

BMPF7010:

**A Mixed Methods, Interpretative
Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) of Music
Performance Anxiety (MPA):
Three accounts from singers in popular music**

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Glossary

Acceptance and Commitment Coaching (ACC) - A coaching model based on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), a psychotherapeutic model that aims to support people to develop psychological flexibility - or the ability to take action on their cherished values in the presence of discomfort. (Eifert and Forsyth, 2005).

Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) - This is also known as "Tapping" (Church, 2018). EFT draws on exposure therapy and acupressure to help individuals down regulate their hippocampus' sense of danger in response to a specific stimulus. In a typical practice, the individual will recount a difficult experience, and pause at each point of retelling that causes activation. They will tap on several pre-defined acupressure points for each activation. (Church, 2018)

Group Experiential Themes (GETs) - A number of PETs tables are brought together for synthesis; this leads to the development of themes that related to the entire group - GETs. These are usually represented in a table and presented in the finding's section of a study's report (Smith et al, 2022)

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) - a phenomenological, idiographic approach to qualitative research that is both metrology and method; it is underpinned by hermeneutics (Smith et al., 2022)

Kenny Music Performance Anxiety Index, Revised (K-MPAI-R) - A measure developed by Dianna Kenny to assess the presence of problematic MPA. (Kenny, 2023)

Music Performance Anxiety (MPA) - Is a level of anxiety experienced in the face of performance, which can have affective, cognitive, physical and behavioural symptoms (Osborne, 2016; Kenny 2016)

Neurotypes - a term used to indicate that people's brains have different kinds of neurological function from person to person (Chaunie, 2021)

Personal Experiential Themes (PETs) - PETs are developed towards the end of the process of analysing an interview transcript, when the larger themes that govern the interviewee's experience have begun to emerge. These themes are typically displayed in a table. (Smith et al, 2022)

Project Proposal

Project title

Perspectives on Music Performance Anxiety from young singers (aged 16-18) in popular music

Introduction

THE CONTEXT

Music Performance Anxiety (MPA) is the distressful anticipation of an upcoming musical performance, and is thought to be strongly related to performance anxiety and social anxiety (Clark et al., 2020; Eifert and Forsyth, 2005). Within healthy ranges, performance anxiety can increase performance in athletes, but in excess it can cause somatic and psychological symptoms that hinder singing (Wiedemann et al., 2021; Juncos et al., 2017). Recent studies about MPA in singers have placed a practical focus on the role of the singing teacher in delivering interventions using Acceptance and Commitment Coaching (ACC), a model of coaching based on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) aimed to support people in developing the psychological flexibility to act on their personal values in the presence of discomfort (Mahony et al, 2022; Shaw et al., 2021; Harris, 2019). However, the singer's perception and explication of their own experiences is given little focus in the literature. Singers working within popular music genres have not been addressed specifically in the literature to date, and student vocalists are underrepresented, particularly adolescents (Clark et al, 2020: Paul et al., 2024). When adolescents and popular styles do appear in a sample, it is often a broad sample, and data based on age and genre is rarely extrapolated from the other groups for interpretation (as per Dobos et al., 2018). Student singers in popular

styles in the age group of 16-18 (the typical age range for the final years of study in secondary education in the UK) have not been addressed specifically in the literature to date. As a singing teacher with experience of working intensively with this age group and genre in a vocational college setting and privately, I have seen the effects of problematic MPA in the students similar to those cited in the literature; performances that give a poor indication of the singer's true ability, and some students ceasing music-making altogether (Gómez-López and Sánchez-Cabrero, 2023; Papageorgi et al., 2008). In some cases, students enrolled in vocational secondary level education fail to complete their courses with problematic MPA as a contributing factor.

JUSTIFICATION

My role as a singing teacher is to help students achieve their personal goals as singers. While students at tertiary level are thought to be at slightly higher risk for MPA than professional musicians, there is little data on students undergoing vocational training at secondary level, despite the dangers of low achievement at this crucial time in education and its links to poor employment prospects (Mahony et al, 2022; López-López et al., 2019). It has been theorised that popular genres, with their greater allowances for individual interpretation, lead to less risk for problematic MPA than classical music (Gómez-López and Sánchez-Cabrero, 2023), but currently only one study exists that addresses a popular style directly (James and Shipley, 2022). For practitioners of singing employing evidence-based approaches, the literature for MPA does not yet specifically address the variables of adolescent singers of popular music, or include sufficient qualitative research to provide a holistic picture of MPA. Empirical data alone may provide only a partial picture, and so qualitative research with the proposed group could serve to challenge, corroborate, or simply deepen the scope of the existing literature (Eatough and Smith, 2017). In fields like healthcare, the need for the stakeholders perspectives in an intervention is thought to be increasingly important to support practitioners in their decision-making (Higgins et al., 2022). Such a goal is also consistent with Evidence-Based Voice Practice (EBVP), a model that includes empirical literature, the experience of the teacher and the perspectives of the student to be cornerstones of a healthy voice practitioner's work (Ragan, 2018). Qualitative research that

engages with adolescents singing in popular styles is therefore crucial for the formation of evidence-based voice practice among singing teachers.

INTENDED IMPACT

The intended impact of this project is several fold:

- To add complimentary qualitative data to the existing body of literature about MPA more generally, and problematic MPA in singers more specifically. This will contribute to a more holistic body of literature and potentially identify where further research may be warranted.
- To understand how young participants between 16-18 years old in popular genres, may conceptualise MPA, interpret it, experience it and its impact as singers. This may illuminate how their concept of the problem informs how they seek support (if at all).
- To obtain quantitative data that will situate qualitative findings alongside the existing research on MPA.
- To support participants experiencing debilitating MPA with a workshop beyond the study, potentially positively improving their ability to perform.

Methodology and Design

PROJECT OUTLINE AND INTENTIONS

This study intends to deepening my understanding of as a MPA as singing teacher, and to address a gap in existing research - namely the perspectives and experiences of singers studying popular music at secondary level and experiencing problematic MPA. The study aims to administer the Kenny Music Performance Anxiety Inventory (KMPAI) questionnaire to test for problematic MPA, alongside a demographic questionnaire, and to conduct semi-structured interviews and focus groups (Kenny, 2023). Data collection will take place in person or online, audio-recorded and

transcribed, and analysed using qualitative methods. The findings of the interviews will be compared with the body of literature about MPA, and a literature review will provide a sense of the data's relationship to existing research (Grant and Booth, 2009; Boote and Beile, 2005). The findings of the research will be shared through a written report and a presentation. The research will be supervised by an academic supervisor at the Voice Study Centre.

METHODOLOGY

The research problem presented is inherently pluralistic; the aim to "fill a gap" in a body of research that is largely quantitative is a deductive stance that aligns with a post-positivist outlook, while centring individual experiences (via interviews yielding qualitative data) is a constructionist outlook. To address both concerns, a mixed methods embedded design utilising the framework of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is proposed for this study. IPA centres individual experiences of phenomena, typically utilising interviews to gather rich data, and taking a hermeneutic view of the subjective process of analysis that follows (Smith et al., 2022). Within this study IPA will be framed by methods and processes that have a slightly more aggregative focus, like questionnaires and a literature review - this is intended to situate the findings alongside the existing literature to analysis its contribution and relevance to both the literature, and to practice.

PROPOSED METHODS

To address the aims of the study with due regard to ethical practice, the following methods are proposed:

- **Literature review:** Two reviews are intended in this study: an overview style review that aims to provide a summary of a body of literature, and a narrative review, which is more purposive in nature, will be employed in this study (Grant and Booth, 2009). MPA itself, and methods like interviews will be subject to an overview approach to ensure sound understanding and practice; narrative review methods will anchor and contextualise the data. Ensuring rigour and

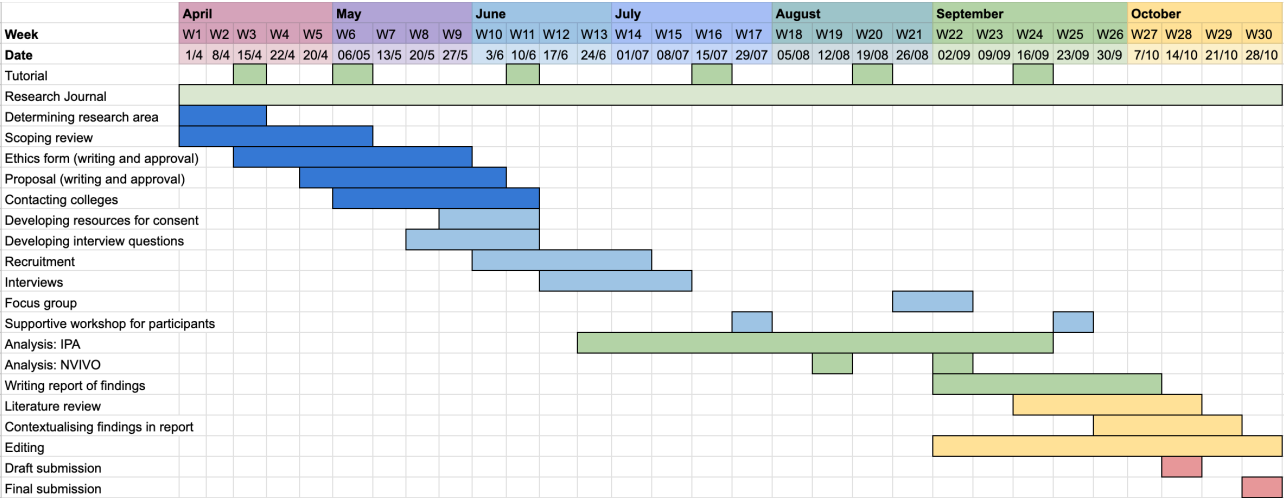
transparency is often a challenge for these styles of review; therefore the review processes will be carefully documented.

- **Reflective journal:** This will provide space for reflective practice to identify biases, subjective responses to the data, and to think through different aspects of the research to ensure transparency of process and the credibility of the results (Berg and Lune, 2017; Creswell and Creswell, 2018).
- **Questionnaires:** These will take the form of the Kenny Music Performance Anxiety Inventory (KMPAI) to screen participants for problematic MPA (Kenny, 2023), and questionnaires constructed by the researcher to gather qualitative, or demographic data.
- **Semi-structured Interviews:** Rich, multi-sensory qualitative data can emerge from a person's speech and behaviour in semi-structured interview, the primary method of data collection within IPA (Smith et al., 2022; Coen, Mannion and Morrison, 2018; Robson and McCartan, 2016). The privacy of an interview can also allow the interviewee to discuss matters usually avoided in a social setting (Gill et al., 2008). This may take place over Zoom or in person. They will be recorded and transcribed using a service like otter.ai, creating the basis for a textual analysis (Berg and Lune, 2017).
- **Focus groups:** These may be used to gather data about normative meanings and perceptions in the social context of a group; they can generate research questions and test the findings and theories of other studies (Gill et al., 2008).
- **Analysis-** Transcriptions will be analysed inductively through a pre-defined set of steps recommended for IPA by Smith et al. (2022). This will involve stages like reading and re-reading, exploratory comments, and then gradual formation of overarching categories (Delve and Limpaecher, 2023). Data will also be analysed using NVIVO software.

EXPECTED TIMELINE

The research process will commence in the first week of April 2024, and carry on until November 2024. See Image 1 below for proposed timelines for each phase.

Image 1: Project schedule



ETHICS AND INSIDER RESEARCH

The positionality of a practitioner-researcher carries biases that are important to acknowledge for transparency and credibility (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The report will include detail about researcher positionality, as it permeates every aspect of the work and therefore needs clarification. As a singing teacher who does not have a history of problematic MPA, my viewpoint can be conceptualised on a continuum of being both insider and outsider to the subject (Breen, 2007). As an insider, my experience of supporting people with problematic MPA engaged in vocational studies at secondary level, and prior research into MPA may give me increased sensitivity to the subject, facilitating exploration in interview, and practical knowledge of ethical codes and safeguarding procedures that may support participant wellbeing. However, it also brings bias about

MPA which may impact the design of the study and analysis of the findings, as I may take certain aspects of participant experience for granted (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2018). I am also an outsider: I have never personally struggled with problematic MPA, therefore external to the lived experiences of the participants. This outsider aspect of my position may support me in identifying unique features of each participant's account as distinct from my own, and the framework of IPA may reinforce this with its decidedly idiographic orientation. The ethical need for critical reflection on these positions throughout the research will be met through a journal, maintained to facilitate reflexivity and reflection (Dey, 1993).

Participant wellbeing and safety is an important consideration. Participants between ages of 16-18 who experience problematic MPA constitute a vulnerable group, and safeguarding their wellbeing is a core consideration. To enhance safety, a participating college (with whom the author works regularly) will be invited to facilitate the study, supporting recruitment and consent process for students and their parents or guardians. They will be invited to host the research onsite to give participants recourse to the safeguarding structures of the college should the need arise. Further to this, I hold an up-to-date enhanced DBS check and am trained in safeguarding, with experiences of safeguarding practices in schools, colleges and organisations attended by people under 18. The consent process will provide detailed information about the purposes and procedures of the study, so participants are informed before consenting. The potential to evoke distress in participants in interview must be acknowledged. Participants will be reminded of their right to withdraw and refuse questions at any point, and a debrief to check in and assess their needs will be carried out at the end of each interview. They will be provided with information that signposts them to mental health services, and accessible resources about MPA for them to explore. Beyond the study, participants will be offered a workshop about MPA to support them and thank them for their contribution. The safety of their data is crucial: this study involves highly sensitive information including names, ages, socio-economic background, gender identities, neurotypes, and health conditions. In addition to a moral and legal imperative to keep their data confidential (Data Protection Act, 2018), participants have rights with respect to their information. The proposed structure for protecting their data is outlined in Appendix 1, Section J (p.69).

PERSONAL LEARNING OUTCOMES

- To contribute to the literature about MPA in singers by providing qualitative data that may compliment existing research and reveal further questions for inquiry.
- To potentially adopt the participant's language around MPA when exploring this in the context of singing teaching.
- To expand my experience as a qualitative researcher. Having completed one qualitative study early in this Master's programme, this will allow me to apply the learning from my previous work, and expand on it.
- To explore new methods of data collection and analysis. Interviews, focus groups, and the use of software like NVIVO will be new to me in this project.

Project report

A Mixed Methods, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) of Music

Performance anxiety (MPA):

Three accounts from singers in popular music

Introduction

Music Performance Anxiety (MPA) is a multi-faceted phenomenon, in which performers experience persistent apprehension and anxiety related to musical performance (Clark et al., 2020; Kenny, 2016b). It can manifest in a broad range of cognitive, affective, behavioural and physical symptoms, such as lapses in memory, changes of mood, avoidance of performance and shallow breathing respectively (Juncos and de Paiva e Pona, 2017; Osborne, 2016). It is thought to have a variety of causes, and can be focal - specific to certain contexts (like an audition, or a solo) - or linked to broader experiences of anxiety for the individual (Kenny, 2016). Performance anxiety itself is not inherently maladaptive; at appropriate levels it has been shown to increase athletic performance, but above a certain range it can greatly inhibit performances, and result in avoidant behaviour that precludes performing (Wiedemann et al., 2021; Juncos et al., 2017). For practitioners striving toward an Evidence Based Voice Practice (EBVP), input from three areas of knowledge are thought to be required: The practitioner's experience and expertise, the student's goals and perspectives, and scientific literature about singing and the voice (Ragan, 2018). From this standpoint, recent literature that engages all three of these facets is of particular interest to voice practitioners. Several recent studies investigate the efficacy of interventions for MPA, administered by singing teachers using Acceptance and Commitment Coaching (ACC) to support students in reaching their performance goals (Shaw et al., 2020; Mahony et al., 2022; Paul et al, 2024). These studies show promising results, achieving outcomes comparable to a clinical practitioner administering Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), in six sessions . In the context of these studies, the Kenny Music Performance Anxiety Inventory is generally used to

measure the severity of the anxiety experienced by participants (Kenny, 2016a) This measure speaks to the phenomenology of the singer's experience in the formation of its questions, but with a quantitative output that is essential for building clear answers for questions like the prevalence of MPA in certain populations, or the efficacy of various interventions. While this transmuting of lived experience into numerical data is useful, it can mean that the richness and homogeneity of the experiences of singers with MPA is rendered invisible. As a singing teacher, working in mostly popular genres, I regularly encounter MPA in my practice. While the literature helps orient me to evidence-based tools for supporting them, I do not see the richness of their experience reflected in the literature, and nor is the genre they study represented in the literature. In the literature review for this study, a sample of 82 studies relating to MPA was retrieved; just six of these studies included popular music styles. This could can obliquely lead to voice practitioners - such as singing teachers - being unable to find literature that clearly speaks to the contexts and parameters their students may be navigating. This study intends to contribute a formal, qualitative investigation to the research base, that gives voice to individual experiences of MPA, particularly among singers in popular styles.

