talk they could probably sing but they were not certain of this assertion. The other segment felt that singing was not so dependent on physical capability but that it was dependent on vocal training.

The second concept was the idea of innate ability. There was a basic consensus that one must have innate ability to sing, but they were not bound to the idea of innate ability as the only aspect of singing. They acknowledged that if one practiced, one could develop vocal skill. However, these concepts of development and practice were put forth by the participants with the stipulation that one can only develop within the limitations of their innate ability. Sara commented, "Everyone has a base ability . . . . But I think it has limitations."

On Non-singer:

Most of the participants had not given much thought to the concept of the term non-singer before the introductory session. After that session, several of the participants agreed that they would have attributed worldwide the usage of the term. They expressed interest and fascination in the fact that the term non-singer is not a universal concept but restricted to certain contemporary cultures.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Musical Ability

The question of musical ability has occupied the attention of some psychologists for well over half a century and considerable debate has ensued over the correct terms to employ when referring to musical ability. The issue that has served as the focal point for the debate is the question of how one comes to possess musical ability. It is for the most part inherited or is it primarily developed by environmental influences?

The resolution of this question, frequently referred to as the nature-nurture controversy, has varied over the last century. In the first part of the twentieth century the innate-ability position was generally accepted while in the fifties, positions that seemed to completely exclude any genetic influence gained popularity. If musical ability was shown to be innate, music teachers might choose to exclude some students from their classes. If musical ability was shown to be environmentally influenced teachers could argue that all children should receive music instruction. Current thinking rejects the either-or position of nature-nurture and instead posits some proportional product of both positions.

A number of research studies have confirmed that the perception of innate ability as being possessed by only a minority of the population is dominant. (Hallam and Prince, 2003; Joyner, 1969; Seashore, 1938; Welch, 1979; Winner, 1996). One of the most vigorous supporters of this view of musical ability was Carl Seashore. Seashore developed a musical ability test called Measures of Musical Talents in 1919 (Seashore, 1938; Welch, 1979). This test became the basis for musical testing for the next several decades. It was based on the concept that if one is a poor singer, it is due to a deficiency

in certain fundamental sensory or perceptual musical capacities. Seashore based this test on the belief that musical ability has a genetic basis that is unalterable over time no matter the amount of time put in to practicing or training (Hallam and Prince, 2003; Shuter-Dyson, 1999; Welch, 1979). Seashore's ideas of innate musical ability subsequently influenced music research and were considered basic fundamentals of vocal measurement for many years (Welch, 1979). Several well-recognized musical tests were then developed based upon Seashore's ideas. These included the Drake Musical Aptitude test, the Wing Standardized Test of Musical Intelligence, and the Bentley Measures of Musical Ability test (Shuter-Dyson, 1999). These tests served as dominant factors in deciding the musical ability and ultimately the inclusion of many students and adults in musical endeavors. The influence of these tests continued into the work of researchers such as Joyner, Winner, Gordon, Vernon, and Revesz.

Joyner (1969) found that the individual who cannot sing recognizable melodies in-tune has a vocal instrument that is unfit to use in a singing situation. Revesz (1953) measures the ultimate criteria of musicality as being the musical depth that each individual has for listening, comprehending, and vocalizing. According to Revesz either a person has this innate ability or does not. Vernon (1968) emphasizes the existence of genetic differences affecting musical ability among individuals. Gordon (1979) believes the potential for learning music cannot be increased in a child from what he or she was born with, but advocates working towards the fulfillment of this potential.

A more recent researcher, Winner (1996), takes into account research on music ability as a developing skill but continues to stress the importance of innate ability. She states that it is impossible to isolate ability from practice but that practice cannot be

considered an important part of musicality without innate ability. Winner claims that if a child does not possess innate musical ability then no amount of motivation or practice will make up for that deficiency. Inborn musical talent comes first, according to this researcher, and she discredits many of the current thoughts on musical development and motivation by stating that only innate talent leads to a resulting high level of achievement (Winner, 1996).

Ideas, consistent with Winner's, are foremost in contemporary thinking on musical ability. O'Neill (1999) found that children as young as eight are more likely to believe that music ability is innate and cannot be improved by effort. A study performed by Legette (1998) discovered that failure, or success in music, was attributed to ability by both junior and senior high school students. Hallam and Prince (2003) indicated that more than 75% of post-secondary professors believe that singing requires a special gift or natural talent. Hennessy (2000) found in her work with post-secondary students that there were widely held beliefs that being able to perform music required special gifts or talents that were only possessed by a small number of individuals.

In contrast to these views of innate ability possessed by only a few individuals, the idea that all people have an innate physical capability to sing is coming to the forefront. One of the arguments for musical ability being an innate part of every person's make-up comes partly from the research on prenatal and postnatal infants. Several researchers (Cross and Morley, 2002; Kogan, 1997; Kessen *et al.*, 1979; Papousek, 1995; Sloboda, 1996; Trehub, 1993; Trehub *et al.*, 1984) conclude in their research that prenatal and postnatal infants have similar and sophisticated means of interpreting and assessing music. Each individual is born with a vocal tract that provides a powerful and lifelong

instrument (Papousek,1995). Kogan goes so far as to say there is ". . . a body of rigorous experimental work on the musical perception of human infants . . . [which] clearly demonstrates that prior to one year of age, infants have almost all the skills of musical perception present in musically unsophisticated adults" (Kogan, 1997, p. 194). Cross and Morely (2002) enrich this argument by stating that all human beings display capacities that form the foundation for mature musicality and that these foundations are present regardless of the specific culture into which the child is born. Musical ability has been correlated to speech ability and it has been discovered that children have a natural predisposition to both. Musical skills should be taught as early and as naturally as speech since musical skills are as much a part of each child's genetic structure as is the ability to acquire a language (Papousek, 1995).

Research also supports the idea that all people have an innate physical ability to sing, in that all human beings are equipped with a physical apparatus through which vocalization is possible. The physiological capacity to sing can be traced back as a part of the human body throughout history (Cross and Morley, 2002; Greenfield, 2000; Kogan,1997). This physical attribute evolved with humans throughout the ages. Evidence of this physiological capacity to sing may be illustrated by contrasting two diverse cultures such as the Plains Indians in the United States and the Pygmies in Africa. In these two groups there is very little cultural commonality yet there is clear evidence that both groups are physically capable of singing and include this activity as a part of daily life (Cross and Morley, 2002). Musicality is grounded in human biology and is common to all humanity. The idea that physical ability to sing is universally evident gives credence to the likelihood that all humans can indeed sing (Cross, 1999; Nettl, 2004).

Along with scholarly studies of physiological characteristics, researchers are also asserting the concept of musical ability as a general characteristic of the human species, rather than as a rare talent in a small number (Blacking, 1973; Shuter-Dyson, 1999). John Blacking was one of the first music researchers to bring this point of view to the foreground in music research. His work with the Venda people in Africa gave Blacking the basis for his assertions. Kingsbury writes of Blacking's work that, "Blacking points out that Western notions of musical talent are diametrically opposed to the Venda idea that all normal human beings are capable of musical performance" (Kingsbury, 1988, p. 61). The idea that musical talent is reserved for a small number of societal members is not a universal assumption. Singing has been a part of the world's cultures for thousands of years and yet Western culture contests the view that musical talent is a fundamental human characteristic (Kingsbury, 1988; Ruddock and Leong, 2005; Shuter-Dyson, 1999; Welch, 1994).

The idea that singing ability can be developed in people throughout their lifetime is in direct opposition to the idea that musical talent is possessed only by a chosen few (Ruddock and Leong, 2005). Some researchers are proposing that singing ability can be developed throughout one's lifetime and that singing ability is not an innate gift only apparent in a small percentage of people. There has been a shift away from the single entity conception of musical talent to a multi-faceted developmental conception. (Dweck, 1975; Goetze *et al.*, 1990; Hallam, 1998; Hallam and Prince, 2003; Kazez, 1985; O'Neill, 1999; Relich *et al.*, 1986; Schunk, 1983; Sergeant and Thatcher, 1974; Sloboda, 1990; Topp, 1987; Welch, 1979; Welch, 1985; Welch, 1986; Welch, 1994). Within this circle of researchers, it is generally reckoned that all humans have the physical capacity and

innate musical ability for musical competence. Nevertheless, they do not deny that there are differences in ability throughout societal members. According to their studies, the reason for such differences in singing ability in individuals is due to the variety of factors afforded each individual to develop personal musical skills.

One of the first factors that influences an individual's personal musical development is the amount of personal effort given to developing musical skills (Dweck, 1975; Relich *et al.*, 1986; Schunk, 1983). Topp (1987) demonstrated this concept of effort in a particular project. At his university, Topp offered a course called Music for People Who Fear Music. All of the university students who came into the course desired to sing but none had any formal background. Throughout this month long course, each student rehearsed three hours per day and was encouraged by the professor to progress as far as they could. At the end of the course, because of the individual effort of each student, every student sang a solo and deemed the experience a positive one (Topp, 1987). Even though formal music training is not a pre-requisite for singing, it is considered as a path for development.

A second factor affecting an individual's musical development, according to current researchers, is the acceptance of the theory of a musical spectrum. Welch (1986) defined musical spectrum as a continuum of development. He claimed that a change in societal perception was needed in relation to the acceptance of a musical spectrum. In the prevailing view of musical ability as an innate attribute, there is no room for the concept of a continuum of musical development. However, if one aspires to the concept of musical skill as a developmental process, then one must permit and accept individuals at different musical stages. Welch (1986) states that different types of singers need to be

allowed and encouraged to be at different points along a developmental spectrum of singing ability. He sees that progress along the continuum is possible if the singer is encouraged, challenged and supported. In his work with children he found that " . . . a child who shows evidence of being at one of the less skilled stages should be regarded as a client for development, rather than necessarily revealing an irretrievable lack of ability in music" (Welch, 1986, p. 300).

The phenomenon of the adult non-singer may be unique to our particular culture. Singing and singing ability is viewed in black and white terms, leaving no room for a spectrum of development. Our society sees singing ability as a lifelong trait that is fixed and uncontrollable (Austin and Vispoel, 1998; Ruddock and Leong, 2005). Our musical culture seems to place the act of singing in the hands of a few, selected individuals who are seen to possess innate musical ability and have relegated the rest to the role of an audience (Hennessy, 2000; Ruddock and Leong, 2005; Vispoel and Austin, 1993). Hallam and Prince (2003) in their work on the notion of musical ability found that members of our society conceptualized the culture as one where only a minority of gifted people have real ability and this ability is an innate, natural talent. Austin and Vispoel (1998) found this same attitude in work done with secondary students. They found that as students mature, they tend to focus on musical ability rather than effort and that these secondary students are more willing to attribute their failures in a music setting to lack of ability than in any other subject area.

Hennessy states that the, " . . . main problem with music is you regard it as being something you can't do unless you're really good at it" (Hennessy, 2000, p. 188). O'Toole (2005) found that there is a constant self-evaluation process happening and she

says that even when an individual hums a pleasant melody, that person is evaluating whether he/she is a good enough musician to be humming. People have become critical of themselves because they feel they lack the requisite talent. The result is they stop humming or singing. They end up feeling humiliated and embarrassed that they had even attempted such a musical endeavor. (Vispoel and Austin, 1993).

The idea that innate ability is restricted to a small percentage of the population is not a viewpoint that is held worldwide (Hallam and Prince, 2003). The very act of declaring someone musical and nonmusical itself is culture specific to Western society. Numerous non-Western cultures do not have a specific term for music or singing because it is impossible to separate the concept of music from the society's broader cultural practices (Cross and Morley, 2002). The implications of such an ideal challenges Western thought and allows a new conception of singer to emerge.

Several researchers have written about non-Western cultures and their musical and singing concepts (Blacking, 1973; Blacking, 1984; Feld, 1984; Kuss, 2004; Marshall, 1982; Merriam, 1967; Messenger, 1958; Mngoma, 1998; Muph, 2006; Nettl, 2004; Oehrle, 1990; Oehrle, 1991). Marshall (1982) in his work with the Debarcani peasants in former Yugoslavia found that musical talent was viewed as being distributed equally to all. The Debarcani people saw differences in individual musical performances as a result of a particular person's desire and subsequently acquiring a skill and not as a result of innate ability. Merriam (1967), in an ethnomusicological look at the Flathead Indians of Western Montana, asked these people why they sang. He found that this question did not even fall into the sphere of how the Flathead Indians thought about music because the act of singing was engaged in naturally, daily and without

embarrassment or false modesty. Merriam writes, "Singing is clearly a pleasurable activity, entered into without much reservation and enjoyed both by the singers and those who listen to them" (Merriam, 1967, p. 32). Elizabethe Oehrle (1991), a prominent South African researcher, made an accurate summation of how integral the music is to the black community. She states that, "For them music-making is part of life, and life is music" (Oerhle, 1991, p. 167). This common practice of music making extends from the family unit to include the entire community. So music-making becomes a corporate, communal activity in which the majority of children and adults partake. Children and adults share in the excitement of the music and all are called to be active participants. The concept that everyone is included in the music-making leaves no one an outsider and creates no barriers to being fully engaged in musical production on a daily basis. This inclusion of all transpires because there is an underlying belief, held by the community, that everyone is musical (Blacking 1973; Mngoma, 1998; Oehrle, 1991). Feld (1984) continued to look into non-Western cultures through his work with the Kaluli people in Papua New Guinea. He found that musical talent, as in Western thought, has no parallel concept within this culture. It is assumed by the Kaluli people that everyone is musical. The thought that there are those who are not musical is not even conceived nor is there even terminology in their language for one who is nonmusical. Messenger (1958) echoes this sentiment through his findings of the Anang Ibibio tribe of Nigeria. When conducting his research, Messenger looked in vain for, what he called, a non-musical person within the tribe. He also tried unsuccessfully to find words describing non-musical people in the Anang Ibibio language. He could find no one who would admit to such a term nor name another person who could not participate musically in the culture. All were considered musical and

capable of singing well. John Blacking, in his work with the Venda people, was one of the pioneers, in music research, to challenge the Western culture's concept of singing ability as being possessed by a chosen few. He pointed out that the Western notion of musical talent is, " . . . diametrically opposed to the Venda idea that all normal human beings are capable of musical performance" (Kingsbury, 1988, p. 60). Blacking found among the Venda people that it was assumed and expected that all people sang and as a result, all the Venda people did.

With the concept that all humans possess a capacity for musical competence coming to the foreground in music research, researchers have begun to look at cultural and environmental factors that affect singing (Hallam and Prince, 2003). Each successive investigation reveals that the process of cultivating singing and musical skills involves many complex cultural factors. These complex cultural factors include the amount of time spent practicing, parental and teacher involvement, environmental conditions, and personal motivation.

The amount of time spent practicing is considered to be one of the factors in developing singing and musical aptitude (Hallam,1998; Hallam and Prince, 2003; Kazez, 1985; Mitchell, 1991; O'Neill, 1999; Sloboda, 1996; Topp, 1987). O'Neill (1999) speculates that the best indicator of musical competence is to look at the accumulated hours of practice that an individual has put into his/her musical development over the years. On average, professional musicians have practiced 10 000 hours on their principal instrument to obtain their status. Several musicians commented in an interview with researchers Hallam and Prince that, ". . . musical ability is often mistaken for the fruits of hours of painstaking practice" (Hallam and Prince, 2003, p. 19). Sloboda (1996) found

that no individual who practiced two hours per day failed to achieve higher levels of musical skill and Kazez (1985) established that even those who deemed themselves as tone-deaf improved their pitch sense with sufficient practice.

A second factor in the process of cultivating singing and musical skills is parental and teacher involvement. The extent of influence that parents have on individual musical development is being documented as tremendous. Parents influence musical thought and choice, make musical opportunities available, ensure practicing is efficient and completed, and support and encourage all musical endeavors attempted by their child (O'Neill, 1999; Sergent and Thatcher, 1974; Shehan Campbell, 1998; Sloboda, 1996; Sloboda and Howe, 1991). Teacher influence, an alternative to parental influence, is also a factor in individuals developing singing skills because they offer opportunities for high levels of accomplishment (Howe, 1987; Kunkel, 1985).

The third complex cultural factor in the process of cultivating singing and musical skills is the environmental factor. The environmental factor is broken down into two parts: school support and societal support of musical and singing activity. It is now being realized that the level of competence that one reaches as a singer is dependent on the availability of opportunities for learning (Sloboda and Howe, 1991). These opportunities for learning will only blossom in an educational and societal setting where music is valued, enjoyed and encouraged (Shuter-Dyson, 1999). An individual will exhibit a variety of singing behaviors solely dependent on his/her musical context (Welch, 1986). For example, if a young person is in a school situation where singing is perceived as a positive experience, most young people will become involved and develop admirable vocal skills. If the school climate is such that singing is a negative experience, these same

young people will not become involved and will thus stunt their personal musical development. Sloboda (1990) found that most school climates were not conducive to singing. He reported that only 27% of participants in his study rated positive memories of music when a music teacher was involved and only 17% of events were remembered as a positive memory when a participant was in a performing situation at a school. This shows how influential school and societal views on singing are for each student's musical development.

Finally, one must look at individual personal motivation in the development of singing and musical aptitude. It has been found that in working with adults, who deemed themselves as non-singers early in their childhood, the desire to sing and be involved in musical endeavors was great. The motivation to express themselves through music and to be able to participate without feeling embarrassment or shame are some of the main reasons that adults come back to singing after avoiding participation for many years (Topp, 1987). This great desire inspires individuals to practice, which ultimately aids in the development of musical skills. Without this motivation, musical and singing skills will remain moribund throughout their entire adult life.

Characteristics of Adult Non-Singers

Even with well-founded research supporting the idea that musical ability is apparent in all, there are still many within Western society who believe they are not musical. These individuals are called, for the purposes of this paper, adult non-singers. There are two major characteristics that most adult non-singers possess. These characteristics are: a) each adult non-singer perceives themselves as being unmusical and b) each adult non-singer has had a negative singing experience in his or her childhood

Adult non-singers were caught in a society in which the idea of musical ability is dependent solely on innate gifts. This idea is so dominant in our society that it becomes internalized and accepted by adult non-singers. These individuals falsely come to the conclusion that they are not and cannot become musical (Henessey, 2000; Ruddock and Leong, 2005). Their perception of not being musical becomes a barrier to singing involvement. Also this perception of themselves as not possessing the innate musical ability they believe is necessary to be musical, causes feelings of shame, humiliation and inadequacy when they are faced with any choral activity (Freer, 2006; Hennessy, 2000; Legette, 1998). Since an adult non-singer's self-perception of musical ability is one of incompetence, this perception will have a negative effect on future singing (Bouffard *et al.*, 1998; Monks, 2003; Ree, 1999). An example of this is in Mawhinney's (1987) work with 600 university students. Sixty of these students perceived themselves as being unmusical, yet they scored on average 59% on a pitch-matching test while those who deemed themselves as musical only scored 78%. One of the conclusions from this research was that it was only their self perception of being unmusical and not their actual ability that placed them, in their minds, on the unmusical side of society.

All research conducted with adult non-singers reports that some kind of negative singing experience occurred in their childhood and that this experience has played a crucial role in their later life. This is the second major characteristic of the adult non-singer. This experience usually involved an authority figure and is remembered as an important influence (Hennessy, 2000; Knight, 2002; Ruddock and Leong, 2005; Shuter-Dyson, 1999; Topp, 1987). Knight (2002) in her research into the phenomenon of adult non-singers discovered that each person had been silenced as a singer in either a

classroom or ensemble experience by a teacher or authority figure. This silencing had been a moment of great humiliation for each individual. Each individual accepted from the authority figure this attribution of being unmusical as a truthful verdict and without question held onto this viewpoint well into their adult life. Freer (2006), in his narrative research on his own singing experiences of childhood, remembers during puberty and the time of his subsequent voice change that he was told by the music teacher to stand in the back of the choir and only mouth the words. Freer writes, "Believing that I could not sing, I immediately quit choir" (Freer, 2006, p. 73). He did not engage in any vocal activity until he met a college professor who convinced him that he could, indeed, sing.

These are, unfortunately, not isolated cases in the phenomenon of adult non-singers. The story of the adult non-singer is a fairly common one and how they characterize and describe themselves also holds a regrettable commonality. They feel that they do not compare musically with family members or friends nor do they even try to sing for fear of being humiliated and judged by their society. An adult non-singer equates singing with a skill that one can either master or cannot master. Even though there may be an academic understanding of singing skill as developmental, adult non-singers believe that this does not apply in their situation (Knight, 2002; Ruddock and Leong, 2005).

CHAPTER THREE: THE PATH OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Personal Background of Individual Participants

Cheryl is currently an office administrator with a large corporation. She is 56 years old and attended a variety of elementary, secondary, and post-secondary institutions in the Calgary area. Her religious background is in the Lutheran faith and her ethnic background is fifth generation Canadian. Cheryl's response to asking if she had received any formal vocal training was, "Nada."

Sara is a 27 year old, masters of music student at the University of Calgary. In her early childhood, she emigrated from Guatemala and spent the majority of her schooling career around the Calgary area. She comes from a Roman Catholic religious background and a Latin American cultural background. Although she has received extensive instrumental instruction, Sara has not received any vocal coaching.

Motherhood has been the focus for Nancy for much of her adult life. At 54, she has explored careers in library science as well as massage therapy. However, she has always kept her family and home life at the forefront. Nancy attended elementary school in Winnipeg and secondary school in Calgary. She comes from a varied ethnic background including a Russian father and a Dutch mother. Even though she did not receive any formal training, she did receive vocal coaching through elementary choir, church choirs, and adult musical theatre productions. She is now very involved in yoga and is pursuing music on a different level. She wrote, "I haven't taken any further formal voice 'lessons' as I am now involved quite a bit with yoga in my quest to understand myself and my existence. Music has much to offer on so many levels. From pure enjoyment to its healing vibrations. The study of vibration, in its various manifestations,

is fascinating. Its healing potential is incredible. All this makes life such an adventure!"

The teaching of microbiology was Helen's career for 30 years. She was responsible for teaching this subject to first and second year students at the University of Calgary. This 67-year old academic attended elementary and secondary school in Winnipeg while her university education was in Calgary. Her formal musical training included 11 years of piano lessons, culminating in obtaining Grade 8 Royal Conservatory status. However, Helen did not receive any formal voice training throughout her childhood years.

Sydney, 74, a retired nurse of Irish and English descent, attended elementary and secondary school in Regina and post-secondary school in Edmonton. She took piano lessons as a child but did not have any formal vocal training throughout childhood and adolescence.

Accordion lessons, music theory and harmony, and singing back-up with an adult band sums up a lifetime of musical activities for Tony. Although this 44 year old, Roman Catholic, Italian man did not have formal vocal training, he continued to sing throughout his childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. His reasoning for being a part of this research was he had never been confident in his voice or his sense of pitch. His elementary, secondary, and post-secondary schooling all occurred in the Calgary area.

Ameeta is currently a land administrator for a company based in Calgary. She is 49 years old and of an East Indian ethnic background. She grew up in the Hindu faith but described her involvement with this faith as more of a philosophical basis than as a religious faith. Ameeta attended school in smaller centres in both Saskatchewan and British Columbia. She responded that she had received no formal music training

throughout her life.

Gilbert, a 52 year old retired professional reservoir engineer, spent his elementary schooling days in the Northern Alberta Peace River school district and his secondary schooling days close in St. Albert, Alberta. He did take piano lessons from age six to eight and then again from age 42-45 but he has had no formal vocal training. His grandparents were from France and Quebec and he is of the Roman Catholic faith.

A career spent promoting and enhancing education appropriately describes Ed's professional career. Ed spent his adult years as a teacher, principal, and superintendent in the Calgary Catholic School Board. He is now retired from a position in the education field at the age of 62. He spent his own early schooling career in a one-room school near Wainwright. There were eight grades in the school and he attended that school for grades one to four. The majority of his secondary school was also in Wainwright with one year at a boarding school in Edmonton. His father is from a French Canadian background and his mother is Ukrainian Canadian. When I asked if he had any formal musical training, his written response was, "Nothing whatsoever.

Ancaster, Ontario was where Marjorie's elementary and secondary schooling occurred. She attended the University of Waterloo before moving west and attending the University of Calgary and Olds College. She spent her professional career as an urban land use planner. In her last 15 years in this position, she was responsible for a division of 65 to 100 employees. She is now retired and is enjoying a change of pace as a part-time horticulturalist. This 61 year old is from five generations of Canadians. She was brought up in the United Church of Canada but is not currently active in this church denomination. Marjorie, even though she had some introductory piano and banjo lessons,

states that she did not have any formal vocal coaching in her childhood or schooling career.

Cheri's career goals have taken her into the medical field. She is currently a practicing pediatrician and manages her own clinic in Calgary. Her entire elementary and secondary schooling career took place in Brandon, Manitoba. She is 44 years old and claims a Protestant religious background. She had a brief encounter with playing the clarinet in junior high but did not receive any formal musical training throughout her childhood or adulthood. (Appendix I)

Acknowledgment of Pre-Conceived Perceptions

"The insight into the essence of a phenomenon involves a process of reflectively appropriating, of clarifying, and of making explicit the structure of meaning of the lived experience" (van Manen, 1997, p. 77). To arrive at such phenomenological insights, as van Manen has described, I analyzed my participants' private lessons for their similarities in experience and thematic aspects. I asked basic question, such as, "What is the uniqueness of this experience?" and "What is the significance of similarities or differences in the lived experiences of the participants?" Field notes taken from the lessons as well as transcribed notes from each individually videotaped session form the basis of the research data.

My journey began with the participants themselves as it was important for me to know them as individuals. Session Two was dedicated to discovering their perception of themselves as singers, how that perception had been formed, and how that perception had a past, a present, and a future. I discovered, especially in that session, that the narratives wove back and forth between childhood and adult singing experiences and were multi-

layered. Delving into such topics as childhood singing experiences, feelings of resentment or sadness about not having sung throughout their adult life, and personal views on musical talent and innate ability, revealed rich narratives.

During the sessions, it became apparent that two main factors needed to be addressed. One of these factors was a recognition of the historical background of the participants. As none of us live in isolation, I considered that we are who we are because of different experiences. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), the researcher must always be aware of where the participants have come from in terms of biases and background. No participant comes to a study without a past that unconsciously has affected his/her present. The participants, even though they may not have been aware that they have been affected by the past, carried such assumptions into their present thinking. With these purposes in mind, discussion ensued with the participants about past and present cultural assumptions and how such assumptions impacted their personal singing involvement in society and in the school system.

The second factor was the recognition of my own biases and perceptions as a researcher and how that affected the study. Clandinin and Connelly tell that " . . . it is important to note how imbued field texts are with interpretation. . . . Although we sometimes choose with conscious awareness, at other times we choose without being aware that we are making a choice" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 93). When I was viewing the data, I noted variables such as where the lessons were held (was my office at the university a comfortable and uninhibited setting for the participants?), what hour of the day lessons occurred, how much I directed the lessons (were participants allowed to speak freely or did I dominate the conversation?), and how I dressed (was wearing casual

clothing adding or detracting from the formality of the lesson?). I tried to assess the impact that each of these variables had on the words and actions of the participants. In taking into account these variables, the transcribed texts became a contextual reconstruction of events situated in a three-dimensional space; a space that considers feelings, hopes, environment, past, present, and future (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In other words, "We need to come to terms with our assumptions . . . to hold them deliberately at bay" (van Manan, 1997, pg 47).

Concepts Arising from the Gathering of Participants

In the process of gathering these particular participants for the study, I observed unexpected, yet very interesting, trends. The first was the relative ease with which participants came forward for the study. Within a short period of time after announcing this research project, I had filled my quota of needed participants. In pondering why was it so easy to find participants for a research project on non-singers, I thought back to my many memories of people saying either that they were a non-singer themselves or that they knew of someone whom they deemed a non-singer. Comments such as, "You don't want to hear me sing," or "My daughter just can't sing," were common when I explained my occupation and research topic. The relative ease of finding participants unfortunately supported the commonality of this societal occurrence.

The second trend was that female participants came forward freely while the majority of the male participants had to be coerced or encouraged to participate by the women in their lives. Was this attitude a reflection of societal prejudices that men should be involved in more active endeavors than singing? Or did this trend support the idea that women are willing to face a deficit in their life while men are more prone to ignore it?

A third trend that emerged from gathering participants was that more females than males participated in this research project. This should not have been surprising as I have dealt with the paucity of men in singing endeavors throughout my career. It appeared my research on non-singers was to have the same ratio of men to women as most Canadian choral ensembles.

Reasons Why Participants Labeled Themselves as Non-Singers

When I asked my participants to tell their story of why they felt they were an adult non-singer, it revolved around at least one of three themes. The three themes are: 1) negative childhood experiences with singing at school; 2) negative childhood experiences with singing in the home; 3) cultural influences on the concept of singer.

Negative Childhood Experiences with Singing at School

When I asked about childhood singing experiences, I did not ask specifically for positive or negative encounters; I simply was looking for a description. The responses I received were amazingly similar. None of the participants described a positive childhood experience with singing. They all focused on a specific person or a negative encounter which affected their perception of themselves as singers. The person involved in the negative encounter at school was predominantly a teacher. Often this negative experience superceded any positive singing encounters at school. Even if my participants were encouraged by their parents to participate in musical endeavors, these opportunities were never pursued because the image of non-singer had been internalized. In the same light, positive elementary or junior high choral experiences were tainted by this negative encounter. Humiliation and shame were closely associated with the incidents when the participants simply accepted the judgment of the teacher.

