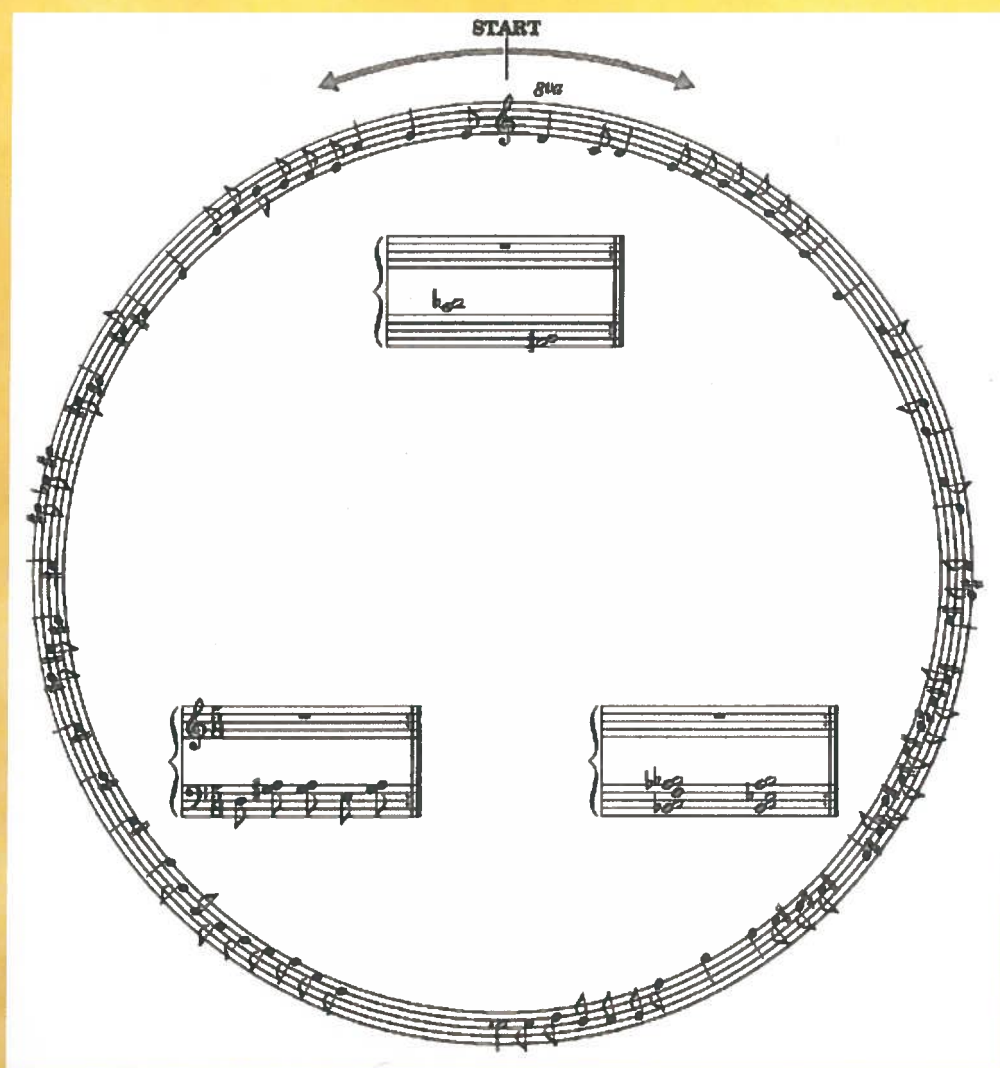


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Factors Affecting the Formation of Adolescents' Singing Style:

A study on Japanese and Portuguese Adolescents

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Abstract

The goal of the present study was to explore the factors influencing the development of different types of singing styles. Thirteen junior high school students volunteered for the study; 9 participants were from Japan and 4 were from Portugal. Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were conducted by the authors, in the participants' native language. The Modified Grounded Theory Approach (M-GTA) was adopted to analyze the interview transcripts. The interview data yielded 19 concepts. After examining the relationships between these concepts, seven categories were developed; two categories pertained to the singing style and five categories were related to the factors that form a particular style of singing. The first two categories, *Active singing* and *Inactive singing*, represent the degree of active commitment to singing. The remaining five categories, *Relieving stress*, *Evaluation*, *Positive influence of the interaction with others*, *Negative influence of others*, and *Belittling one's singing skill*, were considered to influence either the active or inactive singing style. The characteristic singing style for active singing was observed among Japanese participants and the factors for developing such styles seemed to be based on the Japanese singing culture, such as karaoke and choral competition. On the other hand, strong commonalities regarding the factors influencing inactive singing were seen

between the Japanese and Portuguese participants. For participants from both countries, it was revealed that singing sometimes becomes a stressful activity.

Keywords: Singing, Music Education, Karaoke, Culture

A number of studies have showed that, in the modern society, music forms an essential part of young people's lives (Behne, 1997; Fitzgerald, Joseph, Hayes, & O'Reagan, 1995; Garton & Pratt, 1991; Larson, 1995; Larson, Kubey, & Colletti, 1989). Research focusing on the musical behavior of young people has clearly revealed that majority of them are deeply involved in various kinds of musical activities such as listening, singing, and playing instruments (Boal-Palheiros & Hargreaves, 2001; Hallam, 2010; North, Hargreaves, & O'Neill, 2000; Tarrant, North, & Hargreaves, 2000).

Although the current youth are deeply involved in various kinds of musical activities, the balance between performing and listening has not always been the same. Several studies have pointed out that although amateurs enjoyed performing music in the 19th century, the engagement in musical performances has declined in contemporary societies (Barthes, 1986; Masuda & Taniguchi, 2005). Since people have been able to listen to music everywhere due to the availability of digitally recorded music products, a dominance of musical listening has been evident since after the 1980s.

Over the past twenty years, however, participation in musical performances has been revived amongst young people. In Japan, the continued popularity of karaoke

played an important role in popularizing singing activities in everyday life. Since the 1990s, the karaoke facility, called karaoke box, became popular throughout Japan, and many people could sing their favorite songs with luxurious accompaniments at reasonable costs. Furthermore, karaoke has become portable and ubiquitous as a result of the popularization of i-mode (a mobile phone Internet access system), which has also opened up karaoke to young primary and secondary school students. Although there had been a recent history of young people's participation in musical performances before the emergence of karaoke (e.g., garage bands and the folk song boom), only passionate music fans were involved in such activities. The important aspect of the current popularity of the karaoke culture in Japan is that engagement in a musical performance has been revived among a wider range of young people (Mito, 2010).

Contrary to the case in Japan, in other countries, the characteristic singing culture of karaoke does not exist. For example, in Europe, karaoke singing is not as popular as it is in Asian countries, and there are few specialized karaoke facilities for young people (Kelly, 1998). Furthermore, the singing style of karaoke in these countries is also different from that in Japan. While karaoke singing in Japan is focused on singing, in Europe, it is conducted as part of social gatherings (Kelly, 1998).

In recent years, karaoke also became popular amongst young people in Portugal, where children sing together with their families and in some restaurants. The lack of research does not allow for a deeper knowledge on this topic. Perhaps television contests such as "The Voice, Portugal" are even more popular, as evident from the fact that several young people regularly apply for such contexts.

In Japan, singing activities are also an essential part of schooling. A questionnaire study conducted by Mito and Boal-Palheiros (2012) showed that singing competitions are extremely popular in Japanese schools. Junior high school students are highly engaged in singing activities and majority of them answered that singing competitions were one of the most positive musical experiences in their life. In Portugal, though singing practiced regularly in generalist schools, it is engaged in less often as compared to that in Japan. Additionally, the musical activities in Portugal are dominated by playing of instruments, mainly the recorder and Orff instruments, as reported by music teachers (Boal-Palheiros, 1994; Boal-Palheiros, 2005). There are no regular competitions for choral singing, but rather for playing the recorder, which is very popular in many schools. In a recent questionnaire study, students reported that singing is regularly practiced and enjoyed during music lessons, and they mainly entail Portuguese, Pop, and Rock songs (Boal-Palheiros & Mito, 2015).

