CultureCase

Singing can sustain psychological wellbeing

This research was conducted by **Stephen Clift and Grenville Hancox** at **Canterbury Christ Church University, UK**

Summary

This paper reports the results of a study of 1124 choral singers from Australia, Germany and England. The choirs varied greatly in character, make-up and repertoire. The study asked about people's singing experiences and their health. The survey focused primarily on asking what effects (if any) singing in a choir had on the respondent's quality of life, social or psychological wellbeing, and physical health. The vast majority of participants in the study reported some benefit from choral singing. The results showed a significant correlation between psychological wellbeing in women and the degree to which they felt they benefited from singing (this was not detected in men). It also showed that some people used singing as a mechanism to cope with difficult life circumstances.

The effect of singing on people with low levels of psychological wellbeing

The research looked in detail at the views and experiences of people who reported low levels of psychological wellbeing but also reported that they derived a large amount of wellbeing from singing. These people tended to report troubles resulting from four sources: mental health problems, significant family problems, physical health difficulties and bereavement. They articulated how singing had helped them deal with these challenges.

Singing probably affects psychological wellbeing in six ways

In contrast to most of the research in this field, the paper sets out a clear theoretical framework for how singing may affect wellbeing. The authors hypothesise that singing works to affect people in the following ways: generating a positive affect, encouraging focused concentration, controlled deep breathing, fostering social support, cognitive stimulation, and generating the benefits of regular commitment. A given mechanism may have more than one outcome for wellbeing, and two or more mechanisms may have a similar impact.

Gender is an important factor

72 per cent of the choir members in the survey were female, and there were gender differences in how they perceived the benefits of singing. This may reflect real differences in how singing affects people, or it may more likely result from differences in how men and women perceive and articulate these effects.

Keywords

singing **cross-national** **wellbeing** **survey** **health** **choral**

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Author email	**Stephen.clift@canterbury.ac.uk**

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