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Older people's motivations for participating in community singing in Australia

Juyoung Lee and Jane W. Davidson, The University of Melbourne

Amanda E. Krause, Curtin University

Abstract

The aim of this project was to investigate the motivations of older people who regularly attend community singing groups in Australia. Four focus group interviews were conducted with 64 participants belonging to three community singing groups. Participants explained their motivation to attend and sing with others in the groups. A total of eight motivating factors were identified via an inductive thematic analysis, including (1) the importance of singing in my life; (2) enormous pleasure of singing with little pressure; (3) challenge and achievement; (4) spiritual and uplifting emotions; (5) strength in overcoming my age, disease and hardship; (6) good leadership; (7) fellowship with others; and (8) purpose and meaning of group singing. The themes were viewed and discussed from various perspectives including positive psychology and the PERMA well-being model. The findings suggest that the older participants seem to experience different motivation factors while at different stages of their engagement in the groups.

Keywords

community singing groups

motivations

older people

well-being

focus group interviews

PERMA well-being model

Introduction

The use of arts participation in well-being contexts is internationally practised (Clift 2012). Using music as a tool to benefit well-being is a topic of growing interest to researchers as well as practitioners (Clift et al. 2008; MacDonald et al. 2012). A challenge facing researchers is to understand the relationship between music participation and well-being impact (Skingley et al. 2011). In this article, singing is selected as the form of engagement to be investigated since it has few skill barriers to participation (Davidson and Fedele 2011). In other words, there is no musical instrument to be learned and manipulated, and thus singers are arguably freer to focus on goals associated with expressive experience, rather than the matters of technical control.

The cohort selected for the study are older adults, the rationale being that relatively little attention has been paid to the well-being potential of music in the lives of older people (Creech et al. 2013). Due to medical progress and improved quality of life, our society is rapidly growing older, with people experiencing an increased life expectancy (World Health Organization 2011). As more people have a longer period of late life than ever before, promoting and maintaining the well-being of older adults has become ‘one of the most pressing priorities of our time’ (Skingley and Vella-Burrows 2010: 35). Moreover, in an Australian context, group singing is becoming an increasingly popular community activity (Gridley et al. 2011). Consequently, to understand the relationship between musical participation and well-being benefits, the current project investigated the motivations of older people taking part in community singing groups in Australia.

Literature review

Surveys reveal that more than half the population over the age of 60 years have some disability that restricts everyday activities (World Health Organization 2011). A proportion of these people are likely to experience some psychological distress, especially as some become increasingly socially isolated as family members move away or die (Flood 2005). Socially isolated people in western countries have between two and five times greater risk for dying from all causes compared with those who maintain close ties with family, friends and the community (Berkman and Glass 2000). Thus, offering regular opportunities for new social connections and social capital benefits is extremely important for older people.

Previous research has highlighted positive social consequences associated with participating in music for older people, such as socializing with others, feeling supported and experiencing belonging and group membership (Livesey et al. 2012; Lally 2009; Creech et al. 2013; Joseph 2009; Hillman 2002; Lehmberg and Fung 2010; Camic et al. 2011; Bailey and Davidson 2005). Musical activities provide a structure and offer a way to sustain social interaction with others (Gembris 2012). Indeed, for those living alone, the groups offer an opportunity to get out of the house to meet others (Creech et al. 2013; Livesey et al. 2012).

In addition to the psychosocial impact of music, it is important to recognize that both passive music listening and active music participation can elicit physiological responses such as shivers down the spine or palpitations (Sloboda 1991). Since we know that different pieces of music elicit different physiological responses, a psycho-physiological understanding for the discrimination of emotional responses to music is required, which can be contingent on factors such as who we are with or what we are doing or thinking when exposed to the musical experience. One such offering is by Juslin (2011) who suggests a number of mechanisms that

might induce emotion in response to music. These include rhythmic entrainment, that is, where an external rhythm in the music influences the bodily rhythms of the listener so that the body synchronizes in a common periodicity with the rhythm; musical expectancy, where specific features of the music confirm, delay or interrupt the listener's expectations about the continuation of the music; and, additionally, contagion, where the listener 'mimics' the emotional expression of the music in an internalizing process (Juslin 2011). Whether these mechanisms stand up to empirical validation remains uncertain, and yet, there is no doubt that music elicits emotional response.

