

# THE INFLUENCE OF VOCAL PERFORMANCE ON SINGING SELF-CONCEPT

## BACKGROUND

A growing body of research demonstrates that musical engagement is associated with wide range of well-being benefits (Daykin et al., 2018; Krause et al., 2018). Additionally, research into musical identities indicates that musical self-concept plays a role in the extent to which we engage in musical activities (Lamont, 2017). Therefore, when considering how to widen musical participation for well-being benefit, it is important to consider the role of individual identities which include some component of music. Musical self-concept is socially constructed (Hallam, Cross, & Thaut, 2016) and little consideration has been given to defining the broader socio-cultural factors at play in the formation of musical self-concepts. Here we investigate socio-cultural influences on singing self-concept.

## AIMS

Drawing on social comparison theory, the experiment considered the potential influence of the exposure to different types of vocal performances on singing self-concept. Social comparison theory states that people (in part) develop self-concept through describing and evaluating themselves in comparison with others (Hargie, 2011). Popular reality TV shows such as "The Voice" consistently portray extreme vocal performances as "good singing".

The present study asked, "How does exposure to examples of varied types of singing influence participants' own singing self-concept?" With media representations of "good singing" represented by TV shows like "The Voice", we hypothesized that exposure to singing in the style of "The Voice" may negatively influence participants' singing self-concept compared to hearing amateur singers.

References: Daykin, N., et al. (2018). What works for wellbeing? A systematic review of wellbeing outcomes for music and singing in adults. *Perspectives in Public Health*, 138(1), 39–46; Hallam, S., Cross, I., & Thaut, M. (Eds.). (2016). *Oxford handbook of music psychology* (2nd ed.). New York: Oxford University Press; Hargie, O. (2011). *Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice*. Routledge; Krause, A. E., et al., (2018). Musical activity and well-being: A new quantitative measurement instrument. *Music Perception*, 35(4), 454–474. Lamont, A. (2017). Musical identity, interest, and involvement. In R. MacDonald, D. J. Hargreaves, & D. Miell (Eds.), *The handbook of musical identities* (pp. 176–196). Oxford University Press

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## METHOD

145 Australian residents completed an online experiment. After providing demographic information and answering a series of questions to establish the participant's baseline level of musical training, participants heard a one-minute recorded example of "Happy Birthday". Participants were randomly allocated into one of four conditions, such that they heard either:

1. Male and female professional singers performing a plain version
2. Male and female amateur singers performing "as they would normally sing the song"
3. Male and female professional singers performing in the style of "The Voice" reality television series
4. An unaccompanied piano version (control)

After listening to the audio, participants were asked to judge the quality of what they heard and also to respond to items about their own singing abilities and self-concept.

## RESULTS

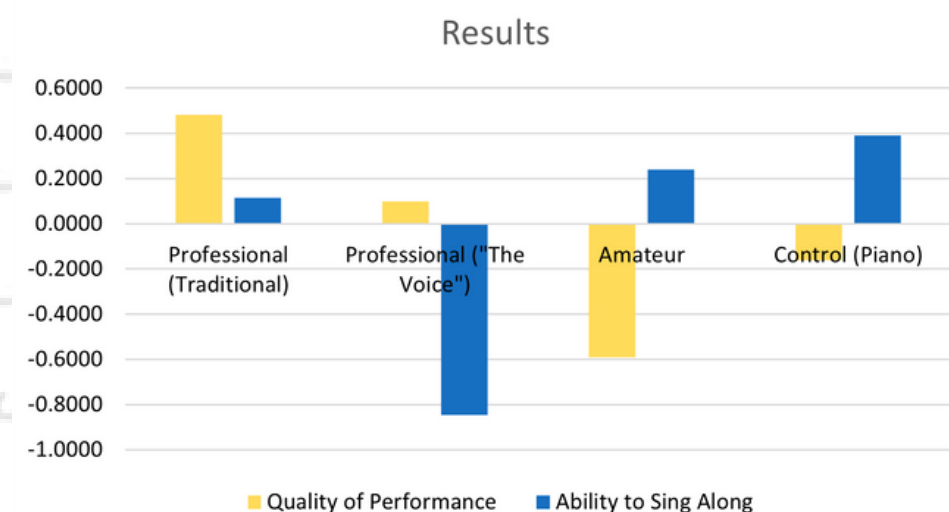
Whilst data collection is ongoing, preliminary analyses indicate that:

- Participants judged the quality of the versions differently, such that the quality was rated highest for the professional plain version and lowest for the amateur version (See Table).
- Participants in the control and amateur conditions reported higher confidence in being able to sing along with those versions than participants in the professional conditions (see Table).
- Participants' ratings for being able to sing well or wanting to improve their singing were not affected by the audio condition. Thus, participants did not appear to engage in any re-evaluation of existing self-perceptions of singing ability. However, it is possible that previous music experience might moderate the relationship. Supplementary analyses will investigate this potential moderation further and consider additional data concerning how musical self-concept relates to well-being.



## DISCUSSION

Our research seeks to uncover identity-based barriers and enablers to participation in musical engagement for well-being. We hypothesized that exposure to certain types of singing might negatively impact singing self-concept (which would act as a barrier to musical engagement), but preliminary results indicate that the audio condition did not affect singing self-concept. However, participants demonstrated a preference to sing along with the piano control or the amateur version. This preference raises interesting questions in relation to singing for well-being, particularly in group contexts, where such groups are usually facilitated by highly-skilled vocalists. Might participants in these groups prefer to be led by someone more like themselves - i.e., an amateur? Or would instrumental melodic guidance be preferred? Alternatively, might this preference for singing with the amateur version simply be indicative of a preference to group together singers of comparable ability? In the quest to articulate best practice for facilitating singing for well-being, these are important questions which warrant further research.



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