Cheri's negative encounter happened in grade four in a school outside of Winnipeg, Manitoba. All students were given the opportunity to audition for a recess choir that would practice from January to May. The culmination of the rehearsing was to be a bus trip to Winnipeg to perform. She went eagerly to the audition with all the other girls. When the list was posted with the names of the choir members, she was the only grade four girl not to be accepted into the choir. She remembers, "I was devastated. They didn't even say, well you can hand out music. I was out. I was completely ostracized. So I was out at recess by myself in the freezing cold with no one to play with but all the boys. All the girls went to the choir. There was no one to play with at nine years old. It was humiliating – being the only one. You really have an awareness of acceptance or rejection at that age. You aren't egocentric anymore where you don't notice what everyone else is doing. It was absolutely devastating. And they practiced and practiced and practiced all through the winter months. It was a huge social event in the spring that I wasn't a part of. It was just devastating for me. Up until that point I didn't realize that I actually couldn't sing." I asked her if she had participated in the singing up until then with no reservations and she responded, "Always a good student, energetic, vivacious." When asked if this incident had affected her concept of herself as singer now, she replied, "Of course, I have associated this all with singing." When I asked her if she participated in any musical offerings during the rest of her schooling career, she replied, "I went to a junior high that had lots of musical productions but I never, ever had the confidence to be a part of them." Upon pondering about her childhood experiences, she realized that singing had been important to her as a child because she did desire to sing and to belong to the musical community. When I asked if she did not pursue musical endeavors

throughout her adolescence because of that grade four experience, she quipped, "Yah, I think so. I never had the confidence to participate, to try out for a role. That was it – that was done." She finished with, "Your impact [as a teacher] can be huge, without you even knowing it –positively or negatively. The one little thing you say could be the turning point either positively or negatively. It is a huge responsibility to be holding in a young person's life."

Sydney told a similar story. She came from a very musical home where piano lessons and musical participation were encouraged. Sydney's experience goes back to a teacher in grade two. She recalls one particular day, she was singing enthusiastically, when the teacher said to her, "Would you mind just mouthing the words?" This comment contributed to her low self-confidence in herself as a singer for years beyond that classroom. She made the assumption at the age of seven, based on the statement from an authority figure that she could not sing and has not sung in any great capacity for 65 years.

Cheryl also related that her negative experience occurred within a school setting. She loved to sing but never received encouragement from home to pursue this venture. She went through childhood thinking that she did not have a good voice. She was drawn, because of her internal desire to sing, to join a grade seven choir directed by her homeroom teacher. When the time came for the choir to perform, her teacher told her not to sing in the performance. Cheryl remembers being heart-broken because she loved this activity. She wrote the following response when I asked her to tell how much she wanted to sing as a child. " I REALLY, REALLY, REALLY wanted to sing. I used to dream about entertaining people by singing songs at parties and singing on stage." Even though

she will now sing around the house and in her car, she is too embarrassed and self-conscious about singing in a more public setting. This aversion to singing in a public setting is wrapped in the feelings of humiliation which Cheryl felt in grade seven.

Marjorie grew up and was educated in a small town in Ontario. When I asked her if she had any memories of musical experiences in her childhood, she mused that her itinerant elementary school music teacher was like the "wicked witch of the west." Marjorie described her as having a scolding and authoritative manner. The teacher would bang rhythms out with a ruler on the desk and comment on how the children should already know how to perform the musical task. She would single out children who made mistakes. The music teacher also threatened to leave the stage at a school concert if Marjorie's class did not sing better. Marjorie remembers her teacher saying, "If you don't start singing together, I'm just going to walk off this stage." Marjorie wrote, "Music class was NOT fun at all. I just remember thinking, 'Oh, she's [the music teacher] coming' and it wasn't a happy thing." Marjorie, a highly sensitive person, felt that any message about singing ability was a message to her. If her music teacher said to the class that they were not singing properly then Marjorie thought that she was not singing properly. She said that, "I was never . . . singled out but in my mind I was." Marjorie also felt she was never recognized as an individual person by the music teacher. This was a result of following two older, extroverted brothers through the school system. When I commented near the end of the sessions that she did not have a specific negative encounter with a teacher, she corrected me and said, "Well, yes, I had that music teacher that kind of discounted me. You're Doug's younger sister and he sang alto so you're an alto. That kind of faceless [relationship] . . . And then she scolded the whole choir for not

performing right. We were in grade two. And I took that personally. And I think in hindsight, as an adult, she [the teacher] was probably just a talented person with a whole bunch of frustration but there's still no excuse."

Helen came from a musical home. She was encouraged as a child in musical affairs and she participated in church choir and piano lessons. She never considered herself particularly musical but she enjoyed playing enough to reach a grade eight level in Royal Conservatory Piano. Family celebrations always included singing and playing and she remembers this in a positive light. However, her experience at school was a different matter. In grade three, she decided to audition for the school choir. She was excited about this singing opportunity. During her audition the teacher said to her, "You know, you don't have a very good voice, Helen. Just stand there and just do what you have to do but don't sing too loud." She remembers that interaction as a pinnacle moment in her singing career. She wrote, "I was very embarrassed at the time. I thought the teacher was very mean." Since that incident, she has not considered herself a singer. "I would never, ever consider myself as a singer." She never pursued singing or any musical endeavor through the elementary or junior high school system. When I asked if she thought her grade three teacher's comment had affected her participation as an adult, she replied, "I think so because my friend [Nancy] has been encouraging me to join a community choir. I keep saying, 'Oh, I can't sing. I would never be able to do something like that.'" When I continued asking her if this may have affected her perception of herself, she laughed and said, "Well, I don't think I'm a singer. I can sing at church the hymns and our Christmas carol sing-along that we have at home but I would never consider myself a singer."

Similar childhood experiences continued as a theme for Cathie. In grade three, Cathie's classroom teacher pulled her aside and encouraged her to sing. This occurred over an extended period of time. Cathie, a shy student, enjoyed this individual attention and was keen to sing and impress her teacher. However, she did not realize that the culmination of this training would be to sing in the small town music festival. She ended up on stage in front of her family, peers, and adjudicators singing the song that she and her teacher had prepared. Cathie remembers this performance experience as a very negative one. She felt humiliated because she did not perform at the same level as the other singers. After that performance experience, she concluded that, "I'm never going to do that again. That was it. I just felt like such a disappointment to my teacher, to myself." When I asked if she had performed since then, she responded, "Never. That did it for me. That experience made me say, 'I'm not doing that again.' It was uncomfortable, I'm not good at singing and so I just never put myself in that situation where I had to do that." I asked if her mother talked to her at the time about this incident. Cathie indicated that the singing incident was never discussed. This negative performance experience, combined with an introverted personality, is one of the reasons Cathie believes she has not sung in 40 years. She commented, "For me singing was very personal, so criticism was hard to take."

Sara is currently a masters of music student who has won numerous instrumental awards and participates in concert bands and orchestras. She has not sung since junior high. Her singing story ends when she heard about a comment made by a teacher about her singing ability. While she was participating in her junior high choir at an assembly, a science teacher heard her sing. That day after school, Sara received a ride home with one

of her friends. Her friend's little sister said to her, "Mr. Kelp told our class that you couldn't sing." This statement made her very uncomfortable. She went home that night and recorded herself singing to determine if this statement were indeed true. When she was unable to ascertain if she was an incompetent singer, she chose to stop singing. Sara quit choir and never sang again. She surmised that, "What I was perceiving as fun and good was being perceived elsewhere as just awful. It was a really big shock to me." She sees this experience as the root of why she has not sung in the last ten years. "I don't sing because of that experience." When I asked her if she ever considered that the science teacher was wrong in his assessment, she paused in the interview and then said, "No, I'm sure he wouldn't have said anything just for kidding or to be rude. I think that if he said something it was because it troubled him or it was really obvious. Maybe he was wrong in telling the class but not in the assessment." She concluded with the declaration, "When it comes from a person in authority, how can you not believe that?" I asked a further question to see what her perception of herself as a singer would be like if she found out that her friend's sister had misunderstood the science teacher. Would her perception of herself as singer be different if she found out that the comment made about her singing ability was actually not directed at her? She responded, "I have thought a lot about your question, and the truth is that every time I come to it, I'd rather not think about it. I think that if I had misunderstood my friend's sister or she had misunderstood her teacher, it would be so unfortunate to have gone all this time with my mouth shut up and being all shy about singing." She had convinced herself that she could not sing because her science teacher made that statement about her singing ability. Even though the statement was not made directly to her, she never questioned the declaration. Sara related

that, "Singing was so important to me and so much fun. Choir was my place of relief from school, I guess, and it was something that I couldn't get enough of. I will always remember those days. They were just so much fun, and such a good way to unwind and release some tension. It was very relaxing to be in choir." I asked Sara if a teacher had commented on her jogging ability, would she have taken it so personally? She wrote, "No, I wouldn't have cared so much, but singing is your voice. It's the way you communicate. In a way, I guess it's also your heart that you're sharing with all those people you sing to. So, it really hurt."

Negative Childhood Experiences with Singing in the Home

Similar to the negative childhood experiences with singing at school were the negative childhood experiences with singing in the home. Even though Gilbert, Ameeta, Nancy and Tony had supportive domestic environments for musical endeavors, there was an occurrence within their home situation that defined their development into an adult non-singer.

Gilbert had two influential people who contributed to his development as a non-singer. The first person was his mother. He describes her as pushy. She tried to entice Gilbert to do the things that she wanted him to do through coercion or guilt. "Just do it for me. Do it for Mom." These were often words Gilbert heard while growing up. Gilbert resisted this coercion and often did the opposite of what was asked by his mother. This was the case in singing. He was encouraged by his mother to sing in both school and church but he found her overbearing in this desire. This made Gilbert retract his involvement with singing all together. "I didn't want to encourage her so I just didn't sing at all." I asked him if he thought if his mother's overbearing desire was part of the reason

why he does not sing as an adult. He responded, "That started it. I don't sing. I haven't sung as a young boy and it just carried on." Gilbert currently takes a yoga class once a week. The yoga instructor often chants during this class and encourages the participants to chant as well. Gilbert describes his experience with chanting: "It is an embarrassment. I'm tight and tense. I'm not enjoying this. In my mind, deep down, I am waiting for my instructor to say, 'Oh come on Gil, you can sing louder,' and then right away I equate her with my mother who is trying to push me. So again it is very interesting how we create those things. My brain is expecting you [me as the researcher] to start saying 'Sing' like my mother did."

The second influential person in Gilbert's singing life was a boy named L.T. L.T. was six years older than Gilbert and was the leader of the neighborhood group of boys. This influential 12 year old thought singing was a sign of being a sissy so Gilbert, as the youngest, also adopted this attitude. Gilbert stated, "Well, I couldn't have my friends, especially L.T., know that I was singing. I would have been called a girl and that would have devastated me. I grew up in a small town and I wouldn't have had anybody else to play with. L.T. and the gang set the agenda as to what was ok to do and what was not ok to do." Even to this day, Gilbert views men who sing as a strange. There is something deep down that makes him think that singing is not for boys or men. He sees men who sing as frail. He feels they should be rugby or hockey players instead. This attitude, he believes, comes from his childhood and the influence of L.T. I asked if he believed that he would look more admirably upon singing if L.T. had sung, and his answer was "I believe I would be singing today if L.T. had sung."

Ameeta's negative experience in the home setting involved an encounter with her brother. The story happened at Christmas time when Ameeta was in grade four. Neighbors had gathered in the community centre for a Christmas celebration. A general invitation went out to all the children to sing a solo in front of the group so Ameeta decided she would stand up and sing. She recalled this incident by stating, "So I remember singing and he [her brother] is laughing at me. He is laughing and he is younger than me - two or three years younger than me. So from that point . . . I was so embarrassed I started crying. At eight years old or seven years old. You mentioned about a discouraging situation around an adult. Well it wasn't an adult at all. It was my brother. I don't know if that was what caused me not to sing. It may have been subconsciously. It probably did I am thinking now." Ameeta has now been seeking out some opportunities to sing but it has taken several decades to come to this point in her singing career. When I asked how being humiliated in public had affected her, she wrote, "My incident happened in public at a point in my life (when I was seven) when I was really putting myself out there. So I was very embarrassed and I still remember my brother's reaction to this day – 40 odd years later!"

Nancy's negative experience with singing occurred in both her childhood and adulthood home environments. Nancy's father had played the violin before marrying her mother. However, he did not play after they were married. Nancy remembers tension in the home and this became associated with the lack of support for musical endeavors. Now, having had the chance to assess childhood influences on adult musical practices, she mused, "This is why I am here [as part of this research]. I think this thing about my Dad is part of it. I don't know how much more is there. If I really identify with my Dad?

All these things you wish you could get past." In an email response to the question of how much as a child did she really want to sing, she responded, "Even though I didn't know it then, it was probably the most important thing to me. Even now I remember songs learned in elementary school . . . That experience may have included not just singing, but acceptance by others of me as a singer." Coupled with these childhood experiences with music was a school experience from her grade seven year. "In grade seven you had to sing in front of everybody and you were tested. We didn't ever sing as a group outside of the classroom. I don't know how I was at that point but it was very traumatic."

Despite these circumstances, Nancy sang throughout childhood, adolescence and into her adult life. It was not until she had her own children that she started to think of herself as an adult non-singer. "When I was told not to sing was when my kids got older. I loved all the musical songs and the kids songs [Charlotte Diamond, Raffi] and it was always on. Then there came a point when . . . they started to listen to other music and I didn't sound like the pop stars." I asked if she remembered what her children had said about her singing. "I can't remember exactly but there was the tone. There was less and less time at home and they would have friends over and they didn't want me making noise. I internalized that a lot more. They didn't say it to be mean but that's what they came up with. It's really hard to overcome that."

Tony believes his perception of himself as a non-singer also goes back to his childhood experiences in the home. Tony has always been involved with music-making. "Music runs in our family on both sides. My Mom and Dad are in church choir and I would say that my dad is very gifted. In fact, I think he could have been a professional

singer. My mom is a very good singer and my brother has a good sense of natural pitch. That's where I feel a bit shortchanged. The gene pool kind of got diluted with me." Tony has taken keyboard and accordion lessons, studied theory, and played in a band for years. However, he feels his singing career may have been stunted because of comments made by his father. "But from the singing end, as a kid, I'd be whistling and my Dad would say 'You're out.' He says the way you whistle is the way you sing. So there has always been this thing that I am out of key . . . I was kind of shut down so I never really [pause]. So in my childhood experience, I have been very musical and pushed to be musical but it was in the singing, I was led to believe by my Dad early on that I had a pitching issue." In a later discussion about the concept of a pre-eminent moment, Tony suggested, "The incident would be the whistling incident where I am whistling to a record and am thinking that I am right on and he is saying, 'You're way out. You hear it?' And in fact I couldn't hear it. And then that coupled along now with every other incident [throughout youth and adulthood]. Now you kind of recognize that you don't have the pitch . . . you are a little reluctant to [pause]. That is what sparked me into thinking I don't have the goods. I had all the ambition. Even had long hair at one time!" Tony, throughout his childhood and adolescence, sang with a band. It was not until he was in his mid-teens, when he started to use microphones and amplified sound, that he began to doubt his own singing ability. "It was probably when I was 15 or 16 when I took a conscientious step back and said I don't want to be part." Even though Tony currently sings with a band, he is very particular about what he sings. "So if we learn a new song, it would be a one in twenty chance that I would take a shot at singing it. Had those incidences [with his father and the band] not occurred, I might have taken a shot all 20 times. I kind of got pigeon-

holed and was led to believe my range was like this (indicates something very small)." Tony, at the end of the Session Two stated, "I do believe that the biggest downfall is when you are criticized at a young age. If you are shut down in your elementary school years, that can affect your life. It hurts down to the bone. If you are shut down, you may never do that again, which is a big loss."

When I asked Tony if he felt singing was important to him as a child, he replied, "Absolutely . . . Considering how much value I put into it, I was very quick to shut it down when I was led to believe that I may not be that gifted. I always thought wouldn't it be great to be a John Lennon or Dean Martin." He stopped singing lead in public with his band during his adolescent years because of his lack of confidence with his singing voice. "The public part of it was huge. When I sang in my car to the radio, I thought, that I sounded great. In public, I brought that same confidence but didn't receive the same accolade. Being humbled in public then translates into a personal humiliation as you become your worst critic."

Cultural influences on the Concept of Singer

The third major reason why the participants labeled themselves as non-singers is based on a personal resignation to the societal cultural influences on the concept of singer. These cultural influences fell into five categories: environmental factors at school and at home, a focus on the idea of innate ability, a limiting definition of the concept of singer, a lack of understanding of the physical vocal instrument, and the pressure of a culture of excellence.

Environmental factors at school and at home influencing concept of singer

The opportunity to sing at school for the participants was described predominantly as non-existent. Gilbert's comment was, "I don't think there was ever a time in grades one through three where we were asked to sing." Ed commented, "There were no choices in junior high. There was no music per se. There were little sessions [one or two classes] of music as part of curriculum in late elementary grades. I don't think we did any music in junior high. I don't think it was offered in our school . . . So, in terms of schooling, there was no opportunity and the small amount of opportunity that there was, there was not encouragement for me as an individual." Marjorie concurred with Ed's assessment. She regrets there were not more informal opportunities to be involved with music at the secondary level. She mused that it would have benefited her schooling career had there been more recreational opportunities afforded to her through the school. "Once you got into high school, if you didn't choose the music option, there was no exposure to music."

For the majority of the participants, singing was not encouraged in the home. Sydney, Sara, Tony and Helen recalled being encouraged by their parents to pursue instrumental interests such as piano, flute or accordion but not singing interests. Helen commented, "I don't really remember my parents encouraging me to sing formally. I played the piano, so I think it was enough for them to keep me focused on practicing piano." Sydney talked about how her mother, who held a music degree, encouraged her to play the piano but did not encourage her to sing. She thinks that, " . . . we were living with my grandparents at that point and she was taking care of a baby. She probably just didn't think about it."

For Ameeta, Ed, Cheri, and Cathie, their home environment neither encouraged nor discouraged musical participation; musical participation was simply not a part of the family makeup. These participants equate this disinterest for musical participation to their own perception of being a non-musical family. "No, no one ever encouraged me to sing. Singing wasn't part of our family at all," Ameeta stated in a session. Cathie commented, "I wouldn't have called us a musical family!" Ed concluded the discussion on childhood experience with singing in the home, by saying, "Well, it was pretty much non-existent."

Focus on idea of innate ability

To discover if the concept of innate ability resonated with the participants, I asked their view on how it influences the capability to sing. The participants were in agreement that most people, unless there was a physical impediment of the vocal apparatus, could sing at a basic level. They were also in agreement that one could not progress beyond producing an adequate vocal sound without possessing an innate musical gift for such a sound. The idea that one could improve with practice did come to the forefront. However, there continued to be an underlying tone of the necessity of innate ability. Marjorie felt that everyone with time and effort could become a satisfactory singer. However, to excel she proposed that one needed to have such ability as part of their genetic makeup. When I asked Helen if she thought Celine Dion's success in the music industry was due to her innate singing ability or her commitment to developing her vocal sound, Helen said, "I think she probably has an innate ability . . . When you hear of Celine Dion or famous opera singers, like Pavorotti, that must be innate to have those beautiful voices." When I presented the findings from O'Neill's (1999) study that concluded that musicians practiced 10 000 hours before achieving professional status, Helen found pause for

thought. She said, "So even if you don't have any innate ability but you practice and practice and practice, will you get to the same level as someone who has innate ability?" At the conclusion of this discussion, Helen began to see the merit in viewing singing skill as a developmental process. "Obviously if you had that innate ability and [you] practiced enough, [you] could probably become a professional but I think it is a combination. I am not sure I would have said that before coming in today. Before I would have said you would have had to have that natural ability." The following quote by Tony on innate ability versus developmental importance summarized the beliefs held by the participants. " . . . you can learn to be an average singer but you need a god-given ability to be a great singer . . . So, I think its 50/50. But I don't think if you don't have that god-given ability you can do better than 50. You can go from 25 to 50 but you can't go over the top."

A limited societal definition of singer

The third major category of cultural influences on the concept of singer is the belief in the limited societal definition of singer. I brought forward the following societal definition of singing to my participants: singing is to utter words and vocables in musical tones with these utterances related to delivering songs as a trained professional. The participants agreed with this definition because they believed the idea of performing to a standard was imbedded in the meaning of singer.

I proposed to use the broader definition of singer that I wrote in Chapter One; singer being one who could produce a vocal tone. My participants received this broader definition with some speculation. The idea of being able to perform in front of an audience was thoroughly embedded in most participants' definition of singer. When I asked Helen if she thought there was an acceptance of a spectrum of singers in our

society, she said, "No, I guess there are two levels. People like you and Doug Baker [friend whom she views as having musical talent] are on one level and then Pavarotti on another level. But people like me? I don't think most people think of us as singers." Marjorie suggested a very interesting concept that applies to the widely held view of singer. "Maybe we should have a different name for all the rest of us? If Celine [Celine Dion] is a singer, then what are the rest of us? We can make music with our voices but not at that level of excellence. If I say I'm a singer, everyone expects Celine Dion. If we could say, yes I'm a singer but I am a singer that sings to her baby at night. If I could say I'm a singer but I'm a midnight mom singer but not a performance singer. But if I say I'm a singer, it is expected that I can get up on stage and sing. Maybe if there were different levels allowed, then people would dabble. I can contribute at this level and I will joyously contribute at that level." Her final comment illuminated a flaw with the limited societal view on the definition of singer. "One word of singer is too big."

Concept of not having an adequate physical instrument with which to sing

Most of my participants believe that human beings have the physical capability to sing but they quickly qualified by saying that this does not mean that all people have an adequate vocal instrument that is capable of producing pleasing results. Ameeta, when asked if she felt that she had the physical capability to sing, responded, "Everyone has the physical capability but not everyone is good." When I asked Sara the same question, she laughed and responded, "No, I think I have musical ability but I think there is something that's not . . . didn't develop in my vocal cords, in my throat. I can play my instrument really well. I obviously know a lot about music but if I had any physical ability to sing then it is really limited." I pursued this idea by asking her if she believed there is a

physical difference between her vocal instrument and a professional singer's instrument. She quipped, "Yah, I think there would be difference." I concluded this portion of the interview by asking if she thought she had an adequate vocal instrument. She paused and then responded, "I don't know. I want to say yes but I don't want to say it's totally adequate."

Pressure of a culture of excellence

Since the participants came from different cultural backgrounds, I was curious to discover how their experiences with Canadian culture as well as other cultures could illuminate our societal view on singing. Marjorie and Sydney talked about their views on the white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant culture. Marjorie grew up in this type of culture that required one to work hard on earth in order to reap the reward in heaven. Dancing and singing were seen as sinful and one did not want to embarrass oneself by participating in such endeavors because that ultimately embarrassed the family. Sydney concurred with Marjorie's summation by saying, "The white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant – I think we are all inhibited to quite a degree. It is something to do with that Protestant work ethic back in the time of the Reformation. We can't relax without a guilty conscience. If we were Italians, or French, we would sing more and it would be more natural for people like me." When I asked what effect the white, Anglo-Saxon culture had on her, Sydney said, "I think it is restrictive. I think some of those early Protestant groups, you pretty much had to toe the line and couldn't have any fun. Couldn't dance, couldn't sing. That is what I was brought up in."

Sara and Tony experienced growing up within a different culture. Sara's family emigrated from Guatemala during her early childhood. I asked her to describe the singing

experience as seen through the eyes of Guatemalan culture. "It's kind of different in Guatemala. There is music everywhere. There is no generational gap. The music I listen to is the music that my grandma listens to. There is no gap. Everyone shares the same kind of music. When I moved here, I guess it did change because there is more of a kids listen to this kind and adults listen to this kind." I asked her if she thought she would be a non-singer if her family had remained in this Latin American culture. She laughed and said, "No. Because there is so much, you don't even call it music performance. It is part of the culture. Everyone sings or plays something and you practice outside. You have people dancing and playing outside. They haven't yet isolated the performer from day to day life . . . Even going to a concert, it doesn't feel the same way as here. There isn't a gap like the performer, the sole proprietor of the music and we can't do it. It is just like someone is showing us something, sharing something that they can do and is really good. You can take part and enjoy. Rather than a showing." I pursued this cultural view by asking Sara if she felt there was an acceptance of a spectrum of musical ability in Guatemalan society. She responded affirmatively. "Yah, even if you are singing with your family or if you want to strum the guitar, or clap your hands in a family situation. There is something for everybody. It is more inclusive. You are encouraged at whatever level you are at. They are not limited to - okay you have to sing the first part of this chorale. You just contribute on whatever part you can. So if you can only contribute the humming every now and then, then that is what you contribute. It is more inclusive that way."

Tony, being of Italian descent, grew up in a very musical home. He asserted definite views on how Canadian culture affected not only his participation in singing, but

the participation of societal members at large. In the opening session, Tony said, "Music runs in my family on both sides." The concept that singing should be limited to a select few was not a part of Tony's cultural upbringing. His upbringing was quite the opposite. Tony commented, "Western culture decides immediately that you have it or you don't. At Italian soccer games, they sing. Everyone is joining in. No one is thinking I can't sing. It is understood that you have to be part of this thing. You can walk down the street in Italy and someone is singing from a balcony." However, when I asked him about the potential of singing on a balcony in downtown Calgary, he responded, "I don't think you could do that here. If you ever see anyone walking down the hall singing or whistling, you would think it strange or why is he so happy? Our culture keeps everyone in check."

The Perception of Non-Singer as Manifested in Participants

Once my participants had labeled themselves as non-singers, based on the combination of their negative childhood singing experiences and cultural influences on the concept of singer, this label was perpetuated throughout their adult lives. The outward expression of this perception of self as non-singer was visible throughout the sessions in one or more of the following manifestations:

- Physical barrier to singing
- Psychological barrier to singing
- How nervousness and self-consciousness affect vocal production
- How nervousness and self-consciousness affect their confidence in their own singing ability
- An inability to produce vocal sound adequate to their own ear
- A reluctance to accept physical capability

- An acceptance of the societal concept of required perfection in order to sing
- A realization they were missing basic music skills
- Feelings of resentment and regret

The participants displayed such characteristics throughout the sessions. These outward manifestations were expressed vocally during our time together, shown to me through their voice and body language, or written to me in email responses.

Physical barriers to singing

In Session Three, the majority of the participants erected physical barriers to singing. These physical barriers became evident in four ways. The first manifestation was the participants' choice of where to stand. Most participants stood at least two metres away from me during singing activities and continued to do so throughout the sessions. This appeared to allow them a feeling of safety in the face discomfort.

The second manifestation was to lean against the wall during singing exercises. For example, Cheri, in Session Six, was leaning against the wall with weight on one leg during the vocal exercises. I noted that Cheri, through this body language, communicated a discomfort with singing and an attempt to distance herself from the experience. I did not ask her to move away from the wall as I thought it might inhibit her even more.

The third manifestation was shaking the head if they did not feel they had sung a passage up to their standard. Numerous participants responded with this movement when they missed an interval, mispronounced a word, or did not feel their sound was adequate. Helen, in session four, often shook her head and made such comments as, "This sounds horrible." Such physical manifestations affected their vocal sound by blocking the airflow

and disrupting the vibration of the vocal folds. A vicious circle then ensued as the vocal sound emanating became even less likely to meet their expectations.

The final manifestation of creating a physical barrier was to fold the arms across the chest while singing or talking. During the opening session when asked if she would sing *Happy Birthday*, Sara immediately folded her arms in front of her while exclaiming, "No, no way." Cheri often had her arms folded at the start of the vocalization exercises in a possible attempt to place a physical shield between us. When I asked the participants to bring down their arms so their singing performance would not be impeded, they complied. However, when new concepts were introduced, I noticed that the arms again became folded and crossed in front of the chest. These four physical manifestations were an outward indication of the inner shield that these participants had developed over the years from childhood into adulthood.

Psychological barriers to singing

The psychological barriers to singing that were erected by the participants were almost as blatant as the physical barriers. The participants showed through dialogue and in email responses their acceptance of the identity of non-singer. Throughout the sessions, they revealed thoughts about themselves as non-singers and these revelations were often unprompted. On one side they discussed a theoretical knowledge that they could physically vocalize but on the other side was a psychological impediment that did not allow them to accept the singing experience as positive. There were two facets to this psychological barrier: the first was a resistance to sing during the sessions and the second was a resistance to sing in the wider world.

An inner conflict became evident when the participants were asked to sing in Session Three. At the beginning of this session, Gilbert stated, "Boy, I can't wait for the end of this [the research sessions]. I can't wait for it to be over." After he sang, Gilbert commented, " . . . I was nervous and the sensation in me was I don't want to be here. Again, I can equate that to when I was a young child. I identify with that." Sara, after Session Four, in which she appeared to be very nervous, exclaimed, "The psychological thing about being told I can't sing, I can't sing, I can't sing. And now I have to come here and sing!" In response to my statement that she was used to singing in the tenor range, Marjorie commented, "I must correct you. I haven't sung a lot." Cheri, after I had complimented her, would make degrading comments about her own singing ability. She said, "There is a book called Naked on the First Tee. It is a self-help book. And that is sort of how I feel. When I am standing on the first tee box, I don't feel like I'm standing out there naked. But here [laughter]?" Ed, at the end of his first session of singing simply sighed, "Phew!"