Context and Literature review

MUSIC PERFORMANCE ANXIETY (MPA)

It has been suggested that between 24%- 70% of musicians experience MPA (Clements-Cortéz et al., 2024). While MPA is not intrinsically harmful, and can improve performance, at severe levels it can evolve into a clinical problem with a broad range of symptoms (McGrath, 2012; Juncos and de Paiva e Pona, 2017; Wiedemann et al., 2021). Symptoms can appear through observable behaviour, changes in mood, physical, and cognitive symptoms (Kenny, 2011). For anxious singers this could be embodied by performance avoidance, harsh self-judgement, increased heart rate and shallow breathing, and anxious rumination (Kenny, 2011; Clements-Cortéz et al., 2024). It is theorised that one's capacity to cope with emotional arousal is related to the severity of the MPA

they experience - that Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD) is thought to strongly predict MPA may be indicative of this (McGrath, 2012; Wiedemann et al., 2021). Women, and performers under 30 are also more susceptible to problematic levels of MPA (Kenny et al., 2012). MPA affects singers across levels of ability, skill and professional standing, in any genre, and at any time in their lifespan (Papageorgi et al., 2008; McGrath, 2012, Wiedemann et al., 2021). The intensity and discomfort of the experience has been known to end careers in music prematurely (Papageorgi et al., 2008; Gómez-López and Sánchez-Cabrero, 2023). Mahony et al., (2022) class treatment for MPA into three categories - medication, psychotherapy-based interventions, and alternative interventions utilising relaxation, or physical health as a therapeutic anchor. As stated in the introduction, the recent research into teacher-led interventions for singers is promising, and largely quantitative (with the exception of Paul et al., 2024). Quantitative literature alone however cannot give a holistic picture of MPA, and while many practitioners experience MPA themselves, or witness it in the lives of their students, if these experiences are never expressed in the context of a formal study, it is more difficult for other researchers to consider them formally. Within healthcare, qualitative studies are increasingly seen as a vital counterpart to quantitative explorations of interventions, adding the dimension of the patient's experience to support healthcare workers in their decision making (Higgins et al, 2022). The extent to which this qualitative voice is present in the literature about MPA - and who this voice can be said to represent - is the subject of this study's literature review.

LITERATURE REVIEWS WITHIN THIS STUDY

Two reviews were carried out for the purposes of this study at different stages of the research (See the first tab of Appendix 3, p.69). At the outset of this study, a scoping review was carried out to form a picture of the literature base for MPA and inform the study's aims. The University of Wales Trinity St. David's Library catalogue was searched using the keyword "Music performance anxiety" (This library catalogue draws on 118 databases; see Appendix 4, p.69). 1,097 results were returned, the first 100 results were reviewed. 69 results were studies, 25 were books, 5 were

articles, and 1 was a video. The studies retrieved were examined by reading titles, abstracts and sometimes scanning their methodology sections (where necessary) in order to seek out investigations that used qualitative methods; they were not subject to further review at the time. 10 results sought out qualitative information; 7 studies utilised interviews as a primary method (see Table 1), and 3 contained a free text, or qualitative style question alongside more quantitatively focused questionnaires. Only one of the studies using interviews as a primary focus examines singers as a sample; none of the studies explicitly address popular music (with 3 making no record of genre), or adolescent singers. Treating this as an indicative sample of the research base, it was initially proposed that the study would seek a sample of young singers between the ages of 16-18, studying in a vocational college to sing professionally in popular styles to fill a perceived gap in the literature. While it was not ultimately possible to work with the intended age group due to unsuccessful recruitment, the qualitative focus of the research was retained, as was the intention to seek out singers in performing popular styles.

Table 1: Studies using interview as a primary method of enquiry retrieved during scoping review

Source	Topic	Interviewees	Genre
Clements-Cortez et al, 2024	Music therapy as an intervention for MPA	University music education majors	Jazz
McAfee and Comeau, 2023	Coping strategies used for MPA	Music teachers	Classical implied
Moura and Serra, 2021	Constructs of MPA in education	Music teachers	Not observed
Paese and Egermann, 2024	Meditation as an intervention for MPA	Teachers, therapists, meditation practitioners	N/A
Sieger, 2017	MPA in instrumental music studies	Music teachers	Not observed
Guyen, 2017	MPA and test anxiety	Music teachers (pianists)	Classical
Stothert, 2012	MPA in choral singers	Choral singers	Not observed

The second literature review (a narrative review) had a specific function: to ground the research findings in the context of the body of literature about MPA (See the second tab of Appendix 3,

p.69). It commenced using the same database and keywords as in the initial scoping review, but noting all records relevant to MPA. This was to assist later contextualising of the present study's findings more readily. The process of searching and documenting this cross-section of the literature took place during the early stages of the study and recruitment, but the studies themselves were not read until after the findings had been analysed, so as not to unduly influence the analysis of the data gathered in the present study. As previously, 100 results were noted: 82 results relevant to MPA, of which four were qualitative and a further four were mixed methods. The criteria for selection was qualitative studies utilising interviews as a primary method to investigate MPA, which led to the identification of the four studies listed in Table 2. Each of these records, in addition to studies identified during the initial scoping review, was read after the analysis of this study's dataset was complete. Kirsner et al., (2023) was excluded from review at this stage, as the interviews focused on the early domestic relationships of singers to their parents, rather than on MPA itself.

Table 2: Additional studies using interview as a primary method of enquiry retrieved during narrative review

Source	Topic	Interviewees	Genre
Paul et al., 2024	Acceptance and Commitment Coaching as an intervention for adolescents with MPA	Adolescent singers	N/O
Barros et al., 2024	Context, perception and strategies of MPA in Portuguese higher education	Teachers and students	Classical (some reference to Jazz)
Kirsner et al., 2023	The role of early parenting experiences and cognitive schema in MPA (Study 2)	Participants for Study two were drawn from a sample of Musicians comprised of 9% singers; it is unclear if any singers were interviewed	Classical
Irie et al., 2023	Coping strategies and symptoms of MPA during different time periods relevant to performance	Undergraduate and post-graduate students (various instruments including singing)	Only Classical pianists invited to interview

Research Methodology and design

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

The proposed study centres subjective perspectives of individual singers about their experience of MPA, while producing points of connection to a body of literature that largely employs more objective methods. These research aims entail potentially incommensurable assumptions about the nature of reality (ontology), the way knowledge is acquired or identified (epistemology), and the values that inform the research (axiology); thus the study draws on two different paradigms. Post-positivism posits a single, knowable reality; achieving understanding through observation and measurement by an objective researcher - although it recognises the degree to which reality can be known, or objectivity achieved, is questionable (Creswell and Creswell, 2018; Trochim, 2024). Post-positivist research is commonly deductive, using pre-determined ideas about the subject, a hypothesis, a strict structure of inquiry and objective forms of measurement laid out in advance of study (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Its precursor, positivism, was heavily associated with quantitative studies, and while Post-positivism is pluralistic in its approach, this pluralism is in the service of a singular truth (Coen et al, 2018). Constructivism recognises multiple truths, where knowledge is individual, subjective and can be understood through rich description of individual experiences (Chilisa and Kawulich, 2012). Findings often arise through the emergence of patterns and themes from the data, through the researcher's analysis. While researchers strive for objectivity to produce unbiased, credible results, it is recognised that this is not entirely possible, as they construct findings via their own consciousness, which cannot be fully objective (Eatough and Smith 2017; Creswell and Creswell, 2018). For constructionist, preserving the complexity and individuality of participant accounts is a concern during analysis, so the process of reduction is undertaken carefully. Some of the tensions between these paradigms particular to this study are found in Table 3 (p20). In an attempt to reconcile these two philosophical camps, this study employs a mixed methods embedded design underpinned by Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), where qualitative methods and analysis (interviews) are framed and situated by

quantitative measures and deductive methods (KMPAI-A, demographic questionnaires and literature review) (See Image 2 below for study design).

Image 2: Mixed Methods Embedded Design

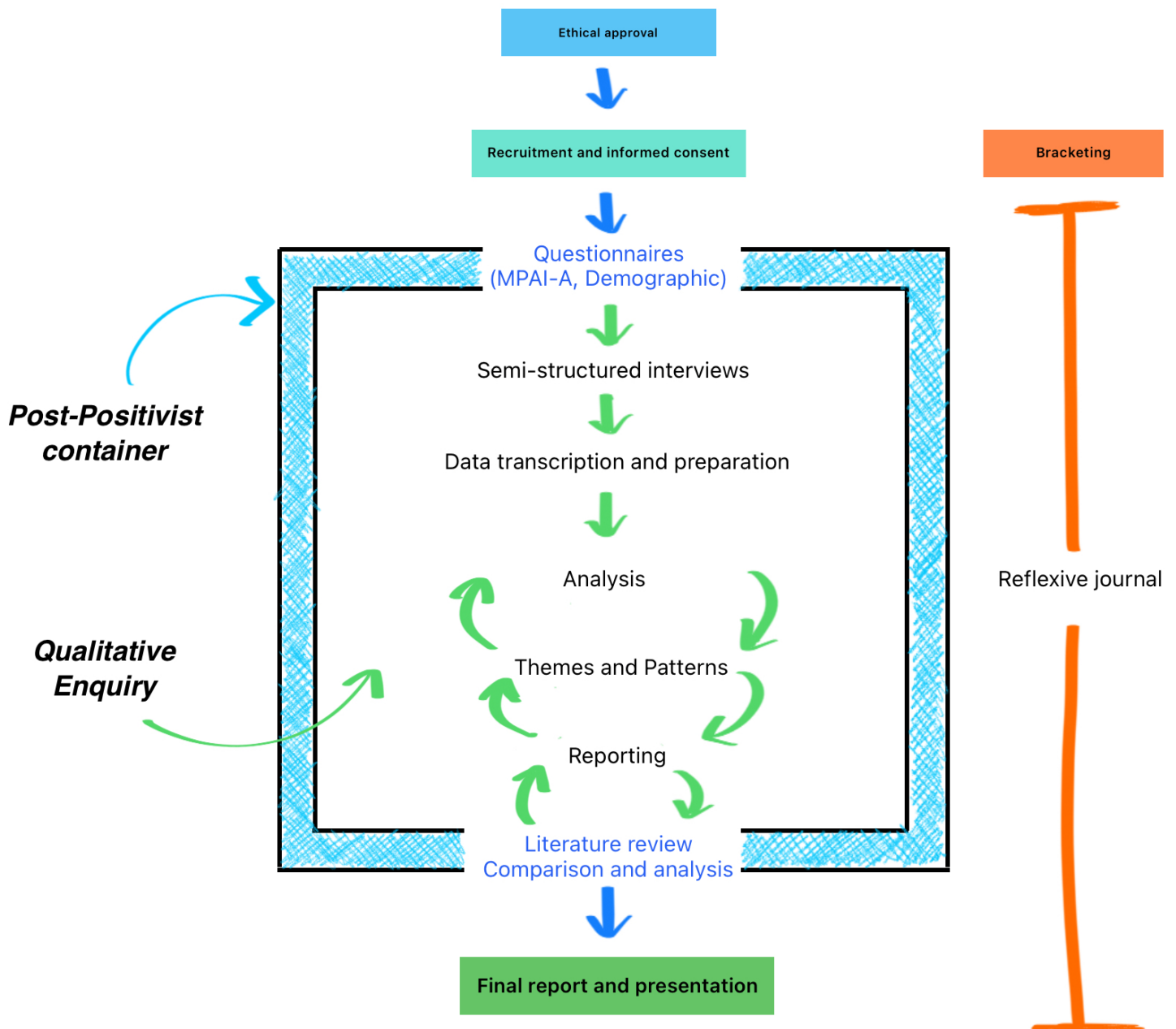


Table 3: *Paradigmatic contractions in the present study*

POST-POSITIVIST	CONSTRUCTIVISM
Deductive thinking: The study is at least partially defined and shaped by pre-existing literature, employing measures like the KMPAI-A to align with the research base	Inductive thinking: The experiences of participants cannot be known in advance, and therefore lines of enquiry cannot be truly known in advance
Desire to be as objective as possible	Inevitable subjectivity
Numerical	Verbal
Uniformity of data to support aggregation	Human perspective and experiences and their particulars - faithfulness to rich detail
Researcher is outside of the participant's experience	Researcher is involved in the world of singing and so may have some anecdotal knowledge or awareness of participant's experience
Values general, singular truths about a phenomenon	Values human experiences of a phenomenon
Values the aggregation of the results of different studies	Values the richness of human experience
Results of questionnaires allow for alignment with empirical data	Findings of interviews may not represent other people

IPA is the methodological basis for this work - phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography are at its core (Hefferon and Gil-Rodriguez, 2011; Smith and Nizza, 2022). Phenomenology seeks to reveal the essence of a phenomenon via the individual - the person's sense-making, and what it reveals about the nature of an event or experience is the core concern (Eatough and Smith, 2017). Hermeneutics originates from the practice of analysing texts to derive meaning (Crowther et al. 2017). This is pertinent to the analysis of interviews, or reflexive practices undertaken by the researcher, where a dialogic relationship exists with text, moving from the meaning of a specific sentence, to the overarching themes of a paragraph iteratively, through the process of reading, re-reading and reflecting (Smith 2007; Von Zweck et al, 2008). This cyclical relationship between the "parts" and the "whole" of a text is thought to facilitate deep analysis, first theorised by Heidegger, and developed for practical application by Gadamer (Winter, 2020). Smith suggests that for IPA, a double hermeneutic process is in place, as a phenomenon is first interpreted by the participant in dialogue with their experiences and consciousness, and subsequently interpreted by the researcher, in dialogue with transcripts from an interview (Smith, 2011). Idiography centres the

experiences of the individual, arriving at broader conclusions through a focus on the humanity of the participant, and particulars unique to them (Eatough and Smith, 2017). IPA is associated with interviews and qualitative analysis as methods (Delve and Limpaecher, 2023). This provides the flexibility for the pluralistic goals of this study; an attempt to contribute to overall understanding of the existing literature about MPA through the lens of the proposed sample. However, its subjectivity, and the heterogeneity of structure and methods used to conduct IPA more broadly can limit its generalisability (Delve and Limpaecher, 2023). To manage this subjectivity, researchers work to suspend their own meaning and interpretations in a reflexive process called bracketing (Coen et al., 2018). IPA also tends to involve small sample sizes (given its idiographic view), and the process of analysis can be time consuming (Delve and Limpaecher, 2023).

In order to better link the inevitably subjective findings of the IPA methodology to the more broadly objective body of literature about MPA, more objective or aggregative methods will also be used. During the recruitment process, The Kenny Music Performance Anxiety Inventory (KMPAI) will support the selection of participants to invite to interview, and to improve replicability. Demographic questionnaires will give clear indications of the scope of the study and how it relates to the existing research, and a literature review will be used to tie the findings more broadly to the existing literature. These methods, explained more thoroughly in the next section, are intended to root the subjective findings of IPA within a more positivist framework to increase their relevance, replicability, and usefulness to researchers, academics and practitioners alike, without compromising its idiographic focus.

Methods:

It was initially proposed that this study would include focus groups for data collection, and NVIVO for data analysis. Time constraints resulting from an unsuccessful initial period of recruitment greatly diminished the capacity to gather additional data through focus groups, or to utilise

additional methods of analysis, in this case NVIVO, so these methods were removed from the study.

The Kenny Music Performance Anxiety Inventory, Revised (KMPAI-R):

This 40 item inventory is designed to assess MPA as understood through the lens of Barlow's tripartite theory of anxiety; questions therefore address biological vulnerability, general psychological and specific psychological as they interact with stimuli, adjusted to speak to the context of performance (Gómez-López and Sánchez-Cabrero, 2023; Kenny, 2023). Statements about performance related anxiety are proposed, and answered with a seven-point Likert scale (0= strongly agree, 6= strong agree; sometimes this appears in reverse) (Philippe et al., 2021). More severe MPA is indicated by higher scores (Philippe et al., 2021; Kenny 2023). A preliminary study to ascertain a clinical cut-off score to indicate the presence of MPA using this measure showed a range of scores as potential indicators between 84.5 - 118.5 (Kenny, 2016b). This measure has been used in over 400 studies, validated in 22 languages, and has a good internal consistency ($\alpha = .94$) (Kenny, 2009, 2023). See Appendix 5 (p.72) to view the questionnaire and scoring sheet. This measure was administered online through Microsoft forms.

