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ABSTRACT In western society music performance is generally considered from the perspective of the elite performer, and the performance literature within the psychology of music has been representative of this preoccupation. But, in spite of much attention being directed to the 'how' of creating exceptional performances, little attention has been given to the 'why' of performance. Results of an investigation with members of a choir for homeless men indicated that group singing and performance, at the most amateur levels of musicality, yielded considerable emotional, social and cognitive benefits. The present article further explores the effects of group singing and performance with (a) a second choir formed for homeless and other marginalized individuals who had little or no music training or group singing experience, and (b) middle-class singers with low to high levels of music training and choral singing experience. Results indicate that the emotional effects of participation in group singing are similar regardless of training or socioeconomic status, but the interpersonal and cognitive components of the choral experience have different meanings for the marginalized and middle-class singers. Whereas the marginalized individuals appear to embrace all aspects of the group singing experience, the middle-class choristers are inhibited by prevalent social expectations of musicianship. The outcomes may be of relevance to music educators, therapists and choral conductors who wish to create a choral environment in which the benefits of singing and performance override elitist concerns.

KEYWORDS: *choirs, cognitive stimulation, emotional, homeless, musical elitism, social*

Introduction

THE ELITIST MODEL OF PERFORMANCE

In western culture performers of music often are well trained, well rehearsed, and required to execute their craft with technical precision and creativity. The level of excellence that has come to be expected has functioned to expose the

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masses to many exceptional recorded and live performances. In addition, technological progress has dramatically increased opportunities to listen to and experience music (Hargreaves et al., 2002; Storr, 1992) and 'in spite of dire warnings that recordings might empty opera houses and concert halls, the audience for live performances has also multiplied' in the West (Storr, 1992: ix). The expert model of performance and increased accessibility to outstanding musical performances have contributed to the creation of a musical climate in which the majority of the population have been relegated to 'procurers' rather than 'producers' of music. Indeed, Storr (1992) reports that there has been a decline in 'domestic music making' (p. 108), and Bunt (1994) and Papousek (1996) have found that the outstanding quality of much recorded music actually inhibits adults from singing to children. Writing about the decline of music making in western culture, Blacking (1973) suggests that 'technological development brings about a degree of social exclusion: being a passive audience is the price that some pay for membership in a superior society whose superiority is sustained by the technical ability of a chosen few' (p. 34). In this vein, Small (1998) poignantly states:

Our present day concert life whether 'classical' or 'popular,' in which the 'talented' few are empowered to produce music for the 'untalented' majority, is based on a falsehood. It means that our powers of music making for ourselves have been hijacked and the majority of people robbed of the musicality that is theirs by right of birth . . . (p. 8)

In line with the expert and elitist model of musicality, much of the literature in the psychology of music that pertains to performance focuses on issues which are pertinent and critical to professional performers in the western art tradition. Some of these issues include: the physiology of the voice structure (cf. Bunch, 1995; Sundberg, 1987); techniques of execution that are considered necessary to produce outstanding performances (cf. Bunch, 1995; Kagen, 1960); and overcoming performance anxiety (cf. Watson and Valentine, 1987; Wilson, 1997). Sundberg (1987) states that research which has concentrated on the singing voice has tended to be specific to operatic singing, and Bunch (1995) confirms that, conventionally, the singer's focus has been 'the voice rather than the actual effect it was having' (p. 150). Similarly, Small (1998) reports that performance-directed literature concentrates on the presentation of the music rather than the meaning that is generated through participation in performance.

Despite the dedication required to perfect technical skills (Manturzewska, 1990) and the anxiety that is often associated with performance (Clark and Agras, 1991; Steptoe, 1989), there seems to be no lack of individuals willing to expose themselves to the rigorous regime of training, and the possibility of performance-related stress, to participate at the most elite levels. For example, at the Juilliard School of the Performing Arts and the Eastman School of Music the acceptance rates are approximately 8 percent and 12.5 percent

respectively, indicating the difference between the number of students who apply to these very competitive institutions and the number who are chosen to attend. Even though many musicians aspire to become elite performers, the questions of 'why' musicians choose to perform or 'what' psychological or physiological benefits may be derived from performance have generally been neglected in the academic literature.

POSITIVE EFFECTS OF PERFORMING

Vocal soloists, in both the classical and popular domains (cf. Davidson, 2002; Parton, 1994; Robinson, 1989; Söderström, 1979), and professional choristers (Beck et al., 2000), have reported that performing for an audience is often a profound experience which produces positive emotional effects. Also, performance in rock bands (Cohen, 1991) has been found to facilitate increased self-esteem and more extroverted social behaviours. Additionally, a recent body of evidence has been developing which demonstrates the overall or holistic health benefits of both professional and amateur group music activities. Beck et al. (2000) reported results from the implementation of a Likert-type Singers Emotional Response Scale (SEES) with members of a professional chorale which indicated that group singing had positive emotional, social, physical and creative outcomes. Similarly, from results of a self-report questionnaire and a survey with a university choral society, Clift and Hancox (2001) found that members perceived that choral singing was conducive to emotional, social, spiritual and physical health. In interviews with performers attending the 2001 Buxton Gilbert and Sullivan (G & S) Festival, Pitts (2004) explored how performers explicate and demonstrate their musical identity within a group activity. Results suggested that the social and musical components contributed equally to individuals' commitment to, and enjoyment of, membership in their G & S Societies. The musical and acting components provided challenge, achievement and the opportunity to escape, for a time, the frustrations of everyday realities, and the social component provided friendship in an environment of shared interest.

Contemporary physiological studies have also advanced understanding of the effects of choral performance through the measurement of secretory immunoglobulin A and cortisol levels of professional (Beck et al., 2000) and amateur (Kreutz et al., 2004) choristers before and after singing. Secretory immunoglobulin A (sIgA) is an endocrine defence against bacterial infection in the upper respiratory tract and cortisol is a measure of stress. Generally, increases in levels of sIgA and decreases in levels of cortisol are considered favourable. In both the above studies there was a significant increase in sIgA between the before and after group singing conditions. Additionally, in the Kreutz et al. study, in a pre and post group listening condition, sIgA did not decrease significantly. However, the effects on cortisol were less clear. In the Beck et al. study, cortisol significantly decreased during practices but not during a performance, and in the Kreutz et al. study, cortisol decreased

significantly between pre and post passive group listening but not between a pre and post group singing condition. Although differences in the effects of cortisol were found for the professional and amateur singers, the similarity in the increase in sIgA levels for both groups suggests that active participation in group singing may enhance immune system functioning.

While the studies cited in this section provide important information relating to the effects of both solo and group music participation and performance, the question of how level of expertise may affect the group performance experience has not been addressed.

Effects of group singing for homeless men

In an attempt to understand more clearly the effects of participation in choral performance for individuals with low levels of music training, Bailey and Davidson (2002, 2003) explored the effects of group singing with members of a choir for homeless men. The only prerequisite for choir membership was being or having been homeless. While all of the choristers appeared to have experienced positive life changes since joining the choir (for example, when the choir started only one of the choir members was in permanent housing and at the time of the interviews all of them were in permanent housing), only 7 of the 17 available members of the total of 19 members of the choir agreed to be interviewed. Several deterrents including (a) shyness, (b) distrust of the process, and (c) mental illness seemed to contribute to the low participation rate. Of the seven choir members who participated in the interviews, none had formal music lessons in childhood, one had been a member of a boys' choir for several years, one had played in a rock band in his late teens and early 20s, and one had a few years of voice and xylophone lessons in his adult years while he was a member of a band in the Canadian Armed Forces. The results of an emergent theme analysis of a semi-structured interview with members of the Homeless Choir suggested that the choristers perceived that participation in group singing had adaptive characteristics that were found to fall within four primary categories:

- clinical-type or therapeutic benefits;
- benefits related to group process;
- benefits attributable to choir/audience reciprocity; and
- benefits derived from mental stimulation.

However, this was a small sample and there was a concern that the success of the choir, and the positive effects accredited to membership in the choir, may have been the result of some extra-musical element which was specific to this particular group. For example, the director was very religious and devoted much of his life to the Homeless Choir. Perhaps the success of the choir was principally a result of the specific characteristics of the director.

