

**PAMCOSF | February 28,
2010**

**Effects of Psychological
Trauma on Vocal
(Singing) Performance**

Grace Johnson, DMA

Voice Teacher

Gorin School of Music, Mountain View, CA

Adjunct Associate Professor of Music

Shenandoah Conservatory of Shenandoah University,
Winchester, VA

Acknowledgements

- Amy Asbury, MM, Doctoral Student²
- Christopher Y. Chang, MD. ENT Consultants, PLC.¹
- Carmen T. Gonzalez, PhD. Counseling Center.¹
- Sarah Maines, MM, Doctoral Student²
- Melissa M. Mainville, MS, CCC/SLP. ¹
- Janette Ogg, DM, Professor of Music-Voice²

1 Fauquier Health System, Warrenton, VA

2 Shenandoah Conservatory of Shenandoah University,
Winchester, VA

Psychological Trauma

- Present/Current
- Posttrauma
- Cyclical

Psychological Posttrauma Response

- Altered Emotionality
- Avoidance
- Dissociation
- Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
 - Hyperarousal
 - Intrusion
 - Constriction

Psychological Posttrauma Effects: Implications for Singing

Posttrauma Effects	Component of Singing
Altered Emotionality	Performance
Avoidance: evasive or active intent (e.g. smoking, bulimia)	response/interpretation Phonation (vocal fold damage); Performance preparation
Dissociation	Proprioception; Breathing; Laryngeal stability
PTSD	
➤ Hyperarousal	Breathing; Debilitating anxiety
➤ Intrusion	Mental focus; Breathing; Performance demands/response
➤ Constriction	Proprioception; Performance anxiety; Resonance

Somatic Response to Posttrauma (Relevant to Singing)

- Change to Hippocampus
- GERD
- Epilepsy/Pseudo-Epilepsy

Somatic Posttrauma Effects: Implications for Singing

Posttrauma Effects	Component of Singing
Asthma	Breathing
Change to hippocampus	Memory; Performance demands
GERD	Phonation (vocal fold damage)
Pseudo-epilepsy	Performance Demands (?); Memory(?)

Psycho-Somatic Response to Posttrauma

- Body Armoring
- Body Image Problems
- Somatoform Disorders

Psycho-Somatic Posttrauma Effects: Implication for Singing

Posttrauma Effect	Component of Singing
Body Armoring	Proprioception Breathing Phonation Laryngeal Stability; Resonance
Body Image Problems	Eating disorders Difficulty looking in a mirror
Somatoform Disorders (Psychogenic Voice Disorders including Muscle Tension Dysphonia [MTD] or Psychogenic Dysphonia)	Phonation: (Laryngeal stability) Performance stamina

Muscle Tension Dysphonia



Plicae ventricularis
(Lateral Compression).

Image reprinted with permission
from Dr. Christopher Chang from
his website www.VoiceInfo.org.

Additional Difficulties Reported by Singers with Childhood Sexual Abuse History

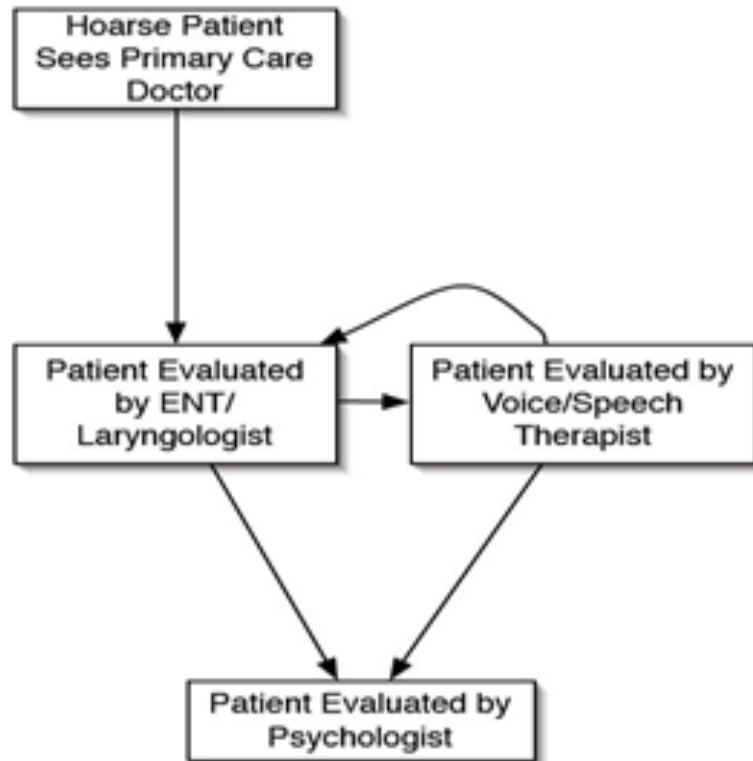
- Self identity and classification (*Fach*)
- Vulnerable to demands of opera roles
- Difficulty with trusting authority figures such as the voice teacher