Demographic Questionnaire

A demographic questionnaire was created for this study to support the selection of participants to invite to interview, and to provide clarity about the populations and contexts the findings may speak to. It comprises 27 questions (some of which are branched and only answered if relevant) encompassing personal details, musical background, nationality, ethnicity and religion, Gender and Sex, Socio-economic background, Neurotypes and Health. Few questions were mandatory in an effort to combat nonresponse bias (a dropout in respondent rates when a participant cannot, or does not wish to answer a question) (SurveyMonkey, 2024). Question structure and language about Nationality, Ethnicity and Religion, and Socio-economic background were drawn from guidance from the Office for National Statistics and harmonised standards for questions used in

UK censuses (Office for National Statistics, no date; Government Analysis function, 2011, 2023; Gov.uk, 2023). Very little information about socio-economic background, race, ethnicity and nationality, neurotype, disability, and genders have appeared in studies about MPA reviewed for this work, this obscures who the literature can be said to represent, and may not go far enough to show the impact of systematic disadvantage and inequity perpetuated when research is carried out through the lens of western patriarchy and white supremacy. While this study may not be generalisable, it still intends to feed into practices that support the recognition and articulation of these factors where possible and relevant. See Appendix 6 (p.75) to view the demographic questionnaire.

Research journal

A research journal was used to provide space for practical organisation and to facilitate clear reporting on the process, but also for reflection and reflexive practice. Text highlighted in blue indicates reflexive or reflective passages, while yellow indicates notes for consideration in the practical development of the study. See Appendix 7 (p.75) to view the research journal.

Semi-structured interview

Semi-structured interviews are a frequent feature of IPA, as the presence of pre-determined questions adds structure, while offering flexibility in wording and order of those questions to allow for the natural flow of the interview, and facilitate depth of detail from the participant (Smith et al., 2022). Questions for interview must be carefully worded to ground the interview in the research concerns while being open enough to allow the participant to share the recollections and thoughts most pertinent to their experience (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2018). An Interview guide containing suggested questions was created in advance of interview and discussed with an academic supervisor. In order to maintain presence and attentiveness in the interview, the research guide was memorised (as much as possible) in advance (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2018) See Table 4 below for an extract of research questions in development. In practice, an additional question was asked

at the end of each interview - "What would you like other people to know about your experience with performing?". See Appendix 8 for the development of the questions, and Appendix 9 for the full interview guide, both p.75.

Table 4: Extract from research Question development process

Draft 1		
Research Questions	Interview Questions	Possible prompts
<i>Introductory</i>	Can you describe what you really like about singing.	What did/do you experience/feel/notice? What was important/significant about that for you?
What is this participant's experience of MPA?	Can you tell me in as much detail as possible, what you experience when you have a performance coming up? What does this mean for you as a performer?	What happens in your body/ your mind? Can you give me an example? How do you remember it? You mentioned_____, Could you tell me more about that? How does this impact the performance/you personally?
Why does the participant think MPA happens?	Do you have a sense of why this might happen? What do you think causes these kinds of experiences? Is there anything that aggravates this experience? (Links to next) Is there anything that alleviates it? (Links to next)	Can you give me some examples?

Two interviews were carried out in person. In-person interviews were recorded in the researcher's teaching studio, using a Thomann SC-110 condenser microphone for the participant, and an SM57 for the researcher. These were connected to a Focusrite 4i4, and recorded into Logic Pro X on the researcher's laptop. Recordings were exported as mp3s, and uploaded to otter.ai for transcription. Five interviews took place over Zoom. Meetings were recorded to cloud where zoom stored video, audio and produced an audio transcript. In the case of otter.ai and Zoom, all files (audio, video and

transcript) were deleted from online storage after downloading. Videos recorded over zoom were immediately deleted and not viewed as participant permissions only extended to audio recording. Upon download, a redacted version of each transcript was created, and the original transcripts and audio were labelled and stored in encrypted, password protected folders. Each interview was reflected on after it took place, this took the form of reflective notes in my research journal. In two cases, this self-reflective de-brief took place a day or more after the interview itself.

PARTICIPANTS

Initially, the study invited singers between the ages of 16-18 singing in popular styles to share their experiences of MPA, but a two-month period of recruitment was unsuccessful. Thereafter adults were also invited to participate. All enquirers were over 18. Recruitment was carried out online through posts on Instagram, LinkedIn, and in various community groups frequented by performers in the researcher's community, as well as through direct contact with choral directors, festival organisers, promoters and other singing teachers known to the researcher. In some cases there was some snowballing utilised, whereby interested parties suggested further contacts. This led to 13 formal enquiries. Enquirers were sent a video presentation with detailed information about the aims and procedures of the study (See Appendix 10, p.75), and a link to a digital consent form if they wished to participate (Appendix 11, p.75). 9 participants gave formal consent and completed all questionnaires. All participants agreed to interview, 8 interviews were conducted. **Table 5 (p.26)** shows information for the 9 consenting participants. Ages of participants ranged between 19-53 (Mean: 35), with 2-42 years of experience singing (Mean: 17). There were a range of nationalities, levels of experience, and ages, health conditions, and some variations in neurotype (with 3 participants gave answers that would indicate that this term was not well understood). All participants were cis-gendered women. Most linked their race and ethnicity to their country of residence, and one participant was Black/African/(Participants were de-briefed at the end of each interview, and offered a supportive document with crisis mental health resources in their country of residence, and additional information about MPA to mitigate the mental health risks of a potentially difficult discussion (See Appendix 13, p.76). Participants will be invited to attend a supportive workshop about MPA after the study is completed to thank them for their contribution. Due to time

constraints, only three interviews could be fully analysed for this study. They were with the three participants with the highest scores on the KMPAI-R measure (P3, P8, and P9). One participant was actively receiving lessons from the researcher at the time, one participant was a former student, one was a friend, and one was known to the researcher through participation in a community online.

Table 5: Participant information.

	Age	KMPAI Score	Years Singing	Experience	Genres	Country of residence	Nationality	Ethnicity	Religion	Gender
P1	26	104	22	Formal study, professional	Pop, folk, country, rock	UK	British/Welsh	White, British/Welsh	No Religion	Woman
P2	36	100	6 plus	Formal study, not professional	Pop, soul, gospel	Ireland	Irish	White, Irish	No Religion	Woman
P3	40	148	30	Formal study, not professional	Pop, folk, rock	USA	"USA"	White	Buddhist	Woman
P4	34	146	8	Formal study, not professional	Pop	Norway	Norwegian	White, Norwegian	No Religion	Woman
P5	48	114	42	Formal study, professional	Pop, R,n'B, Soul, Rock, Jazz	UK	American	White	No Religion	Woman
P6	53	108	20	No formal study, professional "yes, very occasionally"	Pop, Soul, folk, gospel	Ireland	Irish	White/Irish	Non-practicing catholic	Woman
P7	34	154	2	Formal study, not professional	Pop, Gospel	Ireland	Irish	White/Irish	Agnostic	Woman
P8	33	174	10 plus	Formal study, professional	R'n'B, Soul, Jazz	USA	American	Black/African	Christian	Woman
P9	19	197	13	Formal study, not professional	Pop, folk	England	British	White, English/ Welsh/Scottish/ Northern Irish/ British	No Religion	Woman

THE RESEARCHER

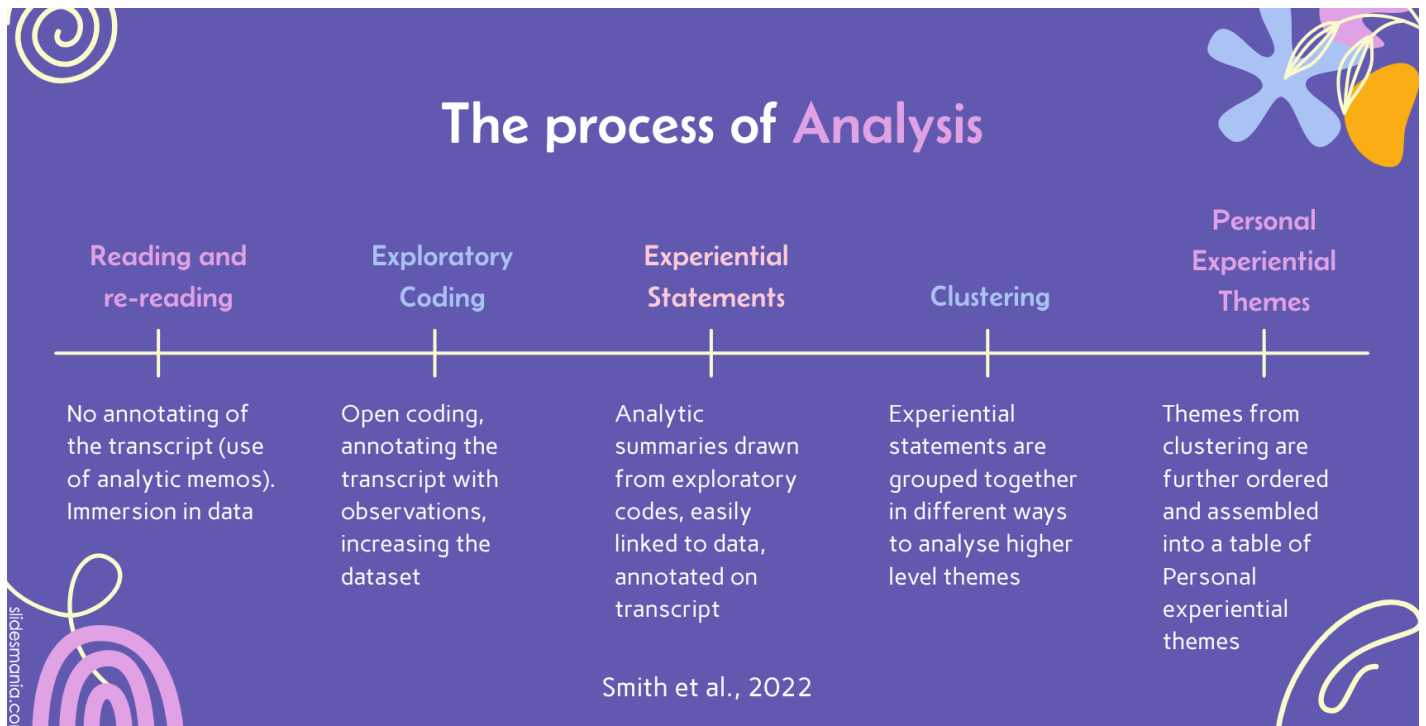
Smith et al. (2022) categorises the interviewer themselves as a research instrument within the IPA framework. Within research for the efficacy of ACT in MPA, Juncos notes the importance of assessing the competence of the therapist, or their adherence to the manuals for treatment, or protocols under investigation (Juncos, 2014; Mowrey, 2015). In this way, the author of the present

study should be transparent and disclose information about experience and positionally to facilitate the reader's assessment of the information, and meaningful comparison and aggregation with other studies. The researcher is a singing teacher who has been teaching privately, and in both further education and secondary schools in the UK for six years. She holds an MA in Music and English from Trinity College Dublin, a Level 4 CET in further education. She has worked as a performer - primarily as a singer - for 13 years. She has also worked as a choral director to a multi-cultural gospel choir and a classical choir, as a composer and musical director for several theatrical productions, an Artistic Mentor at the Garage's Unsigned programme in Norwich funded by the national lottery, and as an adjudicator. She is currently completing a Masters in voice pedagogy with the Voice Study Centre, accredited by the University of Wales, Trinity St. David, where she has studied Belting, psychoacoustics in singing, and carried out practical work-based research into Accent Method (O'Reilly, 2023c) and theoretical frameworks of the combination of Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) with Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) for people with MPA (O'Reilly, 2023a). her philosophical approach is heavily informed by this modality, and complimented by her personal reading and lifelong interest in psychology.

ANALYSIS

Analysis of the qualitative data in this research follows the protocols laid out by Smith et al. (2022) (See image 3, p.28). Each transcript individually undergoes 5 steps of analysis, to facilitate immersion in the participant's world and maintain an idiographic focus. Clear documentation of this process is visible in the transcripts in Appendix 16 (p.85), and illustrates the hermeneutic process inherent in this kind of analysis, where new horizons of understanding are reached by moving between the different analytical layers of each step iteratively. The individual analysis culminates in a table of Personal Experiential Themes (PETs) for each interview, illustrated with samples from the data. These interview are then synthesised into a table Group Experiential Themes (GETs) (Smith et al., 2022). Three cases have been analysed and synthesised for this study, representing those with the highest scores on the KMPAI-R.

Image 3: The analysis of an individual transcript



ETHICS

This study was granted approval by the ethics board of the University of Wales, Trinity St. David, in association with the Voice Study Centre, Ltd., as part of a Masters qualification in professional voice practice in the field of vocal pedagogy. See Appendix 1 (p.69) for the approved Ethics form.

Findings

RESULTS

Following the process outlined in Smith et al. (2022), These findings are synthesis of three separate interviews; each interview first analysed individually, then synthesised, with key themes and categories displayed in a table of “Group Experiential Themes” (GETs) (See Table 6, p.30).

GETs are primarily created to display convergence in participant's accounts, but simultaneously it can point to the heterogeneity of the experience of a single phenomenon (Smith et al., 2022).

Within IPA, participant's accounts are taken at face value, and analysed for deep meaning particularly through what their language might reveal. The results of each individual account - their Personal Experiential Tables (PETs) - are beyond the scope of this discussion, but can be viewed in Appendix 15 (p.85). Throughout the PETs, the GETs, and the analysis below, page numbers will be used to refer the reader to the original transcript for that participant's interview. These transcripts are available in Appendix 16 (p.85). It is common in IPA to select specific sections of the GETs to discuss in a report to avoid a reduction of the nuances in a participant's account for the sake of the larger whole (Smith et al., 2022). While all of the themes and sub-themes in the GETs table below are held in common by these three participants, thorough discussion of each theme may be limited to a single participant per sub theme. The full GETs table, with a summarised commentary and quotations can be found in Appendix 14 (p.76). While there are some references to external literature in the findings below, greater reference will be made to literature in the discussion section.

Table 5: Group Experiential Themes (abbreviated)

Group Experiential Themes (Abbreviated)	
A. TO PERFORM IS TO HAVE AN ACTIVE WORKING RELATIONSHIP TO EXTREME ANXIETY	
They all feel its effects and experience its impact on their performances.	
Anxiety also colours their interactions with performance environment or conditions	
Others do not understand their experience - some don't even consider it	
Their experience of anxiety is not static; all of them are developing and have developed over time	
B. THEY HAVE DEEP, ESTABLISHED RELATIONSHIPS WITH SINGING AND THEIR IDENTITY IS INTERMINGLED WITH IT	
Singing is a part of the self, and provides opportunity for positive interactions with themselves	
This connecting of singing to the self can have ramifications for their experiences of performance with extreme anxiety	
Self-image as a singer functions as a value, to which they orient themselves despite challenges and difficulties	
Participants see a universality to their experiences, and advocate for others	
C. THEY ARE ALL PRO-ACTIVE IN SUPPORTING THEMSELVES	
Skill development is seen as an important facet of developing towards performance	
Preparation is an important, practical manifestation of self-support, but may also be layered with the ulterior motive of experiential avoidance	
Positive interactions with others - like encouragement and peer support - can enable performance	
No participant has found a way to guarantee anxiety will not return	

Table 6: Participant profiles

	Alicia	Grace*	Joanna
KMPAI-R Score (Scores above a range 84 -116 are problematic)	148/240	197/240	174/240
Age	40	19	33
Years singing	30	13	10
Formal study of singing (Lessons, training)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Genres	Pop, Folk, Rock	Pop, Folk	R'n'B, Soul, Jazz
Do they perform professionally	No	No	Yes

Current Residence	USA	UK	USA
Nationality/Ethnicity/ Religion	USA/White/Buddhist	British/White/No Religion	American/Black/African/ Caribbean/Christian
Gender/Sex	Woman/Female	Woman/Female	Woman/Female
Socio-economic [^] background	-	-	-
Neurotype	"Anxiety"	Autism, ADHD	None
Health conditions	"I don't think so"	Yes (no details given)	No

* *This participant is a student of the researcher's.*

[^]*Data from this measure has been excluded; see limitations section.*

ANALYSIS

A. TO PERFORM IS TO HAVE AN ACTIVE WORKING RELATIONSHIP TO EXTREME ANXIETY

They all feel its effects and experience its impact on their performances.

All participants recounted a broad range and severity of symptoms, which negatively impacts their experience of performing both physically and mentally. The symptoms common to all three accounts were an increase in heart rate and negative thinking.

"My heart rate will definitely increase" (Joanna, p.19)

"I'm thinking about how anxious I am, rather than being in the music." (Grace, p.26)

The term "definitely" here implies that Joanna experiences this symptom regularly when anxious. Grace points to a cognitive focus "I'm thinking", where her attention is fixed by an uncomfortable affective experience - "*anxious*"- while "*how*" indicates the severity of the anxiety. "*I am*" could indicate a sense of her whole being as engulfed by this affective state. The second clause of her statement presents a contrast - a state of flow and presence - "*being*" - and immersion in something she enjoys "*in the music*".

