

MALE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF CHORAL SINGING

BY

MICHAEL CARLTON BRAND

THESIS

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Master's Committee:

Associate Professor Bridget Sweet, Chair and Director of Research
Professor Janet Revell Barrett
Assistant Professor Donna Gallo

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate male high school students' perceptions of choral singing. Focus was maintained on three categories of students: choir students, ex-choir students, and never-enrolled students. Data included individual interviews with eleven male high school students from the three aforementioned categories. Four themes emerged through phenomenological reduction: Clan Association, Motivation, Gender Norms, and Casual Singing. Analysis of the data revealed that males tended to perceive choir as an activity more suited for girls. Students with ensemble experiences viewed singing mostly as a learned skill, whereas students without ensemble experience associated singing more with innate ability. Analysis also revealed a disconnect between student perceptions of singing: as either a performance-based activity, or a participatory activity. The essence of this study was that male high school students' perceptions of choral singing are disconnected from their perceptions of casual singing. Regardless of prior musical experiences, self-perceived abilities, social influences, or perceptions of choral singing, high school males are predisposed to sing given the right circumstances.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Missing Male

As with many centuries-old pursuits and pastimes, American choral singing was once limited to, and therefore dominated by, male singers. “The tune book compilers were men, singing in taverns and fraternal societies was presumably a male amusement, writers calling for music literacy among congregations were male, and singing masters and music teachers advertising in colonial newspapers were male” (Gates, 1989, p. 32). In early eighteenth-century Boston, several scholars and church officials noted an inept quality of church singing and sought to reform the public singing practice through the music literacy movement, also referred to as “regular singing” (Gates, 1989). Gates observed that several leading clergymen and intellectuals sought to “spread the message that the incompetent and contentious congregational singing of the time was undermining godliness” (p. 33). This Protestant Reformation in colonial America marked a significant movement in America’s choral milieu, as scholars and church leaders campaigned for increased female (and child) involvement in public singing. According to Gates, the music literacy movement called for an improvement of music literacy *for all*, in the hopes that the unacceptable state of congregational singing might be remedied.

Although men dominated American public singing for well over two centuries, parity between male and female participation was reached sometime during the 1930s, according to data collected concerning enrollment in high school choruses (Gates, 1989). However, since the 1930s, male and female participation in singing has not remained balanced. Gates noticed that young males are “far less willing to be identified publicly with singing as secondary school

students” (p. 41). This observation holds true today, as male singers continue to be under-enrolled in choirs (Elpus, 2015).

The under-enrollment of male singers in choirs has been a topic of discussion among music educators for several decades (Demorest, 2000; Elpus, 2015; Elpus & Abril, 2011; Freer, 2007, 2010; Gates, 1989; Harrison, 2004; Lucas 2007). A recent study by Elpus (2015) suggests that a 70:30 female to male ratio has remained relatively consistent since at least the early 1980s. According to Elpus, “the lack of male participation in American high school choirs is a systematic, nationwide issue that extends beyond the anecdotal evidence offered by practitioners” (p. 96). The systems that contribute to the lack of male choral participation (e.g., parent/teacher/peer influence, voice change challenges, gender and social norms) are more complex than any one solution can offer.

The lack of male participation in choral singing is a phenomenon that is commonly referred to as the *missing male* (Demorest, 2000; Elpus, 2015; Freer, 2007, 2010; Harrison, 2004). Although the missing male discussion tends to address the male and female disparity in choir, the issue is also evident in music education at large (Elpus, 2015; Koza, 1993). According to Koza:

“Missing males” is one among an array of pressing gender problems in music education, most of which have only recently attracted the attention of music education scholars; however, the problems themselves, including the issue of missing males, are not new. (p. 213)

Koza noted that gender issues in music “can be traced back at least as far as the beginnings of the public school movement” (p. 213).

The apparent need for choral educators to balance voice parts (i.e., soprano, alto, tenor, bass) has led to much discussion of the missing male among choral practitioners and researchers, specifically (Elpus, 2015). Some researchers have focused on the significance of the voice change during adolescence (Cooksey, 1977a, 1977b; Fisher, 2014; Kennedy, 2004; Killian, 1997; White & White, 2001), whereas others focus on other social influences such as teachers, family, peers, and social perceptions (Fredricks et al., 2002; Legette, 1998; Lucas, 2007, 2011; Mizener, 1993). Recently, researchers have provided valuable data concerning the social influences that relate to the missing male phenomenon, accounting for various factors that may contribute to the decline in male enrollment (Freer, 2010; Kennedy; 2002; Lucas, 2011). Freer (2010) noted the importance of male role models in choir. He also recommended a shift in pedagogy to emphasize singing as a skill to be developed as opposed to an inherent ability. Kennedy (2002) suggested that teacher and peer influences, as well as repertoire preferences, contribute to boys' motivations to join and remain in choir. Lucas (2011) drew attention to the influences of teachers, peers, parents, principals, nonmusic teachers and coaches on male enrollment, recommending more research concerning those students who are not enrolled in choir.

Although there is continued discussion surrounding male participation in choir, few researchers have approached the issue through direct dialogue with students. For this reason, more research is needed that addresses male perceptions of choral singing through direct conversation. These conversations should include not only the perspectives of males in choir, but also the perspectives of males who have elected not to enroll in choir, some of whom may have never participated at all. Although students who have never been in a choir are not ignored in the discussion of the missing male (e.g., Freer, 2009; Lucas, 2007, 2011), their voices are rarely

represented. These never-enrolled students represent a majority of the students in the U.S. (Elpus & Abril, 2011), but they have received less attention with regard to their perspectives of choral participation.

Gender Stereotypes in Choir

Researchers and practitioners have evolved the language of their discourses to include *gender* and *gender identity*, rather than *sex*, to distinguish between male and female (Asmus, 1986; Elpus, 2015; Elpus & Abril, 2011; Legette, 1998; Mizener, 1993). Other researchers make no distinction, using words such as male, female, men, women, boys, and girls throughout discussion (Kennedy, 2002; Killian, 1997; Sweet, 2018). Whereas *sex* refers to biological differences, *gender* encompasses identities (Melosh, 1993). Melosh observed “the discourses of gender do not merely comment upon or passively mirror sexual difference; rather, discourses define and create what it means to be male and female” (pp. 4–5). Gender transcends a simplistic male/female distinction, encompassing various meanings and identities. These meanings and identities have significant implications within the field of music education.

Choir is not the only branch of music education that has been associated with gender research. According to Elpus (2015), gender plays a significant role in “the gender stereotyping of musical instrument selection... the under-representation of females among the ranks of instrumental conductors and instrumental music educators... and the participation or lack of participation by males in singing” (p. 89). Elpus noted the prominence of the third area—the lack of male participation in singing—stating, “the practical literature is rife with articles and book chapters describing how choral music educators might better recruit and retain male singers” (p. 90).

Male Voice Change

Many of the discussions about male participation in choir include suggestions for improved teaching practices, especially at the middle school level where male students often begin their voice change (Cooksey, 1977a, 1977b; Demorest, 2000; Freer, 2007; Kennedy, 2004; White & White, 2001). Cooksey (1977a) noted that male voice change became a prominent topic in the 1900s with the emergence of junior high schools in America. Voice change—previously referred to as “mutation”—became the subject of various theories, regarding the appropriate approach to helping young males transition through voice change. Cooksey observed, “The question was not whether the young adolescent male should sing during mutation, but rather how the voice should be classified and trained during that time” (p. 5).

How male voices should be trained—voice change pedagogy—continues to be a popular topic of discussion into the twenty-first-century (Demorest, 2000). Freer (2007) advocated for “research-based teaching practices that will positively affect the experience for all our students, especially our boys” (pp. 32-33). Such practices include voice change education, gender-separate ensembles, and placement near the front of the room for male singers. Kennedy (2004) also inferred that a “single-sex environment may be beneficial during the time of the voice change” (p. 277).

Voice change pedagogy includes not only teaching practices themselves, but also the selection of appropriate repertoire (Cooksey & Welch, 1998; Demorest, 2000; Kennedy, 2002). “Carefully selected repertoire allows boys to actively participate, even with their vocal limitations” (Demorest, 2000, p. 38). Cooksey and Welch (1998) advocated for range-appropriate repertoire for male changing voices, arguing that music that is written in appropriate singing ranges is essential to student enjoyment of choral singing.

Kennedy (2002), however, found that range-appropriate repertoire did not seem to contribute to male enjoyment of singing. Rather, male changing voice singers attributed varied styles and challenging repertoire to their enjoyment of the choral experience. Fisher (2014) speculated that voice change might not contribute to the lack of male enrollment so much as students' performance achievement in choir. Fisher found a correlation between student self-efficacy (personal perceived ability) and years of experience in choir, noting that voice change seemed to have no effect on the self-efficacy score.

Social Factors of Male Participation in Choir

Research-based pedagogy with regard to male voice change may help to address male withdrawal from choir, however pedagogical approaches and repertoire selection only affects those students who are present in the choir classroom. Demorest (2000) noted that “proper training and a tailored repertoire, both of which help retain boys once they have joined choir, do not resolve the problem of how to get them there in the first place” (p. 38). The lack of male enrollment suggests that there must be other social factors contributing to male perceptions of choir; these factors may also account for the continuing trend of lower male enrollment. Gates (1989) observed that “public singing is the expression of social values—probably those based on sex stereotyping and status attainment—rather than being motivated by educational, pedagogical, or aesthetic interests” (p. 41). An examination of social values rather than teaching practices, as Gates describes, should include the perspectives of those students who are on the outside of choral education.