A common benefit reported by participants in singing is improvement in mood. Choristers, for instance, report increased feelings of happiness, relaxation and a lifting of spirits (Lally 2009; Lehmborg and Fung 2010; Livesey et al. 2012). It is well known that vocal music in particular offers emotional release, not the least because of the narrative of the text interacting with the musical structures (Davidson 2011). Therefore, participating in group singing might motivate emotional expression and regulation of it since the activity takes place in a controlled and directed environment (Bailey and Davidson 2002, 2003, 2005). In addition to expressing emotions, singing also provides a structure to explore and reflect on emotions to work through difficult times or communicate with others (Hays and Minichiello 2005). In this way, individuals can process their emotions as they work through illness, loss, grief and trauma, for instance (Bailey and Davidson 2005; Bonde 2014; Hays and Minichiello 2005; von Lob et al. 2010).

Therapeutic benefits of musical participation have been promoted in a series of arts and health initiatives, including, for example, the National Network for the Arts in Health (UK); Music for Life Project (UK); and the Music in Healthcare Partnership Project (Ireland). Evaluations suggest that such arts programmes engage people, eliciting immediate responses that can subsequently lead to positive knock-on effects (Greaves and Farbus 2006) for longer-term

psychological and physical well-being. In one study, for example, older adults who participated in a short-term theatre training programme showed significant improvements on measures of cognitive performance and psychological well-being (Staricoff 2004).

Cohen et al. (2006) found that older people with mood disorders who engaged in choral participation, in contrast with a comparison group who undertook different activities, reported improved general health and morale, reduced loneliness, fewer visits to doctors, a reduction in the number of over-the-counter medications taken. A recent study of singing with older people living with dementia showed improved focus and lucidity after sessions (Davidson and Almeida 2014). In the light of these previous studies, it could be that singing groups offer an enhanced sense of self and a regulation of mood unique to the musical experience.

While the previous research highlights the potential well-being benefits associated with group singing, it is also important to understand the motivation to participate in such activities. In particular, since many older adults have often been forced to withdraw from social activities, it is important to consider older participants' motivations to attend singing groups over and above other potential social opportunities that may be offered to them. Therefore, the main research question that guided the present study was 'what motivates older adults to attend and then continue singing in community groups?' Moreover, as this study explored the phenomenon of positive impact of musical participation on health and well-being of older adults, positive psychology theory and the PERMA well-being model may provide a useful theoretical context.

Positive psychology and the PERMA well-being model

In the recent years, positive psychology has attracted much attention from clinical psychology and related fields. Initiated back in 1902 by William James's writing on 'healthy mindedness'

(Gable and Haidt 2005), positive psychology was re-instigated by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Martin Seligman in 2000 (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi 2000). Positive psychology, ‘an umbrella term for the study of positive emotions, positive character traits, and enabling institutions’ (Seligman et al. 2005: 410), studies ‘the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions’ (Gable and Haidt 2005: 104).

Seligman (2011) identified five elements that foster well-being, including positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment (PERMA). The first element of the model, positive emotions, concerns whether a person feels and demonstrates positive emotions such as hope, compassion, empathy, comfort, contentment, joy, gratitude, love or zest. The second element, engagement, deals with whether a person is engaged with something in life such as work or personal interests. Meaning, the third element of well-being, is about ‘belonging to and serving something that you believe is bigger than the self’ (Seligman 2011: 17). The fourth element is relationships, and it concerns whether a person is able to build and sustain positive relationships with others. The final element, accomplishment, is about “‘achieving life,” a life dedicated to accomplish for the sake of accomplishment’ (Seligman 2011: 19).

In work on singing and older people, theory building is necessary to advance the field (Clift et al. 2008), and the PERMA model offers a potential framework that might explain the value of group singing to well-being (Croom 2015). In particular, the PERMA model may be useful for the interpretation of the participants’ subjective perceptions of how their participation influences their personal well-being. It is within this framework that we explore our focus groups.

Method

Study design

A qualitative enquiry that explored the participants' perception of singing group attendance was selected as a methodology. Focus group interviews were used to gather audio and text data.

According to Stewart and Shamdasani (2015), focus group interviews generally involve eight to twelve people who discuss a particular topic guided by a moderator. The purpose of this discussion was not to reach a consensus but gather various views and perspectives (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). Because of the nature and dynamic of group interactions, synergism, snowballing, stimulation, security and spontaneity are considered advantages of focus group interviews (Stewart and Shamdasani 2015). The two main questions asked in the focus group interviews were as follows:

- Why do you keep coming to the singing group?
- How would you describe the experience?