A SECOND CANADIAN CHOIR FOR HOMELESS AND MARGINALIZED SINGERS

Since that initial study in amateur group singing, an opportunity arose to conduct a second study with members of another choir formed for street people and people living in impoverished circumstances. However, there were a number of notable differences between the two choirs:

1. The first choir (Choir 1) was located in the French province of Quebec, Canada and all of the participants were native French speakers. The second choir (Choir 2) was in a predominantly English Canadian province, Nova Scotia, and all the participants were native English speakers. These two Canadian provinces are culturally distinct and the repertoires of the two choirs mirrored the cultural distinctness of each province.
2. Choir 1 was specifically for men, but Choir 2 had both male and female participants.
3. Although the director of Choir 1 had worked with homeless people for many years, he had no personal experience with drug and alcohol abuse, whereas, the director of Choir 2 had experienced addiction problems that were similar to many of his choir members.
4. Choir 1 was comprised of people who lived or had lived on the streets. Although Choir 2 was formed for people living in destitute circumstances, some of the members of the choir were workers and volunteers at the housing support centre which sponsors the choir, and people from the wider community who were interested in the project. For example, a professional guitarist attended practices and performances when he was available.
5. Quite a number of the members of Choir 1 were very comfortable performing for an audience; they seemed to come alive in the performance arena in a way that might be expected from professionals. However, Choir 2, perhaps partially as a result of the type and severity of the mental illnesses of some of the members, was a less flamboyant group. Although these individuals enjoyed their performance activities, they were more reticent than Choir 1 in the public environment.
6. The sponsoring agencies of the two choirs were also very different. Choir 1 was sponsored by a Catholic mission for men and there was frequent contact between the Catholic sisters who managed the mission and the choir members and their director. Choir 2 was sponsored by a secular charitable agency.

Considering these substantial differences, it seemed reasonable to speculate that if the emergent themes indicated with Choir 1 were based on some extra-musical element that was choir specific, then the cultural, gender, director, membership, performance style and sponsorship differences between the two choirs might result in quite different perceptions of the choral experience from the participants in Choir 2. However, if the results were similar, the notion of group singing as a holistically beneficial activity, even at the most amateur levels of participation, would be strengthened.

METHOD

Participants

The participants were 8 of the approximately 25 members of the Nova Scotia Choir (Choir 2). Although, as mentioned earlier, people from various backgrounds participate in the choir, for the purposes of the study, we interviewed only the eight individuals for whom the choir was originally formed, that is, those living on the streets or in extremely impoverished environments. The ages of the participants ranged from 43 to 64 years ($M = 51.5$ years). Of the eight participants, four were diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia, four were chronic substance abusers, and two had been previously incarcerated for acts of violence. Only one of the participants had completed high school and one had acquired a high school equivalency certificate while in prison. All but one of the participants currently or previously lived on the streets. Most of the participants recalled singing in the early school years, but only one had formal music lessons on the piano.

The choir members were contacted through correspondence with the housing support centre which sponsors the choir. A worker at the centre spoke with the choir members at one of their practices and asked them if they would like to be interviewed for a study on singing. The interviews were scheduled for two days and those interested were asked to come to the centre, which services impoverished people seeking living accommodation, during those two days. The patrons refer to this dilapidated building as the 'Coffee House' because hot beverages and day-old doughnuts (donated by a fast-food restaurant) are given free to those who gather there. The Coffee House is in the centre of an area of the city normally occupied by prostitutes, pimps and drug dealers. In order to develop a comfortable level of rapport, the interviewer arrived early each morning and chatted informally with members of the choir before beginning the interviews. Of the eight participants, one came directly from having spent the night on the street, three lived in slum housing which lacked the most basic comforts, and the remaining four lived in subsidized housing. One choir member recounted that because he did not have a lock on his door, he was harassed by drug dealers who let themselves into his room when he received his welfare cheque. But even though these people were living in extremely deprived circumstances, they were cheerful and amicable. Each participant was asked to sign a consent form requesting permission to use the information contained in the interview for purposes of publication in the academic forum. The contents of the consent form, which explained the nature of the study and the participant's right to discontinue at any time, were read to each participant before the interview began. The choir members were assured that their names and other identifying information would remain confidential, and, therefore, all names which appear in this document are pseudonyms.

Procedure

The investigation utilized the outline of the semi-structured interview (see Appendix) which had been developed for our study with Choir 1 (Bailey and Davidson, 2002, 2003). The employment of this procedure was based on research conducted by Smith (1992, 1999) in which he explored the identity shift experienced by pregnant women as they approached motherhood. Similar to Smith, we were interested in the transitional process from the perspective of the participants. The goals, therefore, were to explore (a) changes which had occurred since joining the choir, and (b) participants' perceptions of the catalyst/s which may have prompted change. To obtain a profile of the life of each participant, and to determine the impact of choir membership, the interview focused on the following topics:

1. early life, family, school and previous musical involvement;
2. education and employment, and the circumstances that led to extreme poverty and/or the descent into homelessness;
3. the decision to join the choir and the choristers' first impressions of the choir;
4. the choristers' perceptions of the experience of singing; and
5. the progression of the success of the choir and resulting personal changes.

However, the purpose of the semi-structured interview is to provide the participant with the flexibility to explore freely the aspects of the experience which they believe are most important. Therefore, in this study with Choir 2, and as had been the case with Choir 1, the interviewer did not rigidly adhere to the outline of the interview. The participants had control over the direction of the conversation and the interviewer interjected, throughout the natural flow of the discourse, questions related to the topics of interest. The employment of this semi-structured procedure facilitates differentiation of degrees of interest in, and meaning of, the experience for each participant.

Each interview lasted approximately 1 hour and 15 minutes and was tape-recorded with the permission of the participant. The interviews were transcribed verbatim. The resulting transcripts were analyzed according to the principles of interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) as discussed in Smith (1992, 1995, 1996). Smith (1996) submits that because verbal narratives are not always exact representations of inner thoughts, the role of the phenomenologist is to discern, from the content of the interviews, the meaning of the experience for each participant. To achieve this goal, each interview was carefully scrutinized by the authors and excerpts related to the areas of interest were recorded. After the eight interviews had been dealt with in this way, all the excerpts were classified thematically. At this stage of the analysis there was a fairly large number of themes, but eventually subordinate themes were subsumed within superordinate categories. For example, the importance of self-expression, increase in self-esteem and catharsis of

suppressed emotions were initially classified as superordinate themes, but eventually these three themes were classified under the superordinate category identified as clinical-type benefits. This process continued until the authors were satisfied that the content and meaning of the interviews were authentically represented. As with the results from Choir 1, the emergent themes were validated by an independent auditor who examined the data for other possible interpretations. Given the auditor's high level of agreement with the authors' analysis, the thematic categories presented here are considered to be reasonably appropriate categorizations of the data.

Presentation of the interview material

In order to present the interview material as clearly and concisely as possible, a documentation key was developed. Pauses which occurred in the transcripts while the participants were deliberating on their replies were indicated by two dots (.). Word repetitions which occurred while the participants were searching for the correct word sometimes resulted in rather cumbersome sentences. To simplify these awkward sentences, repetitions were omitted and replaced with three dots (...); when these omissions occurred at the end of a sentence four dots were used (....). Sentences or parts of sentences that were superfluous or redundant were omitted and replaced by square parentheses []. Occasionally it was necessary to clarify the meaning of a sentence; clarifications appear (*in italics inside parentheses*). These documentation techniques did not alter the meaning of the material.

RESULTS

As with Choir 1 (French Choir)¹, the choristers in Choir 2 (English Choir) discussed adaptive characteristics of participation in group singing that appeared to be attributable to (a) clinical-type benefits, (b) benefits of group process, and (c) benefits related to choir/audience reciprocity. However, the perceived benefits of the cognitive component of group singing were less salient than was indicated with Choir 1, but several comments alluded to the importance of this theme. Following are some of the statements illustrating the emergent themes which reflect the choristers' perceptions of the group singing experience. Because of the robust similarity in the outcomes from Choir 1 and Choir 2, and to present the findings in an easily accessible format, comparisons of comments from each choir are summarized in tables (see columns 1 and 2 in Tables 1–4). Each row within a table contains interview excerpts with similar meanings; the rows are labelled accordingly.²

Clinical-type benefits

Comparable to Choir 1, the clinical-type or therapeutic outcomes of choir participation appeared to be related primarily to the act of singing. For example, group singing seemed to facilitate emotional balance:

- Carl: Just let it all out (*through singing*), frustrations, anger and all that, you know, stress.
- Carl: It gives me some relief from my trouble because it makes me feel deep inside.
- Joan: It's such a joy; I forget all my problems.
- Kent: Like it calms you down and it mellows a person out and it makes them feel content.