Disconnection with the audience in the face of anxiety also occurs for them when highly anxious

"I think a lot of the time is usually spent like staring at, you know, lyrics or something." (Alicia, p.34)

"I have to be more limited, not as confident to engaging with the audience, speaking with the audience, even looking out into the audience. You know. Uh it's more of a "I'm just going to look right here. Stay right here the whole time. Just get through the song" (Joanna, p.32)

When Alicia recalls performing, the majority of the experience ("*a lot of the time*") is directed away from the audience. Although the book ends of the sentence "*I think...or something*" serve to downplay a sense of feeling trapped in this situation, "*staring*" implies a sense of being fixed or frozen in one action, and also evokes the sense of her as prey, where the audience is the predator. The end of the sentence - "*you know, lyrics or something*" would seem to suggest that it's not important to her what her attention is oriented to, as long as it isn't the audience.

For these singers describing the impacts performing with extreme anxiety, these symptoms and impacts could be read in terms of the shift in the focus and presence of the performers away from the audience and the music, and into themselves; into introspection and worry. As many of these symptoms are co-occurring with each other (and with many other symptoms described in their interviews, not listed here), we can infer the overwhelming nature of the task of performing, as the performer's attention attempting to field many things at once. Taken together, these symptoms seem to imply the participant's knowledge of what the body, mind, or performer *should* be doing - experiencing a calm heart rate, being present with the music and audience, giving a perfect performance. In this way, as they experience the symptoms, so too do they unknowingly experience themselves as an external observer of the self, measuring their anxious experience against the behaviours of an ideal self.

Anxiety also colours their interactions with performance environment or conditions

A sense of discomfort with the environment of the performance can occur because of anxiety. After a performance she is not confident with, Joanna wants to be left alone.

"If you're not feeling confident about the performance you just had. You're going to be more in your head uh, and not wanting to receive compliments. Cause you're like "it wasn't good, so it doesn't deserve any compliments." Umm. And just not really engaging with others in conversation, or anything like that, You kind of want to stay to yourself." (Joanna, p.33)

For an artist working in popular genres, socialising after an event is an important moment for relationship building with audiences and networking with colleagues, which can have important implications for the artist's ongoing socio-economic wellbeing. In the face of a performance impacted by MPA, Joanna's response to the environment is different - perhaps exemplified most powerfully in her rejection of bids for positive interaction from others (*"not wanting to receive compliments...not really engaging with others in conversation, or anything like that"*), and a harsh devaluing of her own work - *"it wasn't good, so it doesn't deserve any compliments"*. This rejection of her own performance has a punitive air; a rigidity that may indicate that a set of strict internal rules about how a performance should go have been breached. If she identifies strongly with these rules, this may explain her rejection of potential positive, beneficial interactions with others - their positive opinion of her is a threat to her identification with the rules. This may be an expression of the high-ego investment common in severe MPA (Kenny, 2016b).

Others do not understand their experience - some don't even consider it

All participants talk about interactions with people who do not consider, or are simply not aware of, the level of anxiety they experience when they perform.

For Grace, other attendees at open mics can set out to offer support and advice, but their drive to “fix” her anxiety, rather than to understand her, causes them to project their experiences onto hers

“Well, some people think that my experiences and their experiences of pre- performance nerves are the same, and they are absolutely not. I know this, because the people who've said that are middle aged men, who are not coming out of a vanishment from life, and who have grown up jobs, and do grown up things, and have been going to open mics and playing in some capacity for years, um and who know people, and who don't have to be intimidated by the environment they are entering. ehm. So our experiences of nerves are absolutely not the same. But those kinds of people will say things like, “Oh, we all get nervous “or “think positive thoughts” or um [pause] other equally useful things.” (Grace, p.45)

This passage highlights how well intentioned gestures of support can serve to negatively highlight her differences and difficulties. The phrase “middle aged men” in this context evokes injustice: power and privilege ascribed to one party in the interaction, but not to the other - their experiences are “absolutely not” the same in her mind. Her description of her perception of their lives serves to tell her story through a contrast she feels starkly. These men *“have..do..have been...know...don't have to be..”* - the implication that she does not *“have”*, cannot *“do”*, has not *“been”* does not *“know”*, and has to *“be”*. It highlights the negative impact of a recent mental health crisis - *“a vanishment from life”*, from which she is still emerging (*“coming out of”*). This passage conveys a sense of infantilisation, conveyed by her repetition of the term *“grown up”*, and responsibilities like *“work”*. *“Work”* here and *“grown up”* may also serve to highlight these states and actions as hallmarks of functionality and societal fruition.

For Alicia, a lack of understanding can mean spontaneous demands for proof of her skill if she reveals that she sings

"Like if one of my friend goes. "Oh, I didn't know you sing, Can you sing for me right now?" So it's kind of like, not something that would like come out of the blue or unplanned, or like, like, if your boss has like a surprise meeting with you, and you have no idea what it's about, right?" (Alicia p.19-20)

The simile of the boss and the employee demonstrates a disempowering power dynamic; one where the boss (the source of economic power) can treat the employee (who is vulnerable) with little consideration for their time, their mental wellbeing, and experience few consequences. In this context, Alicia is vulnerable and anxious about what might come next. This casting of her "friend" in the role of a careless boss implies a deep tension with either a specific friend, a friendship group, or perhaps her own expectation that others will take possession of her agency in some way, as a result of singing. If this simile is a reflection of her friendships - and to some extent, the context of her singing if she performs publicly - it implies a chaotic, imbalanced social environment, in which her artistic self cannot emerge safely.

Their experience of anxiety is not static; all of them are developing and have developed over time

Alicia, Grace and Joanna describe how their anxiety has shifted over time - MPA is not a static experience, but an evolving one.

As a child, perfection was demanded of Alicia before she would be allowed to perform.

"So I think a lot of my youth, It was always like, if you don't do it perfectly, Then you can't sing the song." p.15

As an adult, Alicia is actively setting perfectionism aside. This development has reduced her fear and decreased her self judgement (discussed in more detail on page p.48)

Joanna had symptoms of anxiety as a young singer that she does not experience anymore.

"I don't normally feel shaky, like that hasn't happened since I was a kid." (Joanna, p.18)

The boundaries of Grace's anxiety seem to be shifting slowly over time, to a point where she may begin to entertain spontaneous performances.

"I don't spontaneously say yes to doing things, ummm, apart from potentially open mics now at this point, but that wasn't always the case." (Grace, p.27)

This interpretation of anxiety as not static or permanently fixed trends towards positive outcomes for the singers - less fear, less self judgement, a reduction of symptoms, and the extension of one's performance abilities. When we take into account the higher rate of anxiety in younger performers, it could be useful for more of them to be aware that their connection to their anxiety can develop, and can be refined over time.

B. THEY HAVE DEEP, ESTABLISHED RELATIONSHIPS WITH SINGING AND THEIR IDENTITY IS INTERMINGLED WITH IT

Singing is a part of the self, and provides opportunity for positive interactions with themselves

All of the participants express a depth of connection to their voices

"What I love about singing is it's an internal instrument. It's an instrument that we carry around 24/7, 365 or 66. [laughs] And yeah, it's, it's, it's very unique in that way. Umm and you know, of course, there's there's pros and cons to everything, But what I love is just that fact. It's inside of me, and I can use it at any time. Uh, I also love...as I have grown into an appreciation for my own

singing, I love the freedom that comes with singing. Umm there's just an...emotional connection with it, and it has a way of balancing the other emotions that may not be as...positive, uh at that moment. So I love. I love that about singing."

(Joanna, pp.2-3)

Her connection to singing has an intimacy and closeness owing its internal, physical elements ("An internal instrument...it's inside of me") and affective elements ("emotional connection...it has a way of balancing the other emotions"). The connection has evolved over time - indicated by the present perfect tense here: "as I have grown into an appreciation for my own singing...". The voice is equally active in the present, always present and responsive to her: "*we carry it around 24/7, 365... I can use it at any time...*". The voice presents a sense of possibility and awe - she states twice that she loves that the voice is internal, and the second time she strongly affirms this "*But what I love is just that fact. It's inside of me, and I can use it at any time*" - the final words hinting towards constant joyful possibility. The voice is special; characterised as "*very unique*", perhaps by implied contrast with other instruments that have an existence outside of their performer, which may lack the intimacy and immediacy of music-making singing can offer.

Here, singing appears to be both of the self, and other. As she describes the connection, the voice is often referred to as "it", bestowing an independence of sorts - "it's very unique...*an emotional connection with it...it has a way of...*". Equally, other language indicates a fusion with it, particularly in the act of singing; the use of possessive language ("*my own singing*") and the integrated sense of self presented here: "*I love the freedom the comes with singing*". The power of singing can bridge fractured pieces of the self by providing access to clarity about one's own emotions, and support healing, demonstrated through words like "connection", "balancing", and the revelation of multiple emotions she may be experiencing ("*the other emotions that may not be as...positive*"). This relationship is also characterised by mutual support. She speaks of carrying the instrument; carrying another is an intimate act of support; an expression of affection and closeness, recalling a parent and child. There is a sense of maturing into the relationship and of deepening appreciation - "*I have grown into an appreciation*". In return, the voice offers her access to flow states "*I love the*

freedom that comes with singing", and grounding in times of emotional dysregulation *"It has a way of balancing the other emotions"*. Further to this, the voice is a source of responsive acceptance; it will respond when she calls *"I can use it at anytime"*. Through singing, Joanna experiences different facets of herself - she is the ultimate recipient of her own care, of her own responsiveness, of her own appreciation.

Alicia's account also attests to some of the dimensions experienced by Joanna - the longevity of the connection and its depth, but her expression of that connection is tempered by other factors

"I guess I've been singing for such a long time. And It's just like a second nature kind of thing."
(Alicia, p.4)

Alicia uses the adjective *"long"* and the determiner *"such"* to emphasise the longevity of her relationship to singing. The simile *"second nature"* signifies that singing is like a fundamental, natural state that she can access easily; it also indicates that it is linked to identity, as it is in her *"nature"* to sing. This in turn implies that singing is something she must do regularly in her life in order to feel fully expressed. The words *"just"* and *"kind of thing"* framing this deep connection may imply a diminution of the significance of singing; this would be consistent with aspects of her interview that diverge from Joanna and Grace's accounts, whereby Alicia does not conceive of singing as an instrument. She received little encouragement as a singer, and was treated as lesser status within her family and by others because of her *"instrumentlessness"* (see pages 21, 37 in Alicia's Personal Experiential Table, Appendix 15, p.85). In her youth, performance opportunities - and thus, chances to experience her own *"second nature"* publicly and proudly - were tied to expectations of perfection, which her account seems to indicate she could never reach as a soloist. This potential downplaying of the importance of singing to her carries a quiet, but devastating self-erasure; a part of her she learned to downplay through educational experiences and within her family. This *"second nature"*, fundamental part of her did not meet the perfectionistic standards of her environment, and therefore should remain hidden.

Yet Alicia persists! Singing is still a source of novelty and self-discovery for her, as it is for Grace and Joanna.

"It's also interesting to like, learn new ways of doing it [singing], or like learning new songs, or being able to shift or move yourself into different directions." (Alicia, p.4)

Singing continues to reward Alicia; it is *"interesting"*, it offers a sense of self-efficacy, reflected in the verbs: *"learn...doing...learning...being able...shift or move"*, and tying these actions back to her own agency through the word *"yourself"*. Singing offers novelty (*"new ways...new songs"*) and variety (*"different directions"*). *"Different directions"* infers that singing is a source of choice and opportunities for exploration, a place where she can choose, and experience control, and enjoy *"doing"*, in a way previously denied to her. Although Alicia's life-long relationship to singing has been touched by difficulty, her curiosity is still firmly engaged - it is still *"interesting"* to her, and the verbs in this sentence are an indicator of active, regular engagement with singing. This is a positive counterpoint to the disempowerment alluded to above, and highlights that for each singer in this study, their connection to singing binds them to juxtaposing experiences: extreme anxiety *and* positive self-expression and connection. In a sense, singing and the drive to perform places them on the path to hurt (harsh judgement by others for Alicia), but also to healing (the joy and empowerment of her ongoing exploration with her voice). This is discussed further on p.39.

This connecting of singing to the self can have ramifications for their experiences of performance with extreme anxiety

While singing bestows access to positive experiences of the self, extreme anxiety can induce the opposite. The impact of extreme anxiety on participants in performance environments can lead to a sense of self-expression denied. Joanna recalls her first public performance at church, which was impacted by intense nervousness with physical and cognitive symptoms.

"It felt like I was really just kind of stepping out in my, into my own. You know? my own artistry, Even at 12 it was just this is me, you know It's a song that I liked. That kinda went well with the style I liked. And uh..yeah, it was. It just felt different for me, and so I was very, very nervous! [laughs] and...the.. at that time I was, I was very shaky. Voice was shaky, hands were shaky, sweating, dry mouth again. Um. And yeah, just all the, all the, the reactions from my body. and I feel like I did not do as well as I would like to have done. Um. I got through the performance. Uh... Yeah, I didn't feel like it was my best. It was just all shaky and all ball of nerves. I feel like my true voice didn't really even come out. So, I was definitely a little disappointed and sad about that. Umm. And yeah, I just, I always think about that moment." (Joanna, p.27)

For 12-year-old Joanna, ownership over the performance is indicated by possessive language - *"my own"*. *"Artistry"* suggests intentional preparation, aligned to a creative vision. This is also suggested by the selection of repertoire relative to her preferred style *"It's a song that I liked. That kinda went well with the style I liked"*. The rhythm and pacing of the clauses in the first three sentences convey clarity and confidence of purpose, with each of her performance priorities laid out in turn *"my own...my own artistry...this is me...it's a song that I liked...the style that I liked"*. Her telling of this has the air of having been told before; perhaps indicative of a situation dissected many times in her own mind, or perhaps an indicator of clear intention and deep investment of her younger self in her vision of what this performance would serve to do. This performance seems to have been intended as a declaration of an independent self - *"this is me"* a simple but clear statement in which she - *"me"* - is born through the act of performing and presenting her vision. *"Stepping out"* is a strong, solitary action, indicating that this event was potentially akin to a rite of passage in her mind, stepping out from behind her mother's skirts; out of the home, and into public view as an independent person. However, the sense that this performance would be *"different"* made her *"very, very nervous"*, the repetition of *"very"* indicating the scale of her anxiety. Physical symptoms included being *"shaky"* (repeated three times). This was observable in her body and in her sound *"voice was shaky, hands were shaky"*, in addition to *"sweating"* and *"dry mouth"*. An unexpected multiplicity of reactions was overwhelming, as she suddenly had to manage *"all the reactions from my body"* - the word *"all"* conveying a consuming nature of this unexpected task,

and perhaps the severity of the symptoms. For a singer, a “shaky” voice, trembling with anxiety, can interrupt the flow of sound, disrupting the audience’s experience of the melody and lyrics. “Shaky” hands can create a visual accompaniment to this sound, especially if the singer is required to hold the microphone. Altogether, it can mean that the anxiety becomes the central element of the performance for both audience and performer; Joanna recalls her performance as “*just all shaky and all ball of nerves*”. “*Just*” implies that her shaking and her nervousness eclipsed other aspects of the performance, with “all” repeated twice, implying the scale of the visibility of anxiety. This precluded Joanna from the expression of self - her musical artistry - to her community. In contrast with the statements of intention that began this passage, the language turns to a sense of failure “*I did not...I didn’t...my true voice didn’t even really come out...it was just all shaky...*”.

Joanna’s language here could be seen to be striving toward different objectives, a harsh evaluation by her younger self, a downplaying of difficult emotions, and an intention to be compassionate to herself in hindsight. Elements of harsh evaluation appear in “*it was just all shaky*”, using the word “*just*” to diminish the worth of her performance because of the unexpected “*shaky*” quality that appeared. “*My true voice didn’t really even come out*” speaks to a deep disappointment - the adverb “*even*” implies surprise that the voice she was expecting - “*my true voice*” - simply wasn’t there. This is a sudden, unexpected change in performance conditions that must have come as an enormous shock. This sentence could also be read as dismissive; a disowning of the young self, by a part of her that could not process the dissonance between the performance she gave, and the self-image she was driving for. This passage is also full of potential euphemisms: “*I did not do as well as I would like to have done...I didn’t feel like it was my best*”. This may be the language of an adult who does not wish to talk about or engage with difficult feelings about performing, or an attempt to contain and downplay the emotional weight of that moment to herself. When she touches on the emotions she felt at the time she also employs euphemism - “*I was definitely a little disappointed and sad about that*”. “*Definitely*”, a strong word that seems to be a precursor to a strong emotional reaction, is undermined by “*a little*”, downplaying her feelings. The disappointment and sadness she felt also seems to be highlighted by the contrast between the rhythm and energy of the initial sentences, loaded with purpose, to a chain of euphemisms that

culminate in a sense of defeat. Another explanation is possible: This could be the calm, hindsight of an adult, who can acknowledge that perhaps they did give a worthy performance which was only diminished by comparison with the envisioned *"true voice"* or *"my best"* she had intended to share. The comparative element is evoked by *"as well as"* and *"like it was"*, and may indicate a desire to hold both her younger self's upset, and her older self's compassion in balance, acknowledging the presence of both. Either way, this moment has had a lasting impact on her; *"I always think about that moment"*, where *"always"* may indicate that the shock of being denied access to her authentic self as a singer was traumatic enough to cause ongoing rumination 21 years later.