Ethics approval of this study was obtained from the human ethics committee at the University of Melbourne (Ethics ID: 1442751.1).

Participants

A total of 64 participants were interviewed from three community singing groups in Australia. All groups had been founded ten years prior to the current investigation. They had come together as a part of a grant initiative that focused on the building of singing groups with the goal of offering musical and social opportunity to vulnerable older people – that is, those living alone in the community, those living with dementia, those in a care facility. Each group meets at least 36 times a year, so more or less once a week, each school term. The repertoire is selected for the

specific groups (e.g., Jewish songs from 1930s onwards for a dementia group based in a Jewish Care Home). All participants are free to suggest and add new material. The project follows guidelines first described by Davidson and Faulkner (2010).

The first focus group consisted of seven singer participants and a music facilitator, referred to as Group A (aged 55–81 years). This group regularly visits nursing homes to sing for people who have dementia; thus their experience in performing at nursing homes was discussed in the interview. The second group, referred to as Group B, involved 26 people (ages ranged between 32 and 88 years) and a music facilitator. This singing group comprised people experiencing Alzheimer's disease or dementia and their supporters, including family members, friends and professional carers. The focus of the discussion was the experience of older adults who have Alzheimer's disease or dementia. The third and fourth focus groups included members of Group C. As the group had more than 50 participants, one focus group comprised the sixteen 'founding' members (aged between 82 and 95 years) and the other included fifteen 'newer' members (aged between 68 and 78 years). The three singing groups all had been set up for their specific age groups.

Data analysis

A thematic analysis was initially conducted by the first author to discover a list of motivating factors to singing group attendance. In order to identify the themes, Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested conducting a thematic analysis via six phases: (1) familiarizing yourself with your data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes and (6) producing the report. Guided and informed by the six phases, three stages were developed over time for the current study: stage 1 (gaining familiarity with the data), stage 2 (searching for themes), and stage 3 (reviewing themes). The following section outlines each

stage.

Stage 1: Gaining familiarity with the data

The four group discussions were transcribed into a Microsoft word file. While reading the transcription repeatedly to be familiarized with the data, key phrases and sentences that appeared critical and important in answering the research question about motivations of older adults in community singing groups were identified and highlighted.

Stage 2: Searching for themes and naming them

In searching for themes, ‘the scissor-and-sort technique’ (Stewart and Shamdasani 2015) was used: the highlighted phrases or sentences were cut and pasted together with similar ideas. As a result of this process, a total of nine themes¹ were collected initially.

Stage 3: Reviewing themes

Braun and Clarke (2006) explain how to review themes:

During this phase, it will become evident that some candidate themes are not really themes (e.g., If there are not enough data to support them, or the data are too diverse), while others might collapse into each other (e.g., two apparently separate themes).

Based on these examples, each theme was reviewed and changes were made. For example, theme 8, provision of service to community, collapsed into theme 9, purpose and meaning of group singing, as the participants consider the service to community as a purposeful and meaningful activity. During this stage, the other two authors reviewed the identified themes, verifying some

of the identified themes as useful and providing suggestions, which led to the revision of several other themes as well. The following section reports the results.

Results

As a result of the three-stage thematic analysis, a total of eight themes emerged. These themes described older people's motivations leading to their continued attendance of community singing groups. These themes included the following:

Motivation 1: Importance of singing in my life

Motivation 2: Enormous pleasure of singing with little pressure

Motivation 3: Spiritual and uplifting emotions

Motivation 4: Challenge and achievement

Motivation 5: Strength in overcoming my age, disease and hardship

Motivation 6: Good leadership

Motivation 7: Fellowship with others

Motivation 8: Purpose and meaning of group singing

Each theme is presented below using supporting participant quotes.