In addition, it appeared that singing in the choir provided opportunities to experience heightened arousal which allowed some of the choristers to escape, at least temporarily, the harsh realities of poverty and the often frightening existence of living with mental illness:

- Carl: After the music (*singing with the choir*) I feel that high towards myself.
- Joan: When I sing with them it's almost like a high. (*and later*) I have something to look forward to every week, the music.

Choral participation also provided some of the choir members with a feeling of purpose and a reason to make positive changes in their lives:

- Dan: Helped me to stop drinking, get off the welfare and be off the street.
- Joan: The choir had about 70 to 75 percent of me being determined and able to lose it (*weight*) easier, you know, I belong somewhere, like they've accepted me.

Effects of group process

Although feelings of belonging are commonplace in the lives of many people, they are a rarity for individuals who exist in marginalized circumstances (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). Carl explicitly describes the social deprivation of the homeless condition in the following excerpt from his interview:

- Carl: It's a tough existence, and it's hard out there you know ... homeless is something like, uh, like, uh, they feel neglected, don't have anybody to talk to, so they take the abuse of substance. They try to, what I feel is, try to kill the pain of being homeless. (*and a bit later*) Well, it's ... their sickness (*mental illness*), I mean that's the illness that they have ... and the illness is the substance that they take, that's the illness ... that's what's killing them.

Belonging to a group appears to provide these homeless and marginalized individuals with a social support system. The camaraderie experienced in the choir setting results in social encounters which are indicative of relationships and feelings normally experienced with family and friends:

- Carl: They're part of me and I'm part of them.
- Dan: Well I tell you, I miss them when I'm not here.
- Joan: These guys accepted me.
- Philip: Just being with the people (*choir members*), sitting down and sometimes having a pizza together. (*and later*) It's a great experience for me, it keeps me humble. And I'm accepted, it's not what's your background or, you know, it's just great for me, we keep it simple; the choir has been there many, many times, emotionally for me.

In addition to the social interaction that takes place within the choir, the

TABLE 1 *Perceived clinical-type benefits from participation in group singing*

	Choir 1 (marginalized)	Choir 2 (marginalized)	Focus group (middle-class)
Introspection	Henri: I used to be a bum, a little bit bum, you know, I changed a lot, I quit smoking ... and drinking, I quit altogether, you know, that's something, you know, 'cause I drink all my life, I smoke all my life, ever since I was 13 years old.	Dan: Helped me to stop drinking, get off the welfare and be off the street ... I've had no encouragement to go and do any drinking, 'cause I'm like with the choir and here (<i>at the support centre</i>). This has helped me that way because other than that I'd be off, you know, in the tavern.	Jill: There is always discovery, you know, discovery within yourself, and discovery of yourself, but discovery of somebody else also ..., discovery of the people that are singing with you, you know, because you get a perception of them too.
Heightened arousal	Louis: Usually we sing at night, I'm so high because of having singing, I'm on a trip. It's a drug for me, it's a real drug, a natural drug.	Carl: Well, it's a natural high, it's a high like for myself, but not just for myself for the other choir members too.	Angie: I love it, I absolutely come home totally wound up and wired and love it, love it. (<i>and later</i>) I'm usually exhausted at the end of a good rehearsal, at the same time so high that I can't go to bed.
Emotional release and homeostasis	Raoul: (<i>I have found</i>) a way out of my traumas. Because if you always live in the past it's not good. Some of us are so uncomfortable, we talk about this one and that one and we never talk about the real thing, you know. Jean: (<i>Singing in the choir</i>) It's a new start, so I forget everything, if someone told me, uh, you're wrong, you're blah, blah, blah. I'm deaf ... I can't hear you ... you can't attack me, because (<i>through singing</i>) I'm immunated against your blah, blah, blahs.	Kent: I think when you sing along (in practice) it helps you, like, it calms you down, and it mellows a person out, and it makes them feel content, more contented. If you sing along with the music, you're getting right into the music. Carl: Oh yes, indeed, indeed I get that inspiration, uh, you know, just let it all out, frustrations, anger, and all that, you know stress ... through the music. After the music I, I feel that high, that high towards myself. (<i>and later</i>) Yeh, it gives me some relief from my trouble, because it makes me feel deep inside.	Sue: I feel incredible when I hear real harmony, I mean total harmony, because it brings tears to my eyes to, just to, I don't know, it just kind of makes me feel in awe that there is that kind of beauty and it just blows me away. Ruth: It's always been something that I've done for myself, it's something that, um, I'm not helping somebody else with something, or working or whatever, it's been something for me and that's important for your sanity.

	Patrice: Now we have more children (<i>choir members</i>) that are more in ... harmony ... in the choir and we can now express the child, the child itself can now be a creative child.	Philip: It's very important that people be allowed to express themselves.	Sue: Music (<i>singing</i>) can make me feel good and can raise my mood, it can make me relax or it can make me feel confident, uh, and it's a huge part of me.
Physical reactions	Raoul: These days, I suffer from arthritis in the knees, but the minute the music starts, I don't feel my arthritis any more.	Joan: Well, I hurt physically a lot, right, but I seen myself thinking I was going to be late (<i>for practice</i>) and I RAN because it's such a joy, it's a, it's a hard, it's hard to, I can't (<i>very emotional here</i>).	Roy: I can go in tired and feel energized but come out being exhausted as well. I have exerted myself an awful lot, there is physical labour involved. The other physical reaction would be gushes so strong that it will literally raise hair and cause close to watering of eyes.
Enjoyment	Henri: I would practise eight hours a day I like it so much, so when there's no practice I don't feel good ... I'm not the only one, we need it now, it's nuts, you know, we need it.	Joan: I don't think it's long enough actually, I think we should have longer practice periods, you know, like, it's something I look forward to every week. (<i>after practice she thinks</i>) 'Damn, I wish we could sing some more' ... I always ask, you know, 'Could we just do one more?' ... like, you know, it's fun.	Roy: It's (<i>singing</i>) one of the most important parts of my life, and each week I look forward to Monday and Wednesday nights (<i>choir practices</i>).
Increased life-satisfaction	Simon: So far, music has greatly helped me socially, emotionally, and it also has opened many doors. There are several in the choir, at least five, six or seven, who have succeeded in their lives because of the music. So people are changing their lives around because of the choir; it is giving people hope and happiness.	Joan: I forget all my problems when I go to choir practice.	Angie: It hugely enhances life! While I have the opportunity and the energy, et cetera, it will be a big part of my life. I have to tell you a little story. I went to see the doctor because my goitre is kind of large, and the surgeon drew a very detailed diagram about goitres and was warning me about surgery, because if you happen to nick, it's connected to your vocal chords, [], so I just thought, 'If you nick it you might as well just slice my throat, because it won't be worth waking up if I can't sing.'