Grace shares that being present in her performances gives her a sense of alignment and purpose within herself, but anxiety can cause dissociation, thereby severing that connection

"If I am too anxious or not familiar with the place, or just there's too much going on, then I vanish out of my body." (Grace, p.51)

"I feel like I'm doing more what I want to be doing. The times I stay in my body." (Grace, p.52)

Grace cites anxiety, a lack of familiarity with the venue and, potentially, over stimulation from the environment as triggers for dissociation when performing. *"I vanish"*, however, betrays a more uncanny experience; it is not simply disconnection from the body, but a complete disappearance of the self. For Grace, her allegiance to the self-as-performing-singer routinely places her in situations where anxiety and overwhelm can cause a rupture in her very existence. Her description also indicates a belief that her consciousness does belong in her body, by describing the body as the point of departure for the self (*"I vanish out of my body"*), and this is consistent with the second quote. When she is in her body during performance, she feels more actively aligned to her purpose *"I'm doing more what I want to be doing"*, underpinned by the repetition of the verb *"doing"* and the close connection to *"what I want"*. It is implied that performance is still not ideal, but it is *"more"* like what she wants. The fact that she qualifies this greater proximity to her purpose with *"the times I stay in my body"* seems to indicate that her disassociation occurs regularly. Ironically, her

commitment to her development as a performer, or to her performing-self, can also cause the self to “*vanish*”.

Although Alicia does not currently perform, she sings naturally in low-demand settings, like the grocery store; yet anxiety means that some of her friends don't even know she sings. She hides this aspect of herself to avoid having to perform.

“I'll like, sing in the grocery store or (laughs) you know, and like these random public places.”
(Alicia, pp.8-9)

“I have a lot of friends that don't even know that I sing because I don't go out and perform.” (Alicia, p.9)

With reference to Alicia's singing as “*second nature*” to her, perhaps singing in public is accessible to her when the demands and expectations to sing are lowest - there is little demand for excellence when singing “*in the grocery store*”, or “*random public places*” - from others, or from her. This may imply that the setting and environment of performance is a major contributor to her anxiety, or potentially the sense of exposure when sharing this deep aspect of the self with others. It is curious that her ability to “*go out and perform*” is perhaps the only way her friends would discover she sings. Is this a devaluing of singing that is not done in a performance setting? An indication that singing lower than performing standard has no function or utility, and therefore that her singing isn't real in some way? It may speak to a certain tension between the term “*friend*” and the sense that there social circles may not be safe people to entrust with her “*second nature*” self, the singer. If the latter, her reluctance to share this information could be an indicator of either low-self value (where she assumes her passions are not important to others), or social relationships that are not built on safety, respect, or sufficient sensitivity for Alicia to believe her disclosure would be received in the way she might wish. Her anxiety about public performance causes her to engage in experiential avoidance of both performances and social vulnerability, thereby in some way hiding or denying an important part of herself.

Self-image as a singer functions as a value, to which they orient themselves despite challenges and difficulties

All three performers had negative experiences of performing and nervousness in their younger years, and yet they continue to develop their voices and work towards performing. It could be theorised that this striving may be connected to a wish to see their own preferred self-image - that of a singer who performs - made manifest, and that this goal functions in the same manner as a deeply held value. In frameworks like ACT, it is theorised that individuals can become “fused” with unpleasant cognitions, situational stimuli, and anxiety, unable to access the critical distance needed to engage in activities or actions that move them towards outcomes that they value highly (Eifert and Forsyth, 2005). Supporting the individual to orient themselves to those values is an important aspect of how this therapeutic model works (Harris, 2019). It seems that for the participants of this study, this self-as-singer identity may function as a valued outcome, therefore they constantly take actions that orient them back to performing and singing in spite of regular aversive experiences.

As a member of a choir at her school, Alicia's early experiences of singing were authoritarian, effacing of individuality, and focused solely on perfection and accuracy.

“Everyone was focused on everything being like perfect, or exactly where it needed to be, and less about actually working with someone as a person.” (Alicia, p.14)

“It was kind of, you know. You, you sing in the chorus. Do whatever, your place, whatever, and that's it. So there really wasn't time to adventure outside of that.” (Alicia, p.13)

Her recollections paint a picture of rigid parameters and following orders, as indicated by the imperative verbs and short clauses “*You sing in the chorus. Do whatever, your place, whatever,*

and that's it". The chorus here is a place not for belonging and music-making, but of knowing "*your place*" and keeping to its boundaries. The chorus is also not a place for personhood or nurturing "*less about actually working with someone as a person*" because "*there really wasn't time to adventure outside of*" the goals and concerns set by the authority figure. As she describes what was missing from her experience, so too does she articulate what she values - "*working with someone as a person*" and "*time to adventure*". She wants to be seen and valued, and to explore. Alicia still went on to do performances with some regularity

"I used to do open mic before Covid with a friend of mine." (Alicia, p.8)

While her use of the past tense here affirms that she is not currently performing, she was still pursuing skill development at the time of interview. As we will see in more detail on p.48, even with the potential aversive conditioning that these formative experiences provide, Alicia still continues to develop her skills as a singer and as a performer.

Joanna's early experiences of singing were marked by extreme anxiety - as exemplified on pp. 40-42. She went on to study performance at secondary and tertiary level (Joanna, p.65), and is a professional singer, singing teacher, and mentor (Joanna, p.81). Something in the way Joanna experiences or understands the significance of singing is an orienting force, even in the face of distress.

Being mistake free is a shared concern among these participants

"In front of a crowd, I think it's that fear of judgement, or fear of you're not doing something right, or...you're gonna look stupid." (Alicia, p.7)

"There is that, um hope that no one has really noticed it. But it's also that... you know thought in the back of your mind, [laughs] like somebody probably noticed that. And you just have to live with that, with people knowing about that mistake." (Joanna, pp.13-14)

Both Alicia and Joanna cite the audience, and their capacity to bear witness as key components in the experience of making a mistake when performing. Alicia openly associates mistakes with *"judgement"* of others, of negative evaluation *"you're not doing something right...you're gonna look stupid"*. It is important to display to others that you know what is correct (*"you're not doing something right"*) and their perception of her is the focus of the mistake (*"you're gonna look stupid"*), rather her internal sense of what matters to her as a singer. Joanna's mind ruminates on whether or not people noticed her mistake, arguing different sides and possibilities (*"hope that no-one has really noticed it...somebody probably noticed that"*). Ultimately, the mistake carries a weight long after the performance ends - *"And you just have to live with that, with people knowing about that mistake"*. The use of the idiom *"you just have to live with that"* is probably not intended to mean that each mistake will be remembered for her entire lifetime, it does convey a sense that she has done something that she should feel guilty about, something inherently bad. There is also the idea that the witnesses to the mistake will never forget - *"people knowing that you made that mistake"*. *"Knowing"* implies continued knowledge, and the word *"you"* here can feel accusatory. This implies that a sense of deep shame accompanies mistakes. Mistakes appear to be incongruent with the image these singers have of the true value of their voices, which can lead to a rejection of any performance containing mistakes as a write-off, a misrepresentation. While logically these singers may know mistakes are a natural occurrence for all performers, at all levels, this does not mean that their self-image is sufficiently secure to integrate errors into their identity as a singer. While mistakes represent a constant threat, still these singers continue to pursue working with their instruments.

C. THEY ARE ALL PRO-ACTIVE IN SUPPORTING THEMSELVES

Skill development is seen as an important facet of developing towards performance

The participants all talk about engaging in skill development for both singing and performing - as discrete skillsets. The time placed into skill development shows that they are not simply passive in the face of their anxiety; rather they are highly active in their efforts to develop. This has led to an increase in their abilities and more resilient, positive orientations towards performances. In the context of this study, the *process of developing skills* as a singer and performer is probably one of the most positively valenced experiential aspects of being a singer.

"That took years and years and years and years, years of lessons [laughs] to get, to gain the understanding to have the skills and tools to, you know, work, Work it on yourself, with yourself. apart from training, and and lessons and things like that. [...] So getting to a place where I felt confident in the talent to where I know if if my body does react, or if I do get nervous. I know that it's still good. It just may not have been presented good at that time, but I know it is good."

(Joanna, pp.40-41)

Joanna repeats "years" five times to convey the magnitude of work and commitment she has poured into formal study of her craft. She cites "lessons" twice and "trainings" as sources for this education. The "understanding", the "skills and tools" were consciously chased "to get, to gain" what she needed to work professionally and support her voice independently (*"work on it yourself, with yourself"*), and still she engages in *"training, and and lessons and things like that"*. The journey of her learning about her singing has never stopped. In describing the outcomes this education she still alludes to the importance of the process of learning - *"getting to a place"*. She alludes to a previously-held concern that nervousness meant that her voice wasn't good by sharing her current view: *"I know if if my body does react, or if I do get nervous, I know that it's still good."* This work gave her more confidence and more resilience to mistakes *"I felt confident in the talent...it just may not have been presented good at that time, but I know it is good"*. Now, Joanna's sense of her skill is secure.

Although she is not performing, Alicia is taking singing lessons with a supportive teacher

"I think the voice lessons were really helpful, too, and to just...and positive and encouraging. So I don't feel like it's always a negative? Whenever I'm doing things like that [Singing in front of someone]? And not focusing on having to be perfect or having to be a certain way all the time, and more focusing on learning it in general. And I think that's probably been the most helpful, because then I don't feel so terrified anymore that I'm doing something wrong, or that it has to be perfect. And that's kind of decreased the self judgment for myself." (Alicia, p. 26 -27)

The transformative impact of her new teacher's approach is evident: *"I don't feel like it's always a negative? Whenever I'm doing things like that [singing in front of someone]?"* "Always" implies that previously, Alicia believed that every performance (no matter the setting) was in some way "negative". While this belief isn't gone, it is changing *"I don't feel like it's always a negative"* - this statement in particular has a tentative quality of testing out what the ramifications of speaking positively about her singing might be. Where previous environments focused on perfection, her lessons are *"more focusing on learning it in general"*. "More" seems to indicate that there is still a standard to be reached, but the learning itself is more highly prized. This shift could be conceptualised as a movement from a fixed mindset (characterised by the idea that ability is fixed and cannot be changed) to a growth mindset (where learning itself is the goal, and ability can be developed) (Dweck, 2006). The impact is profound: an observable reduction in fear - *"I don't feel so terrified anymore"* - directly linked to the shift away from accuracy and perfection, and a decrease in self-judgement.

During a three year mental health crisis compounded by autistic burnout and selective mutism (Grace, pp.31-34), Grace's ability to care for herself or engage in social interaction was severely compromised

Researcher: Did you have access to singing at that time?

Grace: For some of it in specific contexts, namely, [laugh] with a singing teacher in a little room in a church, to varying degrees. It didn't always happen, but sometimes I sang. (Grace, p.33)

"Apart from in those singing lessons, I didn't speak to anyone for about... [pause] three years? Umm which made singing harder." (Grace, p.34)

"The experience of doing it at all was more exposing than it would have been if I had been talking in day to day life anyway. Because it was almost more surprising to me that I was making noises." (Grace, p.34)

Singing lessons were Grace's sole space for speech and singing for a period of three years. She did not have the ability to practice or maintain her voice outside of lessons during this time, as she was not talking "in day to day life" at the at point, and any vocalisations at all during this time were "surprising" and felt to her like "making noises". This contact point, while ultimately positive, was not always comfortable - "all the more exposing" because of the context of selective mutism. "All the more" implies that she expected some vulnerability and discomfort in a lesson, but this specific moment in her life compounded the difficulty of maintaining her instrument. Given the importance of predicability for her elsewhere in her interview, the unpredictability of whether she would sing or not ("sometimes I sang") and the "surprising" nature of vocalising at all may have added an additional unfamiliar sensory element that induced anxiety. Nevertheless, "I sang" - It could be inferred that some aspect of the environment or the student-teacher partnership provided her with sufficient safety to speak, and to explore her singing. Grace succeeded in keeping the connection to her instrument alive and still attends lessons. Her dedication to skill development meant that she had an outlet and some access to singing despite adversity, and her ongoing lessons are a source of support when preparing for regular live performances at open mics (Grace, p.42).

Performing itself is a separate skillset. Alicia sees developing comfort with performing as a matter of creating a sufficient ratio of positive to negative experiences.

"I'm in a networking group. And so one of the things they do is every, every group you have to do like a spiel for like 30 seconds, and then, like once a month, you have to present. And sometimes they have you hold the meeting, And so I've been doing a lot more being comfortable speaking? And being comfortable on the spot? and...so I've been practicing to help with that." (Alicia, p.26)

Alicia has come to see comfort with public speaking as a way of practicing performance skills - *"I've been doing a lot more being comfortable speaking?"* - the verbs "doing" and the "being" in close proximity here indicate that she is now experiencing a significant improvement in her ability to feel comfortable - *"a lot more"* comfortable than before. *"Doing"* here may also indicate that she feels more control over public speaking than before - it is not *"trying"* to be comfortable, but achieving that comfort through *"doing"* it. This is also extended to *"being on the spot"*. The state of *"being on the spot"* is Alicia's primary source of anxiety (Alicia, p.18), where she is subject to the unexpected demands of others without an adequate opportunity to prepare. In this area too she is now *"a lot more"* comfortable. In this passage, she outlines the tasks that are regular features of the networking meetings - *"a spiel for 30 seconds...once a month, you have to present... sometimes they have you hold the meeting"*. Like exposure therapy, where an individual is gradually and carefully exposed to the phobia-activating stimuli, Alicia is exposing herself to public speaking regularly, through a series of structured, predictable, manageable tasks that she can engage in and repeat to build comfort and confidence (Abramowitz et al., 2019). This is an intentional process that she conceives of as practice - *"I've been practicing to help with that"*. It appears to be supporting her in developing new emotional connections to the task of public speaking, and possibly assisting her limbic system to downgrade its previous assessment of the level of danger present to her when speaking in public (Church, 2018).

Preparation is an important, practical manifestation of self-support, but may also be layered with the ulterior motive of experiential avoidance

All singers in this study express the need for adequate time to prepare for a performance. Alicia equates being unprepared with being “on the spot” - and cites it as the origin for much of her anxiety (p.18) As active performers, both Grace and Joanna give detailed, practical accounts of their planning.

Grace and Joanna see thorough preparation as a means to avoid exposure to unnecessary anxiety.

“That's for familiarity, and also probably for control, because if I know, if I am trying to find out as much information for myself, I'm doing something actively. I'm not just passively.... exposing myself.” (Grace, p.36)

“When I don't feel prepared, that is like almost an open gate for anxiety to just, “come on in anxiety”, [laugh] you know.” (Joanna, p.8)

Grace and Joanna's accounts of preparation carry a concern with getting “as much information” as possible - both accounts use this exact wording twice each. Both want to control the outcome of the myriad things that could go wrong. For Grace, if she is not “*doing something actively*”, she feels she is “*passively...exposing myself*”. This juxtaposition of active and passive states almost suggests that to be passive is to allow herself to be attacked or hurt in some way. Joanna sees a lack of preparation as “*almost an open gate for anxiety to just, “come on in anxiety”*” - this simile implying a lack of care through the “*open gate*”, and an invitation to unpleasant experiences (“*come on in*”) to take over, unchecked. For Joanna, preparation involves project management; the co-ordination of programming, preparing her own performance, communicating with other performers, the venues and the host, as well as co-ordinating equipment and venue specifications (pp.4-6).

“Really, the main thing for me is preparing. So as prepared as I can get, helps me to feel confident, and ah, that is going to be a positive and um, successful performance.” (Joanna, p.5)

She reiterates that performance is *"the main thing"* that gives her access to positive states like confidence and a conviction that the performance will go well *"that is going to be a positive..."*.