Importance of singing in my life

Some participants explained how important singing was in their lives. For example, this idea was captured by the following two participant comments:

- *I couldn't imagine my life without singing actually.*
- *If I lost my voice and wasn't able to sing, then I would maybe feel like I've lost a limb... couldn't live without it.*

The intensity and degree of importance of singing that they expressed indicate strong beliefs in a deep connection between singing and their lives. All participants talked about this theme specifically using the word 'singing' instead of referring to it as 'music'. In one of the focus group discussions, the moderator asked them whether it was music in general or singing in particular, to which some participants highlighted the important and useful aspect of specifically singing at their age. They thought that their aged fingers were not good for learning or playing the piano or other instruments anymore, but that they could still sing with joy. Accordingly, the older people in these singing groups seemed to believe that singing was the most useful and appropriate musical activity for their age group, and their strong belief in the importance of singing in their lives motivated them to continue singing in the groups.

Enormous pleasure of singing with little pressure

Many participants expressed feeling pleasure as a result of singing in the group:

- *Pleasure, enormous pleasure, with very little pressure.*
- *It isn't demanding, I find it quite relaxing and it's good to see people of all standards enjoying themselves so much because we're all singing together, and this makes me enjoy it more as well.*

In general, the depth and degree of pleasure they experienced while singing was intense and support the previous findings that report choir participants' feelings of happiness and relaxation (Lally 2009; Livesey et al. 2012; Lehmborg and Fung 2010). Interestingly, the participants claimed that the feeling of pleasure was pressure-free. Specifically, they explained that the source of this pleasure originated from the non-demanding and enjoyable group environment. Some participants compared their experience in the current group to professional choirs that they attended in the past and reported that they did not enjoy these other contexts due to their strict, demanding and stressful nature. Accordingly, for older people, experiencing positive emotions with others appeared to be a more important consideration rather than achieving the professional standards of singing within a potentially more restrictive, stressful environment. Moreover, experiencing pleasure was, in part, tied in part to the larger group atmosphere. As the participant quotes indicated, with regard to the singing group environment, feelings of pleasure for oneself were supported by the fact that others in the group were also enjoying the activity. As emotions can be contagious, older individuals could benefit from sharing in positive experiences with one another.

Spiritual and uplifting emotions

Many participants described the uplifted feelings and spirit they felt after singing:

- *When I leave I feel so much better. But leaving you feel good for quite some time after. A higher elevation of mood, kind of lifts, lifts you up a bit but it stays with me for a while, certainly even on the drive home, and after I'm home for a while. So yeah that's why I found I continue to come primarily.*

- *I find it very therapeutic, I find it very uplifting, it really makes me feel good, yeah.*
- *I won't miss this for anything, absolutely anything, because it just lifts you up.*

'Uplifting' and 'lifted up' were the two main phrases frequently used by the participants who described this particular phenomenon. They experienced an emotional boost as a result of attending the group, which persisted even after leaving the rehearsal. In contrast to the previous motivating factor, enormous pleasure of singing, which occurred during singing, this motivation seemed to be a result of their attendance, and, as such, something that the participants were able to take away from the rehearsal. As the feeling persisted beyond the boundary of the actual rehearsal time, it was a good motivator for continued participation. In particular, as stated in the first statement, one participant articulated that feeling the higher elevation of mood was the primary motivation for him or her to continue attending the singing group.

Challenge and achievement

While many participants discussed the positive emotions they experienced from singing, some others explained the intellectual or physical challenges and feelings of achievement that they experienced from singing rehearsals and performances:

- *Mentally you are alert and it's challenging sometimes.*
- *It's the act of singing, the physicality of it. You have to hold it long enough you know to get through a phrase and you're controlling it.*

- *There's a little increase in my level of mastery every time I have a performance. The more performance the more mastery I must achieve, and that gives me personal satisfaction.*

Beyond being a pleasurable activity, the singing group presented an activity that involved an opportunity to learn and challenge oneself. Other people also mentioned aspects of learning from singing, and they seemed to enjoy the feelings of achievement after overcoming the challenges. These challenges, which might be individually experienced by the participants, could include both physical (e.g., controlling breathing, remaining alert and focused) and intellectual (e.g., learning new songs, singing in different languages, memorizing song lyrics) challenges. This finding further supports the previous research that reported the improved cognitive performance and psychological benefits in older adults after participating in a short-term theatre training programme (Staricoff 2004). As older adults, they might be facing many challenges in other aspects of their lives, so that any sense of achievement from their singing group participation could be very important to their overall sense of well-being.

Strength in overcoming my limitations (age, disease and hardship)

Some participants believed that singing in the group provided them with the strength to overcome their personal limitations caused by old age, disease and challenging life events.

