

# Lipsynching as Vocal Hiding

## Strategies of Silent Belonging among Deaf and Tone-Deaf Amateur Singers

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# Research project

- *The Feel of Singing: Aesthetic Body Awareness in the Vocal Experiences of Deaf, Tone-deaf, and People with Vocal Disorders* (2018-2020)
- Vocal somaesthetics (Tarvainen 2018a, 2018b); Somaesthetics (Shusterman 2008, 2012); Pragmatist aesthetics (Dewey 1934); Interdisciplinary voice studies (Thomaidis & Macpherson 2015); Disability studies of music
- The aesthetic value of singing as embodied experience



# Research materials

- Internet surveys
- In-depth interviews
- Social media discussions (Facebook, YouTube)
- YouTube videos
- The materials on which this presentation is based:
  - Free-form answers to the internet surveys
  - Tone-deaf singers: 240 participants
  - Deaf singers: 30 participants
  - Most of them are amateur singers

# Strategies of vocal hiding

1. Avoiding the situations of singing
2. Singing alone
3. Singing as a joke
4. Singing only when drunk
5. Singing with a quiet voice
6. Merging with other voices or sounds
7. Silent singing and lipsynching



# 1. Avoiding the situations of singing

*“I stopped participating in a choir. The reason was that I felt not good enough, not eligible, I’m not enough, I’m a bad singer. Better singers get to sing, I have no right to do that.” (LT-ID21)*

## 2. Singing alone

*“I have never sung together with others on any occasion. I sing in the car, at home, in the shower mainly by signing without a voice.”(K-ID56)*



### 3. Singing as a joke

*“[...] Sometimes I sing some parts of some song as a joke, not with my real singing voice but with a modified voice [...].” (LT-ID98)*

## 4. Singing only when drunk

*“It is distressing to sing in front of others. I don't sing in front of others unless I am drunk.”  
(LT-ID45)*



## 5. Singing with a quiet voice

*“When the situation calls for it, I try to sing with the quietest possible voice so that no one pays attention.” (LT-ID130)*

## 6. Merging with other voices or sounds

*“In the car, I turn the knobs to the southeast and sing along, and that’s when I don’t hear anymore that I am singing out of tune. It is liberating.”  
(LT-ID80)*

*“Some deaf people like to sing karaoke with each other so that others can't hear it (the music is so loud).” (K-ID14)*



# 7. Silent singing and lipsynching

# Exclusion

*“The priest said before the confirmation that he hopes that all of those with a grade less than 8 in singing would just move their mouths. This is a solemn occasion.” (LT-ID232)*



# Belonging and togetherness

- *Sung belonging* (Phelan 2017):
  - hatred, elitism, and exclusion vs. openness, inclusivity, and belonging
  - The human voice is related to physiological and social bodies.
- *Togetherness* (Bilalovic Kulset & Halle 2020):  
better singing, feeling safe, increased self-confidence

# Shame and belonging

*“Failure brings shame, and to avoid it, I sometimes try to sing as quietly as possible or just move my mouth. But I wouldn't want to be left completely outside.” (ID2-6)*



# Voice shame & Negative musical identity

- “**Voice shame** is the uncomfortable feeling of being heard as ridiculous, worthless or ‘not good enough’.” (Schei & Schei 2017, 1)
- Self- regulation, self-staging, and self-censorship (ibid.)
- **Vocal shame** (Seesjärvi 2017)
- **Negative musical** identity refers to feelings of the incapability in everyday music-making (Bilalovic Kulset & Halle 2020)

# Embodied shame

*“The throat is choking. The voice fades out, becomes quieter, and breaks. Breathing thickens and becomes superficial. Panic. The hands and body are shaking. Shame presses my gaze down. I want to hide and cry. I'm bad. I have no right to exist. I'm a hindrance to others, a burden.” (ID74)*



# Singing agency and control

- Singing agency (Hogle 2020):
  - Singers use certain strategies to protect their fragile singing agency.
  - Hiding is one of these strategies.
- Control (Meizel 2020):
  - where the material voice and the metaphorical voice intersect
- Phelan (2017,9):
  - Singing requires “involuntary motor-sensory activity and conscious, cognitive manipulation.”

# Lipsynching

- Langley(2006)
  - Lipsynching in drag
  - Skill and technique required, timing, ability to convey emotions
  - An active exercise, not a passive one
  - Involves not only articulation but the whole body
- Snell (2020)
  - Personal agency, having a ‘voice’
  - Changes listening
  - Shame and shaming



# Lipsynching as vocal hiding

- Requires skill and timing?
- Requires the ability to convey emotion?
- Is an active act, not a passive?
- Involves the whole body, not just articulation?
- Enhances personal agency?
- Gives the singer a 'voice'?
- Changes listening?
- Causes shame and shaming?
- Is it inauthentic?

# Vocal hiding

- Sociality: belonging, togetherness, exclusion
- Emotions: voice shame
- Identity: negative musical identity
- Agency: singing agency, control
- Lost voices: lipsynching, silent singing
- Vocal hiding can be a singer's decision, uncontrollable embodied reaction, or a form of social exclusion
- Silent belonging



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