A resistance to sing in the wider world also became apparent through dialogue. Numerous participants expressed horror at the thought of singing in a public situation or allowing someone else to hear their singing voice. Gilbert expressed this sentiment when he talked about his yoga teacher and her desire to have him chant. "I don't want you as my instructor, my teacher, to go inside of my titanium shield that I have put around myself. So I can feel the emotion in her voice when she is chanting . . . but I'm [arms crossed in front of him]. I don't want to do that." Cathie, when I asked if she wished she could sing, said, "Oh, it was always in my mind. Because we would go to karaoke and I would sit there and think, 'No way in a million years I could do that.'" Cheri would book

appointments at the time of her children's school Christmas caroling event so that she would not have to attend. Nancy expressed, "I'm really sabotaging myself because here I am saying I can't sing when I probably really can . . . So why do I not want to do it when it's possible?"

Continuing with the theme of resistance to sing in the wider world, I specifically asked the participants two questions. I asked if they would sing *Happy Birthday* in a social setting or if they would sing a solo at a Christmas party. Marjorie and Cheryl said they would sing at both events but either their singing would be so quiet that no one would hear them or they would simply mouth the words without actually vocalizing. Sara was a bit more adamant in her response. When asked if she would sing *Happy Birthday*, she stated, " No. No way. Sometimes I mouth the words if I think someone is staring at me. I don't sing. I don't even sing at church. I stand there with the book open. I don't sing." Sydney, when asked if she would sing a solo at a Christmas party, responded, "I would just melt on the floor. I could not do it. I would just say I can't do it and then I would probably go home." Cheri told me that she would only sing for her daughter and she would stop this activity if her husband or son came into the room.

Some participants projected the same attitudes that they held about their own singing ability onto other people. For example, after Tony had sung a very convincing rendition of *Better far to live and die* from The Pirates of Penzance, I said he should sing this particular piece for his wife. Upon arriving at the subsequent session, I asked if he had indeed sung it for his spouse. He responded, "I did but she closed the door because the baby was going to get some sleep. You [Colleen] had to go there, didn't you?" Tony believed that his wife was thinking the same negative thoughts as he was about his

singing voice. Marjorie shared the following story. " So, last night I thought I had better practice. So I went down to the piano and I was picking out the note and I started to sing and immediately the dog comes up and asks 'Can I go out?' [laughter]. We search for things that reinforce our belief."

Effect on Vocal Production

The non-singers in this study, despite being capable of producing adequate vocal tones, sabotaged themselves by letting feelings of nervousness and self-consciousness physically affect their vocal production. Many of the participants expressed feelings of tightness and tension in the throat and body when singing, which ultimately affected their vocal production. The result of this tension was the inability to breath properly, to produce quality upper register notes, and to produce what they deemed to be an adequate vocal sound.

Smiling at the end of one of the warm-up exercises, Gilbert commented, "I just lost everything. I haven't been able to breathe down in the diaphragm as much as I would like. Right away you get a little bit tense and so then I'm not thinking about this [indicating to his diaphragmatic area]. I'm thinking up here [putting his hand to his throat]." Nancy, in a similar situation, commiserated with Gilbert's view. She remarked, after singing *Song of the Mira*, "It is amazing how I can kill it [the sound] so easily." She had stifled the breath and allowed tension to creep into her body because of her self-conscious feelings about her own voice. Helen expressed a similar experience, "Yah, this morning I could do it [take a full breath]. It just came out. But now I am not going to be able to because I am thinking about it!" Most of the other participants, throughout the sessions, talked about the inability to breathe properly because of physical tension. The

root cause of this physical tension, once prodded to ponder, they realized was the feeling of inadequacy as a singer. Taking a full breath in anticipation of singing would mean full commitment to this action and so they aborted the attempt.

A second sign of nervousness and self-consciousness affecting vocal production was the inability to produce quality upper register notes. When the participants were asked to sing higher than a B4 their reaction was very similar. Many participants forced the sound from the throat and in so doing, created neck and body tension. They would also put their hands to their throat or grimace when asked to sing in this register. Such expressions were physical demonstrations betraying inner feelings of nervousness. Their self-consciousness came from the fact that the higher register is more exposed and the participants felt vulnerable producing such vocal sounds. They were somewhat comfortable singing between A3 and A4 but felt vocally inadequate producing tones in the upper range because of feelings of self-consciousness. It was not a matter of being unable to physically produce such pitches but it was their mindset that deterred them. During the warm-ups when they did not have music or words, the majority of the singers could adequately sing within a 12-note range. These warm-ups would also include upper range notes that were included in the repertoire. However, once they would see these notes on the written page or hear them in the melodic line of the repertoire, the singers allowed their concept of themselves as non-singers to creep into their consciousness. To hear themselves singing in such a range was mentally too uncomfortable for them. This was particularly evident in the cases of Cheryl, Tony, Nancy, and Marjorie.

Cheryl, upon seeing an E5 on the written page in *I'se the B'y,* firmly stated, "I can't get up there." When hearing the melodic contour of *Scarborough Fair* played on

the piano, she commented, "How am I ever going to get up there? Up that high?" Tony also created tension for himself when attempting to sing the higher register notes. While he was singing the line that culminates in an F4 in *Danny Boy*, I noticed tension building up in his neck and shoulders. There was also a glimmer of fright in his eyes at the prospect of having to sing a note in that range. At the conclusion of the piece, he said, "As soon as you hit that note [on the piano], I thought, 'Are you crazy?'" Nancy, when faced with singing a C5, strained her voice and allowed physical tension to creep in to her face, neck, and shoulders. She said, "I can feel the panic already." When I asked why she was panicking, she responded, "Because it's a higher note . . . It's not that it is so uncomfortable anymore. It's just that I have to think and maybe I don't want to think." Nancy, throughout the sessions, alternated between producing a physically relaxed tone with a physically strained tone. After one instance of producing a physically strained tone at the climax of the melody in *Early One Morning*, Nancy commented, "I know, I can feel it when I let it go. It's open. It's different in here [placing her hand to her throat]. And when I close it down, obviously, I'm closing it down." Marjorie, when I told her that she was capable of singing the B4 in *Oh how lovely is the evening*, said, "It's the confidence [that precluded her from singing such notes], I guess." When I mentioned that we needed to work on removing the idea from her head that she could not sing in the upper register, she retorted, "It's more trusting that what comes out will not be horrendous."

Lack of Confidence to Sing

Despite efforts to create a safe singing environment, participants' confidence in their own singing ability was affected by nervousness and self-consciousness. As the

researcher and the one asking them to sing, I purposely wore casual clothes to each session and made my office space inviting to aid in making the sessions relaxing for the participants. I arranged the sessions around their schedule in order to avoid a feeling of being rushed or pressured. Still, most of the participants expressed angst at being in these sessions. Even with a relaxed atmosphere and a schedule they could control, the prospect of being asked to sing and having to comply with that request made them very self-conscious. Nervousness and self-consciousness were dominant feelings reported by the participants. These feelings ultimately affected their confidence in their own singing during the sessions and in the larger context of their lives.

Even within this carefully constructed environment, Ameeta commented, "It [the singing] is fun but I am still really nervous. I am very nervous to come to singing lessons." When I asked how she felt afterwards, she laughed and said, "Afterwards, I am relieved that it's over . . . If you can see my hands on the video, you'll notice my hands shaking." This nervousness undermined Ameeta's confidence in her own voice. She was constantly evaluating whether or not she was producing an adequate vocal sound. Cathie expressed nervousness about singing in a public situation. When I asked if she would sing a solo at a Christmas party, she replied, "I think I would die before I would ever do that. Going up there and singing in front of a group of people? I can't imagine. That would be the big fear . . . No, it would not be something I would do. Even with a lot of alcohol, it just wouldn't happen."

In addition to nervousness, self-consciousness also negatively affected the participants' confidence in their own voice and ability. These feelings of self-consciousness grew out of their negative experience with singing and were displayed in

how they spoke about their singing voice. There were numerous examples with all participants but I will focus on Cheri, Ed, Tony, and Helen.

Cheri, even after four singing sessions, was still very self-conscious about singing in this one-on-one situation. After singing through *Anything You Want*, she halted and stuttered, "I just honestly don't [pause] have the confidence. I feel really [pause] uhm [pause] like I just like it's not [pause]. I feel like I am faking. You know, it's just not me. I just can't do it. It is just so unnatural for me to sing. And so unfamiliar. So it feels really weird. It is painful for me to sing. You are a lovely person . . . but I dread this [clasping hands together in front of her body]. You are a very nice person but I really don't want to. It is so hard for me to do this."

When I mentioned to Ed after Session Two that we would sing the next time we met, he became apprehensive and self-conscious. "I am very leery of the next ones [sessions]. I am very self-conscious about my situation. I consider myself a pretty good public speaker . . . And so I am not scared of being in front of the room or in front of the microphone. But I am apprehensive of this because I feel so unskilled at it. And I am not used to doing unskilled things in front of people. Even just one person . . . I will be trying hard and I will be committed but I don't want you to be disappointed. How can someone be so unskilled?"

Tony, even though he said he would sing a solo in public, still encountered feelings of doubt about his own singing voice. He said he would not analyze his vocal production while performing but " . . . at the end of it, I am always questioning whether I am the right guy to sing that song. I have lost that confidence." He had become self-

conscious that he did not have an adequate vocal sound because of negative experiences with his family and band members.

Helen held similar sentiments. She expressed that she was self-conscious about the possibility of someone hearing her singing at church. "I hear the people beside me singing and they have such lovely voices and I am very self-conscious about my voice. I guess I sing quietly. I love singing hymns. I am not going to not sing but I just sing quietly."

Inability to Produce Adequate Self-Assessed Sound

All the participants could produce a very pleasant and supported vocal tone. However, to some, the tone produced was not adequate. They believed their tone was lacking because they did not possess a stellar vocal instrument. By not accepting their own vocal sound as pleasant, they were reinforcing their perception as non-singer. This was often revealed in the form of a negative comment. For example, Cheryl said, "I've got a frog in my throat," when she experienced a minor catch in her voice. Nancy said, "It was a bit scratchy," after singing through one of the warm-up exercises. Another manifestation of feeling they could not produce an adequate vocal sound was found in their refusal to accept a compliment about their vocal production. I would often hear derogatory comments aimed at their own voice or their ability to sing. I would counter these with positive comments that would be heard but not necessarily taken to heart. For example, when I complimented Marjorie on the perfect execution of the intervals of *Happy Birthday*, she appended, "In a choky, croaky kind of way." The inability to accept that they could, in fact, produce a pleasing vocal sound stemmed from their belief that

they did not possess an adequate vocal instrument. They would not allow themselves to consider any other label than non-singer.

Reluctance to Accept Physical Capability

The participants' perception of themselves as non-singers was perpetuated in their reluctance to accept that they possessed the physical capability to match pitches. The participants agreed that most people possess the physical ability to produce vocal utterances. However, when it came to the belief that they, themselves, had these same capacities, they were not as easily convinced. There was a refusal, because of their embedded concept of non-singer, to acknowledge that they could physically produce an accurate replication of the pitch. Gilbert's journey demonstrates this particular concept in a concise and clear way.

In the first session, I asked Gilbert if we were singing the same pitch. His response was that he could not tell because he could not distinguish individual pitches. However, he was aurally matching pitches consistently from the first singing session. His comment when I told him he was accurately singing the pitch was, "You could have fooled me." Throughout the first two sessions, he continued to match my pitch but I could see in his eyes that he did not trust that he was singing the correct note.

When I reassured him that he was physically responding with the proper pitch, his response was, "I'm amazed. Absolutely amazed! I wouldn't mind seeing that tape to confirm because I don't believe this. Honestly. It's a fluke. It's an absolute fluke. That is what my mind is saying. There is something. I'm not at the level of confidence. This can't be right. This isn't the case. I can't be on the right note. That's what is going on in the background. I'm not really on the right note. That's what I am thinking inside."

When I asked if this belief was a defense mechanism, his reply was, "No, it's not that. It's a belief that I shouldn't be able to hit a note. A strong belief that I shouldn't be able to hit a note." When I asked why he held this belief, he responded, "Because I can't sing." Gilbert continued to believe that he should not be able to match pitches or produce a vocal tone because of his inner image of himself as a non-singer. He often said that he was not confident in his ability to match pitches. He referred to his singing as his " . . . normal monotonic drone." I had a hard time convincing him that I was not lying about his ability to match pitches.

During one of the final singing sessions, while maneuvering accurately through the intervals of a warm-up exercise, I noticed Gilbert smiling. Upon realizing that I had noticed his smiling, he began to laugh. He exclaimed, "I am just surprised that I am able to do this. I think that is why I am smiling. I didn't think that I could ever . . ." When I finished his sentence by saying that he never thought he had the ability to accurately navigate between pitches, he responded, "Yah. So that is where the smiling is coming from. This isn't really me, I'm saying. It doesn't seem like it's me. It's like an out-of-body kind of thing. Like watching myself from afar or something like that."

Acceptance of Cultural Concept of Singing

My participants held the view that unless one could sing perfectly like a professional singer, then one should curb singing activities. This came from the limited notion that singing should be restricted to those who can perform at a certain level (Chapter One). There is a perceived cultural taboo against singing if the person performing is not going to reach a particular standard. My participants came to the sessions with this perception. They were reluctant to sing for fear of failure and fear that

they were not capable of singing to this standard. They were hesitant to allow themselves the chance to develop but desired to be at a standard of perfection.

This was apparent throughout the sessions with most of the participants. For example, Helen, when singing *All Things Bright and Beautiful*, lamented, "It sounds awful. Oh, it just sounds so horrible." Sydney made several remarks about the fact that she was definitely not a star student. Ed was reluctant to hand to me his written pre-test as he was not accustomed to submitting a document that may not have reached a prescribed standard. Cheryl would make comments such as, "I can do it. But not too well." Throughout the sessions the participants regularly made similar comments. When I asked them to delve into the reasons for such statements about their voices, I received responses that centered upon the concept of perfection. This concept is illustrated in the following responses:

Ameeta, when asked why she was creating tension in her upper body while singing on notes that were well within her range in *Early One Morning*, responded, "You want to know what is happening in my head? Whenever I am doing it [singing the line], I am so conscious of hitting the right note that it holds me back. Am I getting it? Am I doing it right? We like to be right. We like to do it correctly." I inquired of Sara why she does not sing when asked by her private instrumental teacher. She responded, " . . . I wouldn't want to take the chance of not being able to sing what I hear in my head. The fear factor of failure." Gilbert and Cathie also perpetuated this concept of perfection. Gilbert claimed, "I don't want to make a mistake. So I am scared. I don't want to make a mistake. So because of that nervousness, then that is where the tension builds. Oh, she's [Colleen] wanting me to do this and I don't want to have her have an unfavorable

impression of me by not being able to hit the notes. So again, it gets to ... I've got to do this. It kind of boils down to an approval. I needed a high approval rating from my piano teacher. I need a high approval rating from you." Cathie was so aware that she needed to reach a certain cultural standard to sing that even though she would sing privately in her car, she would place her cellular headset over her ear when singing. This way it would look to the other drivers like she was simply talking on the phone when she was actually singing. She was so conscious of her singing that even to a stranger in the car next to her, she had to send a culturally appropriate message. Cathie, in a subsequent session, made a poignant summary of this idea of cultural perfection in stating, "Who should really care if you should sing out of tune all the time? What does it matter? I don't know why. I guess it must be a society norm. We have singers and non-singers and for some reason we can never have the two performing. It really comes down to advertising a norm of our society . . . All the should, should, should. It's [the concept of being able to sing perfectly or not singing at all] at the top of the list and it's not good. I don't know who has the rule book, but boy, we follow the rules."

When they did sing during the sessions, not only were they seeking a certain standard, but they were also expecting progress towards that goal with every session. There was an underlying expectation that each individual would improve his/her musical skill during our time together. As the researcher, I had not articulated such expectations, but had inadvertently perpetuated such a view by continually adding on new musical concepts at each session. The desire to improve, eliminate mistakes, and reach perfection was strong in the participants. This is demonstrated in Sara and Sydney's words.

When I asked Sara in a different session if her anxiety about singing had diminished over the duration of the sessions, her reply was, "It lessened overall but I think that at some point it was greater anxiety than at the beginning because I felt like I should be improving. I don't know what she [Colleen] is looking for. So I felt like I had better be better at the end of the sessions than I was at the beginning."

Sydney echoed the same sentiments as Sara. Sydney, while writing down the melodic contour of *Ring around the Rosie* for the post-test, was finding that what she had written down was not matching up with what she was hearing. She muttered, "Isn't that crazy? I'm not learning where we started . . . Isn't that silly? I did better than that before we started the lessons."

Realization of Absence of Musical Skills

The participants revealed another manifestation of the label non-singer when they expressed regret that they had not acquired basic musical skills in their childhood. They felt the acquisition of these skills had not been a priority in their schooling careers. They bemoaned the fact that they did not graduate from grade school with a basic understanding of notation, rhythm, melodic contour, and the process of vocal production. They felt that this void in their schooling limited involvement in musical opportunities in their adult life. Cheryl commented, " . . . I like to see the notes. Not that I know what they are but just so I can see where they go up and down." Cathie said, "Obviously these symbols have meaning . . . " but the meaning was lost to her. Cheri, when asked if the written page was an aid or a hindrance replied, " . . . I am totally lost on there [the written page] . . . When I hear you sing, I can see it going up and then I get lost."

Ed, from his standpoint as teacher and administrator, felt that there was a gap in his own music education in his schooling career. He did not receive a sequential music curriculum program from his individual teachers or the school system. He saw this as a disservice to students of the time and the society at large. He summed up his thoughts with, " . . . so many of the things we don't learn in school, forget, or don't understand . . . Where are we supposed to learn as adults? You can learn about finance or carpentry as an adult if you want. But it seems like this [musical skill] is one of the hardest things to get access to."

Feelings of Resentment and Regret

The final manifestation was the expression of resentment and regret about not having singing as part of individual lives. The majority of the participants expressed that they were sad, regretful, or resentful that they did not have the opportunity or the encouragement to sing. The reactions ranged from being flippant about their seeming bad luck to being quite angry about having missed the opportunity to sing.

Cathie, Ed, and Helen all expressed feeling of sadness when they thought about how singing could have enhanced their lives if they had been encouraged in their earlier years. Ed, in his teaching career, often wished that he could have sung to his students as a teaching tool. Helen mused that she may have tried out for secondary school choir as a youth and for the church choir as an adult had she received more encouragement in her childhood. Cathie harbors negative feelings that she did not receive a more positive experience with respect to singing. She sees this as a reason why she feels uncomfortable about participating in vocal activities.

Sydney, Marjorie, and Tony responded with regret that they had not had the opportunity or the encouragement to sing earlier in their lives. Sydney feels that she has missed out on many joyous opportunities because she felt she could not participate. Marjorie said, "I am regretful that I carried the negative baggage for so long, and so unnecessarily. I am not sure I would have made singing a larger part of my life. I just would have felt free-er when the spirit moved me to sing." Tony wrote, "Resentful is the right word. What I am sad about is that I perhaps should have taken a few more chances at singing in my band given that my perception of bad pitch may not have been well founded." He continued, "I have always had aspirations to always want to be that great singer and to some degree that dream has died a slow death . . . Feelings get hurt along the way when your dream of being a great singer dies."

Sara was the most strident in her response to this question. When asked if she was either sad, resentful, or regretful that she had not had singing in her life because of the negative interaction with her junior high science teacher, Sara responded, "Yah, sad, resentful and regretful! I don't know where to start. It is sad because it was such a good experience up until that point where I realized a teacher had told his students that I couldn't sing. And I wished that that hadn't happened because it was so much fun. I enjoyed singing in the car, with my friends, at parties, in church, in the choir. I am resentful, sad, regretful that I didn't get to see where that could have led." In an email response to the same question at the culmination of the sessions, she wrote, "I'm really mad. Other kids grew up singing in choir, hanging out with their friends, going on trips, sharing fun experiences and I missed out on all of that. I gave up choir because a schoolteacher lacked integrity, and it really wasn't fair. I do regret it a lot."

The Musical Skill Level of the Participants

The participants in my research displayed numerous manifestations of their internal labeling as adult non-singers. These manifestations ranged from feelings of resentment about not having singing as part of their lives to letting feelings of nervousness affect their physical vocal production. However, from my point of view as a researcher, singer, educator, and choral ensemble director, these manifestations were grounded in an erroneous perception: that they were non-singers physically incapable of vocalizing and unable to develop satisfactory singing skills. From my perception, they were singers. I was fortunate throughout the sessions to have witnessed the vocal ability of each participant. I heard folk songs sung with accurate melodic contour and rhythmic accuracy. I heard upper register notes in hymns sung with a free, supported tone. I heard musical theatre numbers sung with a dark, full tone and a sense of character. I heard consistent matching of pitches and precise intervallic navigation. I saw a physical connection develop between the body and the voice, and I saw joy on faces at the culmination of a session. Through witnessing such a display from each participant throughout the sessions, the fact that they were singers was obvious to me. Unfortunately, it was a shrouded mystery to them.

In my field notes after each week of sessions with my participants I would often claim that the participants had lied to me about their status as non-singers. This was because all of the participants could vocalize and were capable of handling their individual repertoire. Each participant displayed vocal attributes along the musical spectrum. These attributes included the ability to match pitches, execute rhythmic patterns, and produce a vocal tone. Every one, even though it was not a central theme of

this research, improved their personal singing skills throughout the six singing sessions. My scrawled field notes would often contain descriptors such as "wonderful", "surprising", and "eye opening" in reference to the participant's ability to vocalize and match pitch. The specific comments that I would write about individual singing skill would be phrases such as "understanding pitch matching", "showing good sense of rhythm", "improving tone", "grasping musical concept", "working hard", "willing to try new concepts", and "gaining firm foundation for future singing endeavors".

During the sessions, the participants continuously guffawed at my claims that they were displaying attributes of a singer. In my excitement to hear them sing, I would make comments about when they had sung in the past or when they would sing in the future. I was corrected many times when I made such claims. For example, Marjorie, when I commented about her singing propensity towards the lower part of the female range, interjected and said, "I must correct you. I haven't sung up or down. Remember? I talk. I don't sing!" Gilbert, in his final email response in reply to the query if he was sad that singing had not been part of his life wrote, "Don't push your luck that I can sing now."

There was resistance by the participants to identify with a singer identity. However, from my point of view, there was no need for a radical conversion because the participants came to the study as singers. Where the conversion needed to happen was in each participant's mind but not necessarily in each participant's vocal display of musical skill. There will be a difference in how the participants described their singing in the previous section to how I will describe their singing in this section. My descriptions will be made in relation to:

- Matching Pitch and Melodic Navigation

- Vowel and Tone production
- Breath Support
- Rhythm
- Vocal Range
- Kinesthetic involvement with singing
- Aural Memory

The final portion of this chapter will focus on what I deemed as my role during the sessions. My role emerged as one of cheerleader for the non-singers. They were not looking to me to be a musical authority nor to judge their musical performance; they were looking to me to support their efforts wherever they were on the musical spectrum.

Matching Pitch and Melodic Navigation

From the beginning of the first singing session, it became apparent to me that all of the participants were capable of matching pitches as well as executing a melodic pattern. The extent of the consistency of matching pitches varied on the musical spectrum but by the end of the sessions all were able to sing a given pitch. For example, Ed initially had some difficulty matching pitches but by the end of the sessions, he had become more consistent and confident with this task. Gilbert, even though he was consistent in matching pitches from the beginning, needed to build up his confidence in his singing skill. The other participants displayed skill in this area from the beginning and used this as a foundation for subsequent activities. In compiling the data for this section, I noticed my notes were inundated with comments that the participants could match pitches. In the sessions, when I asked individuals to hum pitches back to me, most of the participants

quickly responded with the matching pitch. They also identified when I was not matching their given pitch. Some of the participants even told me if I was sharp or flat.

In reviewing my written notes about executing melodic patterns, I see that I noted that melody lines with several intervallic jumps were well within the grasp of the participants. Many of them were able to sing along with the melody line after only hearing it once. If they were familiar with the tune, they generally joined in during my vocal introduction to the piece. For example, Ameeta, even though she had not heard the song *Farewell to Nova Scotia* for many years, quickly joined in on the melody line upon hearing the opening chorus. She navigated easily through the song even though there were rhythmic and word changes in the second verse. I quickly realized, after hearing such musical displays as this from the majority of the participants, that they would need more than *Rain, Rain, Go Away.* For some, such as Ameeta and Tony, I chose to introduce them to the melody lines of classical repertoire in order to expand their boundaries. Sydney and Helen gravitated toward hymns from the United Church Voices United hymnbook. These two women soon discovered that they could easily sing through the tunes. Cathie and Cheri were drawn to the popular idiom in order to display their talent. Cheryl, Nancy, Marjorie, and Sara, appeared to enjoy the melodies of several folk tunes from across Canada. All of the participants displayed an aptitude toward both pitch matching and melodic navigation. Some of them developed while others refined and expanded these skills over the course of our lessons.

Vowel and Tone Production

The initial vocal production that I heard consisted of shallow vowels and unsupported tone. The vowel sound came from the fact that each participant was shaping

their mouth in such a way that it was impossible for a fuller tone to emerge. The unsupported tone was a result of not supporting with the breath. The vocal tone that I initially heard was forced from the vocal folds with little breath support. Once they were coached on how to form the mouth for proper vowel formation and how to support the sound with the breath, they were all able to physically produce fuller vowels and richer tone. The key to their change was my drawing attention to the fact that they had the ability to sing in this manner. It became clear in subsequent sessions that when they focused on vowel production and tonal support, they were all physically capable of producing with a fuller, richer singing voice. For example, when Helen initially sang the words to the hymn, *What a Friend We have in Jesus*, she sang with shallow vowels and a strained vocal tone. To help her expand her vocal sound, I had her perform three exercises. The first exercise involved placing a piece of paper in front of her lips and nose and having her make the paper buzz. This exercise helped Helen gain the physical feeling of how to focus the vowels and how to move enough air to produce an adequate vocal tone. I also had her visualize her sound coming out a small hole in her forehead. This aided in creating a focal point for her sound. The third exercise consisted of Helen singing the melody line on a singular *[u]* vowel. When she sang on this singular vowel, she created a fuller tone. After singing through the piece with these tonal concepts in place, I wrote that she was getting a much better sound than when she sang this hymn at the beginning of the session. This same change from a small, strained tone to a fuller, richer tone could be found in my notes for most of the participants.

For Ameeta, Ed, Nancy, and Tony the circumstance was slightly different in regard to vowel and tonal production. These participants entered the sessions with less

trepidation about their actual singing voices. This was beneficial as they were less self-conscious and more willing to sing out. Thus, I was able to broaden their concept of vowel and tonal production. This was apparent especially in Tony's case. Tony sang with a bright, pop sound. This was most likely from his experience singing cover tunes with his band. Over the sessions, I encouraged him to create a fuller, darker tone. I knew that he could physically produce a much richer tone if he would allow himself to create such a sound. Tony, in Session Six when I asked him to create a fuller tone said, "Actually I'm a little shy to go there to be honest with you. It sounds almost operatic and I have never done that. It's almost like 'Are you trying to fake an accent here Tony? Or what are you doin'? Are you going stupid on me?' I've never done that." Eventually, with encouragement to support the tone with breath and to produce fuller vowels, Tony was able to create a wonderful richness to his voice on such pieces as *Danny Boy* and *Better Far to Live and Die.* This was also the case for Ameeta, Ed, and Nancy. They were able to take their initial satisfactory vowel formation and vocal tone and, with some instruction, create a different yet more vibrant choral sound.

Breath Support

"My understanding of singing in a non-lesson environment was that you had to do this [motioning to tightening his throat] to get those intricacies [of changing pitch and timbre] as opposed to letting the air move the vocal cords." These words from Tony summarized the participants' view of breath support for singing. Of all the concepts involved with vocal production, breath support and diaphragmatic breathing was one of the most difficult to comprehend and execute for the participants. The majority of them believed that vocal tone was dependent on pressure put on the vocal folds. Other than

Sara, who had extensive training in diaphragmatic breathing from her instrumental performance career, the rest of the participants were inconsistent in supporting the tone with more than a chest breath. They were all capable of understanding the concept of diaphragmatic breathing in order to produce a satisfactory vocal tone. However, the majority continually needed practice in implementing this concept throughout the duration of the sessions.

This practice came in the form of breathing exercises. The breathing exercises at the beginning of each session consisted of a physical check of how the breath should feel in the body. This was done by placing the hands on the diaphragmatic area and back and physically trying to move the hands outward on inhalation. Exercises on explosive consonants, such as k, t, and s were also utilized. They used an Hoberman ball as a visual aid to gain an understanding of the need for a large expansion in which to contain the air. Breathing exercises were always executed at the beginning of the sessions when the participants were physically and emotionally alert so that this concept could be absorbed to its fullest potential. The participants seemed to gain an understanding of how this type of support felt physically in their bodies when it was introduced separately. The trickier part came when the idea of breath support, singing, and repertoire were demanded at the same time.

Rhythm

Surprisingly, the ability to feel a steady pulse in the body as well as negotiate an accurate interpretation of the rhythm of the piece, was not an issue for any of the participants. I had anticipated that this integral part of singing might pose more of a problem for these new singers but there were few rhythmic issues through the sessions.