TABLE 2 *Effects of group process from participation in group singing*

	Choir 1 (marginalized)	Choir 2 (marginalized)	Focus group (middle-class)
Affiliation	<p>Louis: Yeh, yeh ... but we get along, like, uh, I can tell Patrice I want to punch him, but he knows about it, it's not true, I just want to joke and we got along, it helps to relax. Oh yeh, I like that, uh, gang.</p> <p>Jean: So, I have to rebuild my own thoughts, you have to work all together now ... and it's easier that way, when you abandon everything. OK I'm free I'll join you, I'll go with you, I'll sing along with you, I'll have fun with you, and we're going to share trouble with you.</p> <p>Raoul: I had a brother-in-law and I thought he was very sick (<i>mentally ill</i>). But, you see, there are 19 of us here who are like that, and we're not in the asylum We've made it. Now you take a guy out of the Choir, and the next day he'll be terribly depressed.</p>	<p>Frank: Oh, they're marvellous (<i>the choir members</i>); we have wonderful camaraderie. See, without it you can't do anything, you have to have that, it's compulsory, I'll put it that way, yes siree.</p> <p>Carl: Participating with the other members, it's not just a thrill for me, but for us all, to participate. And not just listen to myself, but listen to other people as we sing. I've become closer because, uh, it's like they're a part of me and I'm a part of them, and that's the biggest part of all.</p> <p>Dan: Oh most everybody's friendly, there's no one that hates each other. Oh it's one big family. Oh you have a heck of a time together.</p> <p>Philip: The choir, we're a group of people who are all struggling to make it in this world ..., who have a lot of issues. Some of us are mental health consumers, some serious mental health issues, we, uh, some are only a week away from their next drunk, some only one cheque away from the street. Do you follow me? All these things come together in the choir, you know.</p>	<p>Roy: Fellowship, and I like the kind of friendly banter that we do behind the scenes.</p> <p>Sue: For me, being part of the group is good when the music comes together and it's done right, and, you know, it sounds good because it brings, or at least our group, it brought our group together when we were in sync.</p> <p>Gwen: Well, it's a positive thing to be part of a group and that you're all focused on the same thing and all interested in the same thing.</p>

Acceptance

Raoul: So, this shyness stayed with me all my life, and the choir and this place (*the mission*) are the only things that seem to accept me, and want to do something good for all of us here.

Joan: But these guys (*the choir*) accepted me, like, I don't really have a family, you know, like to talk with, right, but they accepted me and it's great.

Respect

Bernard: But our choir is special, you know. The people ... they are my friends and I respect them.

Joan: In this choir everybody's down to earth, they're all down to earth and, uh, you've got to have respect if you're going to get respect, you know.

Andrea: The choir makes me feel more wanted, around folks who are just, just as good, and I'm just as good.

The musical product

Daphne: I don't think I went into the group needing the group as much as my own experience with music and singing.

Angie: Well my experience is that it's great to be part of a group and having experienced different groups I find that some groups are more musical than others, and since I can't control who's in the group ... it's important for me to be as musical and as beautifully musical as I can be.

Claire: It's really exciting when the whole group begins to sing and breathe as one instrument.

importance of social interaction with the larger society was expressed in many of the interviews.

Effects of choir/audience reciprocity

The daily experiences of many marginalized individuals make them feel that they are disdained by the populace. Yet, many street people have a desire to connect with the larger society and, as Carl indicates, something as simple as a smile from a passer-by can send a message of acceptance:

Carl: Well, you know, I don't object to anybody as they approach me, and I just figure if they give me a smile, I say, 'That's good.'

The performance aspect of choral participation appears to create a comfortable distance from which the marginalized choristers can begin to develop a relationship with the public and demonstrate that they are more than their dishevelled appearance might suggest:

Carl: Reaching out to people and letting them know what I am.

Philip: Singing is a way of sharing, you know, yourself with other people. (*and later*) and eye contact ... now I can look around when I sing, you know, I don't have to be ashamed.

Participating in concerts, especially when proceeds are used to assist other marginalized persons, allows some individuals to experience the sense that they are making a contribution:

Andrea: Crowds are around us and then too they're getting some, they're getting some interest out of it too.

Dan: We're doing it to help the people and that's worth just as much as money to us.

An additional reward of the group singing experience was the feeling of pride which resulted from performing for the public, as well as from making and selling a CD:

Andrea: I'm proud of what I sing.

Carl: I thank God and the rest of the choir members for putting something together and making the CD disk which is the best thing that's ever happened in my life.

Frank: And, our conductor, he wrote the song himself, right, and when I first tackled it, it was kind of hard to get the key right, I didn't know which key he wanted, you know high or low, slow or fast. Once I got the hang of it, it turned out all right then.

Dan: You'll notice on the back (*of the CD cover*) all the occupants that are there, their name's listed. So if you hear a song on the CD you know who it is singing, you know who it is Oh yeh, yeh, I couldn't believe when I heard the first, the day that they cut the first record, the first CD, and like there's a silence in between each piece like, and when I heard it I couldn't believe it, when the guy took the CD out of the machine and handed it to me, I was shaking so much I couldn't hold it, I dropped it on the floor (*laughs*), oh yeh.

TABLE 3 *Effects of choir/audience reciprocity from participation in group singing*

	Choir 1 (marginalized)	Choir 2 (marginalized)	Focus group (middle-class)
Connection to larger community	<p>Patrice: I always believed in the choir and I always believed that it's a kind of a mission [] that we have .. some kind of a social mission ... people listen to us The songs that we .. sing and the, the words, the message that we .. are carrying .. in the song .. has a large effect.</p> <p>Raoul: Because when I sing, it's a very powerful thing and a profound feeling. I have the sense that I'm touching the people with my voice.</p> <p>Louis: What we represent of people, of hope, of love also, I think we exchange with people, it's magic ... what we feel inside when we have all those people in front of us listening, it's great, it's like a dream for me.</p>	<p>Carl: It's changed my life ... and it's like reaching out to people and letting them know what each individual song means ... in some ways people could take the songs defensively ... we sing about prostitution, homeless, and the abuse of alcohol and drugs and all that.</p> <p>Carl: And reaching out to people letting them know what I am, who I really am and what I can do and can't do.</p> <p>Joan: I mean, like, I'm in a group, but when I sing with them, like, it's almost like a high, like the night of the CD release ... I was flying ... I had such adrenalin going through me ... I was just going, like I was high or something like that, you know. It was all because of the choir and the people (<i>audience</i>).</p>	<p>Sue: I prefer totally the performance to the practice ... I was just happy to get out there and show what we did to the audience, and one of the best things for me is knowing that the audience loved our performance and they understood what you were trying to get across.</p>
Sharing	<p>Jean: All the love [] we receive from there we will bring it with us for another place, and we are sharing that love with someone else, that's the most important thing.</p>	<p>Philip: Oh yeh, yeh, (<i>singing</i>) it's a whole different process, I mean being an addict ..., I'm very withdrawn, addicts like go into, we listen to music but it's more a selfish thing, it's more, it's not sharing, there's no sharing in addiction, nothing, it's dead. You can be married, you can be single, whatever, there's no sharing. So singing is a way of sharing, you know, your self with other people. That's a big part for me.</p>	

TABLE 3 *continued*

	Choir 1 (marginalized)	Choir 2 (marginalized)	Focus group (middle-class)
Sharing (<i>cont.</i>)	Henri: When you sing in front of the public you tend to express something, you know, you make them feel something, you want to give something that you have, you know, like ... it is kind of a relationship with the people.	Andrea: When you get to do that performance well you got to put your whole meaning to it, put your full thought to it and it will come out alright.	Gwen: It's good to be able to give what you have learned, that's the thing that I find about performing.
Recognition	Bernard: When we first sing and the people, uh, applause or encourage us. I was so happy, I feel so good inside, oh, it's good, I want to keep, to keep singing, I follow the group (<i>And later</i>) Oh I feel so great, so happy, after the people who come and oh 'it was good', 'oh thank you', 'it was nice', 'keep it', 'we like what you do'.	Carl: I get a lot of recognition for it ..., it makes me feel good because, as I said, you know, they see you on TV, see you in the paper, gees, you feel famous. I'm planning to stay as long as I can, I enjoy it very much.	Sue: In general the most positive thing for me ... is feeling great about being able to sing, and when your audience recognizes it and afterward they will come up and say what a great job you did, or you have a nice voice, and being able to get the actual courage to get up and do that in front of a lot of people.
Contribution	Bernard: The choir gives me lots of joy, because I give, .. I give to the others, I try to sing to tell them you have a chance, .. there is hope for you and when I give joy to the people I feel happy, I feel good because I gave to them.	Dan: I don't care if we get paid or not, I'd play anyway, 'cause we're doing it to help the people and that's worth just as much as money to us. We don't really put no charge on anybody. If people wanted a CD, I mean, we accept whatever they give us for it.	
Fear of musical inadequacy	Simon: When I joined the choir, I sang like a pig, I didn't sing very well. I sang very low so that nobody would hear me.		Angie: The most negative aspect of singing in a choral group is when you don't feel that you are prepared for the performance. Ruth: I don't like to think of them out there, I don't like to think that anybody's hearing me, I would rather be in the shower (<i>laughs</i>).