Grace depends on preparation as a means for enabling performance

"The only way I can get through performances at open mics now is by utilising my structure of preparation." (Grace, p.35)

For her, a customised plan "my structure of preparation" is the sole means of accessing performance - "the only way". "*Structure*" gives an air of organisation and logic, while "*my*" implies that it is specific to her needs. Its status as *"the only way"* places quite a lot of weight and high stakes on the enactment of the plan, implying that if the preparation goes awry, this may produce more anxiety for her. Her main preparation concerns are creating supportive schedules with all the tasks she needs to accomplish, practicing her songs (and working on any difficult passages in singing lessons), and looking up the venue in advance so that she has the familiarity she needs to support her in performing

"Trying to know as much in advance - If I do go to the new venue, for example, I look it up on Google Maps and do the satellite thingy where you can walk around it um and look at pictures, so that I have enough information, or as much information as it's possible to get before an event."
(Grace, p.36)

Gaining knowledge of the venue ahead of time is a task with a less certain outcome, as indicated by the verb *"trying"*. While many others simply wish to know where the venue is, Grace uses Google to *"walk around it"* and *"look at pictures"* to reduce the anxiety of going to a *"new venue"*. Building a sense of familiarity with the venue can constitute having "information" although whether this is "enough", or whether other kinds of information would be ideal to have is harder to determine. Alicia also describes an unnerving sense of lack of control in the absence of preparation

Positive interactions with others - like encouragement and peer support - can enable performance

Encouragement from others has been described in all three accounts as a supportive experience, one that aids the participant in positively orienting themselves towards performance. Alicia's experience of encouragement in singing lessons has led to a reduction in self judgement and fear, as previously stated (Alicia, pp.26-27), while Grace sees encouragement before a performance as essential

"I have to get hyped up by someone at some point [giggle] (Grace, p.42)

"I have to" implies the necessity of the action, and "hyped up" implies an increase in energy in motivation that may support her performance. This motivation must come from someone else ("by someone").

Joanna credits her authentic stage presence to a supportive conversation with her mother when she was a child

"It actually - not almost - It did just give me the permission to express myself and be okay with who I was in every situation. I can't change who I am right. I can try to. I can be fake, and put on a facade from one person to the next, but that is not being authentic, so...that gave me the permission to just be myself. And that, I feel that really plays a huge part in who I am on stage."
(Joanna, p.47)

The perceived "permission" of a parent is often a tool for learning in early life; as children we are highly sensitised to what is and is not permitted by our parents, even if not explicitly stated. From their permissiveness we can construct enduring attitudes and behaviours that guide us well into adulthood. In this conversation with her mother, Joanna was encouraged to "express herself" and to practice self-acceptance ("*to...be okay with who I was in every situation*"). This validation of self

feeds into her stage presence, and the language of this passage affirms that strongly *"It actually... It did...that gave me the permission...that really plays a huge part"*. She cites the importance of encouragement not just in her own experiences, but advises anxious performers to seek out people who will offer it (Joanna, p.80).

Friendship and peer-learning with like minded people can be an enormous resource and source of support in encouraging performance and combatting anxiety. Joanna recalls the impact of mentorship from friends in college

"I had some friends in in college who really kind of took me under their wing, and shared a lot of great advice. And in, in such a short, short burst, like short moments, small moments. But just their encouragement was so, so, so helpful and beneficial. And uh yeah, something I think about to this day, just the encouragement, you know, showing me what they're doing, teaching me what they're learning. Ummm. And yeah, it was very, very helpful." (Joanna, p.67)

Joanna was extended a sense of care by peers who *"took me under their wing"*, a metaphor whereby a bird offers protection to vulnerable chicks by taking them in underneath their wing. This mentorship was marked by generosity and passing on knowledge *"shared a lot of great advice... showing me what they're doing, teaching me what they're learning"*. She dwells on their "encouragement", recalling it twice, and using repetitions of "so" and "very" to emphasis just how helpful and meaningful this support was to her.

The sense of precarity experienced by Grace in the environment of the open mic is greatly eased by the presence of a friend - this is characterised as a peer who shares her interest in live music and knows her well.

"The closer I get to a performance, the more anxious I get. And it also depends if I'm going with someone I know or not, because I always like it better when I go with someone I know." (Grace, p.4)

"Generally someone who knows me well, so that they can save me if I need saving [slight giggle] and yeah, someone I am comfortable just sitting with, and watching music." (Grace, p.8)

These friendships all contain a sense of equal investment and participation in the journey - an environment for co-learning and exploration which may create a sense of team-work and mutual support.

No participant has found a way to guarantee anxiety will not return

None of the participants have given an account of any strategy or technique that can reliably prevent the onset of extreme anxiety in performance.

"It's just a part of life" (Alicia, p.16)

"I know nothing else, so I have nothing to compare it to." (Grace, p.64)

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore MPA through the lens of singers in popular music styles in a manner that would allow their own accounts and understandings of the experience to come to the fore, and to relate these findings back to the body of literature about MPA. During the literature review process, 10 qualitative studies utilising interviews as a primary method of investigating MPA were located. Only two of these studies intended to sample singers specifically (Stothert, 2012; Paul et al., 2024), but across the studies there are commonalities with the experiences of the singers in the present work. All participants in the current study experienced increased heart rate in

the face of MPA, akin to students in Barros et al., (2024) and Irie et al.(2023). Perspiration and gastrointestinal disturbances are also noted as symptoms in Irie et al, (2023); within the present study perspiring is experienced by all participants, and two participants shared experiences with taboo gastrointestinal issues related to their anxiety (Alicia, p.17, Joanna, p.16). The shaking alluded to is Barros et al. (2024) is also a feature of Joanna's early experiences with MPA. Fear (Stothert, 2012), worry and nervousness (Guyen, 2017) are affective aspects of MPA that emerge in participant accounts, with many participants across these studies evincing a concern with making mistakes, and feeling shame in their presence (Guyen, 2017; Irie et al., 2023; Barros et al., 2024). Nervousness for these participants increases the likelihood of making mistakes (Irie et al., 2023). Mental anxiety of this kind can overwhelm the performer and prevent them from enjoying the music, as has been demonstrated in the findings of the present study (Sieger, 2017). The commonalities across these studies rendered in a concise manner may give the impression that MPA symptoms occur in a uniform combination, and appear reliably over time; in fact the results of the present study show that these symptoms can occur in different combinations: Grace specifically experiences panic attacks each time she performs (Grace, p.11), while Joanna experiences worry and a constant need to relive herself (p.16). Symptoms are not static; they can shift over timescales as short as a day (Irie et al., 2023), or as long as a lifetime (Joanna, p.18). Interviewees across these studies also suggest causes for the anxiety: this can be underlying, unaddressed issues (Barros et al., 2024; Pases and Egermann, 2024) in line with Joanna's personal belief (p.35-36), or it can be related to the significance or environment of the specific performance (Barros et al., 2024). Grace seems to experience both of these pressures, with an underlying history of anxiety and her autistic sensitivity to any environment rendering performance an overstimulating task (p.28, p.16). Perfectionistic goals are cited as an aggravating factor in MPA for performers MacAfee and Comeau, 2023; Clements-Cortéz et al., 2024), and this has been true for Alicia in her early experiences of singing (Alicia, p.15).

While teachers like Joanna see themselves as having an important role in supporting students with MPA, and teachers are cited as a positive source of support, it's not always sufficient for the student's level of need (Clements-Cortéz et al., 2024; Barros et al., 2024), as evidenced by the

positive regard Alicia, Grace, and Joanna have for their teachers, while still regularly coping with extreme anxiety. Sharing their experiences with friends feels supportive (Stothert 2012; Clements-Cortéz et al., 2024) and adequate preparation for performance is helpful (Stothert, 2012; Moura and Serra, 2021; McAfee and Comeau 2023; Barros et al., 2024) but none of these are a guaranteed safeguard against MPA (Moura and Serra, 2021; Barros et al., 2024). Teachers, students and choral singing attest to the importance of confidence building (Stothert, 2012; Barros et al., 2024), as advocated by Joanna (p.80). Elsewhere, breathing exercises are a popular option for self-regulation (Stothert, 2012; Barros et al., 2024; Clements-Cortéz et al., 2024). Some teachers allude to the need to “control” MPA (Moura and Serra, 2021), but many come to experience a more nuanced relationship with it; adolescents in Paul et al., (2024) show acceptance that they will experience anxiety, but have learned to train their focus onto the aspects of singing that they value. On participants in Clements-Cortéz et al. (2024) is confident in her relationship to the anxiety - when describing a breathing exercise based on blowing out candles, she states that “even though the fire on the candle will come back, I can put it out over and over again with my controlled breathing” (Clements-Cortéz et al., p.7). Alicia and Grace both articulate an expectancy that their relationship to anxiety will be ongoing (Alicia, p.16, Grace p. 64). The ability to accept anxiety rather than continually fight is a central pillar of ACC, which in recent studies has supported singers in reducing symptoms of MPA and engage in performance despite their anxiety (Shaw et al., 2020; Mahony et al., 2022; Paul et al., 2024).

The experiences in the present study are from singers who sing in popular genres, in a field predominated by accounts from classical performers. One of the key differences between classical accounts and the present narratives are the environments in which they are expected to perform. It is interesting to note that there is no description of exams or auditions in the accounts of these performers. Open mics, gigs, and church are the main sites described in this study; these seemingly unpredictable environments are a juxtaposition to the carefully staged recitals evoked by participants Barros et al. (2024), or the exam pressure in Irie et al., (2024). Kenny’s discussion of occupational stresses for singers calls to mind Joanna’s work as a popular singer with the added dimension of project management: she is not only responsible for professional communication and

quality of performance, but also for technical equipment and its appropriateness for the event. The qualitative studies surveyed for this project convey a sense of classical musicians working in closer environments more frequently than the participants in this study. Perhaps this is owing to the prevalence of teachers and students as interviewees within the studies assessed, and in the researcher's experience of immersion in the data during the analytic process, but there is a comparative sense of solitude in the accounts of Alicia, Grace and Joanna; they do not seem to have the sense of an immediate context of like-minded singers as comes across in the qualitative literature presented here.

While the findings of this study can be merged very readily with those of other qualitative studies, it is useful to consider how they might relate to quantitative studies in the research base, and provide a potential bridge to practice, informing decision making in the manner of qualitative studies in healthcare (Higgins et al., 2022). The use of the KMPAI-R measure means that participant accounts in this study can be linked to specific scores, or ranges of scores in other studies. For example, Sims and Ryan (2024) use the KMPAI-R scale in their investigation of performers with MPA, and their relationship to imposter syndrome. 20.47% of participants were singers, and female participants has a mean score of 133.29 on the KMPAI-R. The mean score for the three participants in the present study is 173. Sims and Ryan found a positive correlation between higher scores on the KMPAI-R and higher scores for imposter syndrome, so it could be inferred that participants in the present study may be more likely to experience this, perhaps to an even greater degree than the participants in Sims and Ryan (2024). Being able to apply Alicia, Grace, and Joanna's stories to this study gives its findings a broader context, one where the potential impact of this correlation comes alive with more urgency. Narratives are thought to provide a means of processing scientific information and effectively communicating and applying scientific findings (Martinez-Conde et al., 2019). The narrative frame of reference could support practitioners in assessing the utility of quantitative literature, and co. Looking at interventions for singers with MPA, studies like Clarke et al., (2020) and Mahony et al., (2022) provide a foundation for practitioners to consider their own ability to stage group interventions for music performance anxiety. Immediately appendices like Mahony's session plans for the intervention can be considered against the criteria

of Grace's experience; this may encourage the practitioner to consider what sensory accommodations could make the setting more equitable. When considering Joanna, they might question how the presence of a professional singer could impact other attendees. Studies like the present one provide access to highly sensitive, nuanced experiences of problematic MPA that it may not be appropriate to solicit in the context of their professional work. It is important that practitioners maintain their scope of practice and not attempt to counsel students without the qualifications to do so (NATS, 2021). However, Qualitative studies can provide us with this deep insight, without risk to either student or practitioner, and perhaps sensitise us to what may lie at the heart of a student's experience.

LIMITATIONS

The limitations of this study present several challenges to its credibility and its usefulness, chief among them, the difficulty in generalising a small, highly-subjective sample (Smith et al, 2022). This study was initially intended to investigate MPA in participants between 16-18 years old, studying popular music at a vocational college; communication with the intended partner broke down and an unsuccessful recruitment period followed, causing significant delays to data collection, and to the timeframe available for analysis. Eight interviews carried out for this research' three were analysed and included in the final report. Results from all participants may have carried more weight, as the themes of the study would be more representative of a broader range of experiences (Coen et al., 2018). The shorter timeframe also necessitated a fast turnaround between interviews and analysis; eight interviews were organised and carried out in the space of a month, overlapping with the analysis of the transcripts. In addition to professional commitments and teaching, all of which require active empathy, I experienced empathy burnout which resulted in emotional exhaustion and compassion fatigue (Suarez-Angelino and Saleh, 2024). This had the impact of slowing down aspects of the analysis, as I was resistant to enter into deep dialogue with some of the data, and in one case, making it difficult to be fully present with the account of the interviewee in the moment, and missing opportunities to gain additional detail. Had the research taken place in a better timeframe, it may have been possible to have more space between

interviews to allow adequate time for reflection and to ensure a more realistic distribution of energy and attention; this is a common difficulty in IPA (Delve and Limpaecher, 2023). With more time, it may also have been possible to consider more deeply the potential implications of findings, looking into psychological concepts like self-efficacy, ego-investment, or pedagogical aims like confidence building, reading more widely and incorporating a broader range of sources into the analysis and the final discussion.

This study utilised a demographic questionnaire for transparency of reporting about the participant samples, who they could be said to represent, and thus who may not have represented, as a matter of ethical principle. Harmonised standards for questions of socio-economic background were sought (Government Analysis Function, 2011) and Race, ethnicity and religion (Government analysis Function, 2023; Gov.uk, 2023). The current structure of questions about socio-economic background are centred around British structures and indicators of wealth - school meals, the privilege denoted by different labelling conventions for schools, level of education of parents (Government Analysis Function, 2011). Many of these aspects may play out very differently in the US, or in Norway, where the financial culture and burdens around education and healthcare may render UK-centric class indicators useless. It may even bias data, as Irish, North American, and Norwegian participants did not have the opportunity to provide meaningful data about their class of origin. For this reason, the answers to this question have been stricken from the reporting. The harmonised questions for ethnicity, race and religion are even more ethically dubious, putting a burden of work onto non-white participants, thereby centring the needs of the white population under the guise of "easing respondent burden" (Government analysis Function, 2023). Seeking an alternative, it became quickly apparent that nuances of framing such questions is its own field of study; there would not be sufficient time to seek an alternative. While the structure of these questions is under development now in UK with updated research projected to be published online in March 2025 (Government Analysis Function, 2024), This aspect of the form carried the potential to dissuade participants of certain ethnicities from taking part - it may have been easy to infer that if the researcher wasn't able to root out racist structures in a demographic questionnaire, that this may not bode well for their safety and dignity in an interview setting with a sensitive subject. The

assumption that this would be a simple question to include is a significant ethical oversight in this project.

It is possible that my position as a teacher and a novice IPA practitioner impacted negatively on the project. Interviewing for data collection is conceptualised by some as a specific craft that can only be learned through experience (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2018). The data collected in IPA is dependent upon the quality of the interviewing, and As this project has been carried out by a novice interviewer the quality of the data obtained may have suffered (Smith, 2011). The insider perspective I held, combined with my inexperience may have led me to obscure, rather than highlight, aspects of MPA I might take for granted by simply leaving them unacknowledged (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2018). This lack of experience may also have resulted in missed opportunities for connection within analysis, and may render the analysis itself less useful and credible (Smith, 2011).

CONCLUSION

This study set out to create a formal, qualitative record of the thoughts, experiences and insights of singers about their MPA, with a focus on those who sing popular music. It was proposed that this would take place through use of a mixed-methods design, underpinned by IPA, with semi-structured interviews as the primary method of collection. Some aspects of this initial goal were not achieved: the original sample of performers between 16-18 and the partnership with a local college ultimately did not succeed, however interviews and analysis with an adult sample using the IPA methodology did occur. Through the use of the KMPAI-R and a literature review, it was possible to connect the qualitative findings to a distinct segment of the literature, and more broadly, demonstrating the complementarity of this type of data. This study has developed my skills as a researcher, interviewer and analyst. Engaging in analysis of the texts, it became evident just how crucial further research in this modality is - this study could only contain a small portion of the insights and narratives that emerged during analysis. This area - qualitative work and MPA - is ripe or further research, and the addition of more idiographic accounts centred on singers could support

practitioners and researchers alike in applying EBVP to their own practices. Such narrative accounts also support the processing and dissemination of scientific findings to the broader community (Martinez-Conde, 2019). Studies that address MPA in singers within popular genres are still virtually absent from the literature. It is possible that the present study could be continued and developed to incorporate the findings of all participants; preliminary preparation of the transcripts for the remaining participants gave early indications of themes relating to the anxiety experienced by singers during menopause, singing when living with a chronic disease, and cultures of choral music-making in Ireland. It could also be interesting to explore how the quantitative data - demographic information and the KMPAI-R results - could be drawn into the analysis and examined for deeper significance. As a practitioner-researcher, I have had a particular interest in interventions for MPA using ACC, deepening my understanding of the psychological frameworks involved and applying those ideas with my students in recent years. It was surprising to discover that a topic I have come to know well could evoke such strong reactions and deep emotions simply because the medium of communication was the person's *life*, in their own words, not numbers or abstract concepts designed to represent them. While Martinez-Conde et al. (2019) discuss the importance of using storytelling to spread research *out* into the community, the practical, accessible, nature of the this idiographic focus has enormous potential to bring people *in* - giving practitioners and singers a sense of connection and investment in primary research, and the ability to truly see themselves in the research.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Ethics form

Please click this link to view the Ethics form:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1DNRx0QAfCydruxn0hgd3ARS_FGyq0760/view?usp=sharing

Appendix 2: Organisational letter of approval

Please click this link to view the letter of approval:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1IMB7m96xTF7N-c8lrUAEgd3x7of5Nvc9/view?usp=sharing>

Appendix 3: Literature review spreadsheet

Please use this link to access the scoping review spreadsheet.

