

A Musical Portrait of Singing and Identity: Elder Angelenos' Experiences and Impressions of Singing in Youth and as Seniors

Lisa Crawford*, lisa.crawford@usc.edu, Eun Cho, eunc@usc.edu, Beatriz Ilari, ilari@usc.edu
University of Southern California – Flora L. Thornton School of Music, United States



USC Thornton
School of Music

Overview & Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative study was to interview, identify, and analyze responses of elder participants (over age 65) through a researcher-developed interview protocol about singing throughout their lives. Angelenos of Korean, Hispanic, and Anglo ethnicities took part in the study.

The interview protocol of 35 questions invited response to four sections: 1) personal information, 2) childhood memories and singing, 3) teenage years, 4) singing, and music learning in the elder phase of life. If interviewees were immigrants to the United States, they were asked 3 additional questions.

Elders were recorded or videotaped and most interviewees sang at least one song during the interview when prompted, however, in several cases, elders declined to sing for the interview or said they could not recall a song to sing.



Considering Identity Literature Review

Music is...

- ♦ a device for on-going identity work and for spinning a biographical thread of self-remembrance (DeNora, 1999).
- ♦ a symbolic representation of who we are and how we would like to be perceived by others (Hays & Minichiello, 2005).
- ♦ a way that people come to know and make sense of the society to which they belong (DeNora, 2000).
- ♦ a medium to express one's inner-self by the making of music or specifically choosing music that conveys intensity of emotional feeling felt at any given time by the individual (Sloboda & O'Neill, 2001).

Participants

#	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Birth Country	Challenges of Memory - Self-relevance to music - Desire for musical interaction Emotional responses associated with music-related memories Desire for musical interaction
1	93	F	H	Costa Rica	"American music was very important to me. It is how I learned English."
2	88	F	H	Guadalajara	"Music is only for young people because young people don't like old music."
3	75	M	W	United States	"I listen to music on TV. I listen to I guess what people would call country music. It makes me feel better [because I can't get out anymore]."
4	74	F	A	South Korea	"I believe that music is very important. It brings peace to the world. Without music, the world is going to be very tough."
5	72	M	A	South Korea	(After singing <i>Can't help falling in love</i>) "it was so... romantic and beautiful... It stirred up my heart and it still does so..."
6	70	M	A	South Korea	"I can't say that I'm good at music. However, I can certainly tell you that music takes a big part in my life. Music is deeply embedded in my life."
7	69	M	W	United States	"As a child I didn't sing songs on my own as I was afraid to engage in any kind of emotional expression at home, and I became that person. I grew up afraid of my own voice and have challenged that notion only in my sixties." And, "It is really challenging to think of the memory and then talk about it simultaneously. It comes in pictures and then you have to translate."
8	67	F	A	South Korea	"We don't have any common musical interests with our grandchildren... I wish we can do something musically with them, but their things are just so different from our things."

Findings



Strong nostalgia for songs from birth country

"Since I immigrated to USA in 1971, I have got to like Korean folksongs more than before..." (P5)

Learning English and American culture through American pop song

"American music was very important to me. Immigrating from Costa Rica, it is how I learned English." (P1)

"I wanted to learn English, so I eagerly learned English pop songs from the radio... and also from friends." (P8)



Few mention musical interactions with their children/ grandchildren

"I had a lot of fun to play music with my kids. They sang songs while I was accompanying them on the piano. I recorded that and I still have the recording tapes." (P4)

"I don't like rap. But I learned rock songs with my grandson in the car." (P1)

Lack of common songs to be shared with their children/ grandchildren

"We don't have any common musical interests with our grandchildren." (P8)



Musical tastes influenced by religion

"I didn't listen to or sing pop songs, so I don't really know about them... Because I attended a very conservative church, singing pop songs was strictly prohibited." (P4)

Getting opportunities to participate in music making (e.g., church choir)

"After I retired from my job, the first thing I did was to return to the church choir... I hope to sing in this choir until the end of my life." (P5)



Participation in community musical events

"Every Saturday we went to the center of town and the Mariachis started to play. The whole family went to the garden parties. It was just what we did." (P2)

Wish for more opportunities for musical engagement in community

"There should be a place for old people to go and enjoy music." (P2)

"I wish there were more music programs for elderly people since our musical consumption is dramatically increasing." (P6)

Breaking Stereotypes

EMERGENT CATEGORIES

- Few musical associations AS children
- Few musical associations WITH children or grandchildren
- Mention ISOLATION frequently

INVOLVEMENTS

- Family
- Church
- Community
- Most still live independently

SEEMINGLY AFFECTED ABILITY TO RECALL

- Cultural and familial relationships in youth
- Popular music as teenagers and young adults
- Little interaction musically with children or grandchildren
- Little action with music as elders

MEMORIES

- Often could recall repertoire when associated with a positive or special memory
- Few musical associations with children
- Strong associations with earliest experiences of singing through dancing or formal performances (Example: Standard Oil & Firestone broadcasts)

Implications for Education

RESEARCH

- More interviews and larger number of participants to examine elder memory, history, repertoires.

PRACTICE

- Need to create community opportunities for elders to take part in music.
- Examine singing and repertoires from around the world.