Ameeta, in our first singing session, was able to keep a steady beat with her feet while clapping the subdivisions with her hands. She was able to continue this rhythmic feat while I sang the tune of Jingle Bells overtop. When Ameeta sang vocalizes from the *Royal Conservatory of Music* repertoire, she easily navigated through the rhythm after hearing me sing and play it on the piano. It was her internal sense of pulse that was guiding her as the written notation did not hold the key to the rhythmic integrity of the piece. Marjorie also had no difficulty in keeping a steady beat while clapping the subdivisions. As with Ameeta, Marjorie's rhythmic ability translated into being able to follow the rhythms in the repertoire. Nancy, while singing *This Land is Your Land* and *Farewell to Nova Scotia,* accurately sang the rhythms after hearing the melody line only once. Nancy could always feel where the strong and weak beats occurred and was able to land consistently on beat one within the context of the piece. When any of the participants fell behind rhythmically in the repertoire, they adjusted very quickly. They would adjust without my having to stop and sing it for them; they would feel that it was not right and make the correction themselves. I could see this, for example, in Cathie's case. When Cathie began singing *Farewell to Nova Scotia*, she was rhythmically incorrect. She was not negotiating beat one at the same time as I was and she was singing different rhythms in some measures. However, once she heard me sing and play it, she quickly altered her perception of the rhythm. She made these changes without my help or intervention. Subsequent times when Cathie sang this piece, she was rhythmically accurate.

One of the most remarkable aspects with regard to rhythmic accuracy was the ability of my participants to sing with rhythmic precision through unfamiliar pieces or

pieces they had not heard or sung in several years. Cheri was able to navigate through the rhythmic structure of an unfamiliar piece. I introduced Roy Orbison's *Anything You Want You've Got It* to her in one of the final sessions. Even though she had never sung this song, she sang the tune with me with rhythmic precision. She even came back in, accurately, after a one-measure rest. Much of the repertoire was familiar to the participants but they had not been in contact with it since childhood. However, this did not deter them from accurately singing the intricacies of the rhythmic structure. When I started playing the accompaniment of *The Rose* for Cathie, she immediately sang the melody with rhythmic accuracy without the aid of the written notation. Upon asking her if she had recently heard the piece, she responded that she had not heard it since it was popular several decades ago. Cathie mused, "Yah, it's been a while. I loved Bette Midler."

Vocal Range

During the sessions, most of the participants were hesitant to explore a wide vocal range. The female participants, when given the chance, would choose to remain between A3 and F4. For example, Marjorie chose to sing *This Land is Your Land* between G3 and G4 instead of an octave above as written. She claimed, "I'll keep singing with Ian [Tyson]!" Generally the women would not volunteer to sing higher than F4. Nevertheless, when I gave the starting pitch or engaged them in warm-ups using arpeggios, I soon found that they were all capable of singing with a much wider range. They would choose to use a six-note range but in warm-ups, they generally used a ten to twelve note range. They found it much more comfortable and less daunting to remain in the lower vocal range. It was not physical ability that was inhibiting singing in the upper

range but a psychological resistance to commit to singing that high. When I had Sara turn away from the piano so she could not see what notes I was asking her to sing, she sang up to F5 with a free tone. "That's scary," was her comment when realizing she was capable of singing those pitches. Nancy was one of the only women who would use a two-octave range when given the choice. She was quite willing to sing in the upper range throughout all exercises and pieces.

The male participants were more adventurous in exploring vocal range. When performing the siren warm-up exercise on the kazoo, Gilbert displayed a wide vocal range. He would go down to the bottom of his range (E2) and then up to the top of his falsetto (F4) during this exercise. Ed, when he began singing, restricted himself to a limited vocal range. However, by the end of our first session, Ed was using a ten-note range on the kazoo. In Session Six, when asked to choose a pitch for me to match, Ed sang on a variety of pitches using a range from G2 to Bb3. Tony could be heard singing F4 in full voice. He was also very interested in developing his falsetto. By the end of our sessions together, Tony had a concept of his own falsetto and how it could be further developed. He was willing to try using this new voice and had begun to incorporate it into the repertoire. All three of the male participants were more willing to explore their ranges than were their female counterparts.

Kinesthetic Involvement with Singing

Initially, my participants believed that standing straight, placing hands by the side, and remaining perfectly still epitomized the extent of kinesthetic involvement with singing. When I asked where this image originated, most participants said that it came either from school choir experiences where they were told to stand up straight and still by

their music teacher or from watching adult choirs in performance situations where this physical stance was dominant. The non-singers gathered from their experiences and observations that to sing properly meant that there was little interaction between the body and the voice. However, once I introduced them to the notion that singing was very much connected to the body and to physical movement, they were quick to adapt and embrace this new approach.

One of the first areas of awareness in connecting voice and body was to show how tension affected their singing voice. The most obvious example of this was shoulder tension. This was especially apparent when they tried to inhale a sustaining breath. The shoulders would rise on the intake of the breath and, in some cases, remain high for the remainder of the phrase. However, when I reminded them to keep the shoulders low and back, the participants were very responsive. Most of the participants by midpoint were adjusting to a more natural position for the shoulders. This concept that tension in the body directly affected vocal production began to resonate as each individual singer realized how much the body and voice were one. Sydney commented, "You mentioned last time [about the concept of lessening tension in shoulders] and I have been conscious of it this week."

The second area of kinesthetic awareness was shown through the actual movement of the body while singing. I showed them examples of arm movement: simple circular motion of the arm in front and overhead that encouraged them to keep the air moving and allow the voice to exit the body in a free manner. This uncomplicated movement produced astounding results. Most of the participants created a much clearer and fuller sound, expanded their vocal range, and produced an unrestrained vocal tone in

the higher register when they incorporated this movement into the singing exercise. Many started to add in the arm movement without prompting during subsequent sessions. They began to understand the value of connecting the body and the voice. Nancy and Ameeta pondered importance of incorporating kinesthetic movement. Nancy said, " That feels better [when she was moving her arm]. It's better that I do something." Ameeta concurred with Nancy's sentiments. " I need that kinesthetic thing going on."

Aural Memory

Even though the majority of the participants denied they possessed an aural memory, they consistently displayed this aptitude throughout our time together. This skill was manifested in the ability to reiterate an opening pitch without prompting, sing a melody line accurately against a harmony line or accompaniment, and singing accurately a tune learned in childhood. They would chortle when I commented that this display of aural memory was a part of their musical ability.

An aural memory for opening pitches was an obvious trait in all participants. This was illustrated when they sang *Ring around the Rosie* and *Rain, Rain Go Away.* For these pieces I would sing a starting pitch and show them the corresponding Curwen hand signs. The second time through these pieces, I would not sing the starting pitch but only show the corresponding hand sign. All of the participants, at some point in the study, were able to remember the opening pitch the second time through without prompting. When I would address the fact that they were developing an aural memory for pitch, there were mutterings of its just being luck or a coincidence that they sang the correct pitch.

An aural memory for an entire musical phrase was displayed in their ability to sing accurately a melody line against a harmony line or accompaniment. Singing against

a harmony line was particularly evident in the piece *Softly, Softly*. This lullaby was written with a simple harmonic line in thirds below the melody. I would often sing this harmony line with the participants once they had a firm grasp of the melody. The majority of the participants who learned this piece were able to continue singing their melody line even though they were hearing me sing the harmony line. Tony and Sara demonstrated an aural memory resulting in holding a melody line against a piano accompaniment. Once Tony had learned the vocal line for *Vocalise in E minor* from the *Royal Conservatory of Music* repertoire, he had little difficulty navigating this line with the piano accompaniment. Sara exhibited the same ability. Nevertheless, after hearing the melodic contour to *Song of the Mira*, she was able to recreate it with ease. These examples demonstrate that the participants were internalizing in their own aural memory an accurate melody line.

The ease with which most participants were able to accurately sing a tune learned in childhood was the final display of aural memory. Marjorie, the first time through singing *Farewell to Nova Scotia*, sang the tune while I played the piano accompaniment. It was a familiar tune to her but she needed no reminders as to the melodic or rhythmic structure of the piece. Cheryl, knowing the tune to *O Shenandoah,* instantly began to sing the melody while I played the accompaniment. She had not sung this piece in years but engaged her aural memory in order to recreate this tune overtop of the accompaniment line. Ameeta had the same experience as Marjorie and Cheryl. When I introduced *The Gypsy Rover* to her, I soon discovered that I did not need to teach her this piece as it was already a part of her known repertoire. I began to play the written accompaniment when I saw her put down the print music and sing from her childhood memory. Even though

most of the participants denied an ability to remember melody, when given the opportunity, they quickly demonstrated the opposite.

My Role Throughout the Sessions

In my field notes, I would often write that my role had become that of cheerleader for my team of non-singers. More important than teaching them how to support their sound or how to allow a full tone to be emitted from their body, was instilling in them a sense of confidence in their own ability. After listening to their accounts of negative encounters with singing experiences, it became clear to me that my position had to be one of supporter first and vocal coach second.

This position of supporter or cheerleader ended up being multi-faceted. My role became one of encourager, explainer, facilitator, and comforter. The majority of the participants had never encountered a music teacher who encouraged them by saying they were right; that the pitches, rhythm and melody line they were singing were correct and accurate. These people had predominantly encountered indifference or negativity. Sydney, when I asked if she was anxious about coming to the first session, said, "In a way I was but I was also really excited. Because I thought she is going to help me to do something that I always wished I could do."

The participants also had not experienced a teacher who took the time to explain musical notation. Without this theoretical background, they felt rudderless when trying to navigate through the written page. When I would clarify what the different notation meant, the participants were perfectly capable of understanding the concepts. For example, I spent time with Ed in Session Seven explaining the symbols on the page. He appeared appreciative. Through email correspondence at the conclusion of the study, he

communicated, "I am very glad that I did the research because I still enjoy using what I learned from you [how to decipher musical notation] . . . and feel informed enough to actually try to sing to the notes rather than just guess at it all."

The way in which I structured the study to consist of private instead of group sessions further facilitated the growth of the participants. This one-on-one approach proved integral to the personal achievement of the singers. Nancy, in Session Five, talked about the benefits of one-on-one versus group instruction, "But I have to say that doing it [focusing on vowels and breath support] in choir is different than doing it now. Maybe it's because it's one-on-one or I am in a different place. But it is much more. I can feel it much more. I can understand it." With private instruction, I was able to tailor the sessions to each participant so they received an individual program. This aided in evoking their sense of themselves as singers because they were able to relate to the repertoire and progress at their own pace. Having private lessons allowed them to explore different genres and vocal sounds but always within their scope of interest and ability.

The largest part of this multi-faceted role of cheerleader was to comfort. Comforting the participants took the form of not passing judgment on their voices. To make them feel comfortable enough to produce a vocal sound was the most important part of my role as researcher during these sessions. The sense that the non-singers came to feel comfortable singing was a common theme throughout spoken and email responses. Helen, when asked if she felt anxious about coming to sessions, said, "You made me feel very comfortable. I was anxious, nervous and uptight the first time but after that, I looked forward to the sessions." Tony, in a response to my query if he felt it was a positive experience when he sang with his band, responded, "Uhhmm, no because I think

with my bandmates there was always a hesitation or I didn't want to embarrass myself or whatever. Whereas, you are trying to tell me just go for it. You are expressing confidence whereas in a band setting you are a little more reluctant to let it all hang out . . . " When I asked Ed how he felt about coming to the sessions, he responded, "I was anxious at first but you brought me along slowly and kindly so I became at ease . . . " Marjorie, when asked a similar question, replied, "I was anxious and prepared to be embarrassed. However, you make the environment very safe and comfortable and non-judgmental so the nervousness went away." A non-judgmental attitude toward singing is not unique to this study. There are many situations where singing ability on a musical spectrum is applauded. However, my participants had not encountered such a situation. It took most of them several sessions to trust that I was not going to judge them against a standard. Once these participants realized that I was accepting of where they were on the spectrum, they relaxed both body and mind, were willing to try different vocal exercises, and appeared to enjoy the singing experience. I asked Ed how he thought his singing career would have changed if he, in his elementary school career, had encountered my attitude towards singing. He conjectured that he probably would have learned competent singing skills and would ultimately have used these skills in his professional career as an educator. A non-judgmental atmosphere during the sessions, for these non-singers, comforted them, gave them the opportunity for new experiences, and bolstered their confidence to sing.

Pre-Test and Post-Test Results

In Chapter One I explained that the participants were asked to take a short musical skill assessment test at the beginning and the end of the sessions. This test consisted of

matching pitches, drawing out melodic contours, clapping out a rhythmic pattern, deciphering basic written notation and singing *Happy Birthday*. It was intended to be a recorded measure of musical skill upon entering and exiting the research project. However, the administration of the assessment test and the subsequent results of it contributed fascinating aspects of the study.

Reactions to Administering the Pre-Test

Singing *Happy Birthday* for this assessment test in the first singing session caused most participants a high degree of stress. Sara was visibly agitated in anticipation of the pre-test. She kept lifting herself in and out of her seat especially before being asked to sing *Happy Birthday*. "Aaaaaahhhh!" was her response when I finally asked her to sing this tune. After this task was completed, I asked her if she had experienced stress about singing *Happy Birthday* before coming to the sessions. Her response was, "Yah. But I'm okay now." When I asked Sara at the culmination of the sessions what had made her the most uncomfortable throughout our time together, she referred back to the opening assessment test. "Singing *Happy Birthday* at the beginning. I hadn't opened my mouth forever and you had the video camera on me and then you said, 'Sing *Happy Birthday'*. There was a lot of anxiety there." Cheri, just before being asked to sing *Happy Birthday*, was seen clasping her hands together nervously, sitting on the edge of her chair, rolling her eyes, raising her eyebrows, and smiling uneasily. When it finally came time for her to sing this piece, she said, "Oh my goodness . . . okay." At its completion she laughed nervously and muttered "Thank you," when I stated she had done a good job. "I have to sing it? Out loud? By myself?" was Helen's response to my request for her to sing *Happy Birthday* for the pre-test. Her physical motion of clenching her throat with both her hands

while exclaiming these questions reinforced my recognition of her feelings of anxiety in performing this task. While some of the participants, such as Nancy, Gilbert, and Tony, appeared nonchalant about performing these tasks, there was a high level of personal stress evident in most participants.

Reactions to Administering the Post-Test

There were two primary reactions to the post-test. These reactions were the admonishing of themselves because of perceived lack of musical ability, and the rebuking of self because of perceived lack of improvement. A subsidiary reaction to the administration of the post-test was that of exuding contentment and confidence at the completion of the assignment.

Admonishment because of perceived lack of musical ability is illustrated most concisely in Cheri's reaction to performing the post-test. She decided to begin the final assessment with singing *Happy Birthday*. Cheri chose her opening pitch and began to sing. She was singing well and was both rhythmically and melodically accurate when she stopped. Her words upon stopping were, "I can't. I just can't." She appeared very uncomfortable about the prospect of continuing this piece and so I opted to sing it with her. While singing with me, she continued to sing the piece with rhythmic and melodic accuracy. Producing a vocal sound was so foreign to her that, even though she had demonstrated musical ability throughout the sessions, she would not allow herself to believe that she might possibly have a musical aptitude for singing.

Rebuking of self because of a perceived lack of improvement was the second primary reaction. There was a real sense from the participants that this post-test was the time to prove to me and to themselves that they had learned something about the singing

process. I distributed the individual results of the pre-test as part of the shared data but I never focused on trying to improve that initial score. In fact, after the pre-test was completed, the results were never discussed in subsequent sessions. It was not an issue of the test results being poor but simply because the idea of improvement was not a focus for this study. Nevertheless, there was a sense from the participants that their skill level should have improved since time and effort had been put into this project. Sydney, when drawing out the melodic contour for the post-test, commented in an exasperated tone, "Oh, now. Isn't that silly! I did better than that before we started the lessons." Marjorie joked, "It [everything taught about vocal production] didn't get through!" when I tried to get her to sing along with her clapping of the rhythm of *Jingle Bells*. Helen, after singing *Happy Birthday*, exclaimed, "Oh, it's not very good. It's all coming from here [hand to throat]. I'm really nervous. It's a test." Ed, at the conclusion of drawing out the melodic contour of *Ring around the Rosie*, commented, "They [the lines of the melodic contour] almost look the same. That is hard to do. I can see that I don't have any practice at it." Tony reacted to his drawing of the melodic contour of *Rain, Rain, Go Away* by saying, "Am I missing that high note? See that's where I kind of, with my pitch, I can't often hear that you have gone up to that highest note. I don't know if I have nailed it or not. Is it a natural? Why can't I do this?" Nancy, when drawing out the melodic contour succinctly stated, "Geez, it's getting harder . . ."

A less prominent reaction to the administration of the post-test was one of contentment and confidence. Ameeta and Cheryl, appeared to perform their post-test with poise and self-assurance. Gilbert, upon completion of the pitch matching portion, stated, "I am getting more confident." Sara exclaimed, "Well, the first time you asked me to

sing it [*Happy Birthday*], I was like, 'Oh no. I don't want to sing it.' But actually it felt kind of nice this time."

Results of Pre-Test and Post-Test

The following tables are individual summaries of the actual scores earned on the pre-test and post-test.

Table I Pre-Test and Post-Test Results for Gilbert

Task	**Pre-Test Score**	**Post-Test Score**
Rain, Rain, Go Away (drawing out melodic contour	9/12 11/12	10/12 10/12
Ring Around the Rosie (drawing out melodic contour)	9/13 11/13	10/13 11/13
Jingle Bells (clapping melodic line)	23/25	23/25
Happy Birthday (singing)	25/26	26/26
Pitch Matching (singing back pitches in one octave range)	5/5	5/5

Table II Pre-Test and Post-Test Results for Ameeta

Task	**Pre-Test Score**	**Post-Test Score**
Rain, Rain, Go Away (drawing out melodic contour)	9/12 9/12	10/12 8/12
Ring Around the Rosie (drawing out melodic contour)	7/13 6/13	8/13 8/13
Jingle Bells (clapping melodic line)	22/25	21/25
Happy Birthday (singing)	16/26	18/26
Pitch Matching (singing back pitches in one octave range)	4/5	3/5

Table III Pre-Test and Post-Test Results for Cheryl

Task	**Pre-Test Score**	**Post-Test Score**
Rain, Rain, Go Away (drawing out melodic contour	7/12 8/12	6/12 7/12
Ring Around the Rosie (drawing out melodic contour)	7/13 11/13	9/13 9/13
Jingle Bells (clapping melodic line)	21/25	18/25
Happy Birthday (singing)	13/26	21/26
Pitch Matching (singing back pitches in one octave range)	5/5	5/5

Table IV Pre-Test and Post-Test Results for Sydney

Task	**Pre-Test Score**	**Post-Test Score**
Rain, Rain, Go Away (drawing out melodic contour	11/12 12/12	11/12 11/12
Ring Around the Rosie (drawing out melodic contour)	10/13 11/13	12/13 13/13
Jingle Bells (clapping melodic line)	25/25	25/25
Happy Birthday (singing)	17/26	20/26
Pitch Matching (singing back pitches in one octave range)	5/5	5/5

Table V Pre-Test and Post-Test Results for Ed

Task	**Pre-Test Score**	**Post-Test Score**
Rain, Rain, Go Away (drawing out melodic contour	11/12 12/12	10/12 10/12
Ring Around the Rosie (drawing out melodic contour)	8/13 11/13	10/13 11/13
Jingle Bells (clapping melodic line)	6/25	19/25
Happy Birthday (singing)	11/26	8/26
Pitch Matching (singing back pitches in one octave range)	2/5	2/5

Table VI Pre-Test and Post-Test Results for Nancy

Task	**Pre-Test Score**	**Post-Test Score**
Rain, Rain, Go Away (drawing out melodic contour	9/12 10/12	12/12 12/12
Ring Around the Rosie (drawing out melodic contour)	11/13 10/13	11/13 13/13
Jingle Bells (clapping melodic line)	25/25	21/25
Happy Birthday (singing)	26/26	26/26
Pitch Matching (singing back pitches in one octave range)	5/5	5/5

Table VII Pre-Test and Post-Test Results for Marjorie

Task	**Pre-Test Score**	**Post-Test Score**
Rain, Rain, Go Away (drawing out melodic contour	12/12 12/12	12/12 12/12
Ring Around the Rosie (drawing out melodic contour)	13/13 13/13	13/13 13/13
Jingle Bells (clapping melodic line)	24/25	24/25
Happy Birthday (singing)	26/26	26/26
Pitch Matching (singing back pitches in one octave range)	5/5	5/5

Table VIII Pre-Test and Post-Test Results for Sara

Task	**Pre-Test Score**	**Post-Test Score**
Rain, Rain, Go Away (drawing out melodic contour	9/12 9/12	12/12 12/12
Ring Around the Rosie (drawing out melodic contour)	10/13 10/13	13/13 13/13
Jingle Bells (clapping melodic line)	25/25	25/25
Happy Birthday (singing)	25/26	26/26
Pitch Matching (singing back pitches in one octave range)	5/5	5/5

Table IX Pre-Test and Post-Test Results for Tony

Task	**Pre-Test Score**	**Post-Test Score**
Rain, Rain, Go Away (drawing out melodic contour	12/12 12/12	11/12 12/12
Ring Around the Rosie (drawing out melodic contour)	10/13 11/13	13/13 13/13
Jingle Bells (clapping melodic line)	25/25	25/25
Happy Birthday (singing)	26/26	26/26
Pitch Matching (singing back pitches in one octave range)	5/5	5/5

Table X Pre-Test and Post-Test Results for Cheri

Task	**Pre-Test Score**	**Post-Test Score**
Rain, Rain, Go Away (drawing out melodic contour	8/12 6/12	7/12 7/12
Ring Around the Rosie (drawing out melodic contour)	10/13 10/13	8/13 8/13
Jingle Bells (clapping melodic line)	21/25	25/25
Happy Birthday (singing)	26/26	Did not complete
Pitch Matching (singing back pitches in one octave range)	5/5	5/5

Table XI Pre-Test and Post-Test Results for Helen

Task	**Pre-Test Score**	**Post-Test Score**
Rain, Rain, Go Away (drawing out melodic contour	11/12 10/12	12/12 10/12
Ring Around the Rosie (drawing out melodic contour)	10/13 10/13	11/13 13/13
Jingle Bells (clapping melodic line)	21/25	19/25
Happy Birthday (singing)	20/26	26/26
Pitch Matching (singing back pitches in one octave range)	5/5	5/5

Table XII Pre-Test and Post-Test Results for Cathie

Task	**Pre-Test Score**	**Post-Test Score**
Rain, Rain, Go Away (drawing out melodic contour	10/12 11/12	Unable to complete post-test
Ring Around the Rosie (drawing out melodic contour)	6/13 5/13	
Jingle Bells (clapping melodic line)	25/25	
Happy Birthday (singing)	24/26	
Pitch Matching (singing back pitches in one octave range)	5/5	

Analysis and Significance of Test Results

The change or the lack of change in the test results are both significant for this study. Sara, Nancy, and Helen scored higher on drawing the melodic contour of *Rain, Rain, Go Away* and *Ring Around the Rosie* on the post-test. This change in score may be attributed either to the fact that they were unfamiliar with the premise of drawing out a

melodic contour in the pre-test or they had practiced this skill throughout the sessions leading up to the post-test. Ed showed marked improvement on the rhythmic component in clapping out *Jingle Bells*. He rose from a score of 6/25 in the pre-test to 19/25 in the post-test. This may be correlated to Ed's introduction to the concept of written rhythmic notation. Cheryl and Helen showed a vast change in their understanding of intervallic relationships through the singing of *Happy Birthday* between the pre-test and the post-test. This change could be attributed to their gaining confidence in their own voices and the realization that they were physically capable of singing such a piece.

There were numerous scores in a variety of tested areas that remained virtually the same from pre-test to post-test or were even slightly higher in the pre-test. These areas included drawing out the melodic contour of *Rain, Rain, Go Away* and *Ring Around the Rosie* as well as clapping the rhythm of the melodic line of *Jingle Bells.* Such results harken back to the concept of musical ability (Chapter Two) as a general characteristic of the human species. If my participants had not possessed this general characteristic, they would not have performed at the level because they came to the test with little environmental support. The documenting of negligible changes in test scores concurs with the idea that all humans possess an aptitude for musical endeavors. However, if this study were to have been implemented over a longer period of time or if the pre-test and post-test had been more demanding, my speculation is that I would have recorded a numerical improvement between the first and last test. This improvement would have been founded in their innate ability while blossoming in their commitment to develop. There would have been a marriage between the two camps of innate ability and development. Where the real significance of the actual results lie for my particular study

is that it is not because of an absence of innate physical ability nor the capability to develop singing skills that my participants are deterred from singing. They are deterred from singing because they perceive themselves as non-singers.

Because of the brevity of the sessions, I never intended nor hoped that the sessions would be the agent for huge changes in skill level. The focus of the sessions was also not to practice the specific skills that were needed to improve the test score from beginning to end. The focus was to build confidence and comfort for singing in each individual. The sessions were meant to be agents for change in perception of self as singer. This self as singer was to be created through the combination of knowledge of innate physical capability to sing and a sense that with development skill level could be increased. Where the sessions were significant was in the departure from their psychological perception of themselves as non-singers to the evolution of individual perception of self as singer.

Revelations Participants Discovered about Singing

The participants came to this research study feeling nervous and apprehensive. They were self-conscious about their voices and they were reluctant to share this even in a one-on-one environment. Despite their negativity upon arrival, the participants soon discovered several revelations about singing that they had not been privy to before in their lives. There was a shift in their attitude toward vocal production that was revealed as they talked about their thoughts and beliefs. This change was apparent in a number of revelations that the participants shared with me about their own journey through this research. The following six revelations were prominently discussed during the sessions and at the culmination of the study.

Possessed Physical Ability to Sing

"It makes me feel good that maybe I can [sing]." Cheryl, with a large smile on her face, made this comment in Session Four after correctly singing *Bye, Baby Bunting.* This was a common theme throughout the majority of the participants; the sense that they were genuinely happy and surprised that they could actually produce a satisfactory vocal tone and manipulate accurately through a melody line. The assumption had always been that they were not physically able to sing even a simple melody that could be recognized by the listener. It took several sessions to dispel this notion. In the beginning, they seemed doubtful when I told them they were singing correctly both the melodic and rhythmic elements of the piece. They tentatively agreed with me, but it was not until some of the final sessions that most of the participants fully embraced the notion that they were physically capable of singing a melody line in a pleasant manner. Some of them never did fully embrace such a notion.

I could see their journey from tentative agreement to recognition of their own capability in the following comments. Cheryl, in Session Four, when asked if she realized she was correctly matching pitches in *Rain, Rain, Go Away*, exclaimed, "Yes. I just didn't think I could." Marjorie, when I commented that she was capable of singing two octaves above F3, summoned a long "hhm" in a surprised tone. Gilbert, in Session Five, after consistently matching pitches with me in *Rain, Rain Go Away, Bye Baby Bunting,* and *Ring Around the Rosie* remarked, "I never thought that I would be able to do that. Never in a million years." This sentiment appeared again for Gilbert in Session Seven where he commented, "I am just surprised that I am able to do this. I think that is why I am smiling. I didn't think that I could ever . . . So that is where the smiling is coming

from. This isn't really me, I'm saying. It doesn't seem like it's me. It's like an out-of-body kind of thing." Even in Gilbert's final session, he still had not fully embraced that he was indeed capable of matching pitches consistently. In session eight, he said, "I'm still not believing that I am able to do that [navigate through pitches for *Ring around the Rosie*] . . . I just didn't ever think I could ever do that. Again, while we are doing this, my brain is kind of chattering saying I never thought I could do that."

Tony, Sara, and Sydney, embraced the notion that they could produce an accurate vocal sound but were surprised to learn that they were physically capable of singing with a different timbre, in a higher register, or against a harmony line. Tony, when I encouraged him to sing with a darker tone than he normally sang, mentioned, "I have never heard myself sing like this." He was willing to try to create a different timbre in his voice but was genuinely surprised when he actually could produce such a sound. Tony quipped, in session six, "That big kind of sound. That's very neat . . . You know I am going to a side I have never gone to . . . " When Sara began to sing into her higher register through arpeggios, I had her turn away from the keyboard so she could not see the notes she was reaching. Her comment upon learning she had reached a G5 through this exercise was, "Oh, I just kept getting higher and higher." Sara, even though she came to believe that she could accurately match pitches, was still unable to accept that she could produce a wide vocal range. Sydney reluctantly acknowledged her ability to sing a melody line while a harmony line was being simultaneously sung. At the completion of singing the melody of *Softly, Softly* overtop of my harmony line, I mentioned that she was capable of singing in a choir where there were multiple parts all heard at once. Her response was, "I never knew I could."

Accepted Concept of Development

The participants had a preconceived notion that musical development was dependent upon innate ability. Even though they continued to believe that innate ability was a factor in singing, they began to push the boundaries of the influence carried by the concept of innate ability. They began to accept the idea of development not only as an abstract concept but as a model they could embrace during the sessions and beyond our time together. They began to realize that they, themselves, could develop singing skills through practice and guidance.