As discussed, the degree of interest and commitment to singing is influenced by various musical and national cultures, which might lead to the formation of different singing behaviors among different cultural groups. Mito and Boal-Palheiros (2012) investigated young people's singing behavior and attitudes in and outside the school in Japan and Portugal. Their study revealed that some differences in the musical culture between Japan and Portugal influence the formation of the students' singing behavior. As anticipated, the exposure to karaoke in everyday life and singing competitions at school has a strong influence on establishing a characteristic singing style in Japanese young participants.

The above study has important implications for clarifying the factors that determine the development of a unique singing style, and also for examining the different factors that affect the same in different cultural groups. However, since this study was conducted through a written questionnaire, relationships between the characteristic singing style and its determining factors were not examined in detail. The use of the questionnaire method made it difficult for participants to respond to questions such as "why do you sing" or "how do you sing." Therefore, how different factors establish characteristic singing styles was not well examined.

The goal of the present study was to explore the factors that influence the

development of different types of singing styles. Participants from two countries, Japan and Portugal, were investigated. The data of Japanese participants in this study has already been reported in Mito and Boal-Palheiros (Mito & Boal-Palheiros, 2014). In the previous study, however, the participants' responses to an interview with open-ended questions were simply categorized. Therefore, the relationship between singing style and the determining factors was not deeply analyzed. In the present study, the interview data of the Portuguese participants was included and the whole data was analyzed using the MGTA method.

Method

Participants

Thirteen junior high school students volunteered for the study, 9 participants were from Japan, and 4 were from Portugal. All participants were students at junior high schools and they had not received any musical training.

Data Collection and Interview

Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were conducted by the authors in the participants' native language. The interview started by asking about the

participants' singing behavior, both in everyday life and at school; about why they sing in everyday life situations and at school; and what singing meant for them. After the participants expressed their ideas, the following questions related to the factors that determined their singing style were asked. Participants were asked to describe the most intense singing experience (both positive and negative) they had experienced. Before the commencement of the analysis, the interviews were recorded, fully transcribed, and then translated into English for the purpose of communication between the authors.

Data Analysis

The Modified Grounded Theory Approach (M-GTA) was adopted to analyze the interview transcripts. The M-GTA, developed by Kinoshita (2003), is one of the modified versions of the Grounded Theory Approach (GTA). The major difference between the M-GTA and the GTA is that the former directly produces the concept by interpreting the data, while the original GTA develops concepts by using intervening tools such as codes and properties. Therefore, in the M-GTA, the process of analysis does not proceed in a well-sequenced manner, by slicing the data and coding them, but it starts the analysis of data at the concept level, reading and interpreting the data within the context of the data as a whole. In the process of developing the concepts,

one "analyzing worksheet" is developed for each concept, which consists of the name of the concept, its definition, variations (examples of the concept), and memos for interpretation. Finally, the concepts are further grouped into construct categories by examining the relationship between the concepts.

Results

The interview data yielded 19 concepts. After examining the relationships between these concepts, the following seven categories were developed: two categories pertained to the style of singing and five categories were related to the factors that influence the formation of a particular style of singing. The first two categories, *Active singing* and *Inactive singing*, represent the degree of active commitment to singing. The remaining five categories, *Relieving stress*, *Evaluation*, *Positive influence of the interaction with others*, *Negative influence of others*, and *Belittling one's singing skill*, were identified as the factors that influence the formation of either the active or inactive singing behavior. In the following section, the content of each of these categories and the relationships among them have been discussed.

Degree of Active Commitment to Singing

Category 1: Active singing. This category shows an active commitment to singing. It consists of the following four concepts: singing loudly, practicing singing, autonomous selection of songs, and learning English. As evident from these four concepts, the nature of active engagement in singing was diverse among the participants. The concepts "practicing singing" and "singing loudly" were articulated among the Japanese participants and they seemed to be strongly connected to karaoke singing in everyday contexts. They responded that, even in these contexts, they intentionally practiced singing to memorize new songs, and they explained that the main reason for practicing singing was to showcase their singing ability at a karaoke. Japanese participants also emphasized on singing in a loud voice, and this simple singing behavior also seemed to be related to karaoke. They explained that an important aspect of karaoke is to sing loudly so that they can get excited.

In the school context, active commitment was expressed in the participants' autonomous selection of songs. Some participants found that it was important to select the songs themselves. One 15-year-old Japanese male participant said,

I was happy that a class member could decide the songs that are going to be sung at the competition. The teacher did not interfere in the process of deciding the songs to be sung at the competition. (male Japanese participant)

One concept of active singing was reported by Portuguese participants, as they actively sing for learning English. One boy explained that singing is "a way to train my English." Another Portuguese boy described how they use singing as a tool for developing their English skills.

I usually type "lyrics" (on the internet) and I get the lyrics, so that I can practice even more. I get the lyrics there in English, and in this way, I accompany and then I sing even better. (male Portuguese participant)

Category 2: Inactive singing. Another category which determines the degree of active commitment to singing is "inactive singing." It is clear that there were different degrees of commitment to singing, and not all singing behavior was engaged in actively. Inactive singing includes the following three concepts: singing alone, singing softly, and obligation.

In everyday contexts, some participants in Japan and in Portugal reported that they prefer to sing alone.

At home, I like to sing alone ... I don't like when there are other people around, I don't like that feeling. At home, when I am at the computer, at night, I put a CD on, and I start singing when I feel like it. Sometimes I feel like it, sometimes

I don't. (female Portuguese participant)

Singing softly is also a characteristic singing style in inactive singing. Many Portuguese participants explained that they preferred to sing in a soft voice at home, and this singing behavior suggests that they did not want to showcase their voice. One Portuguese participant reported that, in order to make their own voice less noticeable, they always play the original song very loudly and sing along softly.

When I sing in English, I sing softly because though I think I can sing well, I don't like to show off my voice since I finished primary school and went to middle school; since I was 10. (male Portuguese participant)

Another concept that was included in inactive singing is "obligation," which often occurs at school. In this context, both Japanese and Portuguese participants reported that they sang only when they were instructed to, and that they did not sing until they were required to by the teacher.

At school, I sing only during music lessons, when the teacher asks me to. I sing only when we have singing activities and when we have to sing, otherwise I don't. (female Portuguese participant)

The participants who sang as an obligation did not seem to enjoy singing.

At school, I feel that I am constrained when I sing. Therefore, singing is not

enjoyable. (male Japanese participant)

Factors Influencing Active Singing

As for the factors which seemed to have a positive influence on active singing, the following three categories were identified: Relieving stress, Evaluation, and Positive influence of interaction with others.

Category 3: Relieving stress. Many participants reported relieving stress as the reason for engaging in active singing. Interestingly, most participants associated this reason with singing in a loud voice. One male participant explained,

Singing in a loud voice relieves stress. Even at home, I sing in a loud voice. For me it's a way of getting things off my chest, to feel relieved. That's why I like to sing. (male Portuguese participant)

Category 4: Evaluation. This category comprised three concepts; winning a prize, receiving positive feedback from others, and the automated scoring system. It was clear that the external evaluation made by the jury in a competition, listeners, and automated scoring machines were important factors for active singing.

As discussed before, singing competitions were reported as one of the most intense singing experiences at school, and winning a prize seemed to be one of the most important aspects of school choral competitions. Many Japanese participants explained that they invested substantial efforts to win a prize, and they were extremely satisfied when they could get good results and when their singing was highly evaluated by the jury.

The most positive singing experience was that I won the prize at school singing competition. The students of the class worked very hard and that was fruitful.

Although it is not an official evaluation, the positive feedback from teachers, family members, and friends can also be a strong motivation for active singing. For example, one participant excitedly remembered his experience from elementary school, when he was praised by his teacher.

When the teacher praised me, it made me feel high (excited), when the teacher said to me, "you can sing, you have a good voice," it was fun. (male Japanese participant)

An interesting response by the Japanese participants was that they seriously relied on the karaoke auto scoring system as an evaluation of their singing skills. Nowadays, almost all karaoke systems in Japan have an automated scoring device,

which provides singers with a simple performance rating. This system has become extremely popular amongst young people, and karaoke users are actively using it. The Japanese participant's response showed that the auto scoring system became an important tool for enjoying karaoke singing.

At a karaoke, I compete with my friend on the singing skills using the auto scoring system. We compete to determine the Number One. Sometimes I win, which makes me very happy. (female Japanese participant)

Category 5: Positive influence of the interaction with others. This category comprised the following three concepts: Singing together, Collaboration, and Influence of the family. This category indicated that interactions with friends, classmates, and family members seem to be an important factor for active singing.

Both Japanese and Portuguese participants found great enjoyment in singing with friends.

I prefer to sing with friends rather than singing alone. If I don't have someone to sing with, it's too quiet and it doesn't get lively, so it's no fun. (male Japanese participant)

The Japanese participants seemed to place more importance on the excitement

generated by singing with friends. One of them explained that they sang in a group in order to feel such excitement. Interestingly, this participant introduced their own rule that the first singer in the karaoke has to sing the song which get excited.

At a karaoke, we always sing the song that makes us excited. When we start singing certain songs that don't get excited, we change the song. (male Japanese participant)

Many Japanese participants reported that the collaboration with their friends that occurred during choral competitions was also a strong factor for actively engaging in singing. As pointed out earlier, winning a prize motivated the students to sing. Some participants, however, emphasized more on the importance of the process of preparing for the singing competition than on its result.

The singing competition was the most positive experience in which I practiced singing with my friends. We worked very hard for two months, came to school early in the morning for practice, and practiced even during the lunch break. Although we could not win the prize, I have good memories of it. (female Japanese participant)

The influence of the family on singing was also relevant, both in the Japanese and in the Portuguese participants. Several Portuguese participants reported the

experience of listening to their parents singing or singing with their parents. One of them said that his parents enjoyed listening to him singing.

Factors Influencing Inactive Singing

Category 6: Negative influence of others. While three categories were established as factors for positive singing, two categories related to the inactive singing emerged. One such factor was the negative influence of others, which comprised concepts such as Pressure from the audience, Receiving negative feedback from others, and Receiving direction from others.

Both Japanese and Portuguese participants experienced high pressure from the audience. They showed strong negative feelings when their singing was listened to by other people such as friends and classmates. One Portuguese 15-year-old participant explained the reason why she did not go to karaoke as follows:

I have never visited a karaoke, no, and I don't intend to go. Because when singing in front of other people, I would probably have an attack! I would have to go out of there immediately! (female Portuguese participant)

One Japanese adolescent also reported that he was not confident enough to showcase his singing to others.

I don't want to sing with other people, because they would hear my singing. I would feel shy if other listen to my singing. I don't want others to hear me sing badly. (female Japanese participant)

Another participant expressed a strong aversion when he had to be a soloist at a singing test. He described this event as the most negative singing experience in his life.

The most negative singing experience was the singing test at school. I sung in front of other students. Since I was so nervous, I made mistakes and my voice seemed different. I was ashamed that all my classmates listened to such a voice. (female Japanese participant)

This factor seemed to be closely related to the concept "receiving negative feedback from others." Some participants were extremely sensitive to the feedback they received for their singing. It was clear that sometimes negative feedback hurt the feelings of the singers, even when it came from their relatives.

My sister said that I am ONCHI (poor pitch singer). I was so shocked. I thought I was not going to sing anymore ... When I was singing with the TV, my elder sister clearly said that I was out of tune. (male Japanese participant)

As for the negative influence of others, the instructions that restrict the way of singing seemed to make the singers uncomfortable. One Japanese participant reported,

I don't like the teacher's instructions such as "more loud voice," which makes me angry. I like pop songs rather than the songs in the text book. I don't like the songs in the text book because they are fixed, which means that the way of singing, such as singing certain parts loudly, is predetermined and we have to follow that. (female Japanese participant)

Category 7: Belittling one's singing skill. Another factor influencing inactive singing was "belittling one's singing skill," which comprised two concepts, the quality of one's voice and being out of tune. Many participants were sensitive about their voice and the correctness of the pitch. It seemed that the Portuguese participants were particularly worried about their voice.

In the beginning I sang a lot, but now I know that my voice is not that great for singing. (male Portuguese participant)

Well, I think that my voice is not really ... not very good for a normal singer, but the easier songs, I think I can get them. (female Portuguese participant)

Many comments showed that both Japanese and Portuguese participants felt ashamed when singing out of tune, which seemed to be a serious problem for them.

I sing out of tune, really out of tune, and I can't get the notes right. I can't get

the melody right. I don't know about the rhythm, but in the melody, I can't get the high notes. (female Portuguese participant)

Discussion

The present study provided a theoretically grounded account of the degree of active commitment to singing, and factors influencing singing styles. The two categories, active singing and inactive singing, described different degrees of positive commitment to singing, and the five categories, relieving stress, evaluation, positive influence of the interaction with others, negative influence of others, and belittling one's singing skill were identified as the factors influencing the two contrasting singing styles. This section will discuss how the two types of contrasting singing styles are influenced by the five different factors. Some differences between the Japanese and Portuguese participants have also been examined.

Active Singing

Active singing consists of the following four concepts: singing loudly, autonomous selection of song, practicing singing, and learning English. Singing loudly was particularly observed among Japanese participants and it seemed to relate to the

category of relieving stress. Many participants emphasized on the importance of singing loudly. For example, at a karaoke, they emphasized on warming up and "going crazy" while singing with their friends. In such situations, the participants explained that singing in a loud voice was one of the best ways to relieve stress.

Another important relationship was found between the autonomous selection of songs and receiving direction from others (which is included in the category "negative influence of others"). Selecting their favorite songs seems to be a crucial factor for the degree of active singing. Although the concept receiving direction from others is mainly a factor affecting inactive singing, it also explains some aspects of active singing. Many participants were unwilling to be constrained by a teacher's instructions, even though those instructions were given in order to foster their musical development. This clearly indicated that independent engagement is an important factor for active singing.

The category "evaluation" was also a strong factor affecting active singing, particularly among the Japanese participants. The analysis showed that various types of evaluations, such as winning a prize in a competition, receiving positive feedback from others, and the scoring system of the karaoke machine, influenced participants' active singing. As seen in previous studies (Mito, & Boal-Palheiros, 2012), winning a prize at

a singing competition was pointed out as a strong musical experience.

Another factor that determines the degree of active singing is having positive interactions with others. Many participants emphasized that social relationships were a strong factor for motivating the active engagement in singing. Participants in both Japan and Portugal reported high enjoyment in singing with their friends and family. The positive influence of interaction with others was seen in school singing as well as in everyday life contexts. The collaboration that occurred at choral competitions at school was one of the strongest influences on active singing, especially among Japanese participants. Many of them said that they could not forget their intense experience during the choral competition, in which great social relationships were established while preparing for the event.

Inactive Singing

Inactive singing was found to comprise the following three concepts: singing alone, singing softly, and obligation. The first two singing styles seemed to be determined by the negative influence of others and belittling one's singing skill.

The category "negative influence of others" included the concepts of pressure from the audience, receiving negative feedback from others, and receiving direction

from others. Pressure from the audience was very strong, and it related to singing alone.

The participants' comments clearly indicated that some of them were extremely sensitive about singing in front of other people. For example, one participant's experience during the singing exam, when he sang alone in front of the whole class, was remembered as his most negative musical experience. It is considered that these humiliating experiences prompt them to sing alone.

Similar to the pressure from the audience, the negative feedback from other people also increased participants' anxiety. Negative feedback such as "you are a poor pitch singer" are so shocking to the singer that one participant confessed that he did not want to sing anymore. Another exaggerated by saying that he would have a heart "attack" if he would sing in front of other people.

The concept of receiving direction from others particularly influenced the singing style pertaining to "obligation." Participants were unwilling to follow the instructions from their teachers that determined a certain way of singing. Especially at school, such constraints led the participants to believe that singing at school was obligatory. Given that most of the singing activities during a music lesson were compulsory, it seems reasonable that the students' singing did not occur based on their own initiative. However, it is crucial to note that the formation of this singing style is

not always influenced by the singing context, but also by the way singing activities are organized. It should be noted that the lack of freedom in singing is an important factor for the formation of the inactive singing style.

The category "belittling one's singing skill" is also an important factor influencing inactive singing. As discussed above, pressure from the audience and negative feedback from others seem to lead to the experience of anxiety during singing. The participants' own assumptions regarding their lack of skills are also a strong factor for determining their anxiety. As participants in this study were not music specialists, it is surprising that many of them were so nervous about the quality of their singing pertaining to voice and pitch, and that they were so sensitive about whether they would be able to sing correctly in front of others.

Conclusion

The present study revealed that various factors prompted adolescents to sing actively or inactively. Furthermore, differences and similarities between the Japanese and Portuguese participants were observed in terms of their styles of singing and the factors that influence those singing styles.

In active singing, the characteristic singing style that was particularly observed

among Japanese participants was singing loudly. Japanese participants emphasized on singing loudly, which they reported to engaged in mainly to relieve stress. As anticipated, this singing style seems to be connected to karaoke singing, which originated in the Japanese musical culture. Since one salient trait of Japanese karaoke is that singers sing in order to feel lively, it was important for adolescents to sing in a loud voice. Such singing activities were not observed among Portuguese participants.

Evaluation was also a strong factor affecting the active singing among Japanese participants. Many types of external evaluation, such as winning a prize, receiving positive comments from others, and scoring well on the automated system in a karaoke machine were important motivators for Japanese participants, which encouraged them to engage in singing activities actively.

The present study strongly indicated that the social interaction with family members, friends, and classmates was an important factor for active singing. Especially for Japanese participants, the collaboration that occurred during the preparation for singing competitions had a strong influence on their singing style, especially on active singing. It is interesting that Portuguese participants used singing activities for improving their language skills. Their comments clearly indicated that they actively sang many English songs in order to improve their English.

While the factors influencing active singing were different in Japan and Portugal, common factors that influence inactive singing were observed. Both Japanese and Portuguese participants exhibited a strong anxiety in showcasing their singing to others. Participants were sensitive about the quality of their singing and about feedback from others, which, in some cases, led them to refuse to sing in public. Although the participants in both countries were not music specialists, they were acutely worried about their singing quality, such as the correctness of pitch and voice. A relevant implication of this result is that singing sometimes imposes a bigger burden on young people than other musical activities such as performing instruments, creating music, or listening to music do.

In summary, characteristic singing styles for active singing were observed among Japanese participants and the factors affecting the development of such styles seemed to be based on the Japanese singing culture, such as participating in karaoke and choral competition. On the other hand, strong commonalities regarding the factors affecting inactive singing were observed between the Japanese and Portuguese participants. For the participants in both countries, it was revealed that singing was sometimes stressful.

Implications for Music Education

Although various factors that led to active singing were observed in both Japanese and Portuguese participants, the lack of musical motivation was seen both in everyday life and at school. Few responses described an attraction between the musical aspects of singing. For example, descriptions such as "attraction to songs," "elaboration of musical expression," and "emotional reaction to singing," were rarely mentioned as reasons for singing. Instead, external reasons such as "relieving stress" and "developing social relationships" were articulated as factors for active singing. It appears that singing in everyday contexts and at school is a rather superficial activity. Considering the long-term enrichment fostered by singing activities, both in everyday life situations and at school, the importance of the meaning of music needs to be considered.

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