Freer (2009) is one of the few researchers to address singing participation with male students outside of the choral classroom. His study was intended to contribute “to a broader discussion concerning the participation of males in all types of musical activities within and

beyond formal schooling experiences” (p. 142). Freer’s emphasis on male experiences *beyond* school music has helped to expand the discussion of the missing male to include the voices of missing males themselves.

Need for the Study

Several studies have paved the way for further inquiry into male participation in choir, with specific regard to the missing male phenomenon (Elpus, 2015; Elpus & Abril, 2011; Lucas, 2011; Siebenaler, 2006; Stewart, 1991). Elpus (2015) and Elpus and Abril (2011) built upon the work of Stewart (1991), seeking to provide empirical data to support anecdotal claims that male enrollment in music was disproportionate with that of female enrollment. These studies analyzed data regarding ensemble participation in band, choir, and orchestra, highlighting the prominence of the missing male in choirs. Lucas (2011) and Siebenaler (2006) approached the missing male phenomenon through the use of survey data in order to predict some of the factors that might contribute to lower male enrollment in choir. Lucas (2011) noted that “participants sing in choir because (a) they are good singers and (b) they enjoy singing” (p. 52). This finding did not assume the opposite for students who don’t sing in choir: that they aren’t good singers, and/or they don’t enjoy singing. All of the aforementioned studies have contributed to an increased understanding of the missing male phenomenon, whether through the provision of empirical evidence of the phenomenon, or through the analysis of survey response data.

This study is derived from a need to expand the conversation of male participation in choir beyond the choral classroom and beyond survey response data. Few researchers have directly addressed males who choose not to enroll in choir. “We need to ask adolescent boys what they do and don’t like about choral music. In their responses, we may hear some things that cause us to reexamine what we do, how we do it, and why” (Freer, 2007, p. 33). In addition,

“more research is needed concerning adolescent males who do not choose to enroll in choir” (Lucas, 2011, p. 52).

Purpose and Research Questions

As a phenomenological investigation, this study examined the “lived experiences” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Moustakas, 1994) of high school male singers to gain insight into male perceptions of singing. By understanding students’ lived experiences within and beyond the choral classroom, this study also provided insight on factors that contribute to the lack of male enrollment in choir. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate male high school students’ perceptions of choral singing. Focus was maintained on three categories of students: choir students, ex-choir students, and never-enrolled students. The following research questions guided the study: (1) What are male perceptions of choral singing? (2) What are male perceptions of casual singing? (3) How do male perceptions differ between choir students, ex-choir students, and never-enrolled students? (4) What social influences seem to have the most profound impact on male decisions to enroll or not to enroll in choir? (5) What does it mean to be a male in choir?

Definitions

The following definitions were used throughout this study:

- *Male/Female*: As this study is focused primarily on social factors that influence student perceptions, unless otherwise stated, any reference to *male* or *female* throughout the discussion refers to a person’s gender identity, rather than sex assigned at birth. Although gender identity includes more than just female and male identities (e.g., gender non-conforming, trans), this study did not address gender identities beyond the binary perspective of gender since the focus was primarily on students who identify as male.

- *Middle School:* The term middle school will be used to describe all students in grades 6, 7 or 8. The school district where this study was conducted follows a traditional middle school model (grades 6, 7, 8) rather than a junior high model (grades 7, 8, 9). Any references to junior high are only included within material from other researchers who examined junior high settings.
- *Under-enrolled:* The term under-enrolled is used to describe the disparity between male and female enrollment in choirs or music classes. Although several studies have used “underrepresented” to describe this trend (e.g., Elpus, 2015), these studies examined demographics in addition to gender (e.g., race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status). Because underrepresentation is most often associated with marginalized groups, under-enrolled is the preferred term for the purposes of this study on male enrollment in choir.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This review of research pertains to male perceptions of choral singing and the lack of male enrollment in choirs. The chapter begins with a review of studies that provided empirical evidence of male under-enrollment in school ensemble settings, including but not limited to choral settings. Several of these studies are related to the missing male phenomenon, which is a central issue that informed the development of this study. Following a review of the empirical data, this chapter reviews pertinent studies related to voice change, motivation, and social influences.

Male Enrollment in Ensemble Settings

Using data sets from the National Center for Education Statistics collected in 1982, Stewart (1991) examined which student and school characteristics seemed to determine high school student participation in music courses. She found that students were more likely to take music classes in high school if they were academically advantaged, or if they had previously taken music lessons. Furthermore, Stewart found that schools with more affluent student populations tended to discourage music participation. This was, in part, attributed to the focus that those schools placed on college preparation. Minority students were also found to be underrepresented in music classes due to a lack of music course offerings or lack of promotion of music course electives. Through demographic analysis, Stewart determined that females represented 61.4% of all music students, highlighting the under-enrollment of male students across music classes. Stewart's study was one of the first demographic profiles of music students in the U.S. and paved the way for future researchers to expand upon her profile and analysis from a variety of angles including gender, race and ethnicity, and social class.

Twenty years later, Elpus and Abril (2011) published a study that examined the national demographic profile of band, choir, and orchestra students at the high school level. Using data collected from a 2002 U.S. Department of Education study, as well as data from a 2004 follow-up, Elpus and Abril provided a more recent profile through which to analyze the relationships between student characteristics and ensemble participation. Variables examined included gender, race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, native language, parents' education, standardized test scores, and GPA. Analysis of the data revealed several underrepresented subsets of students including male students. According to Elpus and Abril, overall participation in high school ensembles decreased by almost 10% from 1982 to 2004; however, the female to male ratio of students participating in high school ensembles remained relatively consistent. Elpus and Abril also noted that, "While the total population of the senior cohort of 2004 was 50% male and 50% female, 61.1% of music students were female" (p. 135), representing a significant association between gender and participation in music.

While Elpus and Abril's (2011) study highlighted male under-enrollment in music ensembles at large, Elpus's 2015 research specifically examined choir enrollment in comparison to band and orchestra. This secondary study revealed why the topic of the missing male seems to be predominantly choir-focused. Elpus (2015) expanded the findings of Stewart (1991) and Elpus and Abril (2011) by exploring music participation rates based on gender over time; he focused on band, choir, and orchestra as separate ensembles. Whereas previous data focused on music/ensemble participation at large, Elpus was able to assess distinct differences between the three ensembles with regard to gender participation.

In correspondence with the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Elpus (2015) analyzed data from High School Transcript Studies which included 10 cohorts of

graduating classes from 1982–2009, noting the participation rates of males and females in high school music ensembles. Elpus found that, “female students are also overrepresented in bands and orchestras, albeit to a smaller degree than in choirs” (p. 98). According to his findings, the greatest female-male discrepancy in band occurred in 1990, at which time females represented 60.69% of band students. That same year females represented 73.64% of choir students and 66.30% of orchestra students. Across the cohorts, male under-enrollment was more significant for choral students than it was for band and orchestra students, with the exception of 1998 at which point male students represented only 27.66% of orchestra students, which is nearly equal to that of male choir students who made up 27.49% of choral students. According to Elpus, “female choristers outnumber their male counterparts by a greater than 2:1 ratio, and have done so consistently for nearly thirty years” (p. 96). Elpus estimates a 70:30 female to male national ratio throughout the course of his study (nearly thirty years), indicating a consistent lack of male choral singers in high school.

Elpus showed that the missing male phenomenon is not limited to choir. However, it is particularly notable among choral educators because of the ostensible need to balance voice parts between sopranos/altos (typically female) and tenors/basses (typically male).

It is perhaps unsurprising that the phenomenon of male underrepresentation in US high school instrumental ensembles has gone relatively unnoticed, especially in comparison with the attention paid to the gender imbalance in choral music. Instrumental ensembles can be musically ‘balanced’ without considering the gender of the players, and although players of certain genders might favour certain instruments as the literature on gendering of instrument choices confirms, instrumental directors have leeway in the reassigning of students to new instruments that choral teachers do not. (Elpus, 2015, p. 98)

Elpus's observation highlights the importance of gender-balanced ensembles for choral practitioners who regard the missing male phenomenon as a central issue in choral music education.

Voice Change

Voice change has been a prominent topic of discussion with regard to male perceptions of choral participation, given that male voice change involves a number of physiological and psychological challenges (Fisher, 2014). There is a wealth of research related to navigating young male singers through their voice change; however, Killian (1997) argued that much of this research is concerned with the physiological characteristics of male voice change, rather than the psychological or social characteristics of voice change. The following literature represents studies that address this experience with an emphasis on "psychological or psychosocial aspects" (Fisher, 2014).

Some researchers have turned to the singers themselves to assess the effects of voice change from a psychological perspective, rather than physiological. Killian (1997) conducted a study in which 141 males were interviewed regarding issues surrounding their voice change. Participants included junior high boys (both singers and nonsingers) as well as men in the age range of 23 to 80 years old (both singers and nonsingers). Although Killian found "no significant difference across any groups relative to the overall effect of the experience" (p. 528), she concluded that more singers (both boys and men) recognized their own voice change than nonsingers. Killian also found that the majority of men (81%) and boys (87%) viewed the voice change process as either positive or neutral (determined through the coding of responses for positive and negative indicators). Despite some key findings in this study, Killian concluded that male voice change is idiosyncratic (unique to each individual), and requires further examination

into the “physiological, acoustical, and psychological factors that affect the human voice” (p. 534).

Kennedy’s (2004) ethnography of the American Boychoir School provided further insight into the psychological issues associated with voice change. Her research included interviews, observation, participant observation, and examination of material culture (musical scores, concert programs, school promotional materials, CDs, school handbooks, and academic tour packets). Kennedy interviewed 27 students in small groups, as well as two directors, and ten staff members. She confirmed Killian’s (1997) claim that voice change is idiosyncratic. Kennedy (2004) noted that “frequent monitoring of the individual voice, small-group vocal sessions, and an ear and eye that are well attuned to noticing both aural and physical symptoms of vocal stress are essential components of a choral teacher's practice” (p. 277). Kennedy also noted the apparent benefit of single-sex environments for teaching young male singers, suggesting that teachers provide these opportunities whenever possible. Regardless of environment, Kennedy suggested that teachers need to assist students in exploring the extent of their vocal abilities during the voice change process. However, she cautions against over-singing or pushing while exploring students’ vocal capacities.