Jill: To sing within a group is a confidence building aspect in that you're not so exposed.

Sue: There's always the being disgusted with myself if I screw up and other people hear that. I feel like when people tell me I can sing really good, it's like they're just saying it.

Claire: I don't find that the audience relationship is particularly important. I have been in choirs where nobody came and it didn't really matter, if the music was good it didn't matter.

Jill: Rehearsal is better than performance because if there is a negative audience reaction, or no audience reaction or no audience, well then you feel like there is a let-downness then because, not from your point of view so much, but there is a certain feeling that they are missing out, a sorrow really that all those people are missing out on a glorious experience.

Roy: The audience is very secondary, almost you're alone.

Minimal importance
of audience

TABLE 4 *Effects of cognitive stimulation from participation in group singing*

	Choir 1 (marginalized)	Choir 2 (marginalized)	Focus group (middle-class)
Mental engagement through active participation	<p>Henri: It is very strange, but uh every one of them .. even though that they're not singing good has something special, they could be a very good .. performer and a lot of things like a joke or movements and dance ... uh, everyone has something special.</p> <p>Patrice: Not just listening to music, which is very good, but doing music, oh what a difference, what a great difference it is, thanks god. And then I feel I participate in something, my whole body participates in something, I feel that you create something.</p>	<p>Phillip: The choir has their 10 cents worth about how we're going to do a particular song, we cut it apart, we're doing one now, the Beatles' Song, <i>She Loves You</i>, anyways, and the choir's looking at different angles of doing that, and we talk about that, so we have people who not so long ago were dying emotionally and here we are talking about work.</p>	<p>Angie: A constant alertness and mental energy especially when we are diving into new stuff the whole time.</p> <p>Angie: I have to tell you that given the choice to go and sit and listen to a piece or go and be a part of producing it, I would rather be on the stage than in the audience. Doing the music is what it's about.</p>
Importance of learning	<p>Patrice: I often say, it's as a free singing course I'm taking now, it's a free music course that I'm having, that I'm taking with the choir, and I'm learning a lot of things also in doing music, in doing something I like. I feel that you create something, we create some harmonies, develop a good ear, we learn what harmony is and we try things; some things are absolutely no good, OK, we won't do it again. And this creativity, this is really good for, for your self-esteem.</p> <p>Louis: For myself I have learned a lot of things in the art of singing.</p>	<p>Philip: We have solos where people are encouraged, (<i>our director</i>) takes a month at a time from his own place on weekends to help people come along and sing a solo, you ought to see the change in the person, you ought to see the change in a person being encouraged.</p>	<p>Ruth: The most positive aspect of singing in choir was just how much music I learned, I sang in three (<i>choirs</i>), and, also, just what I learned about music as well because I feel now that even though I don't have a music degree or anything like that, that I can speak quite well about both choral and orchestral music and it helps me appreciate it more too, just listening to it, having some knowledge.</p> <p>Angie: I'm learning to sight read more now than when I first started.</p>

Jill: If the choir's good and the director's good and everybody's focused then it can be a learning experience.

Angie: The exposure to beautiful music has been really, really exciting for me, the joy of learning the stuff and the challenge. Reading it the first time through, you think 'Man I will never get this', and then it develops into this gorgeous sound. Also our director does spend time sort of explaining the music, how the themes move through, and it really does broaden one's appreciation for music.

Roy: Discovering that I can do something that I didn't expect I could do, um there's a joy in hearing just nice sounds, and uh there's a sense of achievement of hitting something right every now and again ... the challenge, the learning reward.

Simon: We have at least 50 songs. And right now we're learning some new ones, we're slowly changing the repertoire. By next spring or the first part of next summer, our entire repertoire will have been changed. We're learning new songs each week. (*Later he comments*) When you like to sing, it's very easy to learn a song by heart. It can take at the most two weeks. We have sheets with the music and the words and we practise at home.

Mental challenge

Raoul: He (*his friend in the choir*) taught me the notes, I learned the piano, the flute and the bass. Each day he taught me something different. They (*guest directors*) show me how to sing and how to control my voice, sing high, sing low, etc; there is so much to learn in the music field, it is so vast.

TABLE 4 *continued*

	Choir 1 (marginalized)	Choir 2 (marginalized)	Focus group (middle-class)
Mental challenge (<i>cont.</i>)			<p>Claire: The things (<i>choral experiences</i>) that I have enjoyed the most were in larger choirs with really professional conductors experiencing classical works, that's what I've loved the most When the music is worth doing and everybody's pulling together it's uplifting for everyone.</p> <p>Ruth: Having a mental challenge was very important as well as developing as a musician.</p> <p>Sue: Being able to learn a musical and remember every word and every line of every one else makes me feel good.</p> <p>Gwen: I like the challenge of more difficult selections and expansion of my mind.</p>

Finally, the public performance arena provides a platform to instruct the larger society about the world of poverty and homelessness:

Philip: If we're singing to a group of people who are obviously affluent, middle class, you know, I damn well want them to realize what we are singing about sometimes I'm going to put an emphasis on certain words, so, you know, it's important to me, but it doesn't take away from the fun of it either, there's a balance, you know what I mean, there's a balance.

Carl: We want to sing to people to let them know that there are a lot of messages.

As Theo, a social worker who works and sings with the choir, suggests:

Theo: It (*singing in the choir*) moves from a kind of personal, spiritual thing, into people challenging the perspectives that have led them into their position, and challenging the stereotypes around poverty and homelessness. So people, interestingly, become a political movement with a small p, it's a way about making a statement about something's wrong with our society. So we can have fun, we can sing spiritually, we can sing about maritime things and we can also sing about the major concerns that we have about things.

Effects of cognitive stimulation

As mentioned earlier, the perceived benefits of cognitive stimulation were not mentioned as frequently by members of Choir 2 as by members of Choir 1, but one chorister in Choir 2 did allude to the benefits of mental absorption:

Philip: The choir has their 10 cents worth about how we're going to do a particular song, we cut it apart, we're doing one now, the Beatles' Song, *She Loves You*, anyways, and the choir's looking at different angles of doing that, and we talk about that, so we have people who not so long ago were dying emotionally and here we are talking about work.

The social worker mentioned earlier also discussed the importance of the learning component of participating in the choir:

Theo: So there has been a huge growth in our own learning and our own ability, which has been fantastic, and, again, it's a very shared experience that we are constantly learning off each other, and having a number of people involved from a variety of different backgrounds and experiences both personally and musically makes for an intriguing mix. There are always things to be learnt.

DISCUSSION

The results of the investigation with Choir 2 reinforced the emotional, social and cognitive benefits of participation in group singing found in our earlier study (Bailey and Davidson, 2002), and strengthened the notion that the positive rewards of group singing and performance are independent of formal training or ability. However, the unique circumstances of these two choirs caused us to consider if the importance of participating in a publicly recognized activity may have had more powerful or distinct consequences for the marginalized singers than would be found with amateur group singers

who are entrenched in mainstream society. To investigate this question, middle-class singers from diverse choral groups and backgrounds were asked to participate in a focus group to discuss the effects of choral singing.

Effects of group singing and performance for middle-class singers

METHOD

Participants

The participants were one male and seven females from a variety of choral groups (church choir; large community choir with a classical repertoire; small community choir which sings popular, folk and ethnic music; musical theatre chorus; director-selected vocal ensemble) with a wide range of music training and choral singing experience. Two individuals from each group were asked to participate in a study on choral singing, but two individuals cancelled and replacements could not be found on short notice; therefore, there was only one member from the vocal ensemble and one member from the church choir. Of the participants, two had no formal music lessons, one was a music specialist, and one had 15 years of lessons (11 instrumental, 4 voice). The remaining four participants had seven, six, four, and two years of music training which was predominantly instrumental ($M = 4.8$). The participants had from one to 30 years ($M = 12.8$) of choral singing experience. The ages of the subjects ranged from 24 to 59 years ($M = 47.8$). All the participants considered themselves to be middle class. It was hoped that if group type and/or level of training were important factors in the effect of the choral experience, the diversity in the types of choirs and different levels of training represented in this sample would reflect the influence of these factors.