The fact that the participants were able to develop their skills through practice seemed to come as a surprise to them. They usually sported large smiles when they recognized that they had progressed in either tone development or timbre of sound. They expressed excitement and pride in the fact that they were improving and grew to become believers that they could influence their own singing fate. Examples of progression in singing development can be seen in several instances with the participants. Nancy, after engaging breath support in the *Song of the Mira* exclaimed, "It feels much better. It feels like the real thing . . . It feels like it comes out more easily that way . . . And so when I am at home, I can see that when I don't practice my breathing it is much harder when I come here." Ameeta concurred with Nancy about the importance of developing proper breath support. "It feels good when I have the air right. Then you can feel when it gets tight. I lose my voice." Ameeta was asserting ownership over supporting her sound instead of relegating it to being a manifestation of innate ability. When I told Tony that he was gaining a firm understanding of the support needed for his sound, he responded, "Is that good? It felt better than the first time. It was more natural." Sydney, simply said,

"Good for me!" when I commented about the extension of her range up to F5. Gilbert, after singing all intervallic jumps correctly in a warm-up exercise, exclaimed, "As the session progressed, it seemed to get easier for me which again I'm just [laughter]. I have to turn my back to you because I just cannot believe that to be right. Yah. It's maybe easier to develop than I would have ever thought." These six participants began to grasp the concept that development, not just inborn talent, was a major factor in improving vocal production. They were also beginning to realize that practice was a major factor in their own personal vocal production.

The participants also realized that they needed guidance on the quest to their own singing development. They were willing and eager to apply the suggestions I gave them because these were viewed as a springboard for improvement. They were open to vocal guidance because they started to believe in the concept of development as a factor in their own ability to sing. Had they not believed that they could improve their vocal sound, the participants would not have taken my suggestions to heart. They would have been polite and executed them during the sessions but then such suggestions would soon have been discarded. In contrast, the participants adopted and practiced the given ideas. For example, after playing the kazoo in Session Five, Cathie talked about the importance of the air flow for her own singing development; a concept that we had discussed in the previous sessions. "It's sort of getting my cords going along with the air. I feel that, when you talked about doing that, having the air flow. It makes more sense doing it like this." Nancy took to heart the concept of using a large column of air to support her sound when she said, " That column of air. When you can picture that coming out like that, it makes a huge difference." Sydney mused about how the knowledge shared about proper

breathing technique filled a void. "Just that fact that you taught me that part [breathing]. It's so helpful. I am really disappointed that no one ever told me this before. Somebody needs to tell you. My Mom taught piano and she sang but she didn't teach me anything about singing." She concluded with the quip, "You are doing well to teach an old lady new tricks!" Near the end of our time together, Tony was consistently singing with a full, supported tone. He expressed that he had really grasped what I was trying to share with him and he was physically employing it in his singing voice. He internalized the concepts that I placed before him and because he felt he could develop, he improved. Cheryl's quote sums up the idea of accepting guidance on the journey of development. "That I did something. That you taught me something. You did teach me something. Amazing things."

Broke Down the Psychological Barrier

Many of the participants entered the study with the mindset that they could not vocalize or carry a recognizable tune. They soon recognized this mindset as their own creation. Throughout the sessions, the participants proved to themselves that they indeed could produce a vocal sound. However it was difficult to overcome the psychological barrier that they had placed on themselves about their ability to sing. Each individual had to process this new information that they in fact could sing. Even though all the participants dealt with this issue, I will share Sara's, Marjorie's, Cheri's, and Nancy's revelations about breaking down the psychological barrier.

Sara wore a large grin as she walked in for the fourth session. I was curious, so inquired as to the reason. She blurted out, "I was really nervous when I came here for the first time and you made me sing *Happy Birthday*. I was so nervous. And then when I left

the session I actually felt really good about being able to hum a few notes. And I actually tried singing in church (laughter). I didn't sing for all of it just for a few. It felt good, Colleen . . . "

At the beginning of the next session, Sara commented about how her feelings had changed about coming to sing. "I always feel a little bit better when I leave [the session]. And there is actually a little bit, just a little bit, of excitement now about coming. Just a little bit." I asked Sara at this point if trepidation has been replaced by excitement. She replied, " Not *ooooh* [moan]. Like at the beginning. Why did I do this?" [I talked about having to release the psychological barrier as the basis for this study] "It is so psychological," said Sara.

Marjorie, in Session Seven, imparted an interesting angle on breaking down the psychological barrier.

> These sessions have proven that I can sing. I do hum along more with the radio. But now it's a question of if I can, do I want to? It's work for me. You make it very pleasant but for me it's work . . . But I was driving up here and thinking, yah I can sing but I don't feel like it today . . . . I thought it might open doors of expression . . . I know I have another tool in the toolbox. I think it might just have to gel a bit . . . Maybe it's just so new a tool in the toolbox, I don't quite know how to use it. But it did drop the fear and anxiety but just the blockage of saying well you can't . . . And it was a whole avenue you didn't walk down. So now the door is open and you can walk down that avenue. So there is a freedom to it. But now it is a choice instead of an absolute. Before it wasn't even a choice. But now it is in your range of choices so how do you want to spend your time?" I

> asked if it was a good feeling that it is a choice. She said, "Oh, yes. Removing the blockage and the negativity of I can't is large. Huge. That is significant. It gives you the freedom of choice instead of saying there is something I just can't do. So that is a very positive thing.

I interjected by asking if she had any specific thoughts as she was driving home from the sessions? Marjorie replied, "I think every session was kind of a door opener in terms of yes I can. Yah, it was confidence building and reassuring and sort of like – oh I can do that. And then the next challenge she gives me, there was the sense that you would only challenge me within my capability. So let's investigate that capability." In a later session, she continued this train of thought. "There is a sense of quiet comfort about it now instead of a [creates a humf sound and makes a pulling back gesture with body] 'Don't make me.' If someone asked me to sing, I would say well I've had seven lessons [laughter]! You get what you pay for!"

Cheri understood she was physically capable of singing. But she also recognized that she did not have the desire or the motivation to sing. Armed with the knowledge of these feelings, she did not see any reason to change her attitude toward singing. This attitude came across when I asked her how she felt upon leaving the sessions. "I guess somewhat relieved that it was done. I mean I, I guess so. Nothing personal, but I just don't have the motivation or desire. So it's like you have *X* number of hours in a day or a week. I feel it is just something that I just don't put the energy into doing at any level. If everyone decided to join a choir? No. I wouldn't do that even if it was close friends. I would just say no. It's not something I want to do." Cheri was cognizant of her internal block to singing. Nonetheless, even the recognition of a lack of motivation and desire was

a step toward the possibility of breaking down this psychological barrier to singing. Now that the door is unlocked, it will be Cheri's conscious decision to push it open or close it again.

Nancy expressed her process of breaking down the walls around her non-singing identity. "I just realized it's a power thing. I don't want to. If I say I can't sing, then I don't have any power. I don't claim who I am, in all my glory. I could stay a tiny person. To be who I really am is really an incredible thing . . . If I just said forget it, it doesn't matter what I'm singing and who's going to hear it and all that kind of stuff, then you can do anything – within reason . . . I don't have to be scared of singing anymore. Oh, oh. See it took courage to say that." I exclaimed that by saying this there was now a different expectation. She said, "Yep, if I don't tell you, then you don't change your expectation so by being brave enough to say that, now I can't go back. I think (laughter)! In the process of doing it, there is something in side of me that when it comes up I have to go past it now instead of being sucked into my same old reality." Nancy continued her thought process in the final session. She claimed, "So it is just amazing. So I have to thank you because you pushed me in that way. And I have noticed, like I was playing with this singing thing this morning because I need to get past that. Why am I tightening up in there? . . . I have trained it [her body] to do the opposite. I've trained it over the years to - okay it's time to sing – now it's time to close down."

Desire Future Singing Endeavors

Eleven of the twelve participants responded positively to the question of whether they would continue to sing in the future. Only Cheri did not believe she would continue to sing in the future. She stated she was not motivated nor did she have the desire to make

singing a part of her daily life. The other eleven participants felt that the sessions had instilled enough confidence in them and in their singing ability to make this activity a part of future endeavors. Their responses were adamant that they now felt comfortable enough with their own voice to continue singing in some capacity in the future.

Most email responses to the question of whether singing would be a future endeavor consisted simply of an emphatic "YES!" A number of the participants chose to elaborate. Tony commented, "Yes, I enjoy it and will do it within my limitations. Whatever they are. Singing releases something within that makes me happy." Helen replied to the question with, "I hope so. I just know that I will have to practice the breathing and other things that you taught me a great deal." Marjorie added, "I actually do sing to myself now in the car, at work, etc, whereas I never did that before. I am not sure about singing more formally (in a choir etc) more in relation to the time commitment and competition with other interests." Ed replied, "Yes, I will sing every chance I get." Sydney wrote, "I will definitely continue to sing." After the conclusion of the research sessions, Sydney wrote, "I wanted to tell you that you would have been proud of me this morning. I went down into Cochrane and walked with the ecumenical crowd from all the local churches through Cochrane carrying the cross. As we walked along we sang hymns, and I felt perfectly confident, and remembered all the things you told me. It made me feel so good . . ."

I followed up the question about singing in the future with the query of whether they would now sing *Happy Birthday* in a social setting of friends or family. I asked specifically about this song as it caused them a great deal of stress during the pre-test. The dominant response to the question was affirmative; they stated that singing *Happy*

Birthday would be part of future social gatherings. Sara, when asked this question, responded, "Yes, because I'm more comfortable now." Sydney concurred by stating, "I will definitely now sing Happy Birthday to people because I know I can do it." Cheryl wrote, "Yes, I'll be the loudest voice there, because I want to show them that yes I can and I am going to sing." Nancy stated, "I will sing if it is appropriate. Maybe even if it's not. It's just life. Although it's sometimes hard to get used to the fact that I'm just human. I don't have to be perfect." Marjorie felt that she now would sing *Happy Birthday*. She commented, "Sure. Because you have shown me that I can!" Even Cheri mentioned that with reluctance, and the support of other singers, she would consider singing this song. Finally, Tony concluded, " . . . I am confident that I can sing the song well."

Because of these responses, I felt sure that there is a real sense of hope for future singing endeavors. While none of the participants had aspirations of making singing a professional career, most of them were excited about the possibility of singing in the future. They were looking forward to singing in the car, singing in church, or spontaneously singing at social events. Ed's email letter, sent after the conclusion of the sessions, summarizes this sense of hope. "Sadly, I was at two funerals this weekend. However, in the sadness, I found enjoyment in that I felt completely confident at joining in the singing . . . I am careful in singing, but now that I have so much of a better idea how to do it, I can certainly join in a heartfelt way, rather than holding back as I used to. For this I have you to thank, and I now look forward to every song."

Changed Attitude Towards Sessions

Upon arrival at my office door for the first singing session, most of the participants displayed feelings of anxiety and nervousness. They were wondering why

they had signed up for such a research project. Some were even hoping I might release them from their duty. They had been most willing to talk about their experiences of why they self-designated as a non-singer but I noticed that real angst crept in at the mention of their actually having to vocalize. An example of this is contained in the scenario surrounding Ed's first singing session.

Ed arrived early. I had my office door closed because I was preparing for his arrival and was not expecting him ten minutes early. When I heard a tentative knock and opened the door, his face dropped and all he said was "I was hoping you weren't here!" This fear of singing that Ed displayed at that moment was also apparent in most of the participants. Gradually, this anxiety gave way to viewing singing during the sessions, as well as singing in general, as a pleasant experience.

As we journeyed through the sessions together, I was genuinely pleased with how well all the non-singers were singing. Even though they may have doubted my sincerity at times, my encouragement for what they were vocally producing was founded on a real excitement for their potential as singers. In my field notes, I would often write that the progression from session to session as well as during the sessions was marked and profound. The majority of the participants experienced little regression in the development of vocal tone. After working through the initial anxiety of singing in front of me, the participants began to display a shift in attitude toward their singing during the sessions. This shift in attitude was from one of apprehension to one of pleasure. With this change, I witnessed more physical relaxation (less tightness in the neck, face and shoulders) and heard more vocal relaxation (less strain in sound, less anxiety about pitch accuracy, more vocal sound being emitted, more diaphragmatic breath support).This

change in attitude was also evident in comments that were made throughout the study. For example, Cathie, at the end of Session Five, looked at her watch in disbelief and said, "Are we done? Oh wow!" Sara, in response to getting to play on the kazoo in Session Three, responded, "You get fun toys? This is better than I thought!" At the end of the session, Sara also commented, "Oh, that's not that bad!" Cheryl had a similar sentiment after the lesson seemed to fly by. She stated, "Maybe this isn't so bad after all!" These statements are examples of comments made by the majority of the participants. For me, these statements provided the affirmation of what I was seeing and hearing during each sessions. Only Ameeta expressed increased feelings of anxiety as time progressed. In session seven, she expressed the following concern. "I am feeling more nervous the further I get into this. I don't know what that is about. Maybe I think I should be learning more or you know . . . I love the music. I think it is the uncomfortableness of singing for somebody . . . I don't know whether I feel more pressure because I have been doing it now. I should sing better so I don't know if that is where it is coming . . . Yah, so I guess what is happening is I am realizing how much I don't know about music [notation] . . . I think that is probably what it is rather than the actual doing . . . It's almost like when you study music, it takes the enjoyment out of it." Ameeta and I, through this discussion, discovered that having the printed music in front of her was increasing her anxiety as she felt that she should understand and be able to decode notation. Armed with this information, I made an adjustment and gave Ameeta only the printed words for the pieces. Her response, after singing in this manner was, "See! That's fun!" At the end of the research time, I asked each participant the following questions:

- Did they leave my office feeling the same way they had felt coming in?

- What was running through their mind after they left each session?
- Did the initial feelings of anxiety lessen as we progressed through the lessons together?
- Were they ever anxious, nervous or uptight during the lessons and did these feelings persist?

The majority of the participants found their anxiety level decreased and their level of enjoyment increased as the study progressed. Two of the twelve participants, Ameeta and Cheri, reported the opposite. These two women found their anxiety level increased as the study progressed. For Ameeta, this increase in anxiety was because," . . . I felt more [internal] pressure to sing better. Having the written music in front of me made me nervous because I don't know how to read music very well and I thought that I 'should' be singing what is written and I didn't have the skill to do it correctly." Cheri wrote in an email response to the question if she was ever anxious, nervous, or uptight during the sessions, "Oh yes. I felt anxious and defeated and unmotivated before and despite encouragement, I continue to feel this way."

Ten of the twelve participants reported their anxiety level was overtaken by a sense of pleasure due to two factors. First, the participants began to realize that I would not judge or ridicule them. This knowledge then corresponded to feelings of comfort when singing in front of me. The second factor was that they became intrigued by the positive feelings created through singing. These feelings spurred a desire to sing which subsequently lessened their apprehension during the lessons.

Helen's sentiments were echoed throughout most of the participants' responses to the question about anxiety level during the sessions. "I think I mentioned this to you at

the beginning that I was really apprehensive about singing in front of you. But you made me feel very comfortable. Once I got going, I didn't feel apprehensive." The majority of the participants expressed a sense of relief when they realized that I was going to accept them where they were in their own vocal spectrum and not judge them according to a conventional musical standard. They began to try the techniques I suggested because they began to trust that I was truly excited to help them progress. Tony wrote, "Colleen was great in instilling confidence and making me feel good about my ability and progress. The nervousness went away with more sessions as I grasped the concepts better and practiced." Nancy commented, " . . . it is not everywhere that I would squeak. I would open myself up and be vulnerable to squeak [during sessions]. And so that was huge. Having that acceptance . . . "

The fact that they trusted me so implicitly was not taken lightly on my part. I realized that had we not developed that sense of trust, the results of this study may have been quite different. I also realized that, because of their negative childhood experiences, they were wary about trusting me and opening up their musical souls. I appreciated their confidence in me and believe that because of that relationship, they progressed as far as they did.

The second factor responsible for decreased anxiety and increases pleasure was that they became intrigued by the positive feelings created through singing. The participants had very little experience with such feelings and once felt, they were desired. The ten participants used such words as excited, happy, and awesome to describe how they felt upon leaving the sessions. These are not words that, I suspect, they thought they would be using as descriptors of our time together when they began the research project.

Cathie wrote, "I have been left feeling like I want more." Sara stated, " . . . it is funny that I left feeling happier at the end of the sessions. The sessions did get a bit easier as time went on. I was even a little excited near the end and sad when we finished." Sydney exclaimed, "I have felt excited coming to these sessions, and also when I leave. I can hardly wait to get home and practice . . . I still feel excited [at the completion of the study]". Tony concurred by saying, "When I left, I felt awesome. The study of singing and music releases something within that makes me think 'Geez, I feel good!' I wish I could do this all day." Gilbert was the most prolific in describing his feelings. When he reflected about previous sessions, he remembered feeling a real longing or yearning to go much longer than the allotted thirty minutes. He was unable to identify the origin of this yearning but it was definitely part of his singing experience. When I asked him if he felt the same way upon leaving the session as he had upon arrival, he wrote, "No, the feelings upon leaving were much deeper. From sadness and grief after some sessions to being two feet off of the ground and feeling like a little boy with no cares in the world! Leaving, I had to shove those feelings aside, rather than explore them because I had meetings to attend and had to get back to my 'proper, usual self.'"

Experienced Joy

When the participants expressed curiosity about whether the singing experience would bring them joy, I was surprised. I was not expecting the non-singers to be searching for joy in this research study. Nonetheless, some of the participants had observed that singing often brought a joyful response in other people and they were curious to find out just what it was about singing that could evoke such a strong emotion. This focus on joy intrigued me so much that it became a source of discussion with all

participants. I asked both in person and in an email questionnaire if being part of this study had been a joyous experience. Three of the twelve were hesitant to assign such a vivacious feeling to their experience. Nine of the twelve whole-heartedly agreed that the study had been a joyous experience and were happy to provide descriptions of such occurrences.

Ed, Marjorie, and Cheri were hesitant to describe their singing experience as joyful. These three appreciated having some of the mystery about singing revealed to them but they felt that to label their singing experience as joyful was too extreme. Ed, when asked if singing was bringing him joy, responded, "Joy might be a strong word, but it has been enjoyable." Marjorie held a similar sentiment as she described her experience as, " . . . not so much joy as the release from a negative burden." Cheri paused when replying to this question and then continued, "No . . . I wouldn't say it was unpleasant but I think joy would be a bit too strong. I would be sort of neutral about it. It wasn't painful but joy would be a little bit exuberant."

The rest of the participants were exuberant when talking about their experience with singing. When asked if joy had been a part of their singing experience, Nancy, Cathie, and Helen all responded affirmatively. Ameeta talked about singing as a medium through which one could reach a spiritual connection. She placed descriptors such as powerful and emotional on the singing experience. Sara stated that after she got over her nervousness of singing in front of me, feelings of joy began to trickle in. Sydney said, "Singing is bringing me a great deal of joy. These sessions are wonderful and I really appreciate this opportunity." Cheryl wrote, "I can't begin to tell you have much fun I am having. I listen to music even more than I used to and I am always singing along."

Gilbert claimed that, at times, the sessions had evoked joyful emotions. When I asked if he remembered the specific incident where he felt joy, he responded, " . . . there were times when I would lose my concentration because I couldn't believe that I was able to do it. So that is where the joy would come in. I would lose my concentration and I'd smile . . . . Singing seems very, very, very emotionally related to me. Go figure. What is that all about? I don't know. This is one thing I would like to explore further about the human condition as to how singing seems to relate so much to human emotions." Tony summarized in an email response his view on the connection between feelings of joy and the singing experience. "Singing is bringing me great joy. I have left every session feeling like I took a happy pill. In fact, I likely continued singing my way to the parking lot and all the way home. To understand the whole art of it as presented in the sessions was truly eye opening and awesome."

CHAPTER FOUR: CHANGE IN PERCEPTION OF SELF AS NON-SINGER

For my participants, the perception of self as non-singer had been the main factor deterring them from taking part in singing activities. It was not a physical deficiency nor a lack of environmental support that was deterring them; it was their perception that they held no place in the singing realm because of past negative experiences. As was seen in this study, this perception of self as non-singer was false. All of the participants were able to match pitch, execute rhythmic patterns, and vocalize a melody line. They displayed an aural memory for intervallic relationships and understood the connection between the body and the voice. The participants, throughout the sessions, displayed the aural traits of a singer. Nevertheless, the psychological restraint of the label of non-singer had prevented the participants in the past from having the courage to break out of this shell. Whether the participants were empowered to change this perception by being part of this study is the foundation for the second major research question. The crux for the research then becomes the perception of self as non-singer to one of self as singer over the sequence of the research. In searching for an answer to this question inquiries were made about their views on negative perception, definitions of terms (such as singing, musician, talent), innate ability, physical ability, and ultimately whether their own perception of themselves had changed.

Participants' Narratives

Helen, when asked the question if her perception of herself as non-singer had changed, responded, "Yes, I think I could sing reasonably well with a lot of practice. I think that most people could be singers with practice. And before I didn't think there was any hope at all. I think it takes practice." When I asked if she viewed what she had done

in the sessions as singing, she wrote, "Yes, I do. A couple of times when singing *Oh how lovely is the Evening*, I thought it sounded quite good and I felt like a singer!" Helen, at the end of the sessions, defined singing as " . . . an expression of words in a melodious manner" and a musician as " . . . a person who enjoys and performs (for themselves or others) by singing and/or playing a musical instrument and who has the motivation to practice because he/she enjoys it so much." Helen felt that musical talent is based on innate ability. "I think people who have an innate ability to sing have the ability to sing beautifully just by opening their mouths . . . People who don't have innate ability have to practice, probably harder, and probably would never be able to make sounds come out like truly gifted singers . . . In these sessions, I have realized that I may be able to become a recreational singer but I will never sound like the women in Angel Voices [ladies ensemble]." Even with this definition of musical talent, when asked if she felt singing ability is something that one either has or does not have, she responded, "I have changed my mind about this since these sessions. Previously, my answer would have been yes. But now I think that anyone can sing to some extent with some training and practice."

When asked if working through the sessions had helped shed new light on her negative childhood experience with singing, Cheri wrote, "Yes, I suppose Mrs. Watt [grade four choir teacher] was right. I really can't sing!" Cheri's perception of herself did not change. It remained as one of non-singer. In the final session, she exclaimed in response to my query if her perception of herself had changed, "Oh, yes. I feel worse, even worse about myself. I don't feel any more confidence. No, I don't. I still think I would be the same at a birthday party or a kid's sing-a-long choir thing. I would feel reluctant to sing . . . And I would never stand up and sing by myself. Like Karaoke?

Never, never. I would rather die rather than do that." When I asked if she would stand beside a friend of hers who she knew could sing, she responded, "Someone I knew could sing? No, I wouldn't stand beside someone I knew was a good singer. No, because I would feel too humiliated . . . It [her voice] is so inadequate. Like I would feel so inadequate. I would be very reluctant to sing by someone I actually knew could sing well." Cheri responded affirmatively to the question of did she still see herself as a non-singer. She said, "Well, I think, maybe my grade four teacher was right. Maybe I really can't sing. Maybe she was protecting me all these years." I asked if she were motivated to sing, did she think that she could develop satisfactory singing skills? She thought for a moment and said, "If I was motivated, I think I probably could. It sounds like structurally and fundamentally I have the ability to do it. Yah, I think if I had [motivation] . . . everything is skill and desire, right? I may have the skills to do something passable and acceptable but I probably lack the desire. I do lack the desire . . . Sadly, I lack the motivation." I asked again about her grade four experience and if she thought her lack of motivation began with being cut from the grade four choir. "Oh, I think probably that was a big thing. Sure. I think prior to that I probably participated like any elementary school kid in activities, in choir. I remember being very devastated on multiple levels. When we don't do things, a lot of it is a coping defense, right? I can't do it well therefore I'm not interested in doing it, right?" When asked if she felt she possessed musical talent, Cheri commented, "Well, talent would be too strong a word. Talent would imply that it is a skill that is exceptional. Ability maybe. I guess if I was motivated to cultivate and had the motivation and desire, I think I could be better than I am. So, I probably have more skill than I have accredited myself to have . . . " As she was walking out the door of the final

session, she added, "I wish I could say it was fun and I had a great time. It was lovely visiting with you but it was definitely stepping out of my comfort zone. It was out of obligation that I continued because I know what it is like to do research and have people fall out of your study." When I exclaimed that I was glad she had stuck it out, she laughed and said, "Yah, stuck it out would be it!"

Tony replied affirmatively to the question of whether his perception of self as non-singer had changed. "In undertaking these sessions, I learned that many of the perceptions I had as a teenager on my ability to sing may not have been completely accurate. I think you kind of answered that sort of pitch issue and I've gone to a zone that I didn't really know I could. But with the techniques you did I've done a different type of singing than what I am used to. I believe with practice, I have the ability to sing well." When I delved into the fact that he would have continued to sing with his band in the future without these sessions, Tony countered, "Yes, but you know what? I would have done it more fearfully . . . Now, I kind of know that it may not be an issue of pitch or the range, so that dark spot has kind of been erased and I will enter it a lot more confidently. So I think that's helped that way."

Tony, during our time together, reflected upon his own definition of singing and musician. Tony wrote, "Singing is the art of manipulating breath through your vocal cords in such a way that the sound created provides joy to the creator and the listener alike." He defined musician as, "one who has the ability to create desirable sounds from an instrument whether organized (by music) or unorganized (ad-lib, by-ear or jam)." In response to the importance of innate ability versus development, Tony answered, "I think they are both key. I feel the sessions taught techniques which certainly allow one to

develop and expand their potential. It helps develop and understand the mechanics of singing so that one can improve with practice. The innate ability I think is in the sound, what might be the 'like' factor. You may be a good singer and technically solid, but it doesn't mean people will necessarily like the sound of your voice or want to hear you sing. Development and training, perhaps allows one to maximize the amount of innate ability one has though this may not be enough to make the sound of your voice satisfying to all. The sessions brought individual satisfaction in allowing one to confidently progress. Therefore, regardless of innate ability, I can experience the happiness singing brings alone in the shower or in the car with my favorite tune. No other listener required." When Tony was asked the question if he believed singing ability was something that one has or does not have, he responded, "I believe the ability to sing is something we all have. I see it as a case of all individuals 'having' and some individuals 'having more.'"

Cathie found it intriguing to discuss her childhood experiences during the sessions. By talking about the issues regarding these experiences, she came to see that her negative childhood experiences no longer held the power over her that they had before our sessions began. This realization helped alter her perception of herself as a non-singer. She concluded that she would use the term singer when referring to herself and that she would entertain the prospect of singing in the future. Cathie also reworked her definition of singing and musician. At the end of the sessions, Cathie defined singing as "carrying a tune" and musician as "someone who understands music." She continued to feel that innate ability played a role in the singing process but was more willing, after being part of this research, to accept that practice and development were also factors. Cathie applied the understanding of practice and development to her own situation. She stated that she

thought she could develop basic singing skills and she was looking forward to pursuing this goal. She even implied that singing lessons and performing a solo in a recital may be part of future endeavors. Cathie is not hampered anymore by the concept that she does not have an adequate physical instrument as she now believes that everyone possesses a satisfactory instrument.

Sara was tentative about agreeing with the statement that she is a singer. I saw this in her reaction when I asked if her perception of herself as a singer had changed. She paused and then answered, "I just always see myself as a non-singer so when you say your perception of yourself as a singer . . . ?" When I pursued this and asked if she still perceived herself as a non-singer, she laughed and replied, "No. Because I'm singing. I have never really thought of myself as a singer before. But I definitely wouldn't describe myself as a singer. Maybe a part time singer . . ." Continuing with this train of thought, Sara wrote, "My perception of the concept of singer has changed, and of myself as a singer has changed slightly more or less because I'm beginning to accept the fact that singer doesn't just mean a singer on stage." When asked how she would define singing, she wrote " . . . it is when a person uses his/her voice to communicate through sounds," Her definition for musician was "a person who makes music through his/her voice or with the aid of a musical instrument." On the role of innate ability in singing, she claimed, " . . . everyone has the ability but training and education are the key to development." She feels she has an adequate vocal instrument but that she needs proper training to ensure its development. When I asked if she was now more relaxed in singing situations, she responded, "Yes, I have tried to sing in more social situations. I still feel nervous and self-conscious but it's a little easier because I know not everyone expects me

to sing like Maria Callas." Finally, her large grin and quick affirmative response to my query of will she continue to sing in the future, convinced both of us that singing would indeed be part of Sara's life.

"Well after all these years I proved that I can sing. It took away the negative judgment . . ." This was Marjorie's verbal response to whether her perception of herself changed by being part of this research project. Her written response to the same question was, "I realize now that I can sing and that singing, like other physical activities requires practice and muscle training to be good at it. I still think that our culture reserves the word singer for high performing professionals and that there is another word needed for the rest of us." When asked how she felt the cultural definition of singer influenced her own thinking, she responded, "Well, I think in terms of the cultural definition, yes it's the same [someone who can sing solo on stage in front of an audience]. So if someone said do you sing I would say well I was part of a research project for non-singers and I had seven lessons. I still wouldn't say, 'Yes, I am a singer.' Because of that labeling and that fear of judgment. Well then, sing! Well you're not good. There's that history of being pre-judged that still lingers." I asked what definition of singer she would like to see adopted. Her response was very intuitive. " . . . I think it [the cultural definition] would still need - I'm a recreational singer, I'm a hobby singer. And we don't have those attached adjectives. I'm just thinking if you ask people if they can sing, they usually don't say yes or no. They usually qualify. They give you a story. Oh well I used to sing with a group in university. People will say no but when they say yes? Is it a qualifier? . . . I think people are quick to frame their capabilities so they are not judged outside of that. So I don't know if 'a' definition would solve that cultural situation. [We need] . . . a

more inclusive idea . . ." Marjorie also discussed how the sessions helped to shed new light on her childhood experiences with singing. She wrote, "Yes, it showed me how much early negative comments stick if you aren't invited to reconsider them." Marjorie also became aware that she has not had a lot of music in her life; either in the form or actively creating or passively listening. She came to the realization that she had not participated in singing situations other than singing or humming to herself for several years. She noticed, however, that since the culmination of the sessions she was singing on her own or along with the radio. Marjorie is still not convinced that singing will be a large part of her future life but the knowledge that she can engage in those activities, if she so chooses, is fulfilling enough at this point of the journey.