(Good News!) Possible Effects of Singing on the Psychological State of Singer

Singing Technique	Effect on Psychological State of Singer
Body Awareness	Interferes with dissociation
Abdominal/Thoracic breathing	Interferes with body armoring Facilitates remembering
Practice/Performance	Improves mood Facilitates connection to self/others

Getting Help: Referral for Lay Voice User

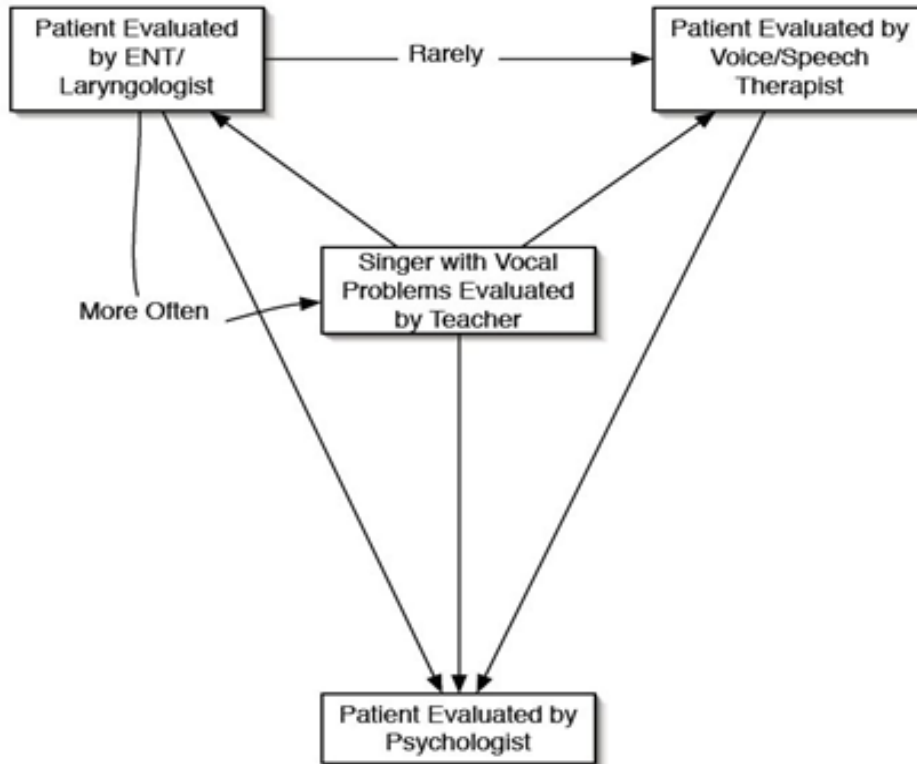
Lay Voice User Psychogenic Dysphonia Flowchart



Printed with permission from
Dr. Christopher Chang.

Getting Help: Referral for Singer (The Voice Team)

Singer with Psychogenic Dysphonia Flowchart



Printed with permission from
Dr. Christopher Chang.

Selected Bibliography

Allen, John G. *Coping with Trauma: Hope Through Understanding*, 2d ed. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press, 2005.

Bremner, James Douglas. *Does Stress Damage the Brain: Understanding Trauma-Related Disorders from a Mind-Body Perspective*. New York: Norton, 2002.

Briere, John and Catherine Scott. *Principles of Trauma Therapy: A Guide to Symptoms, Evaluation, and Treatment*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage, 2006.

Bunch, Meribeth. *Dynamics of the Singing Voice*, 3d ed. New York: Springer-Verlag, 1995.

Doscher, Barbara. *The Functional Unity of the Singing Voice*, 2d ed. Latham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1994.

Goodwin, Jean and Reina Attias, eds. *Splintered Reflections: The Body in Trauma*. New York: Basic Books, 1999.

Herman, Judith L. *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. New York: Basic Books, 1992.

Johnson, Grace W., Carmen T. Gonzalez, Christopher Y. Chang, Sarah Maines., Melissa M. Mainvill, Amy Asbury. "Psychogenic Voice Disorders." In *Laryngeal Diseases: Symptoms, Diagnoses and Treatment*, ed. Frank Columbus. Hauppauge, NY: Nova Science Publications, 2009

Selected Bibliography (Cont.)

Johnson, Grace. "Singing and Childhood Sexual Abuse: Conversations with Voice Teachers." *Journal of Singing* 65, No. 4 (2009): 471-480.

Rosen, Deborah C. and Robert T. Sataloff. *Psychology of Voice Disorders*. San Diego: Singular, 1997.

Rothchild, Babette. *The Body Remembers: The Psychophysiology of Trauma and Trauma Treatment*. New York: Norton, 2002.

Ristad, Eloise. *A Soprano on her Head: Right-side-up Reflections on Life and Other Performances*. Moab, Utah: Real People Press, 1982.

Wormhoudt, Pearl. *With a Song in My Psyche: On the Psychology of Singing and Teaching Singing*. USA: Xlibris, 2001.

Web Pages Recommended in Briere and Scott (2006):

International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies www.istss.org/resources/index.htm

Office for Victims of Crime (U.S. Dept. of Justice) www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/help/welcome.html

David Baldwin's Trauma Pages www.trauma-pages.com/pg4.htm