Finally, Kennedy (2004) recognized that the teachers have a significant impact upon both the physiological development and the psychological development of young singers. Regarding physiological development, Kennedy remarked, “For changing-voice boys, revisiting and sometimes relearning vocal techniques that were successful with the unchanged voice is an important factor of a healthy transition” (p. 273). As for the psychological element, she observed, “I noticed that boys received counseling and support for negotiating the voice change from both

men and women as well as their peers” (p. 276). These support systems were determined to be critical to healthy emotional and vocal development.

Fisher (2014) conducted a study relating student self-efficacy to voice change, grade level, and choral experience. Self-efficacy, or “one’s perceived capability to perform actions at a designated level” (p. 279), was measured using the Singing Self-Efficacy Scale for Emerging Adolescent Males (SSES). The SSES, derived from Bandura (2006), was used to gather data from eighty male choir students grades six through eight. Fisher also classified students according to Cooksey’s five categories of voice classification (Cooksey, 1999; Cooksey & Welch, 1998): Midvoice I, Midvoice II, Midvoice, IIA, New Voice, and Emerging Adult Voice. The results of the study showed that years of choral experience correlated to student self-efficacy, meaning that students with more years of choral experience tended to have a higher perceived ability with regard to singing. However, students’ voice change experiences did not appear to have an impact on self-efficacy.

Motivation in Music Education

Studies on motivation have been used by music education researchers, as a means of understanding success and failure in music (Asmus, 1986, 1994; Legette, 1998). These understandings contribute to the study of student perceptions of school music. A better understanding of student motivation in music education can inform practitioners’ decisions and practices that contribute to successful programs (Asmus, 1994). The following section addresses motivation within the music classroom setting.

Using Attribution Theory (Weiner, 1974), Asmus (1986) investigated student beliefs about the causes of success and failure in music. According to Asmus (1986):

The theory holds that what students attribute to be the causes of success and failure at a task will mediate how the task is approached in the future. For instance, a student who attributes success at playing a musical instrument to diligent practice would more likely persist in learning to play a difficult musical work than one who attributes success to a matter of luck.

Asmus surveyed 589 music students, grades four through twelve, using an open-ended response format that asked students to indicate five reasons that students do well in music, and five reasons that students do not do well in music. Four causal categories emerged from the data: ability, task difficulty, luck, and effort. These causes could be defined as internal (ability and effort) or external (task difficulty and luck). Furthermore, causes could be either stable (ability and task difficulty) or unstable (effort and luck). The results of the study showed that while many students attributed success and failure in music to internal-unstable causes (i.e., effort), an even greater number of students attributed success and failure to internal-stable causes (i.e., ability). Asmus noted that students are less likely to be motivated to practice if they attribute success to innate ability. He also found that as students got older, they were more likely to attribute success and failure to ability-related causes, implying that attitudes tend to shift from effort-related to ability-related. From these findings, Asmus concluded, “Teachers who encourage students with effort related attributions are more likely to have students who adopt the view that if they try hard and apply themselves, they can achieve in music” (p. 274).

In a similar study, Legette (1998) surveyed 595 girls and 519 boys enrolled in music from elementary through high school. Participants were given questions for each of five subcategories and asked to rate the importance of the item from one to five. The subcategories were effort, background, class environment, musical ability, and affect for music. Legette found that “scores

were not significantly different between elementary and middle school students but were significantly different between high school students and the two remaining levels” (p. 108). Contrary to Asmus’ (1986) study, however, Legette noted that both ability- and effort-related attributions increased with age (Asmus observed a shift from effort to ability). Legette deduced:

If students who are successful attribute their success to ability, it is quite probable they will expect the same results in the future. However, should students fail and perceive ability as the cause, they might continually expect to fail in the future. (p. 109)

The perception that success is a matter of ability becomes particularly problematic as students are faced with more challenges in choir, such as voice change. Consequently, Legette concluded that educators should focus on success in music as an effort-based venture.

Asmus (1994) described the intersections between education, psychology, and music with relation to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. According to Asmus, “extrinsic motivation is motivation due to factors outside of the learner. These factors may include reinforcement contingencies, environmental factors, and social factors... Intrinsic motivation is motivation derived from within the learner” (p. 6). Asmus suggested that a model of achievement motivation in music should include both attributions (effort, ability, affect for music, classroom environment, and background) and perceptions of self (self-concept, self-efficacy, self-determination). Through this model, Asmus proposed that “teaching efforts should lead to the development of intrinsic motives to promote future striving and achievement at a learning task” (p. 28). Although intrinsic motives are described as “from within,” Asmus claimed that teachers are able to promote intrinsic motivation through a model of achievement that emphasizes student perceptions of self:

The greater control the individual has over the learning situation, and the more intrinsic the motivators operating within the learning situation are, the more likely self-perceptions will be enhanced. Such situations also tend to enhance intrinsic motivation within the learner. (p. 8)

Asmus showed that in addition to extrinsic motivational influences, teachers can foster intrinsic motivation in their students through a model of achievement motivation.

Social Influences

Woven between the discussions of voice change and student motivation in music are the social influences that contribute to students' choices and perceptions. Although previously mentioned studies are certainly engaged in discussions of social influences, the following studies provide specific emphases on social influences that have significant implications for this study of male perceptions of choir (Elorriaga, 2011; Freer, 2009; Kennedy, 2002; Lucas, 2007, 2011; Mizener, 1993).

Mizener (1993) examined elementary students' attitudes toward singing and choir participation by examining classroom singing and out-of-school singing experiences. She collected questionnaire response data from 542 students, grades three through six. Although most students indicated an interest in singing, more than half were uninterested in choral singing. Mizener also found that nearly all sixth-grade students indicated that they sing along to the radio, despite the fact that many of them indicated that they did not like singing. Mizener's study also included gender-specific data, which revealed that girls expressed more positive attitudes toward choir and out-of-school singing. Girls were also more likely to indicate that they thought they sang well. Mizener (1993) noted that part of the discrepancy between male and female participation could be the result of social environments in which female students receive more

recognition for musical efforts and achievement. According to Mizener, “Girls and younger children, who indicated the more positive attitudes toward singing, showed a stronger perception that family members encouraged their singing efforts and took part in singing activities with them” (p. 243).

Lucas (2007) investigated factors that contributed to adolescent enrollment (or lack thereof) in his study of seventh- and eighth-grade students at four different Oklahoma public schools. He examined the impact of various social influences on male enrollment. There were 226 male participants in the study, the majority of whom were not enrolled in either band, choir, or orchestra. Students completed a questionnaire that included both open-ended questions as well as Likert-type items. The questionnaire addressed eight factors that potentially affected enrollment in music programs: peer pressure, parental/family influence, teacher influence, voice change, masculinity/gender stereotypes, self-efficacy, enjoyment of singing, and scheduling. The results of the study indicated that all of these factors influenced male participation in choir; however, the top two reasons that students gave for choosing not to enroll in choir were: “I don’t like to sing,” and “I am not a good singer” (p. 109). Also, students who were not enrolled in choir indicated little to no response to parent influence, whereas students enrolled in choir were more likely to acknowledge parent influence as a significant factor.

In a second study, Lucas (2011) distributed a survey to 101 seventh- and eighth-grade choir students at six schools to examine male choir students’ reasons for joining choir. Although this research was similar to that of his previous study, it differed in that all of Lucas’s participants were enrolled in choir. Therefore, he only focused on factors that encourage students to enroll, rather than focusing on factors that deter students from enrolling. Lucas’s research assessed male students’ “attitudes about singing in general, self-concept of their own voices, and

perception of others' view of adolescent males' participation in choir" (p. 46). Lucas noted that coaches were perceived to be less supportive of choir participation than principals, family, and non-music teachers. He also found that peer pressure was not as significant as enjoyment of singing when choosing to enroll in choir. The results of the study showed that love of singing and vocal confidence were the most prominent reasons for enrolling in choir.

Siebenaler (2006) surveyed 288 high school students at a large suburban high school. Of these students, 176 were enrolled in choir, while 112 were not enrolled. Siebenaler found:

The factors that predicted continued participation in choral music for these high school students in Southern California were positive support and involvement at home, positive music experiences in elementary school and middle school, a positive self-concept in regard to music skills, and the support of peers. (p. 6)

Siebenaler also noted that 93.2% of the high school students enrolled in choir had participated in middle school music, meaning fewer than 7% of choir students joined in high school.

Kennedy (2002) examined the experiences of junior high boys in choir in a study that focused on the relationships between the social environment and the factors that contribute to male enrollment. Participants included eleven males, three females, and their teacher. Through interviews, observation, and examination of material culture, Kennedy determined four prominent themes related to junior high boys' experiences in choir: acquisition of musical skills, knowledge, and attitudes; perceptions of the choral experience; students' preferred repertoire; and students' motivation to join choir and to remain in choir. Kennedy found that love of singing, teacher influence, and the company of friends were the three prominent motivating factors that contributed to males' decisions to enroll and to remain in choir. Kennedy observed that the teacher had made considerable efforts to recruit singers by taking her choirs on tours to

feeder schools. Kennedy also observed that the company of friends—specifically other male students—helped males to overcome the stereotype that choir was for girls.