"I wasn't quite sure why I thought I wasn't a singer before because I've done lots of singing. I think that we all have different sensitivities to things like . . . pain. Everyone has a different sensitivity to pain. So what makes me so sensitive that I can't sing? So my sensitivity has either been opened up so that by having a little bit of training I can see what I have to do to improve it. So for me to change the way I sing, so my impression of myself, was I was almost helpless before. But now I have some tools and it is up to me to use them if I want to improve. I think that is pretty important." This was Nancy's reaction to the question if she thought her perception of self as non-singer had changed. When I asked if these sessions had helped to shed new light on her childhood experiences, she wrote that she relived the negative feelings of her childhood through the singing of vocal exercises and known repertoire. In pondering these feelings, Nancy surmised, "I wondered about that [negative feeling when singing] and think that maybe they [the pieces] were learned while my whole life was generally a low level of constant

trauma. Perhaps because my parents were in constant conflict, I decided it was better to be quiet than to let out those types of sound." Nancy was beginning to feel more relaxed in singing situations. As an example of this, she described an incident where she recently sang at her son's wedding reception. Even though she was glad to exit the stage at the song's conclusion, Nancy expressed feelings of calmness at singing in such a public venue. She felt she had become, through the sessions, more accepting and tolerant of others in their singing endeavors. She also said that her definition of singing had broadened. Nancy now thinks that singing is an expression of ideas and emotions through the musical sound of the human voice. Finally, she expressed that the manifestation of her musical talent is ultimately in how she lives her life. She shared, " . . . am I in harmony with those around me, with myself and with nature? Maybe, when I am, singing/music flows naturally. Maybe my life will become the vibrational expression that audible music once was. Maybe when I live my truth, it will all just flow in a way that is appropriate."

Ed was initially drawn to be part of the study because of a desire to know if he could sing. "I came to the sessions because I saw an easy opportunity to meet a long-felt need . . ." Through his time in the research, he not only fulfilled that need but also went through a transformation about his own ability to sing. When asked if his view of himself as a non-singer had changed, he wrote, "Yes, I can now sing a bit and I feel proud of that." This response was quite different than his initial answer, given at the beginning of our time together. Initially, he said he saw himself as a non-singer and viewed singing as a source of personal humiliation. After completing the sessions, Ed felt he had the physical capability to sing and that, with practice, he could develop adequate singing

skills. He also acknowledged that while innate ability plays a role in the singing process, the concept of development carries equal status in gaining minimal skill competency. Ed's definition of singing evolved into ". . . vocalizing following a set plan of pitches and rhythm." There was no mention in his definition of a musical standard, solo singing, or performance, all of which he had discussed at the beginning of the sessions.

Sydney, because of her involvement in this study, sports a new definition of singer. "I now think of a singer as anyone who enjoys singing in a group or even alone if they want to! Somebody that feels confident enough to enjoy singing." She defined singing as " . . . expressing emotions and enjoying being in a group or even by yourself and just letting loose." Sydney also had a transformation in her own perception of self as non-singer. "My perception of myself has changed because I realize that with a little knowledge and encouragement I am able to sing! . . . I feel more confident so that makes me relax

more . . ." When I asked if she would continue to sing in the future, she enthusiastically responded, "Yes, I will! I will definitely continue to sing." Even though she does view innate ability as a factor in determining singing ability, she now incorporates the importance of development and practice. "I no longer view singing ability as something you either have or don't have . . . Innate ability is helpful, but development is very important by learning proper ways to do things and by practicing." Sydney, through the sessions, began to believe that she possessed both an adequate physical instrument and a degree of musical ability. Being a participant in this study allowed her to discover her voice and her talents that had been hidden for so many years. In her rationale for being part of this study, she responded, "I had decided a few years ago that I really would like

to take some singing lessons and perhaps it would enable me to be more confident about singing. But I figured I was too old to start doing that, so gave the idea up. This opportunity was amazing for me and I am so grateful. So, I guess my own voice is more influential than my grade two teacher's voice! Took me long enough."

Cheryl, when asked if her perception had changed, mused, "I don't know if you call it changes in myself. Well I don't know. Other than the fact that I'm not convinced that I can't sing anymore. I have found out that it is so much fun. I really wish I had done this, like, 20 years ago. Really, so it is like this satisfaction thing. It gives you this self satisfaction. That you can do something. That you can make this sound nice. And I'm not so shy about it . . . I sing in my car on the way home. I don't even listen to the radio much. I sing these songs [songs from the lessons and community choir] . . . And I am really sad that I have to end these [singing lessons]. I would love to go on and do more. And maybe I will . . ." Cheryl took her musings seriously and has committed to keep singing as part of her future ventures. She is currently taking private singing lessons and is a member of a community choir. Cheryl had always loved singing and felt that this activity would have been a part of her life had she not endured a negative encounter with her junior high teacher. "Yes, I understand that I shouldn't have let that [negative moment] stop me but at twelve years of age, it's hard to do anything about it." The negative connotation in her own voice as well as the concept of self as non-singer are labels that are now a part of Cheryl's past. "Yes, my perception of myself as a singer has changed. I CAN sing with practice . . ." Her concept of what constitutes a singer has also changed. She defined singer as one " . . . who has the ability to put sounds together in a melodious fashion to make it sound pleasing." The idea that everyone has the ability to

put sounds together in such a fashion is now a part of Cheryl's thinking. When asked if she viewed singing ability as something that one has or does not have, she replied, "Not any more. I believe it is something you can learn." She concluded her responses with this comment, "Who knows maybe someday I'll get to sing in a talent show or do a solo!"

Ameeta, when I asked if her perception of herself as a non-singer had changed, replied, "No, I don't think it has . . . To me it [definition of singer] is still about being confident singing on your own and performance . . . To me that is what a singer is. Someone who can sing by themselves and feel confident, right?" Her definition of singer as a person who is able to sing solo in a pleasing and confident manner in front of an audience was fixed. Having this definition of singer was one of the reasons that Ameeta felt nervous throughout the sessions. She felt she needed to feel confident when she sang in front of me in order to fulfill this definition. When she encountered feelings of nervousness instead of confidence, she internalized that she was not a singer. This created a vicious circle of becoming more nervous every time she came for lessons. She confessed, " . . . I am nervous every time I come. To me, that doesn't bode well for singing in front of people, you know?" The second reason for her nervousness was not having an understanding of written musical notation. She felt she never mastered the musical notation and that, in her mind, was the same as not being a singer. "The judgment is coming in . . . I guess what is happening is I am realizing how much I don't know about music . . . I can make this sound but how much I don't know about the notation, you know? I think that is probably what it is happening rather than the actual doing." These feelings of inadequacy were not centered upon her actual singing voice; Ameeta easily sang through all repertoire with a clear and supported tone. The feelings of

inadequacy came when she saw herself not fitting into her definition of singer. When I asked if she thought she would be a non-singer today if her negative childhood singing encounter had not occurred, she responded, "With my definition of singer, no. I still would not be a singer today. In my household academics were stressed and not the arts. So probably I would not have been encouraged to pursue singing." Ameeta, even though she does not label herself as a singer, expressed interest in continuing to sing in the future. She viewed singing in a group as a very enjoyable experience and one that she may pursue. "I would like to continue in the choir [community choir] and perhaps one day take singing lessons (without sheet music) and sing in front of my family. We always have a Christmas concert so will keep you posted if that EVER happens!"

"Perception of myself as singer? . . . First of all, I don't consider myself as a singer," was Gilbert's oral response to the query of had his perception of himself as a singer changed. In his written commentary to the same question, he wrote, "No, my concept of a singer remains the same. Someone who can keep a tune and knows the words to a song." Even though he did not consider his vocalization during the sessions as singing, Gilbert did express intrigue at his progress. " . . . I was surprised that I was able to match the pitches and some of those other things. I was also surprised that I could rudimentarily sing more than one pitch. I never thought I could do that. And it was fun. It was enjoyable." Nevertheless, he was quick to add, "But I don't know if I would want to go any further because there is a lot of fear and trepidation . . . If you took me to a little more complexity, it wouldn't be fun any more and I would hate it and be miserable. That is my belief system . . . It would take me decades to get me to sing something like your choir there. I just don't think I would be able to pick it up that quickly." When I asked

him if he felt he had musical talent, he responded "No." His rationale behind this negative response was musical production did not come easily to him. He found in the past that making music [either singing or playing the piano] caused him to become tense, nervous and distraught. When I asked if he thought he would continue to sing in the future, he answered, "I had a CD on once and I was trying to match the pitches . . . But I think that will wane and I will go to my old habits. I can't see myself doing it but who knows? But I wouldn't bet on it." He elaborated on this topic in an email response. "Unlikely [he will continue to sing in the future]. I will go back to my old habits of not singing. I still worry that if asked to do something more complex than sing three pitches or keep a very simple tune that I would fail. My mind is just waiting for that to happen so it can say,'See I told you so! Don't try to be a singer because you are not one.' Also, I could sing by myself in the future but I would have no way to gauge if I was singing in tune, in pitch etc. so I would be uncomfortable wondering if I was singing the way the 'composer' wanted the song to be sung." Gilbert was hesitant in responding affirmatively to the concept that his negative childhood experience with singing influenced his concept of self as non-singer. "Maybe. Maybe not. I would have probably had to have had a significant positive singing influence in my early life to be singing today." Nevertheless, he did respond affirmatively to the importance of practice and development as a factor in singing. Even though he acknowledged innate ability played a role in being able to sing, he was quick to stress the concept of development.

> I think someone wants to be motivated to sing. To develop singing ability. This is the same as someone motivated to learn mathematics. For example: Math is so easy because I like it! I believe anybody can learn math. In school I couldn't

> understand why some were having such a hard time with math. I just didn't see them being motivated to learn math and also I saw some fulfill their belief that they didn't know math by not applying themselves at all so that their belief was correct. Similarly, I imagine singing is so easy for some because they like it. There might be a little bit of innate ability in singing but probably most of it is developed (This applies to the general population. Of course there are a very few geniuses in both fields, singing and math, where it is all innate ability).

When asked if he felt he had the physical capability to sing, he answered again using the math analogy. "I probably do have the physical capability to sing. I probably do have an adequate vocal instrument. Does that mean I want to sing? For example, for some reason people don't want to do math but they could do it if they applied themselves. Similarly for some reason people don't want to sing but they could do it if they applied themselves. I don't force the issue on the math aspect with people and I don't see other people forcing the singing issue with people who don't particularly want to sing."

Rewriting of Their Non-Singer Story

In order for me to gain a real perspective on how important singing and a singer identity was to each participant, I asked them to re-write their childhood and adult singing experiences. The re-writing of their story allowed them to escape the self-designation of non-singer and see themselves as a singer. I encouraged them to be as outrageous as they wanted in writing this story because it is a dream. My question to initiate their writing was, "If all of you had encountered a positive singing experience in childhood, what would be your adult singing story? Make it as outrageous as you want. What you have kept only as a silent dream? This can be a story about being able to sing

to your child without being self-conscious to being a lead singer for a famous band." The following are the written stories sent to me in their email responses.

Gilbert:

> To counter the negative influences of my childhood friends towards singing I think you would have had to have been my mother who was well respected and known in our small town for singing. You would sing at the Legion, when dignitaries came to town, in church and you would be the best singing teacher in town. You would be the 'go to' singing person in town whose singing ability was unmatched, by a large stretch in our town. (I don't think you could have been an elementary school teacher to get me to sing. My friends would perhaps have rejected me for singing with a teacher but a well known singing mother might have allowed me to sing and still be able to play with them.) With the singing mother as a pretext, as an adult I would probably be singing in a choir in the minimum. It is quite likely that I would be involved in the music/ art/drama industry applying my creative juices to new exciting artistic endeavors. I would be accomplished in music and would have a good singing voice. Playing music and singing would come easy to me, - as easy as breathing, because I have been immersed in music for decades. The creativity would be gloriously fun and I would be a way more relaxed and spontaneous person. I think I would be quite successful in the artistic/ entertainment industry.

Ameeta:

I imagine one day being able to sing in front of an audience with a beautiful, strong voice full of emotion. To sing some uplifting meaningful song like *Imagine* by John Lennon!

Cheryl:

As a child I was always singing to music and sang in school and church choirs any chance I could get. After talking with Pastor Hanson who suggested that because I liked singing so much maybe I should take some voice lessons. My mother agreed and there's where it all started. I went on through Junior and High School singing in the choirs and had parts in the musicals that were put on as joint productions of the Choir and Drama Departments. After school there were many amateur theatre productions, the highlight being *Sweet Charity* where I had the lead role of Charity Hope Valentine. It was at this production a few years ago where I came to the attention of Michael Buble's manager. At that time he was looking for someone to do a duet with Michael. Nelly Furtado was first choice but alas was not available. And that's how it came to be that I sang *Quando Quando Quando* on his latest album. After the success of the song I was asked to join him on tour but by that time I had met my husband. After much deliberation and weighing my two options I came to the conclusion that life with Ron would be much more rewarding than pursuing a singing career.

Even though it is not a part of her re-written story, Cheryl shared the following aspiration in our final session together. I thought it applicable to this chapter.

And, you have to promise me that you won't laugh or you can't tell anyone in the choir. I heard you the other day [in choir practice] say that there was one song that needed a solo in it. And my first thought was wouldn't that be cool [laughter]? But I don't know if I could ever do it but wouldn't that be something. I can't remember which one it was but I don't think I am solo material but it was there because I thought oh wouldn't that be cool if I could actually do that? So now I am feeling a lot better about myself and like I said I am just so happy that I joined the choir.

Sydney:

I would be participating in choirs and groups, and I would not be afraid to get up in front of people. I would have taught my children how to sing, and maybe opened up a whole new enjoyment for them too.

Ed:

With your skill and enthusiasm I think I would have grown up to be a competent singer – and probably a player of some instrument as well – and I would have made use of that professionally as a classroom teacher from time to time, and in taking the lead in social events. Bottom line: I would have had more fun in life.

Nancy:

This could be fun! I would be a member of a small singing group and have a wide vocal range. I would be able to sing in harmony with the others, be confident to sing as loudly or softly as required. I would also be able to sing alone with or without instrumental accompaniment. It would just all be fun. Others would come and join us from time to time- children/friends/family. There would be no

judgment about ability. We would just sing together, often, needing no excuse or reason other than to enjoy.

Marjorie:

I probably would have been a part of an informal folk singing group through my school years. I am of the hootenanny era after all!

Sara:

Well, I would be singing with my own students for sure, and I would also still be in choir.

Cathie:

I would have participated in the singing festival, been encouraged to continue singing with lessons, sung in choirs (church, school) continued competing in various events to test my skill. Learned to read music, understand my voice range, pitch, key, etc. By singing with various groups and different styles of music, get involved with other music inspired people and be a back up singer with different bands or in recording sessions.

Cheri:

I really don't have any musical goals or aspirations which is not the case for other parts of my life; I have creative goals, and athletic goals and reading goals and career goals and family goals, but I don't have any musical goals.

Helen:

I didn't really have a silent dream about singing as I was growing up. Now, my silent dream would be to sing so well that Leonard Cohen would invite me to go on tour with him!

Tony:

My adult singing experience would have had me as the front-man of a rock band. I would have liked to create an image that would include the physique of a Sting, hair like David Bowie, the swagger of a Mick Jagger, and the ego of a Bono. I would be able to get away with this mix because I have the pipes of Freddie Mercury which can more than qualify the acceptability of this persona.

CHAPTER FIVE: RESEARCH QUESTIONS ANSWERED

A researcher can only hope that at the end of a study, there would be a relationship between what was studied and the broader academic body of research. Through the process of composing a literature review, working with the participants, identifying themes, and writing the final document, I am certain that the participants' stories and their implications will add to existing knowledge. This conviction comes from the knowledge that there is a societal shift away from thinking in the linear, reductive approach to a more artistic approach in which one is rewarded for crafting a satisfying narrative. Research in the 21st century is embracing emotionally astute and creatively constructed prose such as these stories afford (Pink, 2006). The narratives of these twelve participants will most likely find importance with music educators. The stories, nonetheless, have the potential to carry their implications both inside and beyond the traditional classroom walls. It is an important topic to bring to the research table because it is relevant today, it is worthy of discussion, and it has ramifications for society at large.

This study of why there are adult non-singers in Canadian society and if this perception of self-designation may be altered is relevant for today's body of research because the phenomenon of labeling as non-singer is still happening in classrooms and homes. This is not a trend that has its beginning and ending in another generation. This is a trend that is still occurring.

It is important to bring the concept of non-singer to the research body in order to gain recognition as a topic worthy of further study. A single research study does not usually make an impact on such an institution as a music education system. Nevertheless, if this particular study tweaks the interest of fellow academics, then it becomes relevant

in the research world. Often it seems as if music education research topics are repeated ad nauseam. However, numerous studies analyzing the same phenomenon are needed to start the movement of the pendulum of change. With a multitude of studies all uncovering the phenomenon of the non-singer, the potential for change increases.

This study will add to previous research on the concept of adult non-singers completed by such researchers as Susan Knight and Patrick Freer. Knight (2002) discovered through preliminary doctoral research with parents the reason for their self-designation as an adult non-singer. She found that the parents had been "silenced" as a child and internalized this sense of humiliation that coincided with the event. Freer (2006) discussed the concept of non-singer through his own experiences with the phenomenon. He shared feelings and thoughts surrounding being labeled as a non-singer and how he eventually shed this self-designation. Through techniques of narrative inquiry, Free drew upon his own story to suggest that educators need to listen to the voice of marginalized adolescent boys in order to create an understanding of how to successfully include boys in singing during middle school. Using these two formative studies as a foundation, I feel my particular research project with its unique characteristics will uncover a different dimension of this topic. The uniqueness of this research project was twofold. The first unique characteristic came through the engagement of the participants in vocal production with the aim of seeing a possibility in change of perception. The idea of being a non-singer was not just talked about but was enacted upon as a living and vibrant component of the research. A second unique characteristic was that the study was not written from my point of view, as a researcher, but viewed and heard through the eyes and voices of the participants. My analysis of the

data has been reserved for this final chapter. This will allow the reader to draw his or her own conclusions without having to wade through my biases that would inevitably permeate the data.

A different view about why this project is relevant to the existing body of research is that it is not only an issue that needs attention in the realm of music education. It is an issue that could be dealt with on a societal level. The limitations placed upon individuals to conform to the societal definition of singer, becomes a matter of some members being forced to live without singing in their personal lives. This singing void exists in the lives of persons desiring to be able to sing but feeling restricted because there was little support from the Canadian society. The societal issue comes in the general acceptance that some people will have to live with this unfulfilled desire. Members of other cultures do not have to endure such negativity about singing because it is embraced as a fundamental human characteristic. Since placing of limitations on individuals is a manifestation of our own culture, it also becomes the responsibility of our culture to look into a balm for this ailment.

Why did Participants Self-Designate as Non-Singers?

There were three major factors that appeared throughout all of the participant's stories that influenced their self-designation as an adult non-singer. They were a) a negative childhood experience with singing in school, b) a negative childhood experience with singing at home and c) a resignation to the Canadian cultural influence on the concept of singer.

Negative Childhood Experience with Singing in School

The negative childhood experience with singing in school was remembered by most participants as an incident in which they experienced public humiliation. This public humiliation usually occurred when the participant's attempt to sing was criticized by a teacher. Before this incident occurred, there was no inkling that they could not sing; they had participated as willingly in singing activities as they had in any other school endeavor. There was a complete belief in this verdict that was made by one whom the participant deemed as an authority. With this event happening at a young age, the participants were ill-equipped to challenge such a statement and simply never did. It was internalized as truth because it came from one in authority. This negative encounter superseded all positive influences at school, home, or in the community. The participants for whom this occurred, grew to believe that they did not have the physical capability to sing, and thus did not partake in singing activities. As they did not partake in such activities, they did not develop singing skills. With this lack of development, when they did sing, their unsupported and small tone was heard as proof that they indeed did not have the physical capability to sing. A vicious circle then ensued. They were unmotivated and lacked the confidence to partake in musical events because of their negative encounter with the teacher. The excitement of being involved in a musical production and the camaraderie that forms there, never happened for the participants in my study, because they were not a part of that social framework. This internalization of being a non-singer and the lack of analysis of the negative encounter with the teacher lasted far beyond their schooling years. Some of the participants have viewed themselves as non-

singers for years; some for decades. They have lived with the repressed dream of being able to sing with no plausible way to see it come to fruition.

Negative Childhood Experiences with Singing at Home

Childhood singing experiences at home were characterized by a negative encounter with a family member. Negative encounters related by the participants centered upon a parental figure. Such encounters took on two forms: one was with an overbearing figure and the other with a critical figure. The overbearing parental figure tried to use their position of authority to coerce their child into singing situations. Harmful feelings of resentment towards the parent because of their actions then became projected onto future singing situations. The critical parental figure would pass judgment on vocal attempts. Such comments would be directed at the child about their inability to sing. These comments were then internalized and manifested in a negative fashion throughout the life of the participant. A different, yet equally devastating, negative encounter with a parent was the memory of feelings of trauma in the home, specifically about singing. Negative feelings about the family became negative feelings about singing. It was often very difficult for these people, as an adults, to overcome such traumatic feelings. The negative attitudes brought on by parental influence became projected onto any singing event for the participants in their adult life.

Another negative encounter with a family member was sometimes remembered as a specific incident in which the participant was humiliated when attempting to sing in a public forum. Being disgraced in a public manner by a family member deeply etched negative feelings about singing into the participant. Such negative encounters were dominant factors in why singing had not been a part of their adult life. There was an

agreement among the participants that overcoming the idea that family members did not want to hear them sing was insurmountable. Once the participant self-designated as non-singer, then the family supported this label. Consequently, the participants became reluctant to have their voice heard because it would mean taking a risk and pushing themselves outside this imposed box. Being discouraged to sing, to this extent, as a child, created real feelings of hurt and betrayal in the participants. They succumbed to this persona and accepted the position of non-singer in the family as their reality.

Resignation to Cultural Influences on Concept of Singer

The final major factor that appeared throughout the participants stories and that influenced their self-designation as adult non-singers was their resignation to the Canadian cultural view about singing. This view took the form of committing to the cultural definition of singer and continuing to allow its influence to manifest itself in their lives.

The participants, at the beginning of the research, committed to the definition of singer as one who can sing adequately enough to perform in a solo capacity in front of an audience. There was an unconscious submission to the idea that one should curb singing activity if one's own vocal sound did not emulate that of a professional singer. Pressure felt by a culture that continually pursues excellence proved too much to overcome for the participants' already damaged sense of self as singer. There was also a resignation to the cultural concept that not everyone is endowed with the innate ability to sing. The participants focused on the concept that singing was predominantly controlled by innate ability. They were skeptical, but not unreceptive, about the role of development and if it could really affect singing ability. When asked if they felt that they would be singers had

they grown up in a different culture, most participants replied affirmatively. Through their involvement in the study, they began to realize how much a culture that does not encourage its members to sing curbs the willingness to participate.

Three manifestations of the negative cultural influence towards singing came to light through discussions with the participants about cultural limitations. The first manifestation was that there was little support for singing endeavors in the home. Parents, because they did not see singing as a large part of Canadian culture, possibly did not feel it necessary to have their children pursue vocal activities. A lack of interest in singing endeavors may have spiraled from an overarching sense of its unimportance in day-to-day life. The reality that there was no consistent acquirement of musical skills through the school system is a second manifestation. As was stated in the section on history of Alberta music education (Chapter Six), singing skills were never in reality a part of the taught curriculum. Learning to sing in school depended on the personnel of the school at the time and the stability of the outside economy. Finally, because of this lack of family and school support, the final manifestation took the form of the participants being unaware that all human beings have the physical capacity to produce a vocal sound. They carried with them, throughout childhood and into their adult life, the concept that they did not have the physical capability to sing. This lack of knowledge, combined with negative encounters, pushed the participants definitively into the realm of non-singer.

Perception Change with Positive Interaction?

I found that the majority of non-singers, with proper vocal coaching and encouragement, changed their perception of themselves as non-singers to that of singers while the minority continued to accept the label of non-singer. Over the six sessions in

which participants received private voice instruction, all of the self-designated non-singers displayed a variety of singing skills. There was no participant who sang in a monotone fashion or was unable physically to vocalize. All participants were able to discriminate pitch, match pitches given, and discern mis-matching of pitch on the musical spectrum. Nevertheless, even though they were able to sing, perception of themselves as singers received a varied response. Nine of the twelve original participants, at the end of the vocal training sessions, stated they perceived themselves as singers. Three of the twelve original participants, even though they successfully performed the same musical exercises as the other nine, did not perceive themselves as singers at the culmination of the sessions.

Perception changed

Tony, Sydney, Cheryl, Ed, Nancy, Marjorie, Sara, Cathie, and Helen, changed their perception of themselves as non-singer changed to one of singer because of a positive interaction with singing. Through this process of answering the question of why did perception of self as singer change, a new sense of meaning and significance may be created for those involved in the vocal world as well as those who continue to see themselves as non-singers (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

There were numerous themes in this change of perception from non-singer to singer. The themes revolved around the transformation to the following beliefs:

1. Improvement in singing ability can be made with practice and development and is not reliant solely on innate ability.
2. The definition of singer does not have to be limited to the societal definition and the definition of non-singer is not a universally accepted term.

3. Negative childhood experiences do not need to continue to dictate concept of self as non-singer.
4. Negative judgment from the past can be overcome through positive interaction.
5. The life-long desire to sing can be fulfilled.
6. Singing is a physical activity in which all are capable of participating.
7. Joy can be found in the singing experience.

The idea that improvement in singing ability can be developed and is not solely reliant on innate ability proved to be a revelation for many of the participants. Even though they initially thought that development was an important concept, most of the participants saw innate ability as the main factor in determining singing ability. They believed that innate ability is seen as the dictator of singing success. They believed the academic idea that practice could improve singing ability, but they were reluctant to apply it to their own situation. This may have been because they felt they did not have the gift of innate ability because of their negative childhood experiences. During the sessions, once they understood that this concept of development did indeed apply to them, they came to believe that their own vocal sound could be improved over time. The sense of hopelessness that they felt at not being in control of their own singing future was lifted. At the end of the sessions, they still believed that an innate gift formed the foundation for singing but were much more willing to accept the fact that each individual had the ability to improve vocal production through practice and continual development. The sense of helplessness that they were not fortunate enough to be endowed with an innate ability to sing had disappeared by the culmination of the study.

By my analyzing their definition of singer, I gave the participants the freedom to place themselves within a term for which they had been on the periphery. The idea that they did not need to live within the bounds of the limited societal definition of singer was liberating for them. The societal concept of singing was transformed by these nine participants. This transformation consisted of including words and phrases such as "joyful experience", "melodious fashion", "pleasant sounding", "vocalization", "recreational", and "communication" in their new definition of what constitutes a singer and singing. There was a paucity of phrases such as performance for an audience, or reaching a standard, in the new definitions from these nine participants. Along with the redefining of the term "singer", came an awareness of the place of the term "non-singer" in our society and in the wider world. This realization gave the participants more justification to entirely reject the concept of non-singer. By expanding upon their definition of singer and rejecting the concept of non-singer, they allowed themselves to contemplate a singer identity.

Perception of the self as a non-singer for these nine participants also changed because negative childhood experiences of singing were finally confronted, challenged, and resolved. They frequently related that they had never analyzed their negative childhood encounter, either as a child or as an adult. They had simply accepted the verdict and lived with the consequences of that sentencing. These sessions helped them to ponder that childhood experience and to peer into it while analyzing all the accompanying negative feelings. Once the attached emotions to this encounter were laid bare, the participants were able to situate it as a moment in their past instead of as a defining moment in their past. The positive interaction with the singing experience during these sessions showed

the participants how influential negative singing experiences can be when left unscrutinized. Participants were empowered to confront and challenge these childhood experiences within the context of a positive adult singing experience.

Connected to the theme of challenging and resolving their negative childhood experience, came the theme that negative judgment from the past could be overcome through positive interaction. The majority of the participants found that singing in a situation in which they did not feel judged or compared was able to make a stronger impact than the negative experience from the past. Most of these participants were seeking affirmation that the proclamation from the past was incorrect. They were looking for a way to change their view of themselves from being helpless to being in control of their own singing destiny. This change of view came through the practical acquisition of singing techinique and a re-evaluation of the importance of their negative childhood encounter. This longing to escape the negative judgment of the past was based on a life-long desire to have singing as a part of their lives.