- *I had an attack of bell's palsy, I was determined and I came back and I feel really great...It's really helped me. [...] I come here and I can sing even with hearing aids...but the bell's palsy was the one that got me motivated. Oh it's fantastic!*

- *When you walk in here, we're all in our 70's, but nobody talks about sadness or sickness. We're too busy having a good time singing and interacting with everybody and it's the highlight of my day and my week.*
- *She's fairly advanced in the Alzheimer's now, but when she's singing she's back there with it.*

As the participant who had an attack of bell's palsy mentioned, the personal limitations and hardships initially motivated them to attend the singing group, but later the attendance seemed to help them to overcome the limitations. This phenomenon is related to findings in previous studies (e.g. Cohen et al.'s [2006] work with older people with mood disorder, and Bailey and Davidson's [2005] work with homeless men). Like the previous studies, the singers in the current study were able to work on difficult emotions caused by illness, loss, grief and trauma through singing (Bailey and Davidson 2005; Bonde 2014; Hays and Minichiello 2005; von Lob et al. 2010). Furthermore, it was likely that the facilitator played a role in providing an environment in which the participants could overcome their limitations. For instance, as previously discussed by Bailey and Davidson (2002, 2003, 2005), creating a structured and directed environment for the vulnerable participants seemed critical in working on the difficult times and emotions experienced.

Good leadership

Across groups, once one participant mentioned the facilitator as a motivating factor, almost everyone agreed, adding personal commentary. From the discussions, it was clear that the good

leadership was a major reason people continued attending the singing group, as illustrated by the following:

- *Bridget [pseudonym] is one of the major draws because of Bridget's attitude to us and to her singing and whatever, I think she's one of the major reasons that a lot of us still come.*
- *It doesn't matter what the song is, it's just, yeah... the company is wonderful, we have laughter as well as singing, and Bridget is what makes it. She holds it together.*
- *Any group is only as good as its leader and I believe we're very privileged to have her.*
- *I can take from the choir director because I'm not a strong singer. And since I've been in this group we've had three different choir leaders and each one has given me a structure to sing within at home, the content on the programme, I take that home. I get a lot from the actual leader of the choir as well.*
- *She carries us with her [enthusiasm] personality, her energy.*

This theme was closely related to the second motivating factor, 'enormous pleasure of singing with little pressure', because participants explained that their pleasure came from the non-strict environment created by the facilitator. This further demonstrated how motivations could be intertwined. Specifically, a facilitator's leadership style was important to the participants' experience and motivation to continue attending. From these comments, it was important that the facilitator led the singing group in a way that fostered the enjoyment of group singing perhaps even prioritizing enjoyment over professional singing quality. As leadership was very significant

to the participants' experience, it suggested that it was a topic deserving of future research. Specifically, future research should investigate the particular facilitation skills and techniques that were beneficial to fostering participant motivation and well-being.

Fellowship with others

For many participants, socializing with others was one of the significant reasons they continued to attend the group. Some quotations follow:

- *I just love everybody here. [...] It's like a fellowship not just a choir.*
- *We're like one big family here.*
- *It brings everybody together no matter who they are or what they are, we all have skills and we can bring our other skills to this.*
- *Everybody wants to talk to each other; we've got a new network of acquaintances... We recognize each other.*
- *Everybody's friendly as you can see; everyone has a nice smile on their face. We all smile, look at them all [laughter]. We always look forward to.*
- *I like the music and I like the people, I like being together.*
- *I do feel that warmth of kinship and that I do know them...like a language that connects everyone, receiving and giving.*
- *The socialization and the singing and it's special. I don't mind missing other things but I don't like missing these Thursdays.*

Interestingly, despite the fact that the group's focus was on music, their use of the phrases such as kinship, big family and sharing yourself with other people seemed to express a much deeper type of fellowship than a typical social group. While some of the members joined the group because a family member or a friend encouraged them, it was clear that the members had bonded with each other. They were no longer strangers as one stated, they 'recognized each other'. Given the fact that the older people often experience loss and grief of loved ones such as family members or friends (Flood 2005), the social aspect of singing group attendance seemed to provide them with the much-needed psychosocial support, which is also congruent with previous findings about social benefits of choir participation (Bailey and Davidson 2005; Camic et al. 2011; Creech et al. 2013; Hillman 2002; Joseph 2009; Lally 2009; Lehmberg and Fung 2010; Livesey et al. 2012; Gembris 2012). It was clear that they were motivated by this experience of fellowship, such that they kept investing their time and efforts to attend the singing group. As poignantly stated by one participant, it was a commitment they did not want to miss.

