

Exploring the experience, expression, and control of anger among singers

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The aim of the present work was to explore the experience, expression, and control of anger of a group of 54 singers at a music college who completed a normative state-trait anger expression inventory (STAXI-2, Spielberger 1999) prior to and after the performances of their mid-year examinations. Both female and male singers differed from their normative groups on the Anger Expression-In scale, which was interpreted in terms of the need to refrain from expressing anger overtly in a competitive and hierarchical system such as that of a music college. In addition, female singers also scored lower in the Anger Control-In scale, which indicates that they experience angry feelings but show a tendency not to develop internal controls to overcome those feelings. The results also showed that there were no significant differences between the singers' State Anger levels prior to and after the performances which indicates that the mid-year examinations did not raise the singers' levels of anger.

Keywords: singers; assessment; emotions; anger; STAXI-2

In the course of the singing activity in a music college, particularly in the context of examinations, there may be several factors that arouse anger. Anger may be a result of the subject's awareness of his/her physical limitations (Lemerise and Dodge 1993). Therefore, it may be hypothesized that given the degree of dependency on the wellbeing of their voice and body, singers might feel angry if their voices do not function well. In addition to this, anger may also stem from the fact that in the moment of the performance, the singer's physical limitations are exposed. Fitness (2000) described five other types of events that made people angry at their workplace, namely (1) being unfairly treated, (2) witnessing amoral behavior, (3) confronting incompetence, particularly one's own, (4) being treated

disrespectfully, and (5) being publicly humiliated. Moreover, she found out that anger was expressed more easily toward subordinates than toward colleagues or superiors.

From an interactionist perspective, Berkovitz (1990) suggested that anger stems from a conjunction of three factors: (1) the action being against the subject's will, (2) the subject's expectations being frustrated, and (3) the subject feeling that s/he is not in control of the situation. If one considers that singers devise a performance plan according to which expectations regarding their performances are created, anger may well arise in the course of the singers' activity. Given that most emotions are dependent on the subjects' social context (Averill 1982), it may well be questioned whether, in the singers' social group, the experience of anger occurs more frequently than in other groups and if it occurs for reasons directly related to their activity. In fact, Kemp (1996) suggested that, given the body-orientated modes of functioning of singing performances and their higher sensitivity, singers may operate at a more "feelingful" level than other musicians, and therefore, one may well ask whether singers are more inclined to experience emotions more intensely, namely anger.

A variety of conscious and unconscious processes are used to deal with angry feelings. The three main approaches are: expressing, suppressing, and calming those feelings. According to Spielberger (1999), the amount and the way in which anger is expressed are critical variables. For that reason, a distinction should be made, conceptually and operationally, between the expression of anger, the experience of anger as an emotional state, and the individual differences in anger-proneness as a personality trait. Thus, the aim of this empirical work was to attempt to contribute to the literature by applying a normative state-trait anger expression inventory (STAXI-2; Spielberger 1999) to a group of opera singers.

METHOD

Participants

The participants were 54 undergraduate vocal students (i.e. first-, second-, and third-year students) at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. In total, there were 29 female singers and 25 male singers. Their ages varied between 18 and 25, with a mean of 21.3 years.

Materials

Participants completed the State and Trait Anger Expression Inventory-2 (STAXI-2, Spielberger 1999). It aims to assess either the intensity of angry feelings at a particular time or how frequently anger is experienced, expressed, suppressed, or controlled by the participants, who, in responding to each of the 57 STAXI-2 items, rate themselves on a 4-point scale. The STAXI-2 consists of six scales: State Anger, Trait Anger, Anger Expression-Out, Anger Expression-In, Anger Control-Out and Anger Control-In, and five sub-scales: Feeling Angry, Feel Like Expressing Anger Verbally, Feel Like Expressing Anger Physically, Angry Temperament, Angry Reaction, and an Anger Expression Index.

Procedure

Two weeks before the school's mid-year examinations, the participants were asked to complete the three parts of the STAXI-2 inventory. Then, during the mid-year examinations, five minutes prior to their performance, the participants were asked to complete Part I of the STAXI-2 inventory. Immediately after the performance, they were asked to repeat the same part, in order to compare the influence of the exam situation/performance on the State Anger of the participants.

RESULTS

The singers' scores were compared with their normative group separately for females and males, in accordance with Spielberger (1999). In order to assess what characteristics female and male singers possessed that might or might not distinguish them from their normative group, a z-test was done. As can be seen in Table 1, significant differences were observed between the mean scores of female singers and their normative group for the scales of Anger Expression-In and Anger Control-In and the Anger Expression Index Scale (Ax Index).

As can be seen in Table 2, the AX-I and Ax Index scores of male singers were significantly different from those of the normative group. Finally, an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was carried out in order to compare the State-Anger levels of both female and male singers at three different stages: Stage 1, two weeks before the examination; Stage 2, immediately prior to the examination; and Stage 3, immediately after the examination. The results were *non-significant*. This showed that the State-Anger levels of the singers did not differ at these three stages.

Table 1. Comparison between the mean scores of female singers and their normative group in the STAXI-2 (N=number of observations).

	<i>Female normative group</i>			<i>Female singers</i>			<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>		
S-Ang	17.9	4.9	266	18.6	5.4	27	-0.74	0.46
S-Ang/F	6.8	2.3	268	7.0	2.6	27	-0.58	0.56
S-Ang/V	5.9	2.2	269	6.3	2.7	27	-0.93	0.35
S-Ang/P	5.3	1.1	269	5.2	0.5	27	0.44	0.66
T-Ang	18.1	4.9	263	19.4	6.0	27	-1.17	0.24
T-Angt	6.3	2.4	268	7.0	3.0	27	-1.34	0.18
T-Angr	8.8	2.6	267	9.1	2.6	27	-0.77	0.45
AX-O	14.7	3.6	266	15.5	3.7	27	-1.07	0.28
AX-I	15.9	4.4	261	18.0	3.7	27	-2.89	0.00*
AC-O	23.3	5.2	263	23.0	5.6	27	0.18	0.86
AC-I	23.5	6.1	265	21.4	4.8	27	2.11	0.04*
Ax Index	31.7	13.8	248	37.0	13.5	27	-1.97	0.05*

* $p < 0.05$

Table 2. Comparison between the mean scores of male singers and their normative group in the STAXI-2 (N=number of observations).

	<i>Female normative group</i>			<i>Female singers</i>			<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>		
S-Ang	19.0	6.6	210	18.0	6.8	20	0.57	0.57
S-Ang/F	6.9	2.7	216	6.6	3.5	20	0.37	0.71
S-Ang/V	6.3	2.7	214	5.9	1.6	20	1.00	0.32
S-Ang/P	5.7	2.0	214	5.5	2.0	20	0.43	0.67
T-Ang	18.4	4.8	211	20.5	6.5	20	-1.48	0.14
T-Angt	6.4	2.4	213	7.0	2.6	20	-1.16	0.25
T-Angr	8.8	2.5	214	9.6	3.3	20	-1.19	0.23
AX-O	15.0	3.5	212	16.6	4.6	20	-1.51	0.13
AX-I	16.6	4.0	207	20.2	6.5	20	-2.44	0.02*
AC-O	23.6	4.8	213	22.9	4.7	20	0.64	0.52
AC-I	23.1	5.6	208	21.2	5.6	20	1.37	0.17
Ax Index	32.7	12.3	196	40.0	13.5	20	-2.35	0.02*

* $p < 0.05$

DISCUSSION

The singers' trait anger levels were not significantly different from their normative group. In this way, they do not seem to be more inclined than other groups to experience anger more intensely. This was hypothesized after Kemp's (1996) suggestion that given the body-orientated modes of function of singing performance and their higher sensitivity, singers may operate at a more "feelingful" level. In addition, it seems that, as a social group, singers may not experience anger more frequently than other groups, a question that arose taking into account the findings of Averill (1982) that most emotions are dependent on the subject's social context.

Both female and male singers differed from their normative groups on the Anger Expression-In scale. These scores may indicate that both female and male students frequently experience angry feelings but tend to suppress them. Spielberg (1999) drew attention to the fact that high Anger Expression-In scores combined with high Anger Expression-Out scores could mean that these individuals would suppress or express their angry feelings at times. Because their Anger Expression-Out scores are not significantly different, it is an indicator of an attitude of suppressing anger feelings. This was interpreted in terms of the need to refrain from expressing anger overtly in a competitive and hierarchical system such as that of a music college. Therefore, it may be that high levels of Anger Expression-In may be a useful trait for singers in a music college.

The above seems to reinforce the results obtained by Fitness (2000) on anger expression at the workplace. In addition, female singers also scored lower in the Anger Control-In scale, which indicates that they experience angry feelings but show a tendency not to develop internal controls to overcome feelings of anger. Finally, the results showed that there were no significant differences between the singers' State Anger levels prior to and after the performances. Therefore, it was hypothesized that the mid-year examinations did not raise the singers' levels of anger. This may be because they did not feel unfairly treated during the course of their examinations, they enjoy singing, are used to performing, and they feel they are good at it. As singers are frequently subjected to examinations, it may well be that they learn how to adapt and respond to the situation. It may also be that the hypothesized relationship between the emotion of anger and the singing activity is not verifiable, at least in the moment of performance itself.

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