The life-long fulfillment of the desire to sing was another theme that emerged from the nine participants who felt that their perception of themselves had changed. While revealing their life-long desire to sing, the secret dreams of wanting to be a singer emerged. The re-writing of the participants' stories in which they were allowed to change the outcome of their negative childhood experience displayed a deep felt longing for an alternate ending to their vocal story. This is illustrated in the phrases used to describe themselves in their re-written stories. The phrases used were, "being more creative", "be able to sing with strong voice", "sing with a voice full of emotion", "not be afraid", "have more fun in life", "pass no judgment", "participate in choir", "sing duet with Michael

Buble or Leonard Cohen", and "be a front man for a rock band". Through these sessions, the individual participants discovered that their hunger for a different ending to their singing story was now in their hands.

Singing was also seen as a physical activity in which they were capable of participating. Before coming to the sessions, the participants were unsure if they actually possessed an adequate physical instrument. Through the experience of singing and receiving vocal coaching, they were able to develop skills that were not evident before. They also began to physically relax during the sessions because they grew accustomed to the positive and non-judgmental atmosphere. By relaxing, they were able to produce a better vocal tone which in turn deepened their new resolve that they could indeed sing.

Finally, experiencing joy when singing was a theme expressed when they discussed their change of perception. Many of the participants were pleasantly surprised and a bit shocked that they would be able to have an emotional connection to the music through singing in such a rudimentary manner. At the beginning of the sessions, they did not anticipate the possibility of feeling joy during the study. However, by the end, they had come to the realization that they could have a joyful experience while singing. Feeling this emotion became the highlight of most sessions.

Through the positive interaction during the sessions, the majority of the participants were able to change from a perception of self as non-singer to one of singer. Their negative childhood encounters were able to be overcome with personal conviction, encouragement, and vocal coaching. The change in attitude towards the concept of innate ability, definition of singer, negative childhood encounter, and physical capability,

combined with a fulfillment of life-long desire to sing and experience joy, were instrumental in their change from non-singer to singer.

Perception Did Not Change

For Cheri, Ameeta, and Gilbert, their perception of themselves as non-singers did not change with positive interaction. The common themes drawn from these three participants' responses centre on the following issues:

1. Lack of motivation
2. Feelings of inadequacy about voice and level of musical talent
3. Inability to break through psychological barriers of past experiences
4. Agreement with the societal definition of singer
5. Feelings of inadequacy about their lack of knowledge of the written musical notation

Even though each of the three participants understood they had the physical capability to produce a vocal sound, they all expressed a lack of motivation to pursue future singing endeavors. It was not that they did not believe they could sing but they did not want to sing. They viewed the concept that they could sing on a different scale than if they wanted to sing. There was also an understanding that they were not limited to the concept of innate ability but that with practice and development they could improve.

Feelings of inadequacy about voice and level of musical talent was the second common theme in the lack of change in perception. Even though all three participants were able to sing, they were not able to shake the feelings of self-consciousness that enfolded their voice. Feelings of inadequacy about their vocal production continued to haunt their lessons and were ultimately instrumental in their decision to remain within the

realm of non-singer. Expressions of not possessing musical talent also were part of the responses. The majority of these participants stated that singing did not come easily to them and this caused feelings of nervousness and angst each time they were required to sing.

There was also a sense, from some of these participants, that the judgment of the negative childhood encounter contained elements of truth. The positive interactions of the sessions were not enough to dispel the concept of non-singer that was internalized through this negative encounter. The pre-eminent moment still held sway over these participants. They could not dismantle through analysis or vocalization the psychological barrier of the label non-singer that had been erected in their childhood. The mantra of Gilbert's, "You aren't a singer so you shouldn't be singing" remained well fixed for the majority of these participants.

An agreement with societal definition of singer was a factor in perception remaining the same at completion as at beginning. The main words used to define singer were someone who can keep a tune, knows the words to a song, is confident about singing solo, and can perform in front of an audience. Within this framework, the participants did not feel they were a part of the concept of singer. Discussion surrounding the possibility of broadening this term reinforced their belief that this is how they would define singer.

Finally, there was a feeling of inadequacy when faced with written musical notation. There was a realization that they possessed limited knowledge about formal music and felt it a daunting task to decipher musical notation. Feelings of nervousness and self-consciousness accompanied attempts to follow and sing with the written music.

Musical notation, even though it may be a comfortable language for some, was seen as an insurmountable foreign obstacle for some of the participants.

Cheri, Gilbert, and Ameeta did not find that their perception of self as non-singer changed with positive interaction. Lack of motivation, feelings of inadequacy about their voices and capacity to read musical notation, inability to break psychological barrier to label of non-singer, and agreement with the societal definition of singer combined together were influential in keeping these participants' perception the same from beginning to end. For educators, there is as much to learn from those whose perceptions did not change as there is from those whose perceptions did change.

CONCLUSION: CONCLUSIONS OF RESEARCH FOR MUSIC EDUCATORS

This paper has examined the phenomenon of adult non-singer in Canadian society through two research questions: 1) Why are there adults who have designated themselves as non-singers and 2) Is it possible for this label to be reversed through a positive singing experience? An intermingling of hermeneutic phenomenology and narrative inquiry were the methodologies used in answering these questions. Twelve participants engaged in seven private singing sessions over the course of three months. The study yielded the following important considerations:

1. The label of non-singer arises out of our particular circumstance and culture. This is detrimental to the concept of development as it limits involvement in singing and perpetuates the idea that innate ability is needed.
2. The concept of the non-singer is not universally accepted. Numerous researchers have discovered that singing is viewed as an activity for all – and that in some cultures no word exists to describe the unmusical.
3. Labeling as a non-singer occurred because of: a) negative childhood experiences with singing at school b) negative childhood experiences with singing at home c) cultural influences on the concept of singer. These three reasons were found in both previous academic literature and in this research study.
4. Perception of self as singer manifested itself in different ways for the participants. Such manifestations were a) placing a physical barrier to singing b) placing a psychological barrier to singing c) reluctance to

accept they possessed the physical capability to sing d) the acceptance of the cultural concept of singer and singing and e) the experience of regret and resentment that they had not previously had the opportunity to sing.

5. The participants, throughout the sessions, made several revelations about singing. Those were a) acceptance of the concept of development b) the removal of the psychological barrier to singing c) a desire to keep singing in future endeavors and d) the experience of a joyful encounter with singing

Important conclusions were drawn from the research. These conclusions were drawn through the following questions: What could be drawn out of this data that might curb the possibility of creating an adult non-singer? What is relevant and applicable to elementary and secondary classrooms? What do I wish I had known about the concept of non-singers when I entered the music class?

Influence Teachers Hold

The potential that we may hinder a student's lifelong development in the area of musical production, is not something that is usually pondered in the midst of planning lessons, concerts, and tours. However, it is something that needs to be considered when making day-to-day educational choices, as well as taken into consideration for more pivotal occasions such as performances. As could be heard through the participants' retelling of their pre-eminent moment, it was not a build up of negative comments that delivered the sentence of non-singer; it was one single event or comment that was probably not even remembered by the teacher at the end of the day that it happened. If

one addresses the voice of the child, then one addresses the child. They are one and the same. This connection between the voice and the person is reiterated in Sara's comment that, "Your voice... it's like they [person commenting on individual's voice] are saying something about your heart and soul." A single comment, as can be witnessed through the narratives, not only affected their singing participation for that school year but also continued to affect them for years and sometimes decades. Once a student has internalized the idea that s/he cannot sing, it becomes very difficult to dispel.

Comments made by educators hold such impact because teachers are viewed as authority figures. I began to realize that I had been a part of a profession where my influence was so highly regarded that one comment could reverberate throughout a person's lifetime. One must only listen to Sara and Cathie's stories (Chapter Three) for affirmation of this influence. Sara's story creates a situation where we, as educators, must consider how we use our position of authority. Had the teacher in Sara's instance been aware of how much impact his words held, he most likely would never have uttered them. Had he been aware of how much Sara revered the status of teachers, he may have sought to use a positive instead of negative approach. Cathie's story of being placed in a festival performance situation, as a very shy child, without any tools to handle the pressures of performance illustrates a misunderstanding of the level of influence. Had the teacher understood her position as an authority figure, she may have assisted Cathie in handling a performance opportunity or simply not put her in a solo performance situation. Even though we think that students are mature enough to understand the nuances of such comments, young people do not have the life skills yet to discern whether the judgment is serious or made in jest. As Sara stated about her junior high encounter, "When it comes

from a person in authority, how can you not believe that?" This impact, even though it is often a negative influence, can also be a positive influence.

Educators must also be aware that positive interactions with authority figures have the potential to change a student's perspective. The majority of the participants were able to change their non-singer perspective through positive interaction with singing during the sessions. I have experienced, in my own work with community choirs, that when I believed that someone could sing, this often equated into his/her being able to sing. Even though the participants were gravely affected by a negative experience, they did not doubt that there was equal power in positive experiences.

Potential of a Negative Comment

Closely linked to the preceding theme of influence, is the theme that negative comments made by the participants' teachers affected them for life. It did not seem to matter how insignificant these statements seem now; the reality is that such statements changed the persona of several of the participants. It was difficult for me not to point out that the teacher surely did not mean for him/her to internalize and hold onto this judgment for a lifetime. However, I realized that no manner of rationalization was going to change the fact that the participants had internalized the non-singer perception. Upon further reflection, I came to the realization that we, as teachers and academics, should not belittle such moments in the lives of students but learn from them so they do not continue in the future. We should also be aware that such negative experiences often override positive experiences. Even though several of my participants had encouragement for musical endeavors from the home, the formative event in their young lives was the negative singing encounter. They talked at length about this negative moment and its

effects while the positive events were only briefly mentioned. This is evident in the stories of Sydney, Helen, and Marjorie. These three came from very musical homes but succumbed to the shame that came with hearing a negative comment from a teacher about their singing voice. The impact of negative comments, for my participants, went beyond the school walls to include family and community members. Pondering the stories shared in this study, it is imperative that we consider the potential impact of our negative comments in the role of parent, sibling, neighbor, friend, or colleague, but particularly as teacher. Damaging comments directed at young people about their singing voice, as Tony puts it, " . . . hurts down to the soul." Most of the educators in the stories, I am surmising, were not aware of their impact. However, that does not lessen the devastating impact nor the responsibility of alienating a young person from his or her own voice. Even though a particular experience may be deemed positive by the teacher, there is the potential that it could serve to be negative for the student. An objective inquiry into whether the activity will be educationally beneficial is worthy of consideration.

This begs the question: Are we, as music educators, to run our classes in an atmosphere of fear that we may offend and ultimately end the singing career of one of our students? How do we actually help a student when s/he is not vocalizing on the correct pitch, misjudging the rhythmic complexities of the piece, or producing a vocal sound that is not blending with the rest of the choir? Are we simply to smile and accept whatever is produced? What happens to our own sense of pride in guiding and aiding our students to more difficult and challenging music? What happens to our own responsibility as music educators to equip them with musical skills that can be developed throughout their lifetime? As I have worked through this study, these questions have surfaced and I have

pondered whether this information could actually have a detrimental effect on both teachers and students.

We live in the Canadian Idol culture, which nurtures the idea that " . . . if you really want something, you just have to go for it" (Edwards, 2007). How do we teach basic singing skills without destroying the dreams of the young? How do we balance a culture that holds their children's self-esteem on a pedestal while teaching formative singing skills? How do we counter years of encouragement from parents with the reality that there is need for improvement?

It is the formation of relationships with the students that disperses the fear of a negative comment becoming a lifelong deterrent. It is in knowing the students as individuals that we are enabled, as teachers, to guide them towards the acquisition of musical skills while maintaining a positive image of themselves as singers. In Larry Beauchamp's (1992) book, Teaching from the Inside Out, he stresses the idea that teachers must know the individual student as a person in order to assess what s/he needs both academically and emotionally. It is in this context that comments given in the spirit of learning and developing may be remembered as a beacon and not a thorn to the students in later years.

Related to understanding students individually is understanding how intricately woven is the singing voice to the heart and soul of the student. As evident in the participants stories, negative insinuations about vocal production is often felt as a personal affront. It is not only a judgment of the voice but also of the person. It is important for the music teacher to teach students how to deal with criticism of vocal production without internalizing a sense of inadequacy as a singer. We need to guide

young singers through the emotional minefield that is part of musical endeavors. We need to equip our students with a singer identity that allows negative comments to deepen, not extinguish, this identity.

Finally, teachers in the school system need to be equipped with the skills to help singers develop singing, aural, and rhythmic skills. We need to have a comprehensive understanding of how to deal with students who cannot consistently pitch or negotiate a rhythmic pattern. It is our responsibility to teach musical skills and for this we must be prepared. It is not appropriate to dissuade a child because s/he is experiencing difficulty. We must encourage their musical journey instead of forcing them to deter from the path.

Within a context of knowing and empowering each child as an individual singer, comments made about their vocal production should not have the negative impact that was seen in my participants. It was when they were personally misunderstood as an individual that the comments were allowed to pierce their musical souls.

Need for a Philosophical Adjustment

In the narratives of the participants, there arose a sense of a need for an adjustment in our thinking about what constitutes music education. The first change centered on the need for inclusion of all students in the learning of music. This is not an new idea. Music education philosophers have proposed throughout the past 50 years that music education needs to accommodate every student. (Dewey, 1958; Ernst & Gary, 1965; Jacques-Dalcroze, 1967; Langer, 1953). There was an underlying sense when reminiscing about their schooling careers that music programs were for elite musicians: those students who either had outside musical training or were seen as naturally gifted. When music courses were offered, they often appeared inapplicable to the participants.

Participants challenged the reality of music education for every student. A second consideration related to inclusion was that music education classes were not available at every school. This information was often related in a regretful tone. Participants often quipped that, had there been more opportunities afforded to them during their school days, they may not carry the identity of non-singer. These two ideas provoke the creation of philosophical questions. Is the role of music education to teach the masses or is it to refine the elite? Are we responsible to train all singers who enter our domain or is it our right to choose with whom we share our expertise? Should the mandate of music teachers be to inspire life long learning in all students or to serve as inspiration for a chosen few? In the case of my participants, they would have appreciated music education for all.

Assumptions and Their Place in the Classroom

Throughout this study, I became aware of my own assumptions about vocal production and pedagogy. These assumptions had an unsettling effect on my participants.

The first assumption I made was in regards to the comfort level of the participants with written musical notation. In the beginning session, I gave each participant a copy of the music with the words within the piano accompaniment. For me, I am fluent in this language and such notation is a guide to the music. For the participants, it was a stumbling block to their vocal production and confidence as a singer. Ameeta commented early in the lessons that, "You will have to sing along because I can't read music and sing." In Session Seven, she confessed that she was feeling more nervous and intimidated than at the beginning of the sessions. This was due to the fact that she felt inadequate about her musical knowledge. In response, I asked if the written music was causing these feelings. She stated affirmatively, "Because I learn by listening, perhaps,

right? . . . So when I am singing it, I go into my head because I am singing what I am supposed to sing what it shows on there [indicating the written music on the stand]. . . . I would have thought it would go the other way right [become less nervous]. It is interesting that I feel more [nervous]." She had felt confident in her voice but not about having to interpret the written page. After this discussion, I gave Ameeta only the words to the pieces. She navigated through the rhythms and pitches correctly and upon completion of one of the pieces, commented, "See, that was fun!" In a written response to the question of how she felt coming to each session, Ameeta wrote, "I felt more and more anxious as the weeks went on because I felt more pressure (mostly internal) to sing better. Having the written music in front of me made me more nervous because I don't know how to read music very well and I thought that I 'should' be singing what is written and I didn't have the skill to do it correctly."

My second assumption was using a formal approach to the sessions. Sessions began with a warm-up and then progressed to Western style vocalizes and repertoire. Written music was placed on a music stand. My assumption in formatting sessions in this style was brought to light by Nancy. She mused, "When you make it serious, that's when I don't let it out [free tone and supported sound]. . . . You know this is a music stand that I don't like because it brings up when I had to play violin and it was my dad's and all - we don't go there . . ." I commented that I had placed boundaries on her singing production and her concept of herself as singer because of the formality of the sessions. "You are putting me into a box and I am trying like crazy to get out of it," she said.

My third assumption pertained to choice of repertoire. Upon analysis, I realized that the repertoire choices were based on my classical vocal background. It was not until

Session Five with Cathie that I doubted my approach. In my field notes, I wrote, "Interesting that I did not consider introducing singing in any other way. Even though I did utilize some popular songs and folk tunes, I taught them in a formal style. I have not utilized rote learning. There has been a focus on Western classical style (use of music, choice of music, being reliant on keyboard, music stand, printed music). Interesting that this is the same issue that music education faces." After this session with Cathie, I began to wonder if my own musical background was dominating my participants' experience.

Reflecting on my own biases and assumptions led me to ponder the extent that we, as teachers, bring our own backgrounds to the podium. The majority of music teachers have been educated in the Western canon through a university system. Do we, because of our educational background, focus on Western classical music to the exclusion of popular, jazz, and world music? Lucy Green (2001), in her book How Popular Musicians Learn: A Way Ahead for Music Education, speaks to this issue. She claims that the Western canonic ideals have been applied to music education. Because of this application, certain methods of teaching music in schools have become accepted as the norm even though they bear little resemblance to what the students are interested in, listening to, or playing outside of class time. Green states that this blindness toward the worthiness of other forms of music results in a generally negative experience with formal music education.

Musical Spectrum versus Innate Ability

The participants came to the study with a perception that innate ability was a dominant factor affecting singing skill. At the end of the sessions, they still believed innate ability was important but they had concluded that it was not the only factor

affecting singing skill. The idea that one is capable of developing singing skills through practice and motivation was an enlightening concept. As the idea of development was an important concept for the participants, it is also an important concept for students in the education system. It cannot be assumed that they possess such an understanding. It may be that through our guidance, the students realize that they are not restricted to their innate singing ability but can develop adequate skills through other avenues.

The concept of development goes hand in hand with the idea of a musical spectrum. As stated in the literature review, musical spectrum is a continuum of development. If one believes in this concept then one accepts that all people have a place on the spectrum and that all are capable of developing singing skills. By the end of the sessions, most of my participants were willing to accept that they held a place on this musical spectrum.

What would our music classes be like if we truly believed that all students were on this musical spectrum? It may seem an odd statement but upon reflection, I realize that I did not accept that all my students were on such a spectrum. I saw my elite, vocal jazz members or my musical theatre leads as singers. However, I did not view the girl who stood in the back row of my concert choir or the musical theatre chorus member as singers. I had a preconceived image and sound of singer. Some of the students reached it and some did not. How would my pedagogical choices have been different if I had recognized each one of the students as having a place on the musical spectrum? How would the atmosphere in my music class have been different if each student knew they were accepted as a singer? If teachers entered the classroom with the idea that all students

are singers on a spectrum, I believe it would change the outcome of choral education programs.

School Support for Singing Endeavors

I came to a point in my teaching career where I finally had the music program I had always desired. I was conducting three instrumental and two vocal ensembles at the secondary level. We traveled to provincial and national festivals and were supported these such endeavors by parents, school administration, and community. When I attended music education conferences during this time I grew aloof to the plea from music education advocates for the consistent teaching of music across the province. After serving on a provincial board I realized that not all students were receiving an adequate music education. Some of my participants lamented the fact that they had not received enough musical training in school to feel competent reading musical notation, understanding musical concepts, or producing a vocal tone. They felt ill prepared for any musical endeavor because of the lack of training they received in the school system.

Working with a Non-Singer in Class

How do we, as busy educators, encourage a non-singer in our class to change his/her identity to one of singer? How can we help such a student overcome the psychological and physical barrier that s/he has placed upon her/himself?

In light of the experience of my participants, the crux to overcoming the self-designation was in the establishment of a non-judgmental environment. The participants felt that they could participate within their skill level and would not have to endure comparison or humiliation. The establishment of this environment created a sense of trust between each individual participant and myself. They expressed that this feeling of

trust corresponded to feelings of comfort with the singing process. Developing a similar environment to this in the classrooms affords teachers a glimpse into his/her students' past experiences and ultimately into why the students deem themselves non-singers.

When we have students entering our classroom who are nervous about singing, who will not sing beyond a seven-note range, and who make derogatory comments about their own singing ability, it is imperative that we understand these as possible manifestations of the non-singer identity. We need to convince them that, even though they feel physically inadequate, they have the ability to develop satisfactory singing skills. If we can recognize such signs as symptoms of self-designation then we are better able to help. In an atmosphere free of judgment, we are empowered to help them change their perception of themselves as a non-singer.

Nevertheless, as we strive to build this create such an atmosphere, we need to be aware that if the student has erected a psychological barrier to singing, making him/her aware of this will take significant time and effort. The majority of my participants, even though they knew the basis of the study, were still hesitant to let fall their psychological barrier to singing. It is important that we slowly and diligently deal with these issues when they are manifested in students. Teachers are not afforded the luxury, as I was in this study, of six hours of one-on-one time with a non-singing student. However, it is imperative to bring about awareness of the psychological barrier to singing to the student.

How then should an ensemble teacher deal with individual non-singers in a class setting? Even though the task may seem daunting, there are several practical exercises that may be used in such a setting with the express purpose of helping the non-singer feel more comfortable with his/her voice. For example, Stene (1969) suggests simple call and

response melodies. This allows a student to sing individually on a short melody that s/he creates in his/her range. Judgment is suspended because there is no right or wrong response but only a vocal experience. Stene continues by suggesting that reading out loud a passage from a Shakespeare play will help young singers to learn to control the various levels of the voice and help them to explore their head voice. Franklin and Franklin (1983) suggest that students will learn to sing in tune only if they are informed about the level of success of their efforts. The authors suggest having the class respond physically (by standing on tiptoes or squatting) when a singer is sharp or flat in matching pitches. Combining the kinesthetic, visual, and auditory components will serve both the non-singer and the confident singer in the class. Phillips (1992) states that simply through the process of singing, the non-singer will gain singing skills. By being a part of the choral experience, an apprehensive student is internalizing the concepts of pitch, rhythm, and harmony. The development of non-judgmental setting combined with a comprehensive knowledge of musical exercises will allow the teacher to successfully work with the non-singer in a classroom situation.

Building Relationships

Relationships form the basis of a singing partnership between student and teacher. We, as vocal teachers, need to keep the personality of the individual student at the forefront of our interactions. We need to develop individual relationships with our students in order for real learning to occur. In my study, the participants often commented how our personal interaction helped them to break through their own concept of themselves as non-singers. My belief in each of them as an individual was one of the main reasons why they viewed the sessions as a positive experience. Throughout the time

with my participants, I realized that our relationship was based on my role as encourager. I was still viewed as an authority figure in musical matters but there was an understanding that I would be positive, firm, and non-judgmental. Even though I have assumed this role in past classroom situations, I was unaware that it should become my *modus operandi*. This concept should be the driving force behind lesson plans, performance opportunities, and day-to-day dealings with students.

Nurture the Dream

After 15 years with a musical theatre company in a small town, I was presented with a poster signed by individual members of the troupe. Karen wrote, "I've become a different person thanks to you." Ruth wrote, "You have opened up a whole different side of me," and Aaron penned, "You are partly responsible for who I am." At the time, these comments took me by surprise because they illuminated a change in perception to self as singer. Upon reflection of the comments in light of this study, I looked to see if there was a correlation in sentiment between what my participants had written and what my musical theatre members had written. The sentiment in the writing on the poster by my musical theatre members correlated most directly to the sentiment found when my participants re-wrote their non-singing past. The sentiment that was displayed when the participants re-wrote their singing story showed a change in how they viewed themselves as singers.

Teachers need to take a more direct approach in the creation of these stories. The changing of a student's singing story needs to be nurtured and the students allowed to let the dream of who they want to be as singers emerge.

Searching for Joy

During my years teaching at the secondary level, I wondered what drew so many students into the musical theatre productions. The rehearsal schedule was demanding; they had to practice on their own time; they did not receive course credit. My question was answered when I entered the backstage area at intermission on opening night. The exuberant laughter, large smiles, and high decibel level of every conversation, illuminated the euphoric state that singing had created. They had discovered the joy that is integral to the musical experience.

As much as I came to expect my high school students to enjoy their musical experience, I was not anticipating the same response from the participants. I thought that because they are adults they would be beyond such a desire. As a result, the concept of seeking joy through this study was not a part of my initial questioning. Only with prompting from the participants was it brought up as a topic of discussion. A sense of wonderment if their singing experience would be filled with joy sparked discussions during the sessions. Their seeking of joy through singing ultimately intrigued me to ponder further this concept. For educators, it is important to realize that individuals of all ages desire a joyful experience through singing. Encouragement to travel on this aesthetic journey will serve as a lifelong motivation to pursue singing activities.

Instrumentalist Does Not a Singer Make

My friend and I are co-conducting a university symphonic band. We have had a successful year and are preparing for our final concert. We have chosen a closing piece called *Sinfonia Voce* that brings together vocal and instrumental forces. In our office, we discuss the need for only 15 band members to play their instruments, leaving the rest of

the players to bolster the forces of the choir. This appears logical and reasonable on paper. But from the podium, it is a different story. After announcing who would be playing and who would be singing, I look up from my list. What I see staring back at me are shocked faces of the would-be singers and relieved grins of the instrumentalists. The idea that instrumentalists at the university level might never have sung in an organized fashion is unfathomable. However, I discover this to be true. I hear many pleas to be switched to the instrumental force for the piece, but my friend and I hold our ground.

This scenario brought to my attention the concept that having an instrumental identity does not guarantee one has a singing identity. The instrumentalists in the symphonic band harbored the same feelings of inadequacy and trepidation that I saw in the participants. Even though these students were trained musicians, they were limited to a single identity. The lack of association between being an instrumentalist and being a singer was illuminated by their resistance to vocal production. As a teacher, it will be important to be aware of the attitude held toward singing by instrumentalists. An instrumentalist does not a singer make.

Recommendations for Further Study

1. *A quantitative, narrative inquiry study with students of different ages would provide a different sociological analysis of the concept of non-singer.*

Karen Stafford (2008) wrote in a school magazine about her own experience working with reluctant singers. Music education researchers need to support such inquiry by delving into issues that are pertinent in today's classrooms. By looking at students of this age range who have already self-designated as non-singers, much may be gleaned as to why they view themselves in this way and if these perceptions can be changed. These discoveries may aid in eliminating circumstances that lead to this self-designation.

Interviews combined with vocal lessons could serve as the data basis for this narrative inquiry.

> 2. *As an extension of this study of the adult non-singer, a longitudinal study could ensue involving the same participants. A longitudinal study would illuminate whether perception of self as non-singer truly changed or if there was a reversion back to the initial perception. If there continued to be a change in involvement and attitude toward singing, this could prove to be important for music educators.*

By interacting with the participants again through an interview process, one would hear through their voice the impact of a positive interaction with singing. A similar methodological approach would be taken to ensure that discrepancies would not occur because of a different focus in approach.

> 3. *Different researchers, such as Knight (2002),Freer (2006), and Topp(1987), covered the phenomenon of singing in their geographical area. A study revealing if the phenomenon of the adult non-singer is present or absent in most regional areas would provide a deeper understanding of how societal influences affect daily singing experiences from a pedagogical and social perspective.*

Do different regions of the country vary in the extent to which singing is seen as a normal, everyday activity? More importantly, do those regions with a vibrant and historically grounded folk culture (i.e. the Maritimes) have a greater percentage of in-tune singers among their population?

> 4. *The popularity of reality television programs, such as Canadian Idol, play an influential role in the lives of young people and adults.*

Should we not be heartened to see that thousands, upon thousands of young people from across North America are motivated to sing in front of their peers, a panel, and a mass audience? Do such programs continue to perpetuate the idea that singing should be limited to those with natural ability or is there a democratic promise of equal Idol opportunity?

5. Canadian educators could benefit from a research project looking at how culture influences singing choices made by females and males.

As I wrote in Chapter Three, I had difficulty finding male participants for this study. However, the female participants were relatively easy to find. I speculated about cultural influence on the participation in singing of males and females but an in-depth study would support or refute such a speculation.

6. As a further extension of this study, the attitude and perception of the pre-service teacher who deems himself or herself as a non-singer should likewise be examined.

Case study methodology would provide insight into the fears that a pre-service teacher would take into the classroom about singing. How these fears will manifest themselves in the classroom and the implications of such manifestations on the students would serve as the data for such research. This is important information for educators in their realization that personal fears and assumptions affect students and classroom environments.

7. A study is needed concerning attitudes toward singing held by teachers in the field. Action research methodology could be utilized in translating those views to the classroom.

Through the examination of teachers in the field it would be possible to discover how the perception of self as non-singer influences the activities and attitudes in the classroom. If the teacher does not sing, how does that influence the students' view of singing? If the teacher is ashamed of their voice, are certain activities that have educational value abandoned because of personal discomfort with singing?