Purpose and meaning of group singing

One of the primary reasons to attend the singing groups was having a purpose and meaning for their group singing activity. For example,

- *I came to join this choir because I liked the ethos of going out to sing to old people. I thought that was just fantastic. [...] and going to nursing homes I just think it's just, just great. I think it's a real service to the community.*
- *That first experience I walked away thinking, 'Oh I've made somebody happy, I've done something good' (yeah) and it made me feel good.*

- *It (performance) is purpose, a sense of purpose, as a facilitator. It gives the group a sense of purpose, it gives things a rhythm, sense of working towards something. It gives a purpose and meaning for why we're singing.*

In particular, the singers in the Group A, who regularly visited nursing homes to provide musical performances, explained how these special visits provided them a purpose – that they had something to work towards as well as a meaning, and that they felt they provided a meaningful service to the community. In addition to finding meaning in their participation by providing a service to the community, some participants also found a personal purpose and meaning to their attendance. For example, one participant stated, ‘it gives me something to look forward to and it gives me that day that’s mine, not just something I have to get over with’. Reflected in this sentiment, older individuals could find a broader sense of meaning to their own lives through their active participation in the singing groups.

Discussion

The results of the current study identified eight motivating factors of older participants’ continuation in community singing groups. While explaining their motivations, the participants offered a solid rationale how their group singing had positive benefits on their well-being, providing further evidence to music researchers who are interested in using music as a tool for well-being outcomes.

Two potentially contrasting themes emerged from the data regarding group singing: the ‘pleasure of singing with little pressure’ and ‘challenge and achievement’. The presence of these themes illustrates an important and interesting point regarding the link between the music facilitator’s leadership style and the older participants’ experiences of group singing. The

participants explained that in the past a strict and professionally driven music facilitator made their previous singing experience ‘stressful’, but the current music facilitator offered pleasurable experiences and even challenges were perceived as being positive under excellent leadership. Thus, it is apparent that the participants’ experiences are intertwined with the facilitation style encountered. In the current study, the participants described good leadership skills as including having an enthusiastic personality, energy, good attitude, singing skills and being able to evoke laughter and companionship among people. Therefore, as mentioned before, understanding excellent leadership styles in music facilitation that can motivate participants’ active participation and promote well-being will be worthwhile to study more in the future to provide useful information about leadership when working with older adults.

The eight motivations can be discussed from various perspectives. First, the participants seemed to perceive various motivations of group singing for their personal, social and community needs. While some factors, such as importance of signing in my life and strength to overcome my limitations, were related to personal motivations, other motivations such as good leadership and fellowship with others were more reflective of the social needs. In fact, when stating personal motivations, the participants used the term ‘I’ to indicate their own experiences, and when they discussed motivating factors with regard to the relationships with others on the social level, the term ‘we’ was used. Additionally, the purpose and meaning of group singing theme was viewed at the community level, as the participants recognized their singing as a helpful service to the community.

In addition, the eight motivating factors seemed to be related to various stages of participation. Once they felt positive emotions through group singing in the initial stage of their participation, they seemed to start noticing unexpected benefits from their participation, such as appreciation of the emotional, spiritual and physical process while singing as well as

experiencing extended benefits of group singing such as overcoming personal limitations related to age and disease. Expanding into community interest and finding purpose and meaning of group singing participation might be related to motivation at the later stage. In this manner, singers identified their initial motivation to join the group as well as various motivations to continue participating over time.

Furthermore, the findings of the current study could be discussed using the PERMA model framework. By doing so, we could consider how group singing in a community context promotes older adults' well-being by fulfilling the five elements of PERMA model: positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment in positive psychology. In relation to positive emotions, the older people articulated the enormous pleasure they gained through singing. The positive emotion element was also captured in the expressions relating to being uplifted. For engagement, the motivating factors such as the importance of singing in their life and having purpose seemed to demonstrate that the singers were actively engaged with the group. With relationships, the participants discussed their relationships with their peers as well as the leaders of their groups. Obtaining strength to overcome personal limitations and having purpose and meaning of their performances seemed to relate to the meaning element. Finally, the challenge of singing and performance and achieving the goals fulfilled the element of accomplishment. Table 1 summarizes the link between the eight motivations and the PERMA model.