Procedure

Because we had identified several specific areas of interest from the results of the interviews with Choirs 1 and 2 which we wanted to compare with the perceptions of middle-class choristers, we decided to change the method from using semi-structured interviews to a focus group. The procedure for the investigation was based on the format for focus groups described in Krueger (1988). Krueger advises that the focus group should embody 6 to 12 homogeneous participants who have an interest or stake in the topic of investigation, and the organization of the focus group should encourage discussion in a supportive environment which is seen to be tolerant of divergent ideas surrounding the issue. He suggests that to encourage individual expression, the interviewer should begin with a statement which resembles the following:

There are no right or wrong answers, but rather differing points of view. Please share your point of view even if it differs from what others have said. We are just as interested in negative comments as positive comments, and at times the negative comments are most useful. (p. 25)

The format for focus groups suggested by Krueger was adhered to as closely as possible. The procedures for procuring consent and the presentation of the interview material which had been used in the study with Choir 2 were used again in the focus group investigation.

The agenda for the focus group was based primarily on information accumulated from Choirs 1 and 2; however, the participants in the focus group had no knowledge of the information collected in the two previous studies. In order to avoid individual opinions being unduly influenced by those of other participants, the participants were asked to write brief notes about each topic before it was discussed with the group. To begin, participants were asked to reflect on their most positive and negative memories with respect to their choral singing experiences and to write down key words or phrases (on a form provided for this purpose) which best described these experiences. Each participant was then asked to share their personal experiences with the group. After each individual had revealed their personal perceptions, time was allocated for group discussion. Second, participants were given a form containing the following seven headings:

1. emotional responses to choral singing;
2. physical responses to choral singing;
3. group process;
4. performer/audience relationship;
5. mental stimulation;
6. your singing voice; and
7. how your singing experience is affected by the choral conductor.

Under each heading the participants again were asked to write key words or phrases reflecting their personal choral singing experiences related to each heading. After the focus group members individually reported what they had written under a particular heading, time was allocated for group discussion of that topic. The entire focus group session was audio recorded. The approximately 3.5-hour tape-recording was transcribed verbatim. The transcript and the written materials from the participants were carefully reviewed and compared with the transcripts from Choirs 1 and 2.

RESULTS FROM THE FOCUS GROUP AND COMPARISONS WITH CHOIRS 1 AND 2

As previously, in order to facilitate cross choir comparisons some of the comments from the choristers are presented in Tables 1–4 and similar ideas are contained within rows. Overall, the results from the focus group members were consistent within the group suggesting that there were no substantial differences based on training or choir type.

Clinical-type benefits

With regard to the emotional effects of group singing, there was substantial

uniformity in the perceptions of the three groups of singers. As with Choirs 1 and 2, the focus group members discussed very strong emotional responses which emanated from their choral singing experiences:

Jill: There is always discovery (*while singing*), you know, discovery within yourself ... but discovery of somebody else also.

Ruth: I feel totally at peace (*while singing*), um, just the sounds of the harmonies, the sounds of the music altogether, not just listening to me and hating me or whatever, but the whole thing, it's just a great feeling to hear it together like that.

Sue: Music (*choral singing*) can make me feel good and can raise my mood, it can make me relax or it can make me feel confident, uh, and it's a huge part of me.

The singing process seems to foster emotional health by creating an atmosphere which induces introspection, catharsis, relaxation and/or increased energy, and improved mood (see also Table 1, column 3). As with Choirs 1 and 2, there was evidence that singing produces an altered or transcendent-like state which some singers have referred to as the 'singers' high'.

Alice: I love it (*choral singing*), I absolutely come home totally wound up and wired and love it, love it.

Roy: (*Choral singing causes*) gushes so strong that it actually raises hair and close to watering of eyes.

Sue: It just kind of makes me feel in awe that there is that kind of beauty and it just blows me away.

Effects of group process

For the participants in Choirs 1 and 2, merely belonging to a group was a very important aspect of choir membership. There were strong indications of caring and concern for one other, and pleasure in just being together (Table 2, columns 1 and 2). Some focus group participants also acknowledged the importance of fellowship:

Gwen: Positive thoughts (*about singing in a choir*), I say fellowship, that's most important to me.

Jill: The joy (*of practice*) is because you got the fellowship, whereas, that's taken away in a performance.

However, for these middle-class participants the more important aspect of group singing is the creation of a worthwhile musical product:

Claire: It's really exciting when the whole group begins to sing and breathe as one instrument.

Gwen: Well, it's a positive thing to be part of a group and that you're all focused on the same thing and all interested in the same thing .. when the music is worth doing and everybody's pulling together, it's uplifting for everyone.

Jill: You're travelling the same road together for a common goal, a common purpose and I find this very fulfilling.

Sue: For me being part of the group is good when the music comes together and it's done right and you know it sounds good.

Another important aspect of the group experience for the focus group participants is that it provides a safe haven in which to experience the singing voice while concealing one's individual sound within the confines of the group. In the focus group discussion there were a number of comments which affirmed feelings of insecurity and apprehension about revealing the singing voice in a public setting:

- Angie: I have moved from being terrified of my own voice to being a lot more comfortable with it, but it's not credited to choral singing, it's credited to having some voice lessons.
- Gwen: I feel it's (*my voice*) terrible but I enjoy it anyway, I really am improving I'm told. My voice coach tells me that, that I was terrible, so now I'm better.
- Jill: To sing within a group is a confidence building aspect in that you're not so exposed.
- Roy: I'm relieved I can coat-tail on other people, uh, not be exposed.
- Ruth: I had a fear of making mistakes and I didn't want my voice to be heard.
- Sue: There's always the being disgusted with myself if I screw up and other people hear that. I feel, like, when people tell me I can sing really good, it's like they're just saying it.

By contrast, several choristers in Choir 1 acknowledged that some members of the choir were not accomplished singers, but only one participant in Choirs 1 and 2 indicated that he felt any misgivings about revealing his voice, and this was only when he first joined the choir:

- Simon (Choir 1): When I joined the choir, I sang like a pig, I didn't sing very well. I sang very low so that nobody would hear me. And slowly, very slowly, the music entered my soul.

Effects of choir/audience reciprocity

For Choirs 1 and 2, performing for an audience was a very gratifying component of the choral singing experience (Table 3, columns 1 and 2). Considering that the members of the focus group are more concerned with the quality of the musical product than those in Choirs 1 and 2, it might be expected that performing for an audience may be a primary motivational factor for these individuals. However, this notion was not supported in our findings. Although two of the focus group participants had positive reactions to public performance (Table 3, column 3), the more general consensus was that the audience was not an integral component of participating in a choir:

- Angie: The joy of learning the music is foremost, the performance is bonus.
- Claire: I don't find that the audience relationship is particularly important. [] I have been in choirs where nobody came and it didn't really matter, if the music was good it didn't matter.
- Roy: The audience is very secondary, almost you're alone.
- Ruth: I don't like to think of them (*audience*) out there, I don't like to think that anybody's hearing me, I would rather be in the shower.

Effects of cognitive stimulation

For Choir 1, the mental stimulation which occurred as part of the learning process was an important component of the overall experience. With Choir 2 this theme was less obvious, but one participant discussed how the behaviour of members of the group changed when they were mentally engaged in deciding how various selections of music should be performed. People were able to contribute significantly to the decision-making process when they had something relevant on which to focus (Table 4, column 2).

In the focus group the importance of the cognitive component is reaffirmed and many of the comments mirror those of Choir 1 (Table 4, column 3), but there is some differentiation in how the mental stimulation comes to be realized. With Choirs 1 and 2, the main objective of the formation of these choirs was to provide the marginalized individuals with opportunities for fun and fellowship. The cognitive component was a positive, but unanticipated, by-product of the experience. Learning and practising music helped to lift the participants out of the lethargy created by homelessness and unemployment. However, the middle-class participants have many choices in how they explore and express their creative and cognitive potential and, as a result, they can be more discriminating in how they choose to fill their leisure hours. As was found with members of Choirs 1 and 2, the members of the focus group sing for the enjoyment it provides, but they also seek choral experiences that will challenge their ability, improve their musical skill set, and increase their level of musical knowledge.

