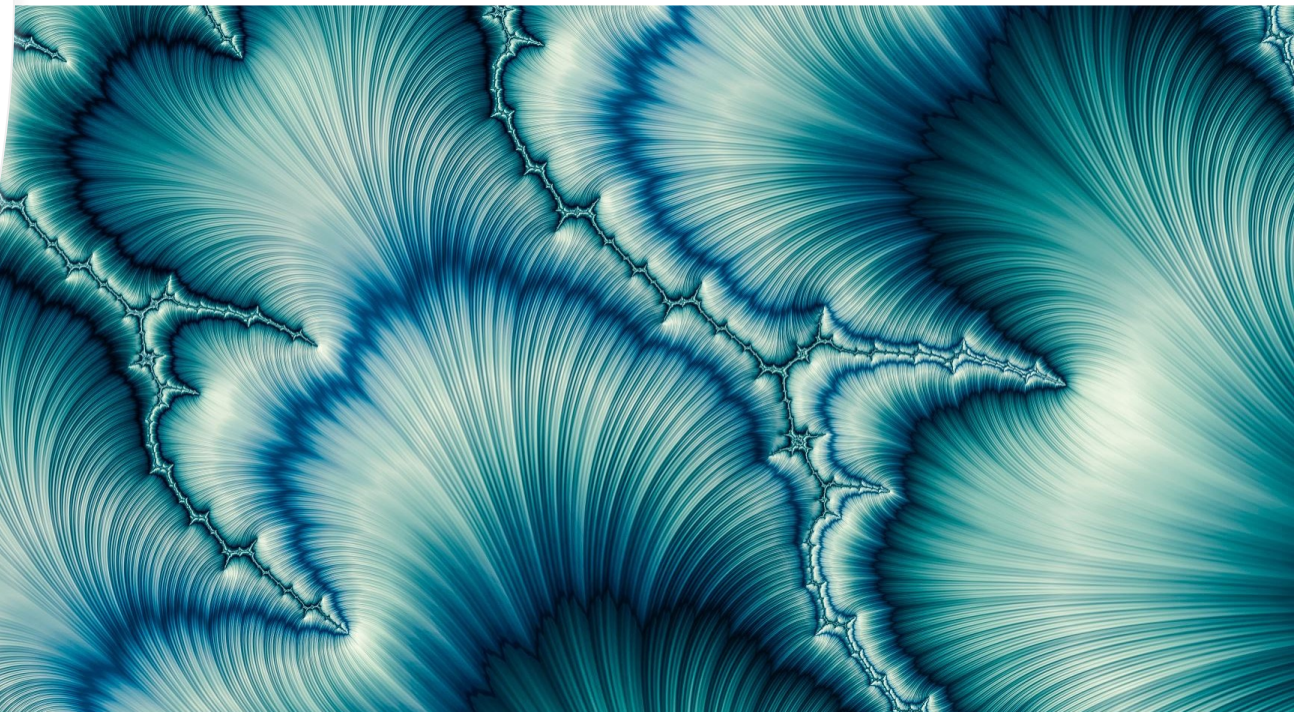


“I’m Not a Singer”

Parental Perspectives on Singing to Infants: Exploring Perceptions, Values, and Beliefs



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Rationale

WHY THIS MATTERS?

- Parental well-being is a growing research focus, Music and Parental wellbeing alliance (2025).
- Perinatal mental health challenges are common, 20% globally, in low to middle-income families.
- In group singing, research demonstrates that singing supports parental wellbeing & promotes infant development.
- Because parent–infant dyads co-regulate, adverse outcomes impact across the infant lifespan

WHY THIS STUDY?

- If singing beneficial to infant development & parent wellbeing
- Parents' perspectives are under-researched, very limited literature.
- ❌ Many adults believe they “can’t sing”, (disclose during groups). In fact 1-2% population have congenital amusia.
- Singing accessible, free resource, mobile
- Understanding parents' perceptions improves practice for facilitators & wellbeing within the dyad.



* When “parent” or “parental” is mentioned, it refers to those caring for children, including biological parents, adopters, foster and kinship carers, single parents, and same-sex couples. Specific groups, like mothers, are named when relevant. Language evolves rapidly, and the aim is to remain inclusive.

First singing mentors

🎵 **Music is ancient**

Humans have produced music for 50,000+ years

A Foetus can detect voices & rhythms in the third trimester

Caregivers vocalise in a specific way to soothe infants, recognisable across cultures

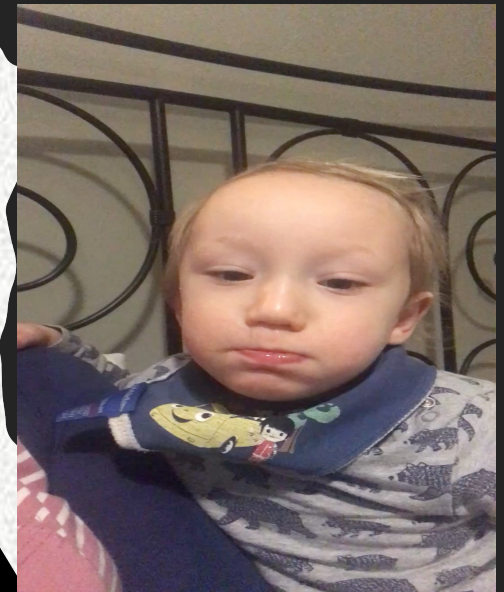
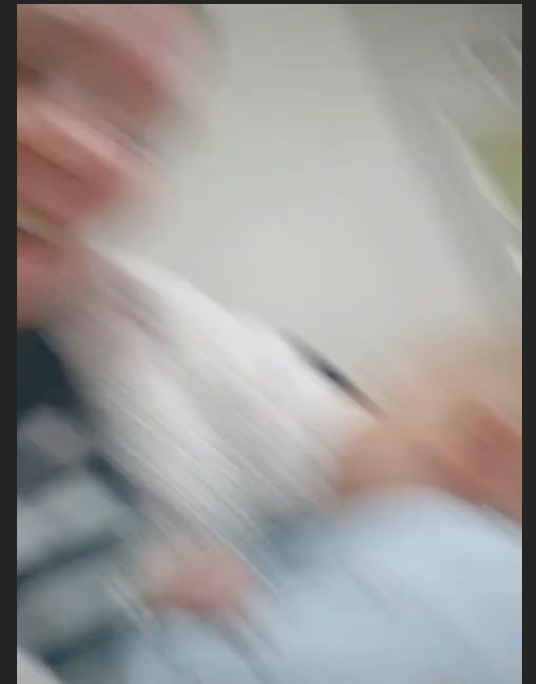
Singing to infants evolved to promote survival by calming distress and supporting feeding and safety.





Infant directed speech and singing

- Universal, more expressive, higher pitch, slower tempo, melodic quality, warm engaging tone
- Infants respond more strongly to IDS Singing over Speech, highlighting significant role in infancy
- Singing to infants boosts parental mental health by lowering stress hormones and easing postnatal depression



Neuroscience

- **INFANTS**
 - Newborns' brains engage auditory, sensorimotor, and salience networks in response to singing.
 - Sung voice stimulates infant neural systems more strongly than instrumental music.
- **PARENTS** (singing brain research scarce)
 - Infant vocal cues activate the orbitofrontal cortex and amygdala in parents
 - Amygdala activity relates to parental sensitivity and links to oxytocin and dopamine reward pathways
 - Parent–infant interaction activates neurochemical systems that foster bonding, emotional regulation, and secure attachment



Theoretical Perspectives in Voice Pedagogy

Attachment Theory



- Singing strengthens bonding and co-regulation, supporting caregiver sensitivity and secure attachment (Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth et al., 1978; Newman et al., 2022).

Modelling (Social Learning Theory)



- Infants imitate caregiver behaviour; confident adult singing models musical engagement and conveys emotional value (Bandura, 1977; Lense et al., 2022; Salvador & Menon, 2025).

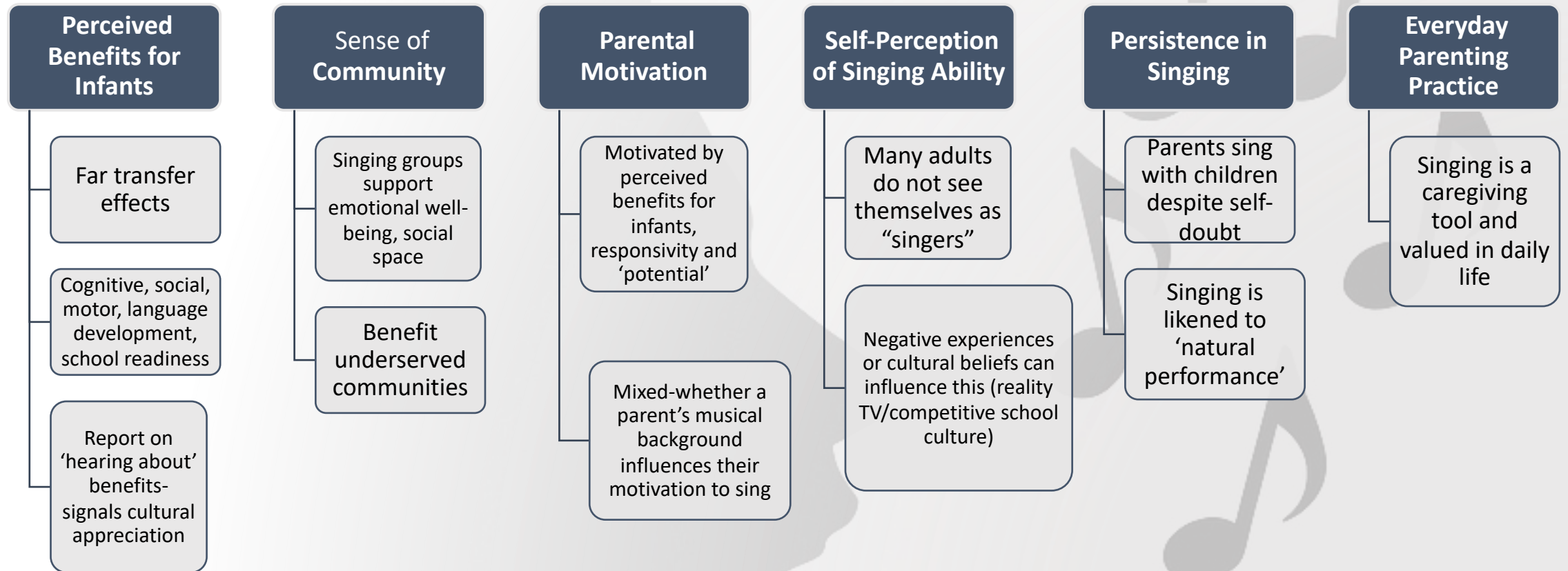
Self-Determinism / Reciprocal Determinism



- Parent and infant influence each other's behaviour; infant responses can increase parental confidence and active engagement in singing (Bandura, 1977; Provenzi et al., 2018; Savage et al., 2020).



Parental Beliefs and Perspectives on Singing



Methods (Mixed methods is scarce)

Mixed-methods: online survey & semi-structured interviews and literature review for breadth & depth

Parents of children aged 0–4 recruited via diverse online/offline channels

Convergent Parallel, Quantitative: Jamovi. Qualitative: Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Interpretivist/constructionist stance (felted together)

Ethics: Insider research, University approval, Consent, Anonymity

Data Triangulation enhances transferability and trustworthiness.



Data Collection Instrument

- Insights from a pilot soft focus group shaped the direction of the questioning.
- Mixed-methods study: 148 participants completed a 36-item positive psychology influenced survey, taking approximately 5–6 minutes each.
- 6 semi structured interviews with a mean time of 14.03 minutes.
- Convenience and purposive sampling
- Quantitative data revealed patterns; qualitative data added depth and nuance, creating a more comprehensive picture



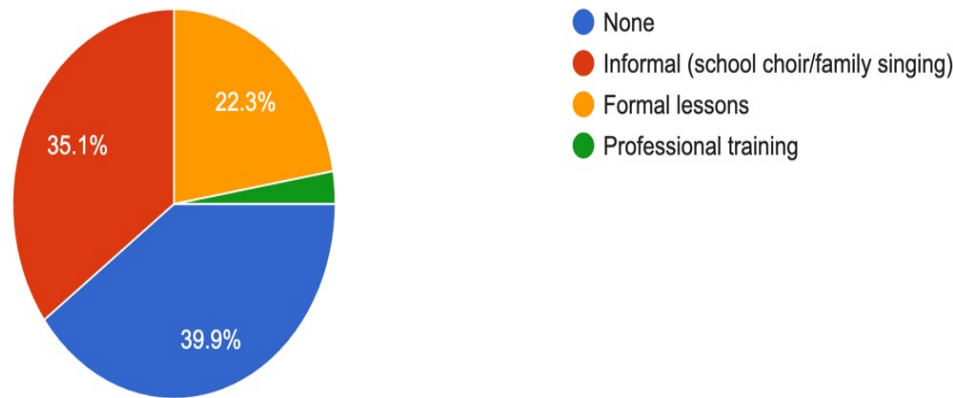
Parental Musical background

25% of parents had formal musical training; musical background not linked to singing beliefs.

Infers, singing to infants is an intuitive act that fosters emotional bonding and does not require musical expertise

*“She’d never sit me down and engage in singing with me.”
(Participant F- a musical theatre graduate)*

Musical background/training:
148 responses

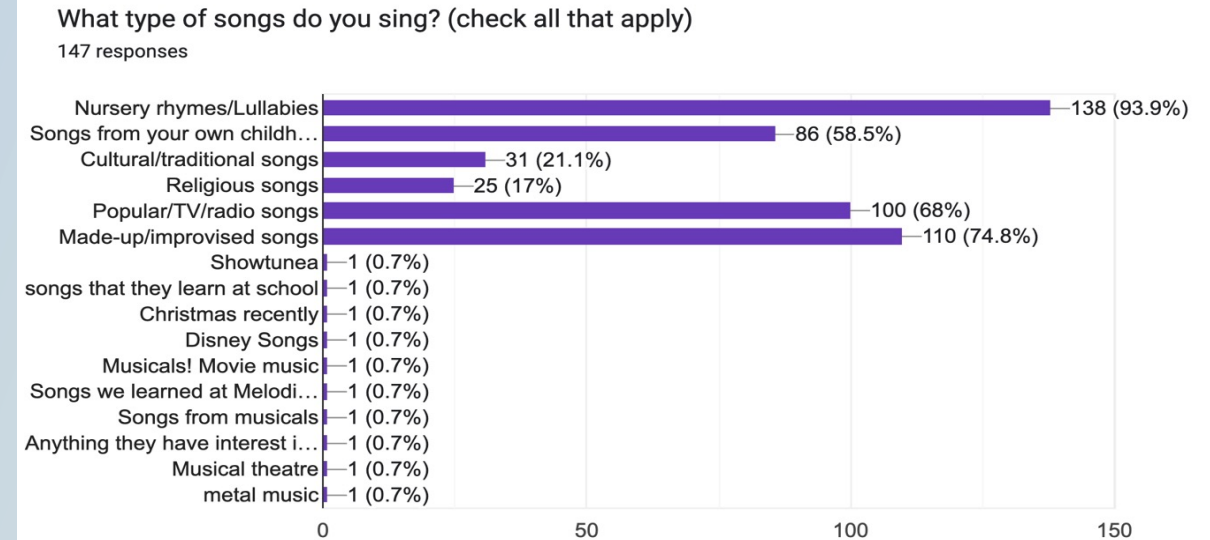


Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Musical background/training	—			
2. Singing important for development	.06	—		
3. Benefits even if parent not a good singer	.14	.32***	—	
4. Singing strengthens parent–child bond	.25**	.51***	.55***	—

. Values are Pearson’s *r*.
p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001.
N ≈ 146.

Frequency and Nature of Singing

- 73.5% of parents sing to their infants several times a day, mostly as part of daily routines.
- Both traditional and improvised songs are commonly used, with improvisation emerging as a notable finding.
- Being sung to as a child was linked to smaller increases in singing as a parent, while current singing frequency showed no association
- *“We always sing at bedtimes and we always sing in the morning. But to be honest, we sing a lot of the time, in the car, throughout the day.”*
(Participant A)



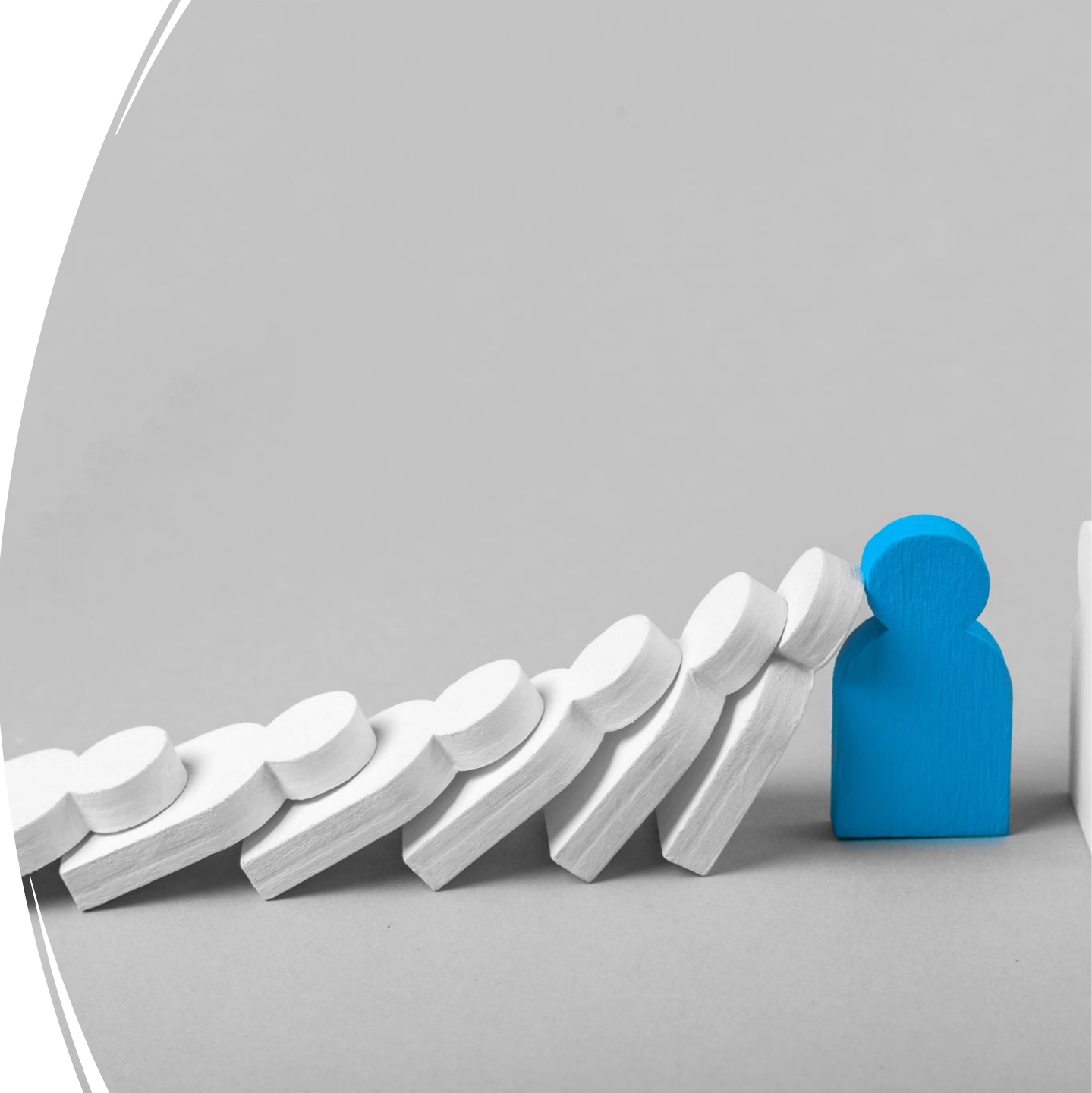
Variable	1	2	3
1. Current singing frequency	—		
2. Caregivers sang to parent in childhood	.02	—	
3. Singing more than expected after becoming a parent	.07	-.22**	—

$p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

$N \approx 145$.

Emotional Value and Barriers

- Singing was strongly associated with general modes of infant development, emotional bonding, language and safety, regardless of parental singing ability.
- Main barriers to singing to infants: tiredness/stress (52.6%), not necessarily a lack of confidence.
- *“And I can feel her looking at me when I’m singing, she’s like taking it and watching me.” (Participant H)*



Universality of singing and Digital Media

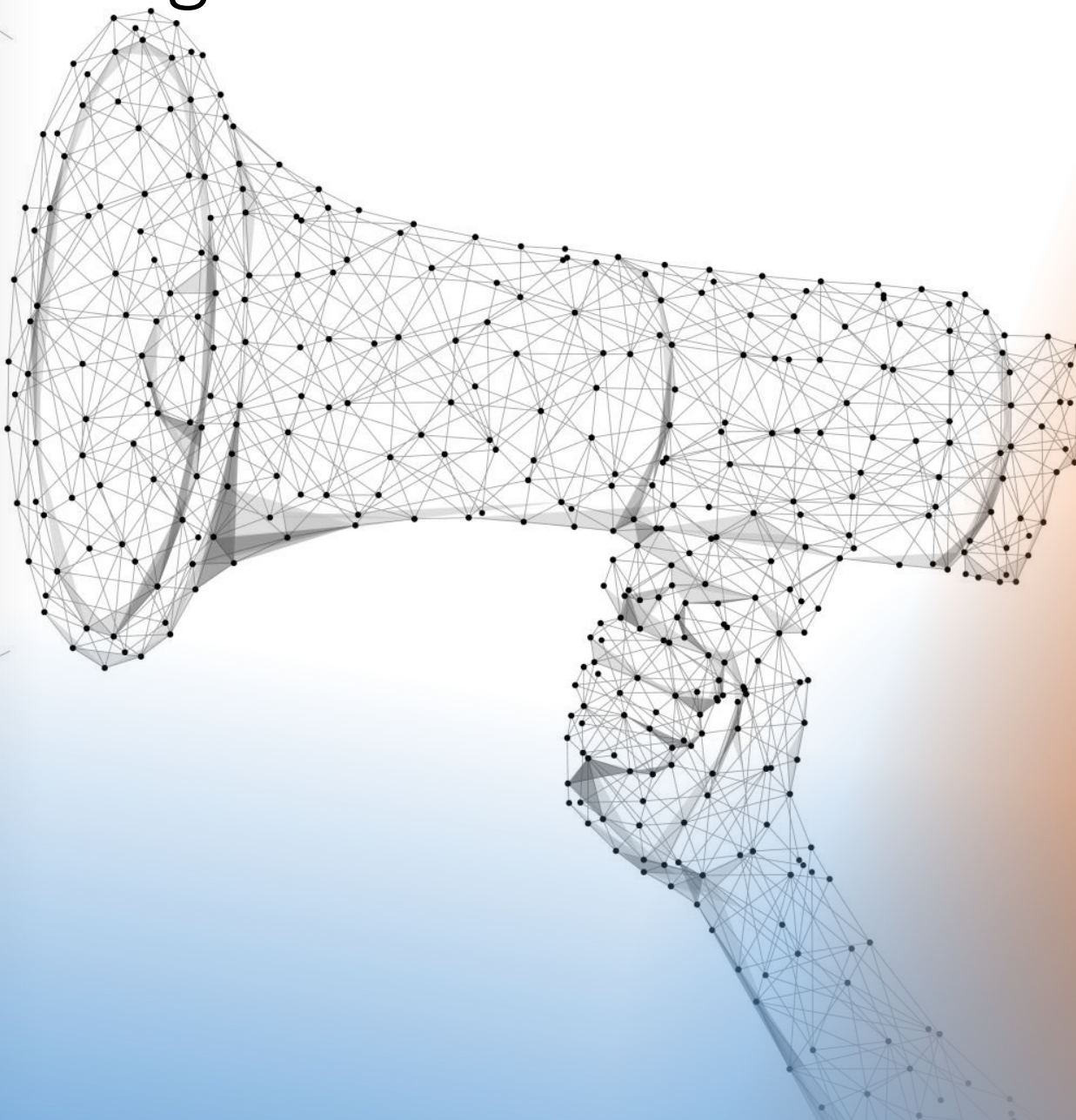
- 68% of Parents sing TV/radio songs; 69.4% use digital music services.

- In the last 30 years, singing with infants remains universal despite technology. (biological predisposition)

- All Interviewees sang to their infants:
"It doesn't matter because I think it benefits. I would rather be embarrassed, and it benefits them. Then don't do it." (Participant F)

Advice to others, was unanimous:

"Just do it" (Participant S)





Virtuous Cycle and Confidence

- Frequent singing is linked to infant responsiveness, emotional bonding, and increased parental confidence.
- 52.4% of parents said singing improved their confidence.
- Infant Responsivity is a leading factor, *“Cause I know she enjoys it.” (Participant C)*

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Frequency of singing	—			
2. Child responds positively to singing	.39***	—		
3. Singing strengthens parent–child bond	.35***	.42***	—	
4. Parent feels confident singing	.33***	.29***	.42***	—

Note. Values are Pearson’s *r*.
 $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.
 $N \approx 146$.

Impact of Singing Non- Musical Development

Everyday caregiving tool

- Singing supports modes of development (through far transfer effects), language, emotion, coordination and sense of safety (regardless of parents' singing ability).
- *"A lot of the songs she does come with movement. So, I think it's good for her coordination as well." (Participant C)*
- *"She wasn't putting sentences together for a long time, but she can recall the whole sentence. So that shows, doesn't it?" (Participant A)*
- *"It teaches her the order of things" (Participant F)*



Singing was used during nappy changes and at bedtime to provide distraction and regulate emotions. For example, during 'elimination communication' practise



"We did that from birth, and we found that we would have to hold her on the potty for a couple of minutes, and we just held her there. She'd get wiggly and grumpy and annoyed, but if we sang to her, it allowed us to hold her there a bit longer. It relaxed her." (participant C)

Singing Identity

Family memory

Weak link between being sung to as a child and current parental singing frequency. However...

Participants overwhelmingly remembered positive and encouraging messages from their grandparents about singing. Intergenerational messaging

I know my grandparents did because they were Irish and I remember my grandad singing Irish songs to me.” (Participant E)

Participant S’s self-consciousness in a female-centric environment likely shaped his singing behaviour, as he sang privately.

Unfortunately. It's a bit weird 'cause like I say, I'm the only dad that turns up or feels a bit strange doing it to a degree.'

Some Parents are deeply impacted by negative historical voice experiences

'as soon as I was singing in front of someone else, I'd tense up and then I would just be horribly out of tune and the director we worked with was quite blunt with things.' (participant C)

Male under- represented

Negative memory



Implications for practitioners



Engage Fathers:

Address low paternal singing engagement by fostering inclusive, non-gendered environments in singing groups. Recognise and empathise with fathers who may feel excluded from these spaces.

Challenge Singing Identity Myths:

Help parents reframe beliefs about being “non-singers” by modelling singing as an accessible, everyday activity, not a performance. Highlight that singing identity is culturally constructed and can be reshaped for developmental benefit.

Model Functional Singing:

Emphasise participatory, functional singing over perfection or performative style. Practitioners should “lead and connect, not perform,” fostering communal music-making.

Highlight Non-Musical Benefits:

Promote the language, emotional, motor and social benefits of singing for families. Use this knowledge as leverage. Frame singing as a caregiving tool and avoid inauthentic praise to nurture genuine confidence and participation.

Limitations

Gender Representation:

Predominantly female participants; male perspectives underrepresented, reflecting wider gender bias in caregiving and research.

Diversity:

No racial profiling to protect privacy and sensitivity; limited indicators of ethnic and linguistic diversity. Broader challenges in researching diverse populations remain.

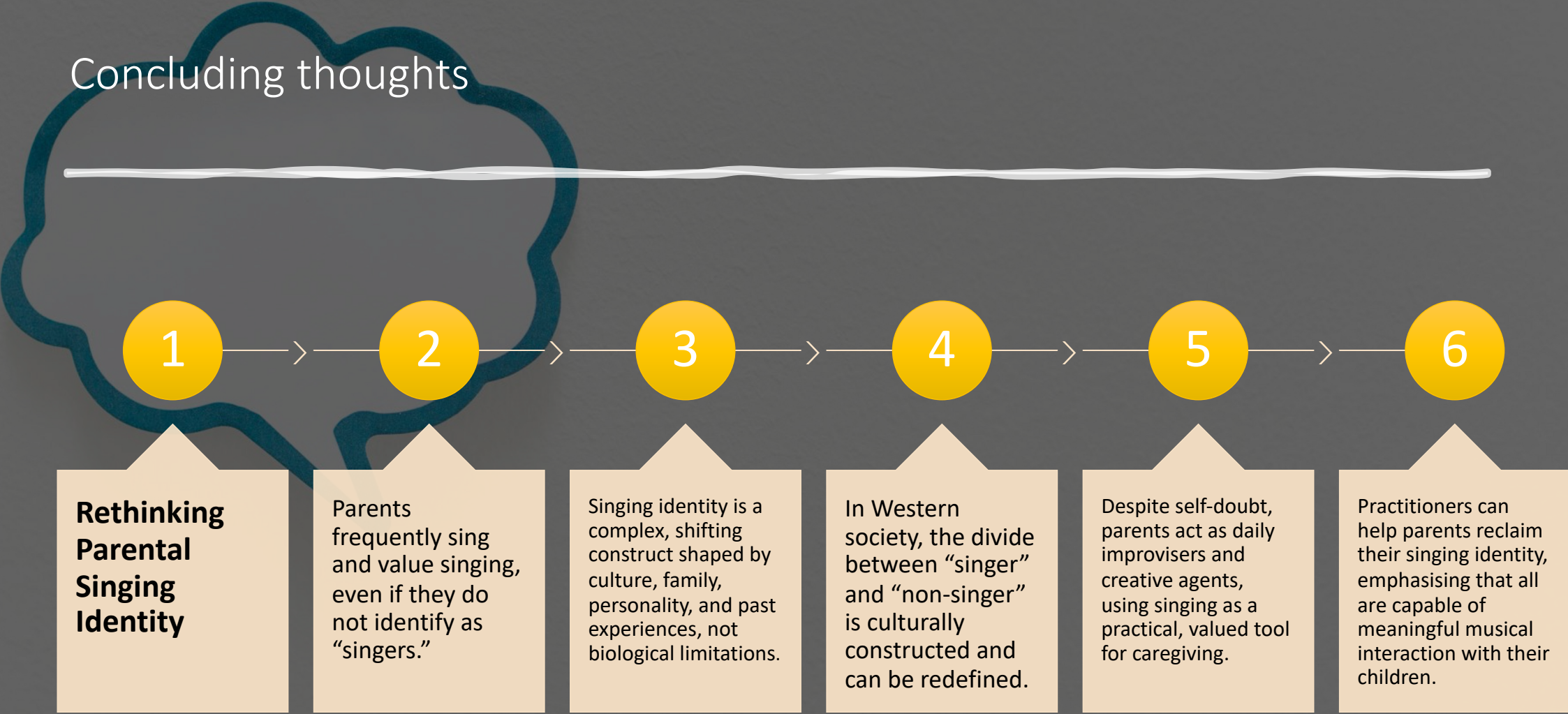
Recall Bias:

Self-reported data may be affected by memory inaccuracies and social desirability bias.

Socioeconomic & Inclusion:

Socioeconomically homogeneous sample; high level of education. Most interviewees held affirmative views about singing classes. Lacked perspectives from parents of neurodivergent children.

Concluding thoughts



1

**Rethinking
Parental
Singing
Identity**

2

Parents frequently sing and value singing, even if they do not identify as “singers.”

3

Singing identity is a complex, shifting construct shaped by culture, family, personality, and past experiences, not biological limitations.

4

In Western society, the divide between “singer” and “non-singer” is culturally constructed and can be redefined.

5

Despite self-doubt, parents act as daily improvisers and creative agents, using singing as a practical, valued tool for caregiving.

6

Practitioners can help parents reclaim their singing identity, emphasising that all are capable of meaningful musical interaction with their children.

Future Revisit



- Broaden recruitment to include more diverse and representative parent groups, such as fathers and neurodivergent families
- Enhance interview methods for richer data, considering factors like microphone placement and childcare support
- Investigate the processes by which parents develop a singing identity

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