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1bB2ZFp_4HrZf5A8NSwKWpgNw3O5bIBzZwr_CMJ_0cew/edit?usp=sharing

Note: please use the tabs at the bottom of this spreadsheet to navigate between the initial scoping review and the more extensive narrative review that followed.

Appendix 4: UWTSD Catalogue: Databases list

ABI/INFORM Collection-ProQuest國際商學全文期刊資料庫
Academic Search Premier (EBSCOhost)
Academic Video Online
ACLS Humanities e-Books
ACM Digital Library
African Journals Online (Open Access)
Ancestry
L'Année philologique
APA PsycBooks
Archaeology Data Service
The Architects' Journal
Archive of the British Association for the Advancement of Science: collections on the history of science (1830s-1970s)
Art & Architecture Source (EBSCOhost)
Artstor
ASME Digital Collection
ATLA Religion
BFI Player
BibliU

BMPF7010 - Extended Work-based Learning Project

Student Name: Emma O'Reilly

Student Number: 2116236

BioMed Central
Bloomsbury Academic
Box of Broadcasts (BoB)
Bridgeman Education
Brill Online Books and Journals
Brill reference works
British Cartoon Archive
British education index
British Periodicals
BUFVC
Business source complete (EBSCOhost)
Cambridge University Press Journals
Child Development and Adolescent Studies
CIS (Construction Information Service)
Cite them right: the essential referencing guide
Cochrane Library
Digital
Digital Theatre Plus Database
DOAB: Directory of Open Access Books
DOAJ Directory of Open Access Journals
Early English books online
Ebook Central
EBSCO eBooks
EBSCO Databases
EBSCOhost Open Dissertations
Education source (EBSCOhost)
ERIC-EBSCOhost 教育學索摘資料庫
EThOS
EUR-Lex
Exact Editions
Gale Engage Virtual Reference Library
Gale Newsvault
GreenFILE (EBSCOhost)
Henry Stewart Talks
Hospitality & tourism complete
Human Anatomy Atlas
Humanities source (EBSCOhost)
IEEE Xplore digital library
IGI Global infosci-business Books
IPA source
Jacoby Online
John Johnson Collection: An Archive of Printed Ephemera
JSTOR
Lexis Plus UK - Academic Library
LinkedIn Learning
Loeb Classical Library
LWW Health Library: exercise science
MarketLine Advantage
Migration to new worlds
NewsBank
Nineteenth Century UK Periodicals, Part I: Women's, Children's, Humour, and Leisure
Office for National Statistics
Performing Arts Periodicals Database
Periodicals Archive Online
Policing insight
Project MUSE
ProQuest Central

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Student Number: 2116236

ProQuest Dissertations & Theses: Global Full Text

ProQuest U.K., Parliamentary Papers

PsycARTICLES (EBSCOhost)

PubMed

Regional business news

Religion & philosophy collection

SAE mobilus

SAGE journals

SAGE Knowledge Complete Books and Reference Collection

ScienceDirect

SPORTDiscus

Springer Nature - Complete Springer Journals

SpringerLink Books

State papers online: the government of Britain, 1509-1714

Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum Online

Taylor & Francis eBooks Complete

Taylor & Francis Journals

Teacher reference centre

Thesaurus linguae Latinae

Theses collection Wales

The Times digital archive

TRIP

UK Data Service

VLeBooks

Vogue archive

Welsh Journals Online

Welsh newspapers online

WGSN

Wiley Online Library Journals

Appendix 5: KMPAI-R Questionnaire & Scoring Sheet

Source: Kenny (2016a)

Below are some statements about how you feel generally and how you feel **before or during a performance**. Please circle one number to indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

		Strongly Disagree					Strongly Agree		
K_1	I generally feel in control of my life.....	6	5	4	3	2	1	0	
K_2	I find it easy to trust others	6	5	4	3	2	1	0	
K_3	Sometimes I feel depressed without knowing why	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
K_4	I often find it difficult to work up the energy to do things	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
K_5	Excessive worrying is a characteristic of my family	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
K_6	I often feel that life has not much to offer me	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
K_7	Even if I work hard in preparation for a performance, I am likely to make mistakes	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
K_8	I find it difficult to depend on others	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
K_9	My parents were mostly responsive to my needs	6	5	4	3	2	1	0	
K_10	Prior to, or during a performance, I get feelings akin to panic.....	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
K_11	I never know before a concert whether I will perform well	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
K_12	Prior to, or during a performance, I experience dry mouth.....	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
K_13	I often feel that I am not worth much as a person	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
K_14	During a performance I find myself thinking about whether I'll even get through it	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
K_15	Thinking about the evaluation I may get interferes with my performance	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
K_16	Prior to, or during a performance, I feel sick or faint or have a churning in my stomach.....	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
K_17	Even in the most stressful performance situations, I am confident that I will perform well	6	5	4	3	2	1	0	
K_18	I am often concerned about a negative reaction from the audience	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
K_19	Sometimes I feel anxious for no particular reason	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
K_20	From early in my music studies, I remember being anxious about performing	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	

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		Strongly disagree					Strongly Agree	
K_21	I worry that one bad performance may ruin my career	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
K_22	Prior to, or during a performance, I experience increased heart rate like pounding in my chest.....	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
K_23	My parents almost always listened to me	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
K_24	I give up worthwhile performance opportunities	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
K_25	After the performance, I worry about whether I played well enough.....	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
K_26	My worry and nervousness about my performance interferes with my focus and concentration.....	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
K_27	As a child, I often felt sad	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
K_28	I often prepare for a concert with a sense of dread and impending disaster.....	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
K_29	One or both of my parents were overly anxious.....	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
K_30	Prior to, or during a performance, I have increased muscle tension.....	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
K_31	I often feel that I have nothing to look forward to	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
K_32	After the performance, I replay it in my mind over and over...	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
K_33	My parents encouraged me to try new things	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
K_34	I worry so much before a performance, I cannot sleep.....	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
K_35	When performing without music, my memory is reliable.....	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
K_36	Prior to, or during a performance, I experience shaking or trembling or tremor.....	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
K_37	I am confident playing from memory	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
K_38	I am concerned about being scrutinized by others	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
K_39	I am concerned about my own judgement of how I will perform.....	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
K_40	I remain committed to performing even though it causes me great anxiety.....	0	1	2	3	4	5	6

©Kenny, D.T. (2009). *Kenny Music Performance Anxiety Inventor-Revised* (K-MPAI-R)

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Student Name: Emma O'Reilly

Student Number: 2116236

K-MPAI© (Kenny, 2009, 2011) FACTORS	SCORE	%
1. Proximal somatic anxiety and worry about performance		
K_10 Prior to, or during a performance, I get feelings akin to panic		
K_12 Prior to, or during a performance, I experience dry mouth		
K_14 During a performance I find myself thinking about whether I'll even get through it		
K_16 Prior to, or during a performance, I feel sick or faint or have a churning in my stomach		
K_22 Prior to, or during a performance, I experience increased heart rate like pounding in my chest		
K_26 My worry and nervousness about my performance interferes with my focus and concentration		
K_28 I often prepare for a concert with a sense of dread and impending disaster		
K_30 Prior to, or during a performance, I have increased muscle tension		
K_34 I worry so much before a performance, I cannot sleep		
K_36 Prior to, or during a performance, I experience shaking or trembling or tremor		
K_40 I remain committed to performing even though it causes me significant anxiety		
TOTAL/66		
2. Worry/dread (Negative cognitions) focused on self/other scrutiny		
K_7 Even if I work hard in preparation for a performance, I am likely to make mistakes		
K_15 Thinking about the evaluation I may get interferes with my performance		
K_18 I am often concerned about a negative reaction from the audience		
K_21 I worry that one bad performance may ruin my career		
K_25 After the performance, I worry about whether I played well enough		
K_32 After the performance, I replay it in my mind over and over		
K_38 I am concerned about being scrutinized by others		
K_39 I am concerned about my own judgment of how I performed		
TOTAL/48		
3. Depression/hopelessness (Psychological vulnerability)		
K_1 I generally feel in control of my life (-)*		
K_2 I find it easy to trust others (-)*		
K_3 Sometimes I feel depressed without knowing why		
K_4 I often find it difficult to work up the energy to do things		
K_6 I often feel that life has not much to offer me		
K_8 I find it difficult to depend on others		
K_13 I often feel that I am not worth much as a person		
K_31 I often feel that I have nothing to look forward to		
TOTAL/48		
4. Parental empathy		
K_9 My parents were mostly responsive to my needs (-)*		
K_23 My parents always listened to me (-)*		
K_27 As a child, I often felt sad		
K_33 My parents encouraged me to try new things (-)*		
TOTAL/24		
5. Memory		
K_35 When performing without music, my memory is reliable (-)*		
K_37 I am confident playing from memory (-)*		
TOTAL/12		
6. Generational transmission of anxiety		
K_5 Excessive worrying is a characteristic of my family		
K_19 Sometimes I feel anxious for no particular reason		
K_29 One or both of my parents were overly anxious		
TOTAL/18		
7. Anxious apprehension		
K_11 I never know before a concert whether I will perform well		
K_17 Even in the most stressful performance situations, I am confident that I will perform well (-)*		
K_24 I give up worthwhile performance opportunities due to anxiety		
TOTAL/18		
8. Biological vulnerability		
K_20 From early in my music studies, I remember being anxious about performing TOTAL/6		
OVERALL TOTAL/240		

Appendix 6: Demographic Questionnaire (blank)

Please click this link to access the questionnaire:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1A4Dx09X3aIV-JnvFE01bAiGMziVJ4kwS/view?usp=drive_link

Appendix 7: Research Journal

Please navigate to this link to access the research journal

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1kla-t3rFHBgEdQuu9hL7aEE4rQ_yHliz/view?usp=sharing

Appendix 8: Question development for interviews

Please click this link to access the question development document:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1W6_y2uA2STXfpjNSJ7yO2jyxU2GaZKud/view?usp=sharing

Appendix 9: Interview Guide

Please click this link to access the interview guide:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1N0BaZKL5-1k1A37bfY4eFsmA2KmLa0aq/view?usp=sharing>

Appendix 10: Video presentation for informed Consent

Please navigate to this link to view the consent video.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1juiSa03FaN2IkNCeaUhg3wTbey9lQ554/view?usp=sharing>

Appendix 11: Consent form (blank)

Please click this link to view the blank consent form

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1abi3yKjyxVpsaR6Z7z3bkWKlgXUsmaPW/view?usp=sharing>

Appendix 12: Consent forms (redacted)

Please click this link to view the redacted consent forms

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1fwSoD2-rUo9gRnOw0tsLznij0dZUik9R?usp=sharing>

Appendix 13: Debrief Sheet

Please click here for access to the debrief sheet:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1qTJExgmjKFobA_B4UV6Ah3JF1tZY55gE/view?usp=sharing

Appendix 14: Group Experiential Themes Table (Full)

Group Experiential Themes Table

Note: Page numbers refer to the annotated transcripts for that participant's interview

A. TO PERFORM IS TO HAVE AN ACTIVE WORKING RELATIONSHIP TO EXTREME ANXIETY.

They all feel its effects and experience its impact on their performances.

While there are a wide range of symptoms and their severity across these cases, there are common experiences across the three cases. Increased heart rate, for example

"My heart rate will definitely increase" (Joanna, p.19)

"They're probably typical anxiety symptoms like heart racing..." (Alicia, p.9)

They also experience an increase in negative thoughts.

"I'm thinking about how anxious I am, rather than being in the music." (Grace, p.26)

"A lot of like negative self, self thought." (Alicia, p.9)

This has impacts on the performances they deliver. All experience a higher rate of making mistakes when highly anxious.

"Maybe I'll forget a lyric on stage, you know. Or maybe I'll forget an entrance to a part of the song, Uh you know, Maybe I'll miss an entrance, or you know, some type of section of the song, I'll make a mistake. But yeah, so that's really where you will see it." (Joanna, p.11)

"Like, when I'm really anxious, I make more mistakes." (Grace, p.64)

They can also experience disconnection from the audience

"I think a lot of the time is usually spent like staring at, you know, lyrics or something." (Alicia, p.34)

"I have to be more limited, not as confident to engaging with the audience, speaking with the audience, even looking out into the audience. You know. Uh it's more of a "I'm just going to look right here. Stay right here the whole time. Just get through the song" (Joanna, p.32)

"On some stages, it open mics because of the lights, you can't see the audience very well, which can be quite useful. Because then I can just pretend nobody's there. Apart from I can hear them because they're nattering." (Grace, p.50)

Anxiety also colours their interactions with performance environment or conditions

All of the performers experience limitations in their ability to be present in the environment of the performance because of anxiety, although it manifests in different ways for each of them. Joanna doesn't want to interact with others in the environment after a performance she deems to be unsatisfactory

"If you're not feeling confident about the performance you just had. You're going to be more in your head uh, and not wanting to receive compliments. Cause you're like "it wasn't good, so it doesn't deserve any compliments." Umm. And just not really engaging with with others in conversation, or anything like that, You kind of want to stay to yourself." (Joanna, p.33)

Grace's sensory processing is overtaxed by the environment and can be push further into anxiety or panic by it

"All of the sensory stimuli on top just mean that the whole experience is a lot, so my threshold for panic is reduced before I even get to the performing part." (Grace, p.16)

Alicia simply doesn't perform, thereby eschewing interaction with the environment completely.

"I have a lot of friends that don't even know that I sing because I don't go out and perform." (Alicia, p.8)

Others do not understand their experience - some don't even consider it

Their experiences of anxiety are seldom considered by those around them. For Grace, this manifests in other attendees at open mics projecting their experiences on to her, thus

"Well, some people think that my experiences and their experiences of pre- performance nerves are the same, and they are absolutely not. I know this, because the people who've said that are middle aged men, who are not coming out of a vanishment from life, and who have grown up jobs, and do grown up things, and have been going to open mics and playing in some capacity for years, um and who know people, and who don't have to be intimidated by the environment they are entering. ehm. So our experiences of nerves are absolutely not the same. But those kinds of people will say things like, "Oh, we all get nervous "or "think positive thoughts" or um [pause] other equally useful things." (Grace, p.45)

For Alicia it can mean spontaneous demands for proof of her skill if she reveals that she sings; this gives her a sense of disempowerment as conveyed by her simile

"Like if one of my friend goes. "Oh, I didn't know you sing, Can you sing for me right now?" So it's kind of like, not something that would like come out of the blue or unplanned, or like, like, if your boss has like a surprise meeting with you, and you have no idea what it's about, right?" (Alicia p.19-20)

Joanna believes that most audience members simply don't consider it at all

"So for non-singers, and maybe even non-performers, I would say, probably non-performers, don't really...consider that someone's getting on stage in spite of them being a nervous wreck." (Joanna, p.69)

This seems to imply that a very significant component of their experience is hidden, misunderstood, or simply not important to others. For Grace, this has the net impact of creating a sense of estrangement for others at a performance. For Alicia, it can feel like an off-putting power play. Joanna sees the potential for both positive and negative receptions of work based on this invisibility:

"The reason I say that [audiences don't consider it] is because people are so critical. People are very critical of performances" (Joanna, p.70)

"They just...haven't even thought about that. They're enjoying the performance so much. They're like, "oh, my goodness, you were nervous? No way!" you know. "I didn't, I didn't even consider that" you know. Which, which, That's good, you know." (Joanna, p.71)

Their experience of anxiety is not static; all of them are developing and have developed over time

Each performer can give examples of ways that their experience with anxiety has developed over time. Alicia is actively shifting her focus from the demands for perfection made of her in childhood, over to learning valued skills

"So I think a lot of my youth, It was always like, if you don't do it perfectly, Then you can't sing the song." p.15

"Not focusing on having to be perfect or having to be a certain way all the time, and more focusing on learning it [singing] in general. And I think that's probably been the most helpful, because then I don't feel so terrified anymore that I'm doing something wrong, or that it has to be perfect. And that's kind of decreased the self judgment for myself." (Alicia, p.27)

Joanna had symptoms of anxiety as a young singer that she does not experience anymore

"I don't normally feel shaky, like that hasn't happened since I was a kid." (Joanna, p.18)

Grace's ability to understand and articulate her own reactions has developed since her childhood experiences of performance anxiety

"I'm aware of my reactions now, and I can identify what and why they exist. Umm. When I was younger, before shows, I would get very anxious, but I thought I was excited, Which I was. I'm sure I was partly excited, but I wasn't only excited, I was also really scared, umm (laughs) And because I didn't have enough self awareness or awareness of emotions or feelings or anything like that when I was younger, I would have had no idea that what I was experiencing was anxiety." (Grace, p.24)

More recently, she can identify that her performance abilities may soon be able to incorporate spontaneous performances

"I don't spontaneously say yes to doing things, ummm, apart from potentially open mics now at this point, but that wasn't always the case." (Grace, p.27)

B. THEY HAVE DEEP, ESTABLISHED RELATIONSHIPS WITH SINGING AND THEIR IDENTITY IS INTERMINGLED WITH IT

Singing is a part of the self, and provides opportunity for positive interactions with themselves

All of the participants express a depth of connection to their voices

"It's an instrument that we carry around 24/7, 365 [...] There's just an...emotional connection with it" (Joanna, pp.3-4)

"I guess I've been singing for such a long time. And It's just like a second nature kind of thing." (Alicia, p.4)

It is a source of positive self-discovery and novelty

"It's exciting to like do new stuff ,and then find out you can do new stuff and...play." (Grace, p.2)
"It's also interesting to like, learn new ways of doing it, or like learning new songs, or being able to shift or move yourself into different directions." (Alicia, p.4)

This connecting of singing to the self can have ramifications for their experiences of performance with extreme anxiety

Extreme anxiety can deny access to positive expressions and experiences of the self. Joanna recalls her first public performance at church at 12 years old, which was impacted by intense nervousness

"I feel like my true voice didn't really even come out. So, I was definitely a little disappointed and sad about that. Umm. And yeah, I just, I always think about that moment." (Joanna, p.27)

She could not express this aspect of herself - her musical artistry - to her community because of anxiety. This experience has stayed with her.

Grace talks about how being able to stay in her body during performances gives her a sense of alignment and purpose within herself, but anxiety can cause dissociation, thereby severing that connection

"I feel like I'm doing more what I want to be doing. The times I stay in my body." (Grace, p.52)

"If I am too anxious or not familiar with the place, or just there's too much going on, then I vanish out of my body." (Grace, p.51)

Alicia sings naturally in low-demand settings, like the grocery store; yet anxiety means that some of her friends don't even know she sings. She hides this aspect of herself to avoid having to perform.

"I'll like, sing in the grocery store or (laughs) you know, and like these random public places." (Alicia, pp.8-9)

"I have a lot of friends that don't even know that I sing because I don't go out and perform." (Alicia, p.9)

This can be particularly true of making mistakes, an experience all of them valence negatively

Self-image as a singer functions as a value, to which they orient themselves despite challenges and difficulties

All three performers have negative experiences of performing and nervousness in their younger years, and yet they continue to develop their voices and work towards performing. It could be theorised that this striving may be connected to a wish to see their own preferred self-image - that of a singer who performs - made manifest.

Early experiences of performing were scary for Grace.

"I'm sure I was partly excited, but I wasn't only excited, I was also really scared" (Grace, p.24)

Grace cites values as a motivation in her life, sometimes being powerful enough to mediate or override extreme anxiety.

"[The anxiety] also depends on, like, my values about a situation, which dictates how anxious or not I get [...] but there are other things, like going to protests that I get anxious about, that I care enough to do it anyway." (Grace, p.30)

"I only want to do things that I see the purpose or benefit of." p.55

Grace's descriptions of attending open mics in her interview are usually in the present continuous tense, indicating that she ascribes enormous purpose and benefit to performing, even though she experiences panic attacks every time (p.11).

As a member of a choir at her school, Alicia's early experiences of singing were authoritarian, effacing of individuality, and focused solely on perfection and accuracy.

"Everyone was focused on everything being like perfect, or exactly where it needed to be, and less about actually working with someone as a person." (Alicia, p.14)

"It was kind of, you know. You, you sing in the chorus. Do whatever, your place, whatever, and that's it. So there really wasn't time to adventure outside of that." (Alicia, p.13)

Although this bred anxiety in her when she explored solo performance, Alicia still went on to do performances with some regularity, and was still pursuing skill development at the time of interview.

"I used to do open mic before Covid with a friend of mine." (Alicia, p.8)

Joanna's early experiences of singing were marked by extreme anxiety and existential worry.

"It was intense when I first started singing. Yeah, there were days that, I always tell my friends and students like, I used to pray to God like, 'am I ever going to get through this? Am I ever going to feel comfortable on stage? ever? you know. And um yeah, it was pretty intense.'" (Joanna, p.22)

"[Singing in Church] just felt different for me, and so I was very, very nervous! [laughs] and...the.. at that time I was, I was very shaky. Voice was shaky, hands were shaky, sweating, dry mouth again. Um. And yeah, just all the, all the, the reactions from my body." (Joanna, p.26)

Joanna went on to study performance at secondary and tertiary level (Joanna, p.65), and is professional performer, singing teacher, and mentor (Joanna, p.81).

These performers have made a significant effort to pursue singing and performing despite difficult and distressing formative experiences.

Being mistake free is a shared concern - others witnessing an error is a source of potential judgement, shame and distress. A mistake can mean you haven't presented yourself in the light you would wish to.

"In front of a crowd, I think it's that fear of judgement, or fear of you're not doing something right, or...you're gonna look stupid." (Alicia, p.7)

"There is that, um hope that no one has really noticed it. But it's also that... you know thought in the back of your mind, [laughs] like somebody probably noticed that. And you just have to live with that, with people knowing about that mistake." (Joanna, pp.13-14)

Mistakes are a source of shame, and incongruent with the image these singers have of the true value of their voices.

Participants see a universality to their experiences, and advocate for others

Perhaps owing to their investment in singing, each participant seems to see a sense of universality in their own experience. When asked "what would you like other people to know about this experience?", each interviewee presents a reflection on forms of support that would have benefitted them in their development.

Grace links her experience as a young autistic woman with the experiences of other marginalised groups, in a plea for a greater variety of ways to interact with live music and develop as a performer outside the bounds of the status quo

"I would like there to be more variation, and therefore, acceptance and representation of different ways to participate in live music. And to show up as a performer, because there is definitely a blueprint of what we expect, and what anyone attending open mics expects to get out of it, and that's great, but that, automatically, therefore doesn't encapsulate everybody's experiences, and people are excluded as a result of the culture of local open mics [...] If somewhere, or an experience, or an environment isn't fully accepting at face value for disabilities, um, marginalized genders and [sighs] ethnicities and everything else under the sun, it cannot be a genuinely safe place, and therefore, people who are more prone to anxiety are going to feel anxious, because it's not an inherently welcoming space." (Grace, p.58 - 60)

Joanna expresses a desire to see more conversation and sharing of practical tools for nervousness and anxiety with a new generation of performers, offering as advice the methods that have helped her the most

"I hope that we can all, together bring more tools and things like that. But yeah, definitely, coming up, it really wasn't a thing. Um. And I think gratefully, more people are talking about it." (Joanna, p.77)

She advises others to focus on confidence building and spending time working on their own insecurities.

"Do whatever it is that will help you to build confidence for yourself. I think that's huge. Um. Give yourself permission, right?" (Joanna, p.80)

"Really being open to always dig in. Right, dig into what you have going on, will really help...really help to...uh release those uh things that have been uh holding you tight! [laughs] And move, moving forward. I really think it helps." (Joanna, p.79)

Alicia's experiences have taught her not to regard singing as an instrument - and playing an instrument was an important way to achieve status and approval in her family life (p.37). Hers is a message of rejecting harsh, limiting beliefs, releasing perfectionism and the expectations of others

"I guess people shouldn't feel less than just because they don't play an instrument. I think that was always my, my downfall in life." (Alicia, p.37)

"I think people limit themselves a lot of the time, which can increase anxiety, so the fact of more of what they can't do instead of what they can do." (Alicia, p.38)

"Learning that you don't need to be, you know, And you don't need to be, Whoever's people's expectations of you should be. And I think that people need a lot more representations of that instead of just, you know, here's this person, and this is the way they always are, or this is the person we always expect them to be." (Alicia, pp.39-40)

C. THEY ARE ALL PRO-ACTIVE IN SUPPORTING THEMSELVES

Skill development is seen as an important facet of developing towards performance

The participants all talk about engaging in skill development for both singing and performing - as discrete skillsets. The time placed into skill development has led to an increase in their abilities and more resilient, positive orientations towards performances.

Joanna attended performing arts schools at secondary and tertiary level, and spent years in singing lessons developing her voice. This has addressed a previous underlying concern that she was not a skilled singer. Now, Joanna's sense of her own skill is secure.

"That took years and years and years and years, years of lessons [laughs] to get, to gain the understanding to have the skills and tools to, you know, work, Work it on yourself, with yourself. apart from training, and and lessons and things like that. [...] So getting to a place where I felt confident in the talent to where I know if my body does react, or if I do get nervous. I know that it's still good. It just may not have been presented good at that time, but I know it is good."
(Joanna, pp.40-41)

Alicia has found lessons with an encouraging, growth oriented teacher to be helpful in tackling perfectionism, decreasing self-judgement and terror at the thought of sharing her voice with others.

"I think the voice lessons were really helpful, too, and to just...and positive and encouraging. So I don't feel like it's always a negative? Whenever I'm doing things like that? And not focusing on having to be perfect or having to be a certain way all the time, and more focusing on learning it in general. And I think that's probably been the most helpful, because then I don't feel so terrified anymore that I'm doing something wrong, or that it has to be perfect. And that's kind of decreased the self judgment for myself." (Alicia, p. 26 -27)

During a three year mental health crisis compounded by autistic burnout and selective mutism, Singing lessons were Grace's sole space for voice use, helping her to preserve her connection with speech and singing. This was challenging for her but provided access to something she loved. Grace now performs live regularly

Researcher: Did you have access to singing at that time?

Grace: For some of it in specific contexts, namely, [laugh] with a singing teacher in a little room in a church, to varying degrees. It didn't always happen, but sometimes I sang. (Grace, p.33)

"The experience of doing it at all was more exposing than it would have been if I had been talking in day to day life anyway. Because it was almost more surprising to me that I was making noises."
(Grace, p.34)

Performing itself is a separate skillset. Alicia sees developing comfort with performing as a matter of creating a sufficient ratio of positive to negative experiences. To develop her skills and practice, she has joined a networking group that provides her with structured exposure to public speaking on a weekly basis

"I'm in a networking group. And so one of the things they do is every, every group you have to do like a spiel for like 30 seconds, and then, like once a month, you have to present. And sometimes they have you hold the meeting, And so I've been doing a lot more being comfortable speaking? And being comfortable on the spot? and...so I've been practicing to help with that." (Alicia, p.26)

Joanna spent time and effort developing a sense of comfort and confidence with being her authentic self while talking to people in order to improve her performance skills

"It's feeling comfortable to be in any situation, and still feeling confident to just be who you are, to be yourself and share your thoughts and not just sit in the corner quietly. [laughs] Not that you can't do that, but you know, being, you know, being able to um engage, yourself. So. Yeah, I feel that was the second thing I, I really had to work on." p.44

Preparation is an important, practical manifestation of self-support, but may also be layered with the ulterior motive of experiential avoidance

All performers express a desire to have time to prepare for a performance. Alicia equates being unprepared with being “on the spot” - and cites it as the origin for much of her anxiety (p.18) As active performers, both Grace and Joanna give detailed, practical accounts of their planning.

Grace and Joanna see thorough preparation as a means to avoid exposure to unnecessary anxiety.

“That's for familiarity, and also probably for control, because if I know, if I am trying to find out as much information for myself, I'm doing something actively. I'm not just passively.... Exposing myself.” (Grace, p.36)

“When I don't feel prepared, that is like almost an open gate for anxiety to just, “come on in anxiety”, [laugh] you know.” (Joanna, p.8)

Grace and Joanna's accounts of preparation carry a concern with getting “as much information” as possible - both accounts use this exact wording twice each. Both want to control the outcome of the myriad things that could go wrong. For Joanna, this involves project management; the co-ordination of programming, preparing her own performance, communicating with other performers, the venues and the host, as well as co-ordinating equipment and venue specifications (pp.4-6).

“Really, the main thing for me is preparing. So as prepared as I can get, helps me to feel confident, and ah, that is going to be a positive and um, successful performance.” (Joanna, p.5)

Grace depends on preparation as a means for enabling performance. Her main preparation concerns are creating supportive schedules with all the tasks she needs to accomplish, practicing her songs (and working on any difficult passages in singing lessons), and looking up the venue in advance so that she has the familiarity she needs to support her in performing

“The only way I can get through performances at open mics now is by utilising my structure of preparation.” (Grace, p.35)

“Trying to know as much in advance - If I do go to the new venue, for example, I look it up on Google Maps and do the satellite thingy where you can walk around it um and look at pictures, so that I have enough information, or as much information as it's possible to get before an event.” (Grace, p.36)

Alicia also describes an unnerving sense of lack of control in the absence of preparation.

“It's not knowing what the outcome is going to be, and having to just put yourself out there and be on the spot and be the centre of attention and not really knowing how it's gonna go.” (Alicia, p.19)

In this way, preparation can be viewed as a means of avoiding the discomfort of anxiety and vulnerability.

Positive interactions with others - like encouragement and peer support - can enable performance

Encouragement from others has been described in all three accounts as a supportive experience, one that aids the participant in positively orienting themselves towards performance. Alicia's experience of encouragement in singing lessons has led to a reduction in self judgement and fear,

as previously stated (Alicia, pp.26-27), while Grace sees encouragement before a performance as essential

"I have to get hyped up by someone at some point [giggle] (Grace, p.42)

Joanna credits her authentic stage presence to a supportive conversation with her mother when she was a child; where her voice, thoughts, opinions and self-expression as a person were validated and encouraged.

"It actually - not almost - It did just give me the permission to express myself and be okay with who I was in every situation. I can't change who I am right. I can try to. I can be fake, and put on a facade from one person to the next, but that is not being authentic, so...that gave me the permission to just be myself. And that, I feel that really plays a huge part in who I am on stage." (Joanna, p.47)

She cites the importance of encouragement not just in her own experiences, but advises anxious performers to seek out people who will offer it (Joanna, p.80).

Friendship and peer-learning with like minded people can be an enormous resource and source of support in encouraging performance and combatting anxiety. Joanna recalls the impact of mentorship from friends in college; being included in their processes and learning was enormously beneficial in her journey with anxiety

"I had some friends in in college who really kind of took me under their wing, and shared a lot of great advice. And in, in such a short, short burst, like short moments, small moments. But just their encouragement was so, so, so helpful and beneficial. And uh yeah, something I think about to this day, just the encouragement, you know, showing me what they're doing, teaching me what they're learning. Ummm. And yeah, it was very, very helpful." (Joanna, p.67)

Prior to Covid, Alicia was able to perform regularly at an open mic when she attended with a friend

"I used to do open mic before Covid with a friend of mine." p.8

The sense of precarity experienced by Grace in the environment of the open mic is greatly eased by the presence of a friend

"The closer I get to a performance, the more anxious I get. And it also depends if I'm going with someone I know or not, because I always like it better when I go with someone I know." (Grace, p.4)

"Generally someone who knows me well, so that they can save me if I need saving [slight giggle] and yeah, someone I am comfortable just sitting with, and watching music." (Grace, p.8)

Events are much more enjoyable with a friend - *"I always like it better"*, where *"always"* may provide a sense that this strategy is reliable. This also provides an additional layer of familiarity - *"someone I know"*. Her ideal companion is someone who understands her (*"knows me well"*), which for Grace also means that they can spot when she is in distress and take positive action to support her (*"they can save me if I need saving"*). They also share the same interest as her (in *"watching music"*) and don't require her to entertain them, content to just sit together.

These friendships all contain a sense of equal investment and participation in the journey - an environment for co-learning and exploration which may create a sense of team-work and mutual support.

No participant has found a way to guarantee anxiety will not return

None of the participants have given an account of any strategy or technique that can reliably prevent the onset of extreme anxiety in performance.

Appendix 15: Personal Experiential Themes

Please click here to access the Personal Experiential Themes

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1jv19GB1XnYAcXavMHjAFOsEbpX_WYGB4?usp=sharing

Appendix 16: Transcripts: Annotated and Redacted

Please click here to access Annotated and redacted transcripts

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/17JPx-JK2avtGE2DEAf0UQ2VhMkxK78kS?usp=sharing>