End Musings

As I worked through the sessions, data, and compilation of this study on adult non-singers, I was constantly reminded of my own teaching experience. I tried to recall

specific incidences of encouraging young singers and what was entailed in those encounters. These are the remembrances that are close to the surface of a teacher's memory as they are usually our success stories that we retell frequently. It is easy to recall the large grin on the leading lady's face at the end of a successful musical theatre run of Brigadoon. It is a pleasure to remember the warm embrace of a young man at graduation, whose only inspiration for finishing high school was choral class. I remember most vividly the emotions that envelop the memory: feelings of pride in positively influencing a young person's life. I have also had a chance to reflect back on the possibility of negatively influencing a student's singing career. One such student comes to mind. Megan (pseudonym) was in grade ten and new to the high school choir. The other girls in the choir were friendly but being a shy 15 year-old girl in a choir made up predominantly of 17 and 18 year olds was intimidating for Megan. I recall passing out the first singing exam which was a lovely tune from the musical Les Miserables and explaining that the first verse would be sung in front of the class as their singing test. There were a series of collective groans, which I promptly ignored. When the time came to perform the exam in front of the class, a few of the more unabashed girls stood and sang their rendition of this piece. When I called out that it was Megan's turn, she reluctantly stood. I played the introduction and she started in at the correct time and on the right pitch. However, after three measures, I heard a catch in her throat and I looked up from the piano score. I could see tears starting to form in her eyes. The rest of the girls looked at the floor. The room grew very quiet as her voice and my accompaniment diminished. She stood there with single tears trickling down her young cheeks. I remember murmuring something about doing the rest at lunch as I tried to regain my

composure and swallow the lump in my own throat. She sat down. Megan carried on with me in choir until grade 12 but I have often wondered if her memory of that event is as vivid as mine. I wonder if she is still singing. More generally, I ponder, "Are there students out there telling the story about how Mrs. Whidden laughed or made a comment about his/her singing voice, and in the process, destroyed his/her self-confidence to sing?" As much as I do not recall incidences other than Megan's, the likelihood is high that this indeed did happen at some point in my career. Did I cut a singer from a high school musical because I just did not want to spend the time dealing with a small, untrained voice when I had more elite musicians to work with? Did I demand a young person sing an audition piece in front of a committee before they were vocally and emotionally ready for such a public performance? Did other girls feel the same way as Megan did about performing in front of the class?

By joining me on this journey, I hope the reader has gained insight into the concept of non-singer. A look at the methodology for the study, along with the compilation of a literature review on this topic supplied the framework. The rich texture of the research, however, lay in the participants' stories. As faithfully as possible, I tried to let their voice be heard without my voice as researcher overpowering theirs. Their insight into their singer identity was heartfelt and sincere. They provided me with new ideas and ways of looking at practices that had long ago become transparent to me. They helped me to discover my own assumptions along with those held by our society. They defined terms that I had taken for granted. They sang for me when they did not want to and told me what I did not necessarily want to hear. These people helped me to shape

themes that are applicable to music educators and they helped me refine my own practice. I thank them and wish them the best of luck in their future singing experiences.

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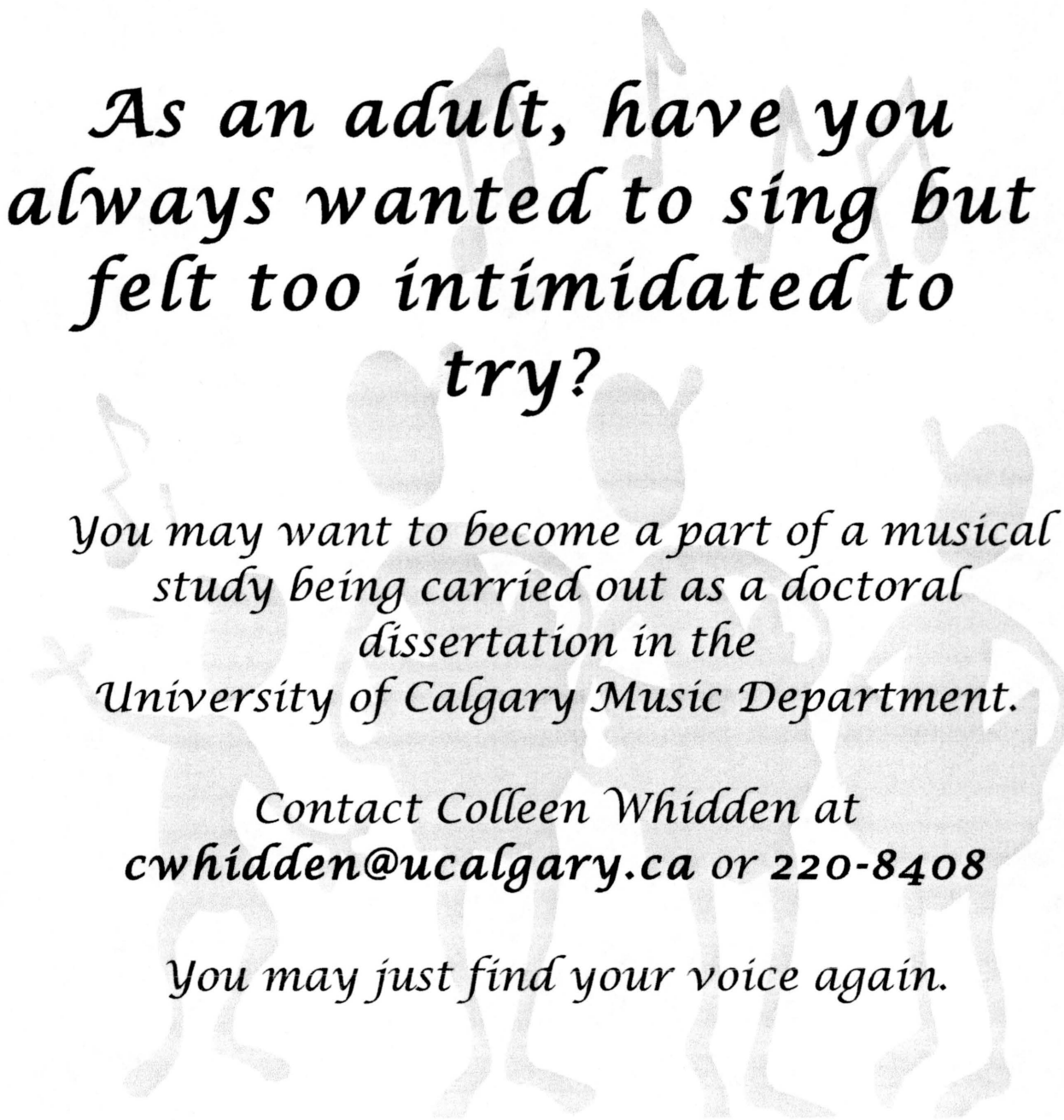
APPENDIX A
Recruitment Notice

Posted at the University of Calgary and Emailed to Potential Candidates

Have you always wanted to sing as an adult but felt too intimidated to try? You may want to become a part of a study being carried out by a PhD student in the University of Calgary Music Department. This study will look at why some adults have self-designated as non-singers, and how that designation can affect various aspects of life. Contact Colleen Whidden at cwhidden@ucalgary.ca or 220-8408. You may just find your voice again.

Recruitment Poster



APPENDIX B

Letter Determining Eligibility

Dear Potential Participant,

Thank you for your interest in this musical study which is part of my research toward a doctoral degree in music education. The overall aim of the research is to answer the query: why are there adults in Canadian society who have designated themselves as non-singers? To determine if you are eligible to participate in this study, please answer yes or no to the following four questions.

1. Are you 18 years or older?
2. Have you been educated in a Canadian school system for your entire schooling career?
3. Do you live in the Calgary vicinity?
4. Do you speak English as your first language?

If you answered no to any of the above questions, you are unfortunately not eligible to participate in this study. If you answered yes to all of the above questions, please proceed to the following five questions. Please feel free to either elaborate in each response or simply answer yes or no.

1. Have people told you that you sing out of tune?
2. Do you feel self conscious about singing in a public venue?
3. Do you wish you had what it takes to sing?
4. Were you told, sometime in your childhood, that you could not or should not sing?
5. Have you made statements about your singing ability such as "I can't carry a tune in a bucket"?

Please return this questionnaire to Colleen Whidden. All contact information is listed below. I will be in touch with you in the very near future to discuss your participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Colleen Whidden

APPENDIX C

Written Explanation Before Consent to Participate

Dear Potential Participant

Thank you for showing interest in my research on adult non-singers in Canadian society. Based on your responses to previous questions, you are eligible to be a participant. The study is in partial fulfillment of a doctoral degree in music education from the University of Calgary. The overall aim of the research is to answer the query: why are there adults in Canadian society who have designated themselves as non-singers? Your role in this research will be to explore your story of why you do not sing as an adult and how that has affected your life. In this exploration, we will look at your childhood experience with singing, your view on innate musical ability, the concept of the adult non-singer being a Western phenomenon, and the cultural and environmental factors present in musical development.

This will take place over eight sessions that will be arranged to fit your schedule. The first two sessions will each be one hour in length and the final six sessions will each be 30 minutes in length. The first session will be an introduction into basic acoustic principles and socio-cultural aspects surrounding singing in Canadian culture. Session one will be a group session with the other participants. The second session will be a private session and will entail an exploration of your personal opinion on an array of musical topics pertinent to this research. The final six sessions will be private voice lessons. During these lessons, we will develop your own personal singing skills by going through vocal exercises as prescribed in *Musical Skills for Adult Beginners* by Veronika Cohen, *A Beginning Singers Guide* by Richard Davis, *Teaching Kids to Sing* by Kenneth Phillips, and *The Singing Book* by Meribeth Bunch and Cynthia Vaughn. These private lessons will be tailored to your own level of ability. At the end of the eight sessions, you will be asked to take the appropriate sections of the Carl Seashore's musical ability test called *Measures of Musical Talents.* The results of this test are only to mark your progress through the sessions. There will be no public performance at the culmination.

If you would like to be a part of this study, please contact me. Upon your confirmation of acceptance, I will send you an informed consent form that you will need to sign and give to me prior to the beginning of our sessions.

Thank you for being a part of this research and I look forward to hearing your stories and your voice.

Sincerely,

APPENDIX D

Ethics Consent Form

Name of Researcher, Faculty, Department, Telephone & Email:

Colleen Whidden University of Calgary Faculty of Fine Arts/ Department of Music

Supervisor:
Dr. Malcolm Edwards University of Calgary Department of Music

Title of Project:
The Adult Non-Singer: Connection, Context and Culture

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study.

Purpose of the Study:
The overall aim of the research is to answer the query: why are there adults in our Canadian society who have designated themselves as non-singers? The study will be broken down into three sections. The first section of the research will consist of three tasks. The first will be to define the characteristics of an adult non-singer; the second will be to describe the causes and origins while the third will explore if and how this situation can be reversed. The second section of the research will be to examine, through a comparison with other cultures, the view that Western society is focused on innate singing ability. The examination of the Western view on musical development will consist of comparing the musical views and the musical development of individuals and communities of Canada to those in different countries worldwide. These comparisons will be essential in

establishing if, in fact, the normative culture is focused on innate singing ability. Finally, the third section of this research topic will be to evaluate how this view of innate musical ability may be impeding musical development in some of its members. This examination will come through extended dialogue with self-designated adult non-singers, such as yourself, and compiling and analyzing your answers and life experiences.

You have been chosen as a participant in this research because of your designation that you are an adult non-singer and your willingness to seek out answers for this phenomenon. You answered yes to questions which were asked to assess if you are truly an adult non-singer. Your participation is greatly appreciated and it is hoped that this will be a fulfilling experience for you.

What Will I Be Asked To Do?

You will be asked to answer questions openly and honestly about why you do not sing as an adult. You will also be expected to try to sing in a private situation during our time together. You will not be expected to sing in any kind of public venue at any time throughout the research.

The time commitment for this research will be 8 sessions starting in November, 2007 and ending in March, 2008. The first two sessions will each be one hour in length and the final six sessions will each be 30 minutes in length. The first session will be an introduction into basic acoustic principles and socio-cultural aspects surrounding singing in Canadian culture. Session one will be a group session with the other participants. The second session will be a private session and will entail an exploration of your personal opinion on an array of musical topics pertinent to this research. The final six sessions will be private voice lessons. During these lessons, we will develop your own personal singing skills by going through vocal exercises as prescribed in Musical Skills for Adult Beginners by Veronika Cohen, A Beginning Singers Guide by Richard Davis, and The Singing Book by Meribeth Bunch and Cynthia Vaughn. These private lessons will be geared to your own level of singing. At the end of the six sessions, you will be asked to take the appropriate sections of the Carl Seashore's musical ability test called Measures of Musical Talents. The results of this test are only to mark your progress through the sessions. There will be no public performance at the culmination. Once the sessions are complete and the thesis has been written, you are most welcome to peruse the final document.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Since it is voluntary, you may refuse to participate altogether or you may refuse to participate in parts of the study. You may also withdraw from the study at any time.

What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected?

Should you agree to participate, you will be asked to provide your name, gender, age, ethnicity, current employment, post-secondary training and where you

attended elementary and secondary school. If you do not wish to provide all or some of this information, you may still be a part of the research but your data will be presented in an anonymous fashion.

There are several options for you to consider if you decide to take part in this research. You can choose all, some or none of them. Please put a check mark on the corresponding line(s) that grants me your permission to:

I grant permission to be audio taped: Yes: ___ No: ___
I grant permission to be videotaped: Yes: ___ No: ___
You may quote me and use my name: Yes: ___ No: ___
I wish to remain anonymous: Yes: ___ No: ___
I wish to remain anonymous, but you may refer to me by a pseudonym: Yes: ___ No: ___
The pseudonym I choose for myself is:
I wish for my information to remain confidential (no reference to me in data): Yes: ___ No: ___
I wish to have session one (introduction) as a group session: Yes: ___ No: ___
I wish to have session one (introduction) as a private session: Yes: ___ No: ___
I wish to have only private sessions: Yes: ___ No: ___

If you agree to participate in the group session, your anonymity and confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. All sessions will be videotaped, unless you do not grant permission. I will watch the videotapes after each session and make notes from them. These notes will be available for you, if you wish, to peruse at the beginning of the next session. The notes will not be a direct transcription but a synopsis of the data. If you do not grant permission for the sessions to be videotaped, I will take notes during our time together. You will be able to peruse those notes at the beginning of the subsequent session. At the conclusion of the research when the data is presented in public, excerpts from the videotaped recordings may be used during these presentations. The inclusion of your videotaped sessions in such presentations will limit the ability to guarantee anonymity and confidentiality.

Are there Risks or Benefits if I Participate?
There are no foreseeable risks, harms or inconveniences to you because of your participation in this research. However, if you become distressed or disturbed because of any aspect of this research, you are encouraged to talk with me or my research supervisor. If you need additional support, you may contact support services that are available under the University of Calgary jurisdiction, the City of Calgary jurisdiction as well as through cross Canadian organizations. Under the University of Calgary authority, I would advise you to seek support through the University of Counseling and Student Development Center where personal counseling is free of charge to University of Calgary students. If you are not a student, I would encourage you to contact the Calgary Distress Center (in

partnership with the United Way of Calgary and Area and the City of Calgary) or the Calgary Health Region Mental Health which both provide personal assistance free of charge. I would also encourage you to seek professional help from your family physician.

The benefits to you as a participant in the research, The Adult Non-Singer: Connection, Context and Culture, will be the chance to evaluate and possibly change your outlook on why you are an adult non-singer. This research may help you, to once again, find your own personal voice.

What Happens to the Information I Provide?

If you consent to having your name used in the research, then any information that you give me will be accredited to you. If you wish to be anonymous, no reference will be made to you but your information will be presented as an anonymous participant. If you wish to be anonymous but have chosen a pseudonym, all of your information will be accredited to the pseudonym. If you prefer to remain completely confidential, information given by you will only appear within general observations. If you decide to withdraw during the research, the data collected up to your point of withdrawal will be retained and may be used.

Participation is completely voluntary and may be anonymous and confidential if you wish. You are free to discontinue participation at any time during the study. No one except me and my supervisor will be allowed to see or hear any of the answers to the session questions or the watch the videotape. The fieldnotes and videotapes from the sessions will be kept in a locked cabinet only accessible to me and my supervisor. The anonymous data will be stored for two years on computer disks and videotapes, at which time, they will be permanently erased.

Signatures (written consent)

Your signature on this form indicates that you 1) understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and 2) agree to participate as a research subject.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant's Name: (please print)

_____

Participant's Signature _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Name: (please print)

_____

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Questions/Concerns

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

Researcher: Mrs. Colleen Whidden
University of Calgary Department of Music/ Faculty of Fine Arts

Supervisor: Dr. Malcolm Edwards
University of Calgary Department of Music

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact Bonnie Scherrer, Ethics Resource Officer, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at (403) 220-3782; email bonnie.scherrer@ucalgary.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.

APPENDIX E

Initial Questions

1. Describe your childhood experience with singing. Was there music in your home? Were you encouraged to participate in musical or singing endeavors? Did you feel you were compared to your friends or siblings –was this a positive or negative experience?
2. How have those childhood experiences affected your singing activity as an adult? Have these experiences encouraged or discouraged participation in singing activities?
3. How have these childhood experiences affected your perception of yourself as a singer in your adult life?
4. Why have you not sung as an adult? Time pressures? Few opportunities? Not interested? No support from family or friends to be a part of musical endeavors?
5. Would you sing "Happy Birthday" at a party of family and friends? Why or why not?
6. How would you feel if you were asked to sing a solo at a party? Why do you think you would feel that way?
7. Are you resentful that you have not had singing as part of life?
8. Were you encouraged to sing as a child by the adults in your life? Tell me a story if you have one about an encouraging or discouraging childhood situation with an adult or authority figure.
9. Do you feel that you are not physically able to sing? Do you think that you have an inadequate vocal instrument?
10. Do you view singing ability as something that you either have or you don't have?
11. Who in your life (either in your childhood or your adult life) do you feel has musical talent? Describe why you think they are talented and what constitutes their musical talent.
12. Do you feel that you have musical talent? How does this talent manifest itself?
13. What if I were to tell you that every human being is physically able to sing? Research shows that vocal folds in human beings go all the way back to the time of prehistoric man and have evolved with the human species. Every person is born hardwired to sing. Does this information affect your attitude toward your own singing ability?
14. Do you think that if you had grown up in a different culture, that you would be an adult non-singer? How much affect do you think your society had on your perception of singing ability?
15. Do you think that anyone, if they practiced enough, could develop basic singing skills? Do you think that anyone, if they practiced enough, could become a professional singer? Why or why not? How important is motivation to singing development? If someone really wants to sing does that mean they can sing?

APPENDIX F

Thematic Overview

Session One Thematic Overview

Session One will be in a lecture format given by the researcher to all participants. This session will provide background information into acoustic principles of music and socio-cultural aspects of singing in Canadian society. This background information will situate the research for the participants.Socio-cultural aspects of singing in Canadian society to be covered were:

1. Definition of an Adult Non-singer
2. Concept of Innate Singing Ability and How this affects Societal View of Singing
3. Non-Western Societal Concepts of the Adult Non-Singer
4. Singing as a Developmental Skill
5. Cultural and Environmental Factors Surrounding Singing Development in Canadian Culture.

Session Two: Thematic Overview

This private session will look at the personal singing experience of each participant. Each participant will be encouraged to relate his/her singing experience through narrative or by answering the following questions.

1. Describe your childhood experience with singing. Was there music in your home? Were you encouraged to participate in musical or singing endeavors? Did you feel you were compared to your friends or siblings –was this a positive or negative experience?
2. How have those childhood experiences affected your singing activity as an adult? Have these experiences encouraged or discouraged participation in singing activity?
3. How have these childhood experiences affected your perception of yourself as a singer in your adult life?
4. Why have you not sung as an adult? Time pressures? Few opportunities? Not interested? No support from family or friends to be a part of musical endeavors?
5. Would you sing "Happy Birthday" at a party of family and friends? Why or why not?
6. How would you feel if you were asked to sing a solo at a party? Why do you think you would feel that way?
7. Are you resentful that you have not had singing as part of life?
8. Were you encouraged to sing as a child by the adults in your life? Tell me a story if you have one about an encouraging or discouraging childhood situation surrounding an adult or authority figure.
9. Do you feel that you do not have the physical capability to sing? Do you think that you have an inadequate vocal instrument?
10. Do you view singing ability as something that you either have or you don't have?
11. Who in your life (either in your childhood or your adult life) do you feel has musical talent? Describe why you think they are talented and what constitutes their musical talent.

12. Do you feel that you have musical talent? How does this talent manifest itself?
13. What if I were to tell you that every human being has the innate physical capability to sing? Research has been done that shows that vocal folds in human beings go all the way back to the fossil time and have evolved with the human species. Every person is born hardwired to sing. Does this information affect your attitude toward your own singing ability?
14. Do you think that if you had grown up in a different culture, that you would be an adult non-singer? How much affect do you think your society had on your perception of singing ability?
15. Do you think that anyone, if they practiced enough, could develop basic singing skills? Do you think that anyone, if they practiced enough, could become a professional singer? Why or why not?
16. How much to you think motivation factors in to singing development? If someone really wants to sing does that mean they can sing?

Session Three: Thematic Overview
1. Breathing and relaxation exercises (to make participant physically aware of the singing apparatus and to put participant at ease in this environment)
2. Pitch-discrimination exercise (both aural and visual feedback will be given to help aid inaccurate pitches)
3. Listening exercises (using the inner ear to hear before singing a response)
4. Work on familiar tonal patterns and descending patterns.

Session Four: Thematic Overview
1. Breathing and relaxation exercises
2. Pitch-discrimination exercise (both aural and visual feedback will be given to help aid inaccurate pitches)
3. Review of the differences between speaking and singing voice.
4. Listening exercises (using the inner ear to hear before singing a response)
5. Work on familiar tonal patterns and descending patterns.
6. Comparison of tonal patterns for sameness and difference.
7. Participant's analysis of his/her own pitch response and what they need to do to correct it (concentrating on what was physically felt in vocal responses.

Session Five: Thematic Overview
1. Breathing and Relaxation exercises (to make participant physically aware of the singing apparatus and to put them at ease)
2. Humming exercises (to make participant aware of vibrations needed for singing and to have them produce a vocal sound)
3. Matching pitches exercise (I will produce a pitch and s/he will match it)
4. Sense of different pitches (s/he will produce different pitches and feel the change physically)
5. Internalizing beat (Lesson One from Cohen's book)

Session Six: Thematic Overview
1. Breathing and Relaxation Exercises (Review of session five)

2. Humming/Matching Pitches/ Sense of Different Pitches (Review of session five)
3. Internalizing beat (Review of Lesson One from Cohen's book)
4. So-Mi (Lesson II from Cohen's book)

Session Seven: Thematic Overview
1. Look at the physical apparatus and physical changes taking place when singing (Based on Chapter Seven in Bunch and Vaughn's book)
2. Review of concepts covered in Session Five and Six
3. La-Do (Lesson IV and VI in Cohen's book)

Session Eight: Thematic Overview
1. Review of concepts covered in Session Six and Seven
2. Re (Lesson VIII in Cohen's book)

APPENDIX G

Pre and Post-test

1. Melodic Contour

Draw out the melodic contour for the following songs

-Rain, Rain, Go Away

-Ring Around the Rosie

Repeat each song twice and participant is encouraged to draw it out two separate time

2. Rhythm

-Clap the rhythm of the tune of Jingle Bells

3. Melody

-Sing the melody to Happy Birthday

-participant to choose starting pitch

4. Pitch Matching

-Participant match the following pitches in their range

C4, G4, Bb4, F4, D4

5. Music Notation

-talk about anything that is recognizable on written score for The First Noel (written in four part harmony in the key of Bb)

APPENDIX H

Closing Questions

1. Has working through these sessions helped you shed new light on your childhood experiences?
2. Do you think if you had not had that negative pre-eminent moment or influences in your life, you would be a singer today as an adult? Why or why not?
3. Has your perception changed of yourself as a singer through these sessions? Has your perception changed of the concept of singer?
4. All of you have sung in these sessions and have progressed in the usage of your voice. I view this as singing but do you?
5. Do you think you will continue to "sing" in the future?
6. Have you noticed yourself being more relaxed in singing situations you have encountered in the last few weeks? Have you tried singing in a situation where you would not have sung before – at a birthday party, in church, in your home? Describe any feelings that you have encountered when singing in these situations.
7. How have you felt coming to these sessions? Anxious, nervous, uptight? Do you leave with the same feelings? What is running through your mind after you leave my office? Did it get easier as the sessions went on or were the initial feelings still prevalent right until the last session?
8. Was there anything that happened in the singing sessions with me that made you feel uncomfortable (eg. breathing deeply, the written page, the door being open)?
9. Did you think the breathing exercises at the beginning were helpful for your singing? Were they helpful in any other areas of your life (eg – tension relief, while excercising)
10. Are these sessions bringing back unwanted feelings from your childhood? Are you hearing voices in your head?
11. Was singing really important to you as a child and that is why you internalized it so readily? Was your own persona wrapped up in a singing persona?
12. How much as a child did you really want to sing?
13. How much do you think the public way in which your "singing incident" occurred affected your reaction? Would it have happened in private or is there a real public humiliation as well as personal humiliation wrapped up in it?
14. If you had been singled out about jogging, do you think you would have taken it so much to heart/so personally?
15. What would this experience have looked like if you had said "I'll show you I can sing"?
16. Will you now sing "Happy Birthday" at a party of family and friends? Why or why not?
17. Are you sad/regretful that you have not had singing as part of life now that you know you can sing?
18. Were you encouraged to sing as a child by the adults in your life but refused it because of the pre-eminent moment or influence?
19. Is singing bringing you any joy? Are these sessions bringing you any joy?
20. Write me a definition of singing – can be as broad or specific as you like. Write me a definition of musician, talent.

21. What part does innate ability have in singing ability versus how much does development?
22. Have you had any insights into singing since we have started together? Have you noticed anything differently musically around you since we started together? Have you participated in any singing situation that you wouldn't have before?
23. Do you now feel that you have the physical capability to sing? Do you now think that you have an adequate vocal instrument?
24. Do you view singing ability as something that you either have or you don't have?
25. Who in your life has been encouraging you in these session undertakings? Is this person's voice as influential as the one you heard in your childhood?
26. Do you feel that you have musical talent? How does this talent manifest itself?
27. Do you think that if you practiced enough, could develop basic singing skills? Will you practice enough to gain basic singing skills?
28. Do you think that motivation factored in to your singing development? How much was personal motivation a factor in you coming to these sessions? What was your motivating factor in coming to these sessions?
29. If you had all been my elementary students, or had me as a mother, or had been interested in singing as a child and thus had not had a negative experience, rewrite your adult singing experiences. Make it as outrageous as you want – what you have kept only as a silent dream. This can be a story about being able to sing to your child without being self-conscious to being a folk or rock lead singer.
30. What kind of singing endeavors will you pursue in the future?

APPENDIX I

Participants' Occupations and Ages

Name	Occupation	Age
Cheryl	Office Administrator	56
Sara	Instrumental Music Teacher	27
Nancy	Mother and Massage Therapist	54
Helen	Professor of Microbiology (retired)	67
Sydney	Nurse (retired)	74
Tony	Engineer	44
Ameeta	Land Administrator	49
Gilbert	Reservoir Engineer (retired)	52
Ed	School Board Superintendent (retired)	62
Marjorie	Urban Land Use Planner (retired)	61
Cheri	Pediatrician	44
Cathie	Office Administrator	51

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MEMO

CONJOINT FACULTIES RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD
c/o Research Services
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3512 - 33 Street N.W., Calgary, Alberta T2L 1Y7
Telephone: (403) 220-3782
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Email: bonnie.scherrer@ucalgary.ca
Wednesday, August 01, 2007

To: **Colleen M. Whidden**
Music

From: Dr. Janice P. Dickin, Chair
Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB)

Re: **Certification of Institutional Ethics Review:** The Adult Non-Singer: Connection, Context, and Culture

The above named research protocol has been granted ethical approval by the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board for the University of Calgary.

Enclosed are the original, and one copy, of a signed **Certification of Institutional Ethics Review**. Please make note of the conditions stated on the Certification. A copy has been sent to your supervisor as well as to the Chair of your Department/Faculty Research Ethics Committee. In the event the research is funded, you should notify the sponsor of the research and provide them with a copy for their records. The Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board will retain a copy of the clearance on your file.

Please note, an annual/progress/final report must be filed with the CFREB twelve months from the date on your ethics clearance. A form for this purpose has been created, and may be found on the "Ethics" website, http://www.ucalgary.ca/UofC/research/html/ethics/reports.html

In closing let me take this opportunity to wish you the best of luck in your research endeavor.

Sincerely,

Bonnie Scherrer
For:
Janice Dickin, Ph.D., LLB., Faculty of Communication and Culture and
Chair, Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board

Enclosures(2)
cc: Chair, Department/Faculty Research Ethics Committee
Supervisor: Malcolm Edwards

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

CERTIFICATION OF INSTITUTIONAL ETHICS REVIEW

This is to certify that the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board at the University of Calgary has examined the following research proposal and found the proposed research involving human subjects to be in accordance with University of Calgary Guidelines and the Tri-Council Policy Statement on *"Ethical Conduct in Research Using Human Subjects"*. This form and accompanying letter constitute the Certification of Institutional Ethics Review.

File no:	**5279**
Applicant(s):	**Colleen M. Whidden**
Department:	**Music**
Project Title:	**The Adult Non-Singer: Connection, Context, and Culture**
Sponsor (if applicable):	

Restrictions:

This Certification is subject to the following conditions:

1. Approval is granted only for the project and purposes described in the application.
2. Any modifications to the authorized protocol must be submitted to the Chair, Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board for approval.
3. A progress report must be submitted 12 months from the date of this Certification, and should provide the expected completion date for the project.
4. Written notification must be sent to the Board when the project is complete or

1 August 2007
Date:

Janice Dickin, Ph.D, LLB
Chair
Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board

Distribution: (1) Applicant, (2) Supervisor (if applicable), (3) Chair, Department/Faculty Research Ethics Committee, (4) Sponsor, (5) Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (6) Research Services.