- Angie: Love the challenge, um I'm learning to sight read more now than when I first started. (*and later*) the joy of learning the stuff and the challenge. Reading it the first time through you think, 'Man I will never get this', and then it develops into this gorgeous sound.
- Jill: If the choir's good and the director's good and everybody's focused then it can be a learning experience.
- Gwen: I like the challenge of more difficult selections.
- Roy: There's a sense of achievement of hitting something right every now and again [] the challenge, the learning reward.
- Ruth: Having mental challenge was very important, as well as developing as a musician.
- Sue: Being able to learn a musical and remember every word and every line of every one else makes me feel good.

DISCUSSION

The elitist perspective of the western art music tradition is based on the notion that successful singing requires special talent and extensive training (Bunch, 1995; Sundberg, 1987). Bunch (1995) conveys this point of view in the opening page of *Dynamics of the Singing Voice*: 'the universality of the human voice as an instrument is its greatest joy and its major disadvantage. Almost everyone can sing and make acceptable vocal sounds, however few people become true artists' (p. 1). It appears that the middle-class singers are

vulnerable to this socially prevalent elitist view, and even though they come from more privileged socioeconomic, educational and musical environments than their homeless and marginalized counterparts, they are less confident about the sound quality of their vocal instrument. Perhaps the social isolation of the marginalized singers frees them from elitist expectations, as they appear to have an innocent confidence that an appreciative audience (as evidenced by attendance and applause) is an indication of a deserving performance:

Dan: There were 954 people and we played in front of them, and we didn't have any problem whatsoever, not even one mistake. I sat at my drums and the choir started and the first three-quarters of an hour we did 26 or 27 songs. And the thing was that, after we played for half an hour, we couldn't get off the stage, there was standing ovations, we had trouble to get out of there.

However, it must be mentioned that the middle-class singers were generally more mentally healthy than the participants in Choirs 1 and 2, and, consequently, they may have more realistic attitudes regarding societal expectations. Conversely, the participants suffering with paranoid schizophrenia, especially when they are not taking their medication, may be somewhat distanced from reality. The issue of awareness was mentioned by Philip:

Philip (Choir 2): We have fun singing, but some of us have a different awareness than others, and not all might have the same awareness, or not awareness, but sense that I have of the reason or why of the choir, you know what I mean.

But, in spite of a life of poverty, illness and hardship, Joan was aware of the distinction between her choir and more mainstream choirs. The following comment illustrates her cognizance of the prevalence of western cultural ideology:

Joan (Choir 2): Different friends of mine, when I told them I was in the choir, they said, 'IN A CHOIR' (*indicated that they were surprised*). Like my sister, she doesn't think she believes in God or something like that, thinks it's, you know, holy songs and that, songs that you hear in church all the time, like a choir represents people usually with their long gowns and that, but this choir everybody's down to earth, they're all down to earth.

Joan believes that her choir is different because it is not pretentious. Nonetheless, an additional point that must be considered is that an audience may be less forgiving with a mainstream choir than with a choir of marginalized singers, and, therefore, society's expectations of middle-class singers may restrict their freedom to sing without the fear of audience dissatisfaction.

The importance of the social component of participating and performing with a choir was more intense with members in Choirs 1 and 2. Participation in an organized group provided these choristers with the structure and stability which, generally, have been unavailable to them because of mental illness,

drug abuse and poverty. In the familial surroundings of the practice room, and in the festive atmosphere that often follows performances, the choir members have the opportunity to engage in social interactions which are uncommon to the most marginalized (cf. Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Rossi, 1989; Wright, 1989). Simple comforts, such as sharing a conversation or a pizza, are symbols of normalcy and acceptance to those who struggle to find the necessities for basic survival. In an interesting contrast, the communal aspect of the group singing experience is only marginally important for the eight middle-class participants. It is likely that the social needs of the more advantaged individuals are provided through encounters with partners, children, friends and co-workers. Here the emphasis is not how the group contributes to the overall well-being of the choir members, but rather how the members of the choir contribute to the quality of the musical product. The primary importance of the group for these individuals is that it provides them with an opportunity to sing without the fear of vocal exposure.

These contrasts are indicative of differences in ideologies of the musical experience in collectivist and individualistic cultures as described in anthropological studies. For example, Blacking (1973) reports that in collectivist cultures participation in musical activities engenders individual recognition and communal solidarity, and Kaemmer (1993) asserts that in western individualistic cultures musical elitism serves to promote class differentiation. The ideas expressed by Blacking and Kaemmer appear to be corroborated in our studies. Membership in Choirs 1 and 2 provides a collective atmosphere in which individual abilities are recognized and valued by the group, but the sense of community seems to transcend any of the other benefits as is indicated in the following comment:

Philip (Choir 2): It (*the choir*) means a lot to a lot of people there I tell ya, I seen some people go there with some serious mental health issues who are just hanging on, boy they show up for that choir practice on Thursdays ... if a choir member doesn't show up for a couple practices, they're hunted down, tracked down.

In contrast, the middle-class subjects appear to exhibit an individualistic and more self-serving attitude related to personal musical needs as indicated in Daphne's comment:

Daphne: I don't think I went into the group needing the group as much as my own experience with music and singing.

It must also be noted that the findings from the focus group that are related to group process are in some ways contrary to those found by Pitts (2004) in her study of G & S Societies. There may be several reasons for this discrepancy:

- The acting component of G & S performances may bring individuals in closer contact with each other than in the traditional choir seating arrangement where members sit in sections next to the same individuals week after week.

- 'Play acting' may break down polite social barriers that often prevent or subdue interpersonal interaction.
- In practising for G & S productions there often are considerable periods of 'waiting' between scenes. During these periods, participants have opportunities to exchange personal information and get to know each other better. Many choirs often have only a very short break in the middle of rehearsals that limits possibilities for social exchange. Consequently, the less rigid format necessitated through the coordination of the various components of musical theatre may more closely resemble the format of Choirs 1 and 2, where less attention is directed to form than is the case with more traditional types of choirs.

The reciprocity that occurs between the choir and the audience enables the members of Choirs 1 and 2 to connect to the larger society from which they have been estranged. The audience provides opportunities to experience feelings of connection, pride, contribution and empowerment. Through performing, the marginalized choristers are able to introduce themselves to society in a way that is removed from the stereotype of the street dweller. Not only do the choristers entertain with their singing voices, they now have a political voice through which they can inform the audience about issues related to poverty and homelessness. In this way, the choir becomes a vehicle of empowerment, and the members become spokespersons for the marginalized. In this one aspect of their lives they have become the masters of their destiny. They are temporarily spared the humiliation of confronting the bureaucratic system to receive services and commodities. For a short period of time they have the opportunity to explore and create through their own volition. However, the reciprocity feature of choral performance is not nearly as important for the middle-class singers. For these individuals, public performance is subordinate to practising. In fact, the audience often detracts from the pleasure of the experience as the presence of the audience creates a testing arena which increases anxiety related to performance ability.

For Choirs 1 and 2, the mental stimulation provided through group singing furnished an opportunity to reveal concealed aspects of the self. Few people are interested in the thoughts of schizophrenics, drug addicts and ex-cons, especially when these individuals are steeped in extreme poverty. It is not surprising that the opportunity to offer suggestions and opinions in a group atmosphere, where all individuals are treated with respect, helps to build confidence. But, for the middle-class singers, who are striving to increase their personal expertise, the cognitive component is important in that it increases their musical knowledge base and allows them to appreciate and speak about music from a more informed position.

The studies with marginalized and middle-class singers discussed in this article illustrate that singing appears to speak the same emotional language regardless of the socioeconomic status or level of training of the participants.