Table 1: The relationship between the PERMA model element and motivating factors.

PERMA model	Motivating factors
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element	
Positive emotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enormous pleasure of singing with little pressure • Spiritual and uplifting emotions
Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of singing in my life • Purpose and meaning of group singing
Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good leadership • Fellowship with others
Meaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strength in overcoming my age, disease and hardship • Purpose and meaning of group singing
Accomplishment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenge and achievement • Strength in overcoming my age, disease and hardship

This close relationship between the results of the current study and the PERMA well-being model indicates that this model can provide a useful theoretical framework in explaining, designing and facilitating group singing programmes. More scholarly discussions and investigations are needed to further substantiate this claim, but we feel confident that linking singing, well-being and positive ageing to the PERMA model has productive potential.

Limitations of the study and recommendations for the future study

As the current study relied on the participants' perception of their singing group experiences, the findings should be understood in their particular time and context. For example, these were people already hooked on singing, and so we had quite a positive interpretation of the group, which may not be applicable for all. Additionally, although a total of 64 people participated in the group discussions, which is a large number of participants for a qualitative thematic analysis, not all the participants contributed in the discussion, and some active people mostly contributed in the discussion. Accordingly, it might be a critical point when interpreting the results.

However, the focus of the study was not to generalize the findings but to understand a group of people in a particular context in depth, and it was evident that the current project provided insight into the lived experiences of older adults when attending community singing groups in Australia. One of the crucial findings of the study was that the experiences of the singing groups could differ depending on the music facilitator. The participants claimed that they did not enjoy participation when music facilitators demanded professional excellence in their singing. Instead, what they valued most was the social context in which they shared the joy of singing with others. Accordingly, investigating specific qualities and techniques of music facilitators who can foster positive emotions and well-being benefits for their music participants in a long term would be useful in the future.

Conclusion

The present study investigated older choristers' motivation for choral participation. Through the thematic analysis of focus group interviews, eight motivating factors were identified and discussed from various perspectives. These motivating factors aligned with all of the PERMA model elements, confirming the usefulness of the PERMA framework in understanding music participation and well-being. Once they experienced engagement with singing, enormous

pleasure from the activity of singing as well as sharing the feelings with others led to feelings of inclusion in a social activity. Long-term participants in community singing groups were afforded strength to overcome their age and disease and find a meaningful way to contribute to their local community. Most of all, being and doing these things with peers of their own age seemed to intensify their experience, which also confirmed the previous research investigating the benefits of singing participation in later life. The participants in this study were fourth-age persons and the importance of these elements to their quality of life and also in relation to their needs must be addressed as our society continues to age, and solutions for positive and active ageing need to be found.

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Contributor details

Dr Juyoung Lee is a registered music therapist, postdoctoral researcher, tutor and clinical supervisor of Music Therapy at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, The University of Melbourne. She currently works on the ARC Discovery Project on musical investment.

ARC Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions, Room 613 Level 6, 757 Swanston Street (Building 199), Parkville, Victoria 3010, Australia.

E-mail: juyl@unimelb.edu.au

Professor Jane W, Davidson is the Deputy Director of the Australian Research Council's Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions and a Professor of Creative and Performing Arts at The University of Melbourne. She is the lead chief investigator of the ARC discovery project on musical investment.

ARC Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions, Room 614 Level 6, 757 Swanston Street (Building 199), Parkville, Victoria 3010, Australia.

E-mail: j.davidson@unimelb.edu.au

Dr Amanda E. Krause is a Research Associate in the School of Psychology and Speech Pathology at Curtin University. She is interested in the social and applied psychology of music, with a particular focus on everyday interactions with music.

School of Psychology and Speech Pathology, Curtin University, Perth, WA 6845, Australia.

E-mail: Amanda.Krause@curtin.edu.au

Note

¹ The nine themes included (1) the importance of music in my life; (2) enormous pleasure of singing with little pressure; (3) conscious and creative process to express my emotions; (4) spiritual and uplifting emotions after singing; (5) strength in overcoming my age, disease and hardship; (6) good leadership; (7) fellowship with others; (8) provision of service to community; and (9) purpose, achievement and meaning of singing as a group.