

A Study of Adult 'Non-Singers'
In Newfoundland

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ABSTRACT

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Adults self-labelling as 'non-singers' ('NS') appear to be an ubiquitous phenomenon. Whilst the literature yields rich evidence about children's impeded singing development, it is sparse concerning adult 'non-singers'. This Newfoundland-based study sought explanations about childhood-attributed adult 'non-singers', and how such self-perception had affected their lives from personal and socio-cultural perspectives.

The study proceeded in two connected, consecutive phases. Phase I comprised case-studies of nine self-attributed 'NS', including group discourse and empirical measures of individual singing ability. Phase I evidence informed a survey instrument, (phase II), administered to a wider cross-section of the public (neither pre-designated as singers or 'non-singers,'). This survey sought to identify experiences, self-concepts and perceptions about singing for possible wider applicability of Phase I findings.

An autobiographical, socially-located and developmental view of singing emerged. Festinger's (1957) 'cognitive dissonance' theory elucidated non-singers' homeostatic attributional accommodations. Dweck's (1998) 'self-theories of intelligence' (entity/incremental) helped illuminate understanding of their non-singing experience. Weiner's (1986) 'attributional' theory provided causal and consequential insight into their management of their non-singing reality and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) 'ecological theory of human development' contextualized the socio-cultural nature of the non-singing phenomenon.

Case-study data revealed common childhood experiential profiles which influenced participants' identity formation as 'non-singers', with ensuing lifelong personal and socially-detrimental effects. A shared profile also emerged in participant-evolved strategies to ameliorate these negative effects. Nevertheless, participants' empirically-assessed singing behaviour exceeded their own self-predicted ratings. Survey data confirmed case-study findings. Other key survey findings were: non-singing is a common, well-established phenomenon in Newfoundland; teachers/schools appeared as foremost attributional factors in non-singing designations; instructional intervention/ facilitation for non-singing was lacking or absent; and a majority of participants favoured a 'developmental' view of 'non-singers', but projected a 'fixed' view in others. Findings recommend further research regarding teachers' preparation/support in developmental singing pedagogy, singing education practice, child/adult 'non-singers' and societal views on 'NS'.