Whereas exceptional performances receive considerable acclaim and attention, the performance experience appears to be no less meaningful for the most amateur and marginalized choristers who sing for audiences in obscure settings. Indeed, for those who are compelled to live in poverty in the midst of affluence, ‘making a joyful noise’ facilitates inclusion, acceptance and empowerment. Choral singing also provides considerable rewards for the middle-class singers, but the full potential of the experience appears to be constrained by elitist notions of musicality. The pure joy of singing, especially

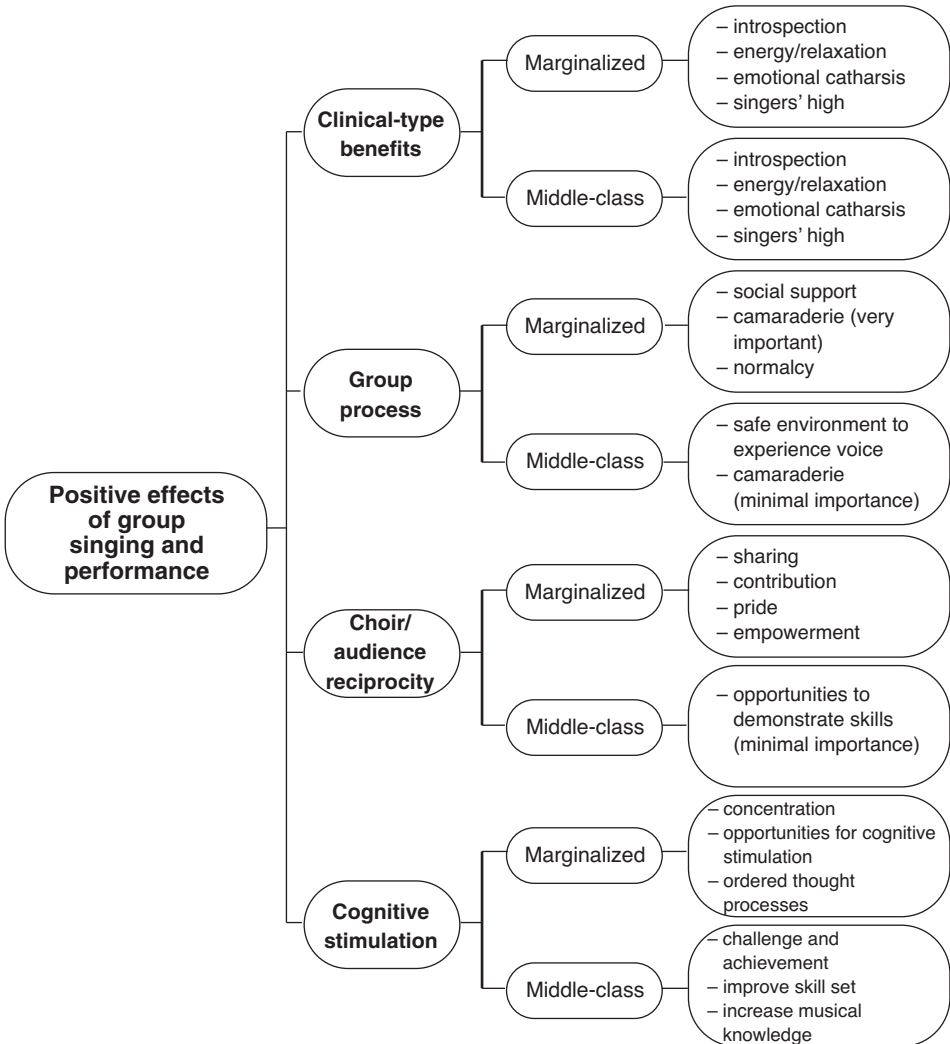


FIGURE 1 *Revised theory of the positive effects of participation in group singing and performance based on evidence from marginalized and middle-class choristers.*

in public, is inhibited by feelings of inadequacy and the pressure to perform within the parameters of 'good musical practice'. It appears that the dominant ideological attitude regarding musicianship not only affects those with aspirations to become professional performance musicians, but also filters through to the amateur chorister and produces fears related to exposing a voice that may not meet a prescribed (though not necessarily obvious) standard.

In our earlier research with Choir 1 (Bailey and Davidson, 2002) we presented a preliminary diagram of the benefits of choral singing. It is now necessary to alter the diagram to include the new information which illustrates the differences between the marginalized and middle-class participants (Figure 1).

Conclusions

This research is a first step in understanding the importance of participatory singing experiences for amateurs at many levels of musical training and ability. It illustrates that group singing and performance can produce satisfying and therapeutic sensations even when the sound produced by the vocal instrument is of mediocre quality. In fact, there may be very little difference in the enjoyment of generating musical sounds at the most professional and most amateur levels. This information may be useful to music educators, therapists and choral conductors who have an interest in encouraging participation in choral singing to promote emotional, social and cognitive health. Further research is required to understand more fully the effects of the perpetuation of elitist notions of musicality and the resulting fear of participating in, and exclusion from, musical activities. At a time when more and more of our leisure hours are filled with sedentary and isolating pastimes, it may be important to determine the differences in the psychological and physiological effects of active and passive activities.

NOTES

1. Although homelessness and extreme poverty are deplorable conditions, this study revealed that there are degrees of destitution even within the homeless condition as the members of this second choir appeared to be more impoverished than those in the first study. The difference in circumstances may have been partially attributable to apparent differences in the level of governmental support for the homeless within the two Canadian provinces. Also, the participants in Choir 2 had more severe psychological disorders, particularly schizophrenia, which may have reduced their coping skills. At least half of those interviewed often strayed from the topic under discussion, choosing to focus on an issue foremost in their personal agenda, usually related to some form of perceived persecution. Despite these digressions, the themes which emerged regarding choir participation were markedly similar to those in the first study.
2. While reviewing these quotations it is important to consider the extent of the

mental distress and physical deprivation that these choir members experience on a daily basis. In view of these extreme hardships, it is remarkable that they are able to articulate their perceptions of the effects of active participation in a musical activity.

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Appendix: effects of group singing interview

SECTION 1: EARLY LIFE

Family life

Could you describe your family background to me? (with the intent to cover relationships with parents, siblings, problems in the family, socioeconomic status)

School life (academic ability, relationship to teachers and other students, extracurricular activities)

What about your school life, how was it at school? What kind of student were you?

Did you have many friends at school?

Did you get along with your teachers?

Did you ever get into trouble in school?

Early music experiences

Did you participate in musical activities? (home, church, school, community)
What level of enjoyment was received from these activities?

SECTION 2: EDUCATION/EMPLOYMENT/LIFE DIRECTION

Education

How far did you progress in school, university, vocational training?
What were your main academic/school interests?

Employment

What jobs have you had?
How long were you employed?
What happened that led to your unemployment? (occupations and success or failure in those occupations)

The descent into homelessness

How long have/had you been homeless?
How has this experience been for you? Tell me about some good and bad times.
How does being homeless make you feel about yourself? (self-esteem)
In your experience, how do other people treat homeless people?
How did/does that make you feel?
Has homelessness affected your personal relationships?
How did you feel the first time you went to a soup kitchen/shelter?

SECTION 3: THE CHOIR

Decision to join

How did you hear about the choir?
What prompted you to join?
How long have you been a member?

First impressions of the choir

What did you think about the choir during your first practice?
What did you think of the director?
Did you relate well to the other choir members?
Have your relationships with the director and other choir members changed since you first joined?

SECTION 4: THE EXPERIENCE OF SINGING

How do you feel when you are singing?
Does the music affect or change how you feel?
Do you have any musical preferences?
Why do you think certain types of music appeal to you more than others?
Are there any differences in how you feel before practice and after practice?
If yes, what do you think has caused that change?
Is there any difference/s between singing in practice and singing in front of an audience?
What about listening to music, is there a difference between listening and singing?

SECTION 5: PROGRESSION OF SUCCESS OF THE CHOIR AND RESULTING PERSONAL CHANGES

When you joined the choir did you know that you would be performing for the public?

How did you feel when you first performed publicly?

Has that changed?

Did you ever think that the choir would be so successful?

Why do you think the choir has been so successful?

How do you feel about the choir now compared to when you first joined?

I hear you have been travelling, what has that experience been like?

You have also produced several CDs, how do you feel about that?

You are beginning to experience celebrity status, how does that make you feel?

Has the choir affected your personal relationships?

Has the choir affected your attitude towards life?

What does the choir mean to your life now?

Is there any other activity that could have accomplished what the choir has accomplished?

What are your hopes for the future? (the choir and life in general)

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