Kennedy (2002) determined that students acquired both skills/knowledge and attitudes as a result of the choral experience. Skills/knowledge acquired included sight-reading, vocal production, and choral etiquette. Acquired attitudes included “professionalism and presentational behaviors” (p. 31). Kennedy expressed that one of the most significant findings was that range-appropriate repertoire did not seem to be a contributing factor to male enjoyment of choir. Rather, the inclusion of challenging and varied styles of repertoire was most important to participants. Finally, Kennedy described the choral experience as a combination of teacher aspects (i.e., students liked their teacher), musical aspects (singing and performing), non-musical aspects (i.e., the lack of written work in choir), and—most importantly—social aspects. “Informants placed high value on friendships, the group experience, and field trips” (p. 33). The study highlighted that male enjoyment in junior high school choir is strongly associated with the social aspects of participating in a choir (building friendships, field trips, contest trips, collective experience).

Using narrative inquiry, Freer (2009) explored factors that influence males to enroll or not to enroll in choir. He interviewed six high school males (ages fourteen through seventeen), two of whom sang in choir, two of whom dropped out, and two of whom never sang in choir. Freer addressed participants’ experiences through the lens of “flow” as described by Csikszentmihalyi. According to Freer, “Flow theory is a proximal theory of motivation in which the enjoyment of an experience or activity results in the desire to seek repetition of the experience” (p. 146). The study was “predicated on the belief that physical, cognitive and emotional development are indistinguishably intertwined with musical development” (pp. 142–

143). Freer noted that some of the key components to achieving flow were clarity of goals, student autonomy, immediate feedback, minimization of self-consciousness, and matched challenge and skill (i.e., the task is not too easy or too difficult). He observed that “flow experience in ensemble rehearsals is possible, but only when individuals are presented with challenges that equal their skill levels... the successful completion of challenges is positively correlated with enjoyment of an activity” (p. 155). Freer concluded that in order to achieve flow, music educators need to adjust pedagogy and curriculum to meet students’ varied interests and to match students’ skill levels.

Freer (2010) juxtaposed the concept of the *possible selves* (Markus & Nurius, 1986) with the missing male phenomenon in choral programs. According to Markus and Nurius, “Possible selves represent individuals’ ideas of what they will become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming” (p. 954). These possible selves are socially influenced:

An individual is free to create any variety of possible selves, yet the pool of possible selves derives from the categories made salient by the individual’s particular sociocultural and historical context and from the models, images, and symbols provided by the media and by the individual’s immediate social experiences. (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 954)

Using possible selves theory, Freer (2010) observed that a lack of male role models in secondary schooling can have negative effects on male identities in music. Freer noted that during adolescence, “Musical ability is, at least in part, a social construction” (p. 17). Furthermore, Freer observed that “adolescent boys tend to attribute their success to ability rather than effort” (p. 24).

Although male perceptions of choir have been well-researched over the past few decades, especially with regard to the missing male phenomenon, much of the research is focused on voice change (Fisher, 2014; Kennedy, 2004; Killian, 1997) or perceptions of music students themselves (Asmus, 1986, 1994; Kennedy, 2002; Legette, 1998; Lucas, 2011). A few studies have included non-choir students in the discussion of male perceptions of choir participation (Freer, 2009; Lucas, 2007; Mizener, 1993). Although these studies have expanded the discourse surrounding male participation in choir, more research is still needed to assess how male students perceive choir and how these perceptions contribute to males' decisions to enroll or not to enroll in choir in middle school and high school.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Rationale for Phenomenology

This study was a phenomenological investigation as described by Moustakas (1994). Phenomenology is a branch of qualitative inquiry “in which the researcher describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants. This description culminates in the essence of the experiences for several individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 13). Moustakas (1994) provided the following rationale for a phenomenological approach to research:

Phenomenology is the *first* method of knowledge because it begins with “things themselves”; it is also the final court of appeal. Phenomenology, step by step, attempts to eliminate everything that represents a prejudgment, setting aside presuppositions, and reaching a transcendental state of freshness and openness, a readiness to see in an unfettered way, not threatened by the customs, beliefs, and prejudices of normal science, by the habits of the natural worlds or by knowledge based on unreflected everyday experience. (p. 41)

As the purpose of this study was to investigate perceptions of choral singing from the perspective of male high school students, this study called for an investigation of the lived experiences of those students. The phenomenon, in this case, refers to male perceptions of choral singing. Although these perceptions were expected to differ somewhat between interviewees, an investigation of their collective lived experiences provided a fresh understanding of the social constructs that may contribute to the missing male phenomenon.

Brinkmann and Kvale (2005) referred to lived experiences as the “life world” in their description of the phenomenological approach:

A semistructured life world interview attempts to understand themes of the lived everyday world from the subjects’ own perspectives. This kind of interview seeks to obtain descriptions of the interviewees’ lived world with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena... it is semistructured—it is neither an open every day conversation nor a closed questionnaire. (p. 31)

The balance described above sums up the initial appeal of the phenomenological approach for this study. To fully investigate male high school students’ perceptions of choral singing, the data collection process needed to include opportunities for participants to speak freely about their interpretations of the phenomenon.

Constructivist Influences

Popkewitz (1998) described constructivist pedagogy as an “attempt to see a relationship between the practices of knowing and what is known... Knowledge is envisioned as tentative and uncertain, having multiple constructions, and formed through negotiations within community boundaries” (p. 549). King and Horrocks (2010) provided the following scenario in order to describe constructivism:

Take, for example, meeting a friend for coffee. They ask how your day is going. Do you engage in telling exact events as they occurred? Of course not. Even if we could remember the unfolding action as it occurred, who would be interested in such a telling? The ‘story’ of your day is life as told, being narrated in a way that transforms life as lived into a meaningful and interesting account (version) of you and your experiences. This version of events is not necessarily accurate in a realist sense. Rather, we have edited our

lives in ways that make sense to us, have value, possibly enhancing our understandings of who we are. (p. 214)

The notion that we ‘edit’ our lives to enhance understanding suggests that there is more than one kind of knowledge to be considered in a phenomenological study (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005). Rather than focusing on a “realist sense” (King & Horrocks, 2010), a constructivist approach to research accesses a different kind of knowledge.

In order to describe the phenomenon in this study, it is important to consider what is meant by *knowledge* in research based on qualitative inquiry. The following philosophical concept was used as a framework for understanding the construction of knowledge in this study. Brinkmann and Kvale (2005) suggest, “interview knowledge can be characterized as produced, relational, conversational, contextual, linguistic, narrative, and pragmatic” (p. 63). I have highlighted four of these features below, as these features most influenced the interview process for this study:

Knowledge as produced... The knowledge is not merely found, mined, or given, but is actively created through questions and answers, and the product is coauthored by interviewer and interviewee. (p. 63)

Knowledge as conversational... Philosophical discourse and research interviews rely on conversations giving access to knowledge. (p. 64)

Knowledge as narrative... The interview is a key site for eliciting narratives that inform us of the human world of meanings. (p.65)

Knowledge as pragmatic... Today, the legitimacy question of whether a study is scientific, or whether it leads to true knowledge, tends to be replaced by the pragmatic

question of whether it provides useful knowledge. Good research is research that works.
(p. 65)

This is to say that knowledge is not merely transmitted, but rather it is constructed through social interaction. Therefore, as a social interaction, the interview itself was a conduit for the construction of knowledge. Participants were not expected to bring an entire set of knowledge with them. Rather, participants were encouraged to construct their own meaning and understandings through a guided discussion.

Epoche

In phenomenology, the term Epoche is used to describe personal biases and suppositions (Moustakas, 1994). According to Moustakas, “In the Epoche, we set aside our prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about things” (p. 85). The Epoche is both a preparation for data collection and an “experience in itself” (p. 85). It allows the researcher to set aside predispositions to allow for the construction of knowledge through phenomenological investigation. This is a critical first step in phenomenology, as it allows one to acknowledge the existence of personal biases such that these biases do not influence the results of the study.

Prior to the interviews, and prior to finalizing guiding interview questions, I wrote about my personal experiences as a male who has worked with many choirs in various capacities: as a singer, as a soloist, as a director, as an assistant, as an adjudicator, as an accompanist. I have included a few excerpts from my written Epoche below:

As a white, straight male who has been singing in and/or teaching choirs for over two decades, I have not yet been in an environment in which I felt like I wasn't being judged by someone for my participation in choir. Even as a high school choir director teaching classes that students typically *want* to be in, I still encountered situations in

which either students, faculty, or administration would treat me as a lesser individual. Although I have learned to challenge these judgements and to embrace my passion and talent for music, I cannot help but wonder how many other young men have been deterred from participating in music (especially in choir) for fear of being labeled as weak, feminine, gay, strange, or any of the multitudinous terms that have been crudely and incorrectly used to describe undesirable characteristics for men. Toxic masculinity has recently come to the forefront of popular discourse, as more and more people have begun to challenge the idea that men are not allowed to emote or show any sign of vulnerability. This notion is at the forefront of my experience as a straight male choral musician and teacher.

I started singing in the Green Bay Boy Choir (GBBC) at six or seven years old. At the time, I do not recall having any feelings of self-consciousness or insecurity. However, as I transitioned into adolescence, social awareness began to influence my thoughts about participating in music. I continued to sing in the GBBC until I aged out and went off to university. What most people don't realize is that I kept my participation in the GBBC relatively secret from my friends at school (at least in middle school). In middle school, I was a band student; trombone was my instrument. I was not self-conscious about my participation in band, though I must admit that I was self-conscious about being first chair, as it indicated that I actually *cared* about band and that I actually... practiced. My closest friend at the time was a fellow trombonist who never practiced, but still managed to remain in second chair due to sheer talent.

He and I played the same position on our middle school football team and continued to in high school. After two years of juggling football and music extra-

curriculars (which had significant time conflicts with one another), I decided to cut my ties with football and focus on music, where I was able to be more myself. I never felt unwelcomed in football, but I never felt that I could openly discuss my participation in music with those guys, some of whom I had been good friends with since grade school. For some reason, the two worlds could not coexist.

Although bracketing was an important precursor to the data collection stage of this study, I recognized that it was not entirely realistic to remove these biases from my research. “The notion that it is possible to entirely bracket off our preconceptions has long been criticized—especially by the existential phenomenologists—as it suggests that we can in some way step outside of the world to which we are inextricably connected” (King & Horrocks, 2010, p. 178). However, the process of setting aside preconceptions informed my interview questions, and brought my own biases into consciousness. Throughout the interview process, I kept these biases in check and tried not to fish for specific answers. As a result, data analysis was richer and yielded some unexpected surprises because bracketing allowed me to remain more open to the participants’ individual experiences.

Setting for the Study

Waters Bend High School (pseudonym) is a high school of approximately 2,000 students in central Illinois. There are currently 208 students enrolled in choir at Waters Bend High School (WBHS), 48 of whom are registered as male and 160 of whom are registered as female. This female to male ratio is approximately 3:1, a larger disparity than the national estimates provided in Elpus (2015). No information was available regarding gender non-binary or transgender students. WBHS met the following criteria for selection: (1) the choir program should be well-

established and respected in the community; (2) the district should offer choir as an option at each of the feeder middle schools.

The first criterion for school selection was determined through personal experience with the choir director, Mr. Holt (pseudonym), and upon recommendation of several respected colleagues at the University of Illinois. A well-established choir program was necessary to limit the potential for students to reject choir due to a poor reputation of the choir program. As this study was intended to explore male perceptions of singing in choir, I wanted to elicit responses that went beyond, “I don’t sing in choir because our choirs are not good.” WBHS’s choral program and director were both established and respected in the community.

The second criterion was determined through direct contact with the school district. In preliminary conversations, both Mr. Holt and his principal confirmed that all of the middle schools that feed into WBHS provide choir as an option, but not as a requirement. This was important to the scope of the study because of the need to examine students who were given the *option* of taking choir in middle school and high school but chose not to enroll.

Participant Selection

Prior to submitting this study for approval at the University of Illinois, I contacted the principal of Waters Bend High School to receive permission to conduct the study. The study was approved by the principal as well as the Deputy Superintendent of the Waters Bend School District (pseudonym). Following district approval, permission to conduct the study was granted by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Illinois (see Appendix A for approval letter).

As this study included the participation of minors, all participants were required to sign an assent form indicating their willingness to participate as well as a parent/guardian consent

form indicating their consent to allow their child to participate (See Appendix B for the student letter and assent form; see Appendix C for the parent letter and consent form). Student assent forms were also used to collect information pertinent to the study. Participants were asked to include their school email, indicate grade level, confirm their gender identity, and select which of the three categories of student they belonged to: currently enrolled in choir, ex-choir, or never-enrolled in choir. Students also indicated their preferred interview time.

Mr. Holt was the sole distributor of the letters, which included an envelope for students to seal their forms. Students were given the option of turning in their sealed envelopes to Mr. Holt or mailing the forms directly to the researcher. Although the latter option was provided, all participants chose to return the envelope to Mr. Holt who gave the sealed envelopes directly to me.

Purposeful sampling (Patton, 2015) was intended to be used to select participants from a variety of social circles (e.g., football, baseball, theater, track and field, band, choir, clubs). According to Patton, purposeful sampling is used to ensure that the subjects that are selected for research will provide the most “information-rich” data (p. 52). However, due to the small return of assent and consent forms, *all* potential participants were selected for interviews. Although the target number of participants was fifteen (five from each of the three aforementioned categories), only eleven students submitted assent and consent forms. Of the eleven students that returned the required forms, seven were currently enrolled in choir (four freshmen, one junior, two seniors), three had never been in choir (all juniors), and one used to be in choir in middle school (sophomore).

High school students were specifically selected rather than middle school students for two reasons. First, by examining high school students’ perspectives, I hoped to elicit a greater

degree of insight regarding both middle school and high school experiences, as a result of the participants' ages and experiences. Second, in addition to years of experience, high school students were selected to avoid selecting participants who had not yet started the voice change process that coincides with puberty. For most young males, the most dramatic voice changes occur during the middle school years (Cooksey, 1977b). Since voice change can be a significant factor in adolescent males' singing experiences (Demorest, 2000; Fisher, 2014; Freer, 2014; Kennedy, 2004; Lucas, 2011), I hoped to recruit participants who all could speak—at least to some degree—about their own voice change experiences.

Data Collection

Preliminary Questionnaire

All students who turned in assent and consent forms were issued a questionnaire through a link to SurveyMonkey® sent to their school Gmail address. Each questionnaire was tailored to the category to which the participants belonged (current choir students, ex-choir students, and never-enrolled students). The formulation of survey questions was influenced by survey questions from Sweet (2003) and Lucas (2007).

The primary purpose of the questionnaire was to inform students as to the scope of the study so that by the time they were interviewed, they had a chance to consider topics that would be addressed. According to King and Horrocks (2010), “an interview alone may not give the participant the time and space necessary to carefully recollect the experience—they may be ‘swept along’ with the research agenda and their dialogue with the researcher” (p. 183). Therefore, the online questionnaire was intended to stimulate thought, to limit surprises during interviews, and to encourage a more expansive dialogue. Of the eleven participants that were

emailed the link to the questionnaire, only six completed it. As a result, questionnaire responses were not included in data analysis.

Individual Interviews

Individual interviews were scheduled according to students' preferred times as indicated on their assent forms. All interviews took place at Waters Bend High School in either the conference room or the ensemble practice room in the music wing. Interviews ranged from ten minutes to nineteen minutes per session—one session per participant. Interviews were recorded using two personal audio devices (one as a backup).

In order to encourage the development of conversational knowledge (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005) interviews were treated as a casual conversation. Although I had guiding questions available for reference, I only referred to these if needed (e.g., a lull in the conversation). Guiding questions were used as a checklist of directions in which to take the conversation (provided in Appendix E). Other questions were generated during each interview as a result of each individual conversation. Each interview, regardless of category of student, began with an open-ended question in which students were asked to share a bit about themselves. Subsequent questions tended to play off of participant responses in a conversational manner.

Limitations. Of the eleven participants (all of whom were interviewed), seven were currently enrolled in choir, three had never been enrolled in choir, and only one had dropped out of choir in middle school. Although I intended to interview five students from each category, the three participants who had never been in choir (all of whom were juniors) were able to provide valuable insight. However, analysis would have benefitted from a greater participation rate of non-choir students (both never-enrolled, and ex-choir).

Phenomenological Reduction

Following the interview process at WBHS, interviews were transcribed and coded. Codes were developed “*only* on the basis of the emerging information collected from participants” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) rather than predetermined labels. Phenomenological reduction allowed for “a suspension of judgement as to the existence or nonexistence of the context of an experience” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005, p. 31). In order to suspend judgement, each statement and code underwent horizontalization. “When we horizontalize, each phenomenon has equal value as we seek to disclose its nature and essence” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 95). This step allowed for participants’ key statements about male perceptions of choir to emerge and for irrelevant statements to be removed from consideration. For example, the code, *video games*, was placed alongside other codes such as *casual singing*, or *sports*. Although several students mentioned an interest in video games, no connections were made between video games and the research questions. However, *casual singing* and *sports* emerged as codes that were relevant to the research questions.

Horizons were clustered into themes which informed the meaning of the phenomenon. For example, codes like *sports*, *teamwork*, *family*, and *friends* produced the theme Clan Association, given the parallels that were observed between these horizons. To understand male participants’ lived experiences, the noema—“the ‘what’ of the appearing phenomenon” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 78)—was considered concurrently with the noesis—*how* the phenomenon is experienced. Imaginative variation—which Moustakas describes as the process of determining possible meanings of the phenomenon using various frames of reference—was then used to determine the essence of the phenomenon (high school males’ perceptions of choral participation).

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The process of phenomenological reduction and imaginative variation brought four themes to the surface: Friend Group Association, Motivation, Gender Norms, and Casual Singing. The fourth theme was most prevalent, given that all participants, regardless of choral experience, indicated that they sing casually under the right circumstances. Throughout Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, three abbreviations are used to identify the three categories of students who were interviewed: choir, ex-choir, and never-enrolled.

Clan Association

Clan association emerged immediately as a prominent theme within this study. The term ‘clan’ implies that these social groups represent more than just a group of friends with a common interest. All participants, regardless of differing social interests, expressed the importance of building a sense of community within their respective social groups, regardless of their level of involvement with those particular social groups. Some participants identified with several or many social groups, whereas others were mostly committed to a singular social group. Furthermore, several participants acknowledged that these social groups are often determined through trial-and-error, especially in middle school, in order to discover what fits best for each person. “I feel like there are more people that are in choir in middle school because they’re just like trying it out, but then after they realize, ‘nah, I really don’t want to do this,’ they switch away from it” (Aaron, junior, never-enrolled).

Several participants were members of the prerequisite Men’s Choir at WBHS which is designated for tenor and bass voices. Although students indicated that they enjoyed singing in mixed choir at the middle school level, several students indicated an improved experience

through the separation of tenors and basses from altos and sopranos. Jeff (freshman, choir) described Men's Choir as "more fun than middle school because we all participate. It's really cool. Like, last year there were maybe three people who actually sang out and then everybody else was just quiet. So, it's a lot more fun this year." Bob (sophomore, ex-choir) also noted that shyness was a factor when girls were in choir. This often resulted in some male singers hiding their voices behind other singers. Men's Choir at the high school level allowed for some male singers to build confidence without the added stress of female singers in the room.

Whether meeting on the football field, in the choir room, at the gym, on the stage, or on the tennis court, participants stressed the importance of building friendships. I asked the three participants who had never been in choir whether they would ever consider joining choir. All three students were open to joining choir, but only if their friends were joining. It is worth noting that all three of these students were juniors and have had a few years to explore their social outlets at the high school level. Ex-choir student, Bob (sophomore), expressed the same conditional circumstance, stating, "I want to be with everybody. So, I feel like I would join. I feel like it would be something cool to do." Regardless of participants' reasons for not enrolling in choir (which will be included in the discussion of motivation), they all prioritized their associations with their current friend groups over interest in the activity itself. They might not have been interested in choir, but they weren't opposed to the idea under the right circumstances.

Team

Several participants noted the similarities between ensemble participation and athletic participation. Choir students and non-choir students addressed the importance of teamwork when building relationships with their respective clans. Scott (freshman, choir) observed the family-like environment that develops among individuals with shared interests:

Well, in middle school—I’ll start there—I was convinced to do a mixed ensemble because of my friends. So, I tried it out and within like three weeks, I really liked it because it felt like a family to me—not to be so cliché and cheesy. I guess sports can be like that... Within that experience, you get to befriend more people, which is where you get that ‘family’ term, kind of, ‘cuz you get to meet people who share the same interest as you and sometimes even the same abilities as you, so you have something to relate to.

Aaron (junior, never-enrolled) also connected choral participation with sports when asked what he thought students learned in choir. Aaron responded:

I feel like it’s just learning how to sing and it’s like a teamwork thing too. Like sports is a good teamwork thing, so I feel like it’s kinda their sport... With choir, you have to like... you have different parts, so you each have to trust each other and have good teamwork to make it sound good.

Several other choir students also alluded to the idea of teamwork, acknowledging the role it plays in the building of relationships in either an athletic or musical setting.

Labels

Several stereotypical labels were reported during discussions: theater kids, choir kids, band nerds, and choir nerds. Although most participants were aware of the stereotypes that surrounded various social environments, several of the participants noted that these stereotypes diminish as students mature over the years, particularly between middle school and high school. Jack (senior, choir) observed, “I feel like, as the years have gone on, it’s gotten better, because as a senior, most of the guys are mature enough to understand that people do different things.” Mason (freshman, choir) observed a similar reduction of stereotypes between middle school and high school: “Like in junior high, choir was kind of like a, ‘Oh you’re in *choir*. You’re a *choir*

kid.’ Whereas in high school it’s like, ‘Hey you’re a choir kid. I don’t care.’ Jonathan (junior, never-been) offered the following explanation for the different attitudes between middle school and high school:

I would say... it’s worse in middle school as far as negativity, because everyone in middle school is so self-conscious about trying to figure out who they are...So, if you’re good at sports, then that makes you cool in middle school. So, I would say like the definite band and choir nerd is more there in middle school... I guess that’s what we’ve seen in movies and stuff, so without having enough years of experience under your belt to know how the world really is—everyone is different—you just kind of fall into stereotypes in middle school. And so that’s what would be portrayed as like a nerdy choir geek.

Of the eleven participants, only one expressed the opposite view that stereotypes strengthen in high school. Bob (sophomore, ex-choir) felt that because people are so young in middle school, they don’t “get called out,” whereas in high school, “most kids don’t really think of you as ‘cool’ if you sing in choir.” It is worth observing that Bob was the only participant in this study who was previously enrolled in choir, though he contended that his only reason for leaving was due to vocal frustration. Bob stated, “I don’t really care what people think if I sing or not.” Despite Bob’s contrasting opinion, the other ten participants agreed that the most of stereotyping and labeling is experienced in middle school. Now, as high school students, participants remarked that their peers are indifferent toward each other’s choices of clan.

Despite the acceptance of differences and the reduction of labels in high school, several students still expressed some self-consciousness about becoming overly-involved or labeled within their own social group. Mason (freshman, choir), for example, likened his involvement in

choir to that of theater, stating, “I’m not a *theater kid*, but I’m *in* theater. And I can kind of tell when someone’s a stereotypical theater kid—like jumping off the walls about theater—like really energetic.” Although Mason enjoyed participating in choir and theater, he preferred not to be labeled as a “choir kid” or “theater kid,” noting that he didn’t fully embrace the stereotypes that are associate with these clans. Jack (senior, choir) noted a similar involved-but-not-too-involved attitude toward choir. “I just kind of go to the rehearsals if it’s like mandatory, but anything that’s like [redacted], or like a cappella groups I don’t usually do.” Jack also preferred the comfort of larger ensembles over the exposure of smaller ensembles, noting that he was a bit shy when it came to performance.

Jonathan (junior, never-enrolled) expressed a similar attitude regarding his participation in band:

There are some people that would take lessons and all that, but I’m not that dedicated. So, there are some people that really care about it and—I probably shouldn’t, but I’d probably label them as like...band nerds...I don’t think I participate, or like, care enough to be one.

Jonathan’s statement suggested that the degree to which a student participates in their clan determines whether or not they receive a label in that clan. His limited participation in band did not necessarily indicate that he disassociated himself from the clan of band, but rather that he preferred to play a different, less-overt role in his clan.

Other students expressed a stronger association with their clan. Apollo (junior, choir) indicated that he was involved in several clubs (French Club, FBLA, Peer Leadership). However, he regarded choir and theater as his “biggest priorities.” Blue (freshman, choir) noted, “I find that I’m more myself when I’m around choir kids than other people.” Ryan (senior, choir) described

the strong friendships that he has built in choir, stating, “It’s a really tight-knit community. We all pretty much treat each other like family here.” Ryan also noted that although people in choir have friends outside of choir, he felt that the friendships built in choir are especially profound.

Participants’ perceptions of their own involvement within their clan varied; these variations arose from a fear or discomfort of being labeled. While some participants fully accepted their labels as “choir kids” or “theater kids” (viewing labels as empowering), others did not wish to identify with their labels (viewing labels as undesirable). Regardless of participants’ degrees of commitment to the identities and stereotypes associated with their clan, participants acknowledged that teamwork and the building of friendships were essential to their enjoyment.

Motivation

In order to discuss motivational influences on participation in choir, it was important to address perceptions of singing as an inherent talent vs. singing as a learned skill. Although students had slight variations of opinions, participants tended to adopt either an optimistic view that anyone can sing, or a view that singing is mostly talent-based. All participants were asked, “Can anyone sing?” While some were quicker to respond than others (mostly those who had completed the questionnaire), most students took a bit of time to consider this question.

Students with choral experience tended to adopt an optimistic view of singing as a learned skill. Mason (freshman, choir) stated:

Can anyone sing? The question is: Can anyone sing well? And I think with enough hard work, you can... yes, I think eventually—whether you are a born musical talent, or you’ve never really sung a piece before—you can always sing. I mean, with enough hard work and dedication and the right teacher, yea you can sing.

Echoing Mason's response, Blue (freshman, choir) stated, "Yes. I think anybody can sing if they really try to. I have friends who say they can't sing, yet I've heard them sing." Arguments for singing as a learned skill centered mostly around effort and motivation. "I believe everyone can sing, it's just a matter of having the actual motivation for it or just the determination in general in doing it" (Scott, freshman, choir).

Two of the three students who have never been in choir did not discount singing as a learned skill; however, these students brought more attention to the notion that singing is something that is influenced by inherent talent. "I feel like it's something that she's [Beyoncé] born with. 'Cuz you can be taught how to sing better—like how to move your voice better—I don't think you can actually be taught like... your voice" (Aaron, junior, never-enrolled). Similarly, Sam (junior, never-enrolled) commented, "I feel like people in choir are people who have a naturally born gift or talent for that, and really have an interest in like theater and performing in front of people." Both Aaron and Sam acknowledged that they thought they could improve their own voices to a certain degree, but they stressed the idea that singing is something that is mostly inherent.

Jonathan, who isn't in choir, but sings on the worship team for his church and plays in band, did not share the nature-over-nurture view of the other two students who haven't sung in choir. Jonathan (never-enrolled) commented, "I think, I mean, it's definitely a learning thing. Like, I think you can learn to do it." Jonathan also acknowledged that he thought himself to be a good singer, but "compared to choir kids, probably not, because I don't have training." In sum, students without formal musical training perceived singing as mostly talent-based, whereas those with formal musical training in the schools perceived singing mostly as a learned skill. Student

perceptions of singing as either ability-based or as a learned skill may have contributed to their decisions to join or not to join choir.

Criticism and Validation

Criticism and validation are two social influences that affected participants' motivation regarding choral participation. Participants recalled moments of criticism that occurred mostly before or during middle school; participants recalled moments of validation that continued through high school. Those who recalled validation from others were enrolled in choir, while those who recalled moments of criticism did not enroll in choir.

Aaron (junior, never-enrolled) experienced criticism from his parents that influenced his perceptions of singing. He recalled the following interaction with his parents:

I thought I was a good singer for a little bit and then my parents recorded me and showed it to me and I'm like 'Oh no, that's not good.' So now I just don't sing.

Through an email follow-up, Aaron confirmed that his parents recorded him singing because they thought it was funny. Despite parental criticism, Aaron was still comfortable singing casually around his parents and other close friends and family. Sam (junior, never-enrolled) also mentioned that others have told him he is not a great singer, though he mostly attributed his perceived lack of ability to a limited range of pitches that he can hit. Neither Sam nor Aaron indicated any moments of validation with regard to their own singing.

While this study focused on the social implications of voice change more than the physiological implications, some physiological frustrations did surface throughout the study. For example, Bob (sophomore, ex-choir) attributed his decision to quit choir to his voice change. "My voice was cracking, and I was like, 'Man this isn't even fun anymore. I don't sound good when I sing, so I might as well just stop doing it'." Bob's own self-criticism contributed to his

own lack of motivation to sing in choir, indicating that criticism can also come from within.

Aaron, on the other hand, recalled getting laughed at when his voice would crack, but he brushed these instances off, noting, “I didn’t really care ‘cuz it’s just your voice—you can’t really change it.” Sam also noted his frustration with voice cracking at his higher range, but given that he didn’t sing in a choir, it didn’t bother him.

Fear of criticism was also a factor in students’ motivations to join or not to join choir. For instance, when asked if he would ever join choir, Sam (junior, never-enrolled) responded:

I don’t know, I feel like I could become better if I was like... awful, and I joined it. Then I could become better. But I feel like everyone else in there, at least, has done it through junior high or something, or at least have like some singing talent, so like I’d be the only one in there that’s like... not good at all.

Sam’s comment is another example of self-criticism, manifested as a fear of criticism. His fear of being behind was also echoed by two choir students without middle school choir experience, who admitted they were hesitant to join high school choir for fear of not knowing as much as those students who started in 6th grade.

Although interviews revealed several instances of criticism from non-choir students, most students in choir did not recall many instances of criticism. Instead, choir students often brought up instances of validation from those around them, noting the impact that positive feedback had on their decisions to either join or remain in choir. Several students could recall specific instances in which a parent or teacher complimented his singing, thereby influencing their decisions to join or stay in choir. Apollo (junior, choir) recounted:

I only thought about doing it [choir] because last year I was doing tech for a musical, and I was like singing in the hallway, and [Mr. Holt] was like, 'Hey you should join choir.' And I was like, 'Ok, why not?' Then I did, and now I love it.

Jack (senior, choir) received validation from his parents, influencing his decision to join choir:

But like when you're in the car with your parents and this song comes on and you're singing and your parents are like, 'Hey you sound pretty good,' or something like that. I guess it's just like a thing: you kind of know. And then I just kind of thought that it [choir] would be a good fit.

Students also experienced validation through the absence of criticism. In other words, the absence of teasing or negative interactions from students outside of choir allowed students to pursue choir without much fear of criticism. Most students felt that this improved with age. Ryan (senior, choir) noted:

Overall people seem to be just ok with it. I mean, in the end, they don't really care, they've got other things to worry about, so if you're in choir, good for you... The only time I've experienced that [criticism] was in middle school when kids were just being kids, but in high school, no, I've never experienced that.

Students also noted a general lack of cross-over or interaction between social groups, which might contribute to the lack of criticism (or validation) between social groups.

Gender Norms

Perhaps the most consistent response throughout interviews was the notion that most people tend to see choir as a "girly" activity. Although none of the participants personally aligned with the view that choir is for girls, most acknowledged that choir is a female-dominated activity and that their peers outside of choir tend to view it as feminine. Jack (senior, choir)

noted, “If a girl says they’re in choir, it’s not as big of a deal as if a guy says they’re in choir.”

One student also admitted to his own prior assumptions about choir, stating:

If you walk up to someone who is not in choir in this school, they’ll think it’s just a bunch of girls singing. And that’s what I thought too, at first. Like the main stereotype is: girls are good singers, guys really aren’t.

Although most students agreed that a feminine stereotype surrounds the choir scene, Aaron (junior, never-enrolled) had the opposite impression. Although female choir students at WBHS outnumber male choir students ten to three, Aaron concluded, “I feel like there are more males in a choir than girls. I feel like their voice is just naturally easier to match with.” When asked whether his peers perceive guys and girls in choir differently, Aaron replied, “No, I feel like it’s just what you like. You’re just you.”

Despite this different perspective, most participants acknowledged a gender discrepancy, citing instances of gender stereotyping from middle school, or simply noting the apparent disparity between male and female choir students at WBHS. When asked to consider why gender stereotypes exist, several students acknowledged that these things were improving as society evolves. Jonathan (junior, never-enrolled) suggested that the typical male narrative is to play sports. He then went on to say, “I mean we’re doing better at getting away from that, but that’s probably the overarching thing.” Echoing his response was Ryan (senior, choir) who noted, “We live in a time where we’re constantly breaking social norms, so yea, I haven’t seen that in high school where people are more mature.” Apollo (junior, choir) offered the following explanation of a vicious cycle that describes the perpetuation of the female-dominated choir classroom:

There are other things that are expected of guys. For some reason a lot of guys, especially like younger guys—like middle school I’d say—are like, ‘Oh, I don’t want to sing. That’s

like silly.’ They think so highly of themselves... Younger guys don’t want to do things that aren’t sports and stereotypically manly things, and it’s kind of silly, but what I think happens is there’s a lot of peer pressure, especially in those younger years... And so, a lot of guys don’t get into choir then. And then, because they don’t get into it, they don’t really do that later in life, because all that starts when you are younger. And then that leads to less guys in choir which leads to people thinking it’s not a guy thing, which leads to even less guys in choir, and it kind of all expands from there.

Apollo’s theory suggested that because students don’t see a lot of guys in choir, fewer guys choose to enroll, which perpetuates the cycle of the missing male.

Participants enrolled in choir tended to agree that male identity in choir was not so different from female identity. In other words, males in choir did not view themselves as different from their female peers. Choir participants emphasized voice part rather than gender, noting that each voice part plays a role in the program. Despite the majority perspective, Scott (freshman, choir) expressed his own heightened sense of importance to the choir due to fewer numbers and vocal timbre. He explained:

Being a male person, I just feel more enthusiastic and more upbeat... Since we’re a smaller group we learned how to be more confident... Especially the basses—I’m one of them—we make up the foundation of the whole choir, so it’s important that we are also there to form a firm basis for the choir.

Contrary to Scott’s perspective, other choir participants did not distinguish between their experiences and those of their female peers, other than acknowledging the difference in voice parts. “I don’t think there’s really any difference. I mean, we just... sing” (Jeff, freshman, choir).

Casual Singing

The most prominent theme that emerged throughout the study was the concept of casual singing (e.g., singing in the car, singing in the shower, singing along to the music). Interviews with students who have never been in choir revealed a significant disconnect between singing in choir (school music) and singing casually. When non-choir students were asked if they sang, they either mentioned singing in the car, singing in the shower, or singing around people with whom they are comfortable. These casual interactions all involved singing along to music rather than performing music.

The distinction between casual singing and choral singing also affected choir students' perceptions of singing. As mentioned earlier, Jack (senior, choir) noted that he was comfortable singing in choir, so long as there were enough singers that he wouldn't stand out. He wasn't interested in singing solos like some of his fellow choristers; he enjoyed the participation element of choir rather than the performance element.

I guess if music is playing—for example like tennis or something like that—and music's playing and I'm singing out loud or something, it's fine. Because I'm comfortable with those people. But if it's in a situation where I'm supposed to be singing good, and it's judged on how well I'm singing, then I feel like it just... the stress level elevates, and I don't sing as good. (Jack, senior, choir)

Participatory singing, as opposed to formal performance, also applied to religious contexts, which were seen as casual singing environments. Mason (freshman, choir) described how involvement in church singing was the impetus for joining choir in school. "I just always enjoyed singing—just the hymns and then in Sunday School—just singing whatever songs they

throw at us.” Jonathan (junior, never-choir) distinguished singing as performance from singing as worship stating:

At church you’re not necessarily performing. You’re worshipping with everyone else.

And so, because everyone else is singing, it’s less on you, but in a choir performance it’s

like you and everyone around you that’s singing. So, it feels like all attention is on you.

While some students expressed interest in showcasing their voices, those who do not sing in choir—in addition to some who do—preferred to sing only in situations in which performance is not emphasized. All participants in the study acknowledged enjoyment of casual singing, and yet most participants expressed discomfort or anxiety at the thought of singing solo. “I just feel like I’m not prepared for that yet. I mean, I feel like I could do it, but I feel the whole... shyness factor, I guess” (Jack, senior, choir).

Summary of Themes

Clan Association, Motivation, Gender Norms, and Casual Singing emerged as central themes within this study and contribute to male perceptions of singing in choir. Although participants had varying interests, all participants acknowledged the importance of belonging to a community of people, identified as a clan in this research. While some students associated strongly with one or two clans, others preferred to be involved in many clans. Furthermore, students varied in their levels of commitment within their clan. Participants described motivational influences on their perceptions including ability- and effort-based views of singing, as well as criticism and validation. Participants with ensemble music experience adopted a view of singing as a learned skill, while participants without ensemble experience adopted a view of singing as an innate ability that can be improved upon to some degree. Fear of criticism and validation influenced participants’ self-perceptions of their voices. Although stereotypes were

prominent at the middle school level, most participants recognized that stereotypes diminished with age and maturity, and that their peers' attitudes toward males singing in choir were mostly indifferent at the high school level. Despite this indifference, participants felt that their peers might see choir as a "girly" activity, largely due to the obvious discrepancy between male and female enrollment. Finally, all participants noted instances in which they sing casually. Although only some students enjoyed singing in formal performance settings, *all* participants enjoyed singing in participatory, casual settings.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to investigate male high school students' perceptions of choral singing, with a focus on three categories of students: choir students, ex-choir student, and never-enrolled students. Through phenomenological investigation, the study was designed to better understand the lived experiences of male high school students with regard to singing and singing in choir. Discussion of the study's findings are organized by the research questions that guided the study: (1) What are male perceptions of choral singing? (2) What are male perceptions of casual singing? (3) How do male perceptions differ between choir students, ex-choir students, and never-enrolled students? (4) What social influences seem to have the most profound impact on male decisions to enroll or not to enroll in choir? (5) What does it mean to be a male in choir? Differences in perceptions—research question (3)—are woven into the discussion of the other four research questions.

Research Question 1

What are male perceptions of choral singing? All choir students regarded participation in choir as positive, while non-choir students (ex-choir and never-enrolled) regarded participation as neutral: neither positive nor negative. Jonathan (junior, never-enrolled), who had a neutral perspective regarding others' participation in choir, acknowledged that he enjoyed singing and that he thought he was a good singer. Considering that enjoyment of singing and positive vocal self-perception were indicators of choral participation in Lucas's (2007) study, one might expect Jonathan to enjoy choir. However, despite his enjoyment of singing and positive vocal self-perception, Jonathan didn't enjoy the music that the choirs sang. He did not appreciate that he could not understand most of the words, as so many of the pieces were not performed in English.

Jonathan's dislike of the repertoire coincided with Kennedy's (2002) finding that style of repertoire is an important factor in boys' motivations to join and remain in choir.

Sam and Aaron (juniors, never-enrolled) had never heard the Waters Bend High School choirs perform, other than the national anthem at sporting events. Given their lack of context, they were not able to indicate whether they enjoyed the repertoire or not. However, both Sam and Aaron agreed that the choirs sounded good when they performed the anthem. Instead, their decisions not to enroll in choir were mostly related to their perceived lack of musical ability. This coincides with Lucas (2007), who found that young males' perceived lack of musical ability was a key factor in their decisions not to enroll in choir. Aaron—who first noted his apparent lack of ability when his parents recorded him singing—developed a view of singing as an innate ability that he did not possess. The view that singing is an innate ability rather than a skill to be trained aligned with Freer's (2010) observation that boys tend to attribute success to ability rather than effort.

Kennedy's (2004) recommendation for "single-sex" environments during voice change was backed up by her research of the American Boychoir School. She observed the importance of the physiological training and the social-emotional support system that was afforded to young males as they experienced voice change. In the present study, several students indicated that mixed gender choir in middle school caused nervousness for some male singers who were reluctant to sing in front of their female peers. Several students observed that some of their middle school choir peers would hide their voices behind more confident singers; Men's Choir at the high school level provided some students with the comfort needed to build their confidence.

Although student perceptions of singing in choir were either positive or neutral, most students assumed that others probably see choir as an interest most suitable for girls. Several

participants used the word “girly” to describe how they felt that their peers might view choir. Some students attributed this perception to the visible discrepancy between males and females in choir. In other words, students see more girls in choir, so the general mentality is that choir is for girls. As for male expectations, several participants noted that males are expected to play sports. The general expectation that males should play sports implied that male participation in anything else (including choir) was less manly, and thereby more suitable for girls. Although participants did not personally align with these gender expectations, they assumed many of their peers did.

Gender expectations or gender norms are easily observable, as Apollo indicated in his description of the vicious cycle of males under-enrolled in choir; males don’t see a lot of males in choir, therefore they don’t join choir—and the cycle is perpetuated. This cycle suggests that participants perceive a lack of male role models in choir. Freer (2010) suggested that the lack of male role models contributes to lower male enrollment in choir, as students do not associate choir with their possible selves. Participants agreed that gender stereotypes diminished as they got older and that gender norms were changing in society at large. However, by the time males have reached high school, their less-stereotypical perspectives don’t seem to be enough to encourage them to consider joining choir in high school.

Social insecurities related to gender expectations may improve over time, but perhaps they do not occur soon enough to allow students to explore options like choir. Several participants noted a significant change in perception and maturity between middle school and high school, but by the time students reach high school, students are not likely to join choir. Siebenaler (2006) noted that participation in music at the high school level is significantly less likely without prior experience at the middle school level. This is supported by Fisher’s (2014) observation that students’ self-efficacy, or perceived ability to perform, increases as they spend

more years in choir. Several students mentioned that they were apprehensive about joining choir in high school, as they would feel behind or inferior to those students who sang in choir throughout middle school. In sum, students who did not participate in choir—or music, in general—at the middle school level were not likely to join in high school.

Not all participants were comfortable with singing within a performance setting (e.g., Aaron and Sam). Furthermore, students had differing views of what constituted a performance, as did Jonathan (junior, never-enrolled), who felt comfortable singing on his worship team at church because he felt that he and the congregation were worshipping together. Among those in choir, students had varying comfort levels regarding performance. Jack (senior, choir), for example, enjoyed the larger ensemble, but he had no interest in singing in the smaller a cappella groups, remarking, “I’m just not comfortable singing with groups like that—like smaller groups.” Others were comfortable singing completely solo. Despite the varied comfort levels with regard to performance, students all shared an enjoyment of casual singing, whether they thought of it as singing or not.

Research Question 2

What are male perceptions of casual singing? Perhaps the most significant finding within this study was that casual singing—in the car, in the shower, on the tennis court—pervades the lived experiences of all of the participants, regardless of their perceptions or experiences with choral singing. When asked about singing in general, participants would default to a discussion of choir. Choir and non-choir participants assumed that “singing” referred to choir. Aside from Jonathan, the other non-choir participants indicated that they don’t sing, assuming that singing referred to choir. Throughout their interviews, the same students revealed that they sing, albeit in non-choral settings. Mizener (1993) observed that the same students who enjoy singing along to

the radio, assert that they do not like singing. In the present study, Bob (sophomore, ex-choir) claimed that his voice change caused him to stop enjoying choir; however, given the right circumstances (people, place, activity), he would sing casually without fear of ridicule or embarrassment. Sam and Aaron (juniors, never-enrolled) indicated that they can't and don't sing, but given the opportunity to sing along to music in the car, or among certain friends and family members, they enjoyed singing. These findings suggest that there is a disconnect between student perceptions of singing as either a performance-based activity such as choir, or a participatory activity.

Research Question 4

What social influences seem to have the most profound impact on male decisions to enroll or not to enroll in choir? Although current choir students were involved choir to varying degrees (e.g., Jack only participated in the mandatory events), each of them acknowledged that they enjoyed their experiences in choir. Enjoyment of singing was a strong reason for joining or remaining in choir. This observation aligned with results from Lucas (2011) and Kennedy (2002), both of whom attributed love of singing as an essential reason for joining choir.

Kennedy (2002) also included “influence of the teacher, and the company of friends” (p. 29) as primary reasons for joining and remaining in choir. Several students at WBHS recounted instances in which they received teacher validation, such as Apollo (junior, choir), who joined choir as a junior after a casual suggestion from Mr. Holt who happened upon him singing in the hallway. The company of friends (Clan Association) emerged as a prominent theme in this study, aligning yet again with Kennedy's (2002) observation. Students in choir used terms like “family” and “team” to describe their social dynamic. Furthermore, students who were not in choir indicated that they would probably join if their friends joined.

Most participants' self-perceptions of their voices were influenced by the criticism or validation of others and students enrolled in choir because they felt that they were good singers. Lucas (2011) also noted that students joined choir because they felt that they were good singers. Contrarily, participants in the present study who did not feel that they were good singers felt that they would not succeed in choir, reflecting the results of the studies by Asmus (1986) and Legette (1998). This observation is also consistent with Lucas' (2007) conclusion that students choose not to enroll in choir if they do not view themselves as good singers. Bob (sophomore, ex-choir) attributed his decision not to reenroll in choir to his dissatisfaction with his voice once he lost his high notes. No longer confident in his tone, he chose not to continue singing in choir.

Peer support impacted students' decisions to enroll in choir at WBHS, similarly to findings in Siebenaler's (2006) study, in which he determined that peer support was a significant influence on choral participation. WBHS choir students indicated that their non-choir peers generally supported their choice to sing in choir at the high school level, which may have influenced their choices to sing in choir. Accounts of middle school peer support differed slightly. Several choir students recalled some judgment from their peers in middle school. Contrarily, students who were not enrolled in choir expressed that their decisions had nothing to do with what others might think of them, indicating that peer influence may not contribute to decisions not to enroll as much as other social influences.

A significant finding of this study was the relationship between school music experience and perception of talent and effort. Sam and Aaron (never-enrolled) viewed singing as a largely innate ability that could be improved with training. In contrast, the nine students with significant ensemble experience viewed singing largely as a learned skill. Since Asmus (1986) and Legette (1998) did not survey non-music students, this finding does not directly align with the results of

their studies. However, the correlation between school music (or ensemble) experience and talent/effort provides merit for further investigation.

Research Question 5

What does it mean to be a male in choir? Male identity in choir was not a significant finding of this study. Of the seven students enrolled in choir, only one indicated that his gender was significant to his experience; Scott felt especially important to the choir as a member of a minority voice part (i.e., the basses). According to Asmus's (1994) achievement motivation model, self-perception is enhanced through greater control over the situation, which stimulates intrinsic motivation. Scott's association with a minority voice part enhanced his intrinsic motivation in choir, as he felt he had more control over his learning and skill development than his female peers. In contrast to Scott's perspective, most choir participants did not view their gender as an important aspect of their participation in choir. Instead, they recognized the importance of each voice part in the ensemble. Although several participants acknowledged an improved experience in Men's Choir due to the absence of female singers, these improvements were not attributed to male identity.

Essence

Four central themes were revealed through phenomenological reduction and imagination variation (Moustakas, 1994): Clan Association, Motivation, Gender Norms, and Casual Singing. These themes represent the lived experiences of these male high school students. Students felt the need to belong to a particular clan with common goals. While some students belonged to several clans, others felt more comfortable committing to one or few. Some participants embraced the stereotypes and labels associated with their clans (e.g., choir kid vs. kid in choir), while others did not wish to be associated with these labels. Regardless of the degree to which

participants associated with a clan, participants saw their clan as a community in which they could build friendships. Students with ensemble experience tended to view singing as a learned skill, whereas those without experience viewed talent as the primary indicator of success. Despite generally positive or neutral views of choral participation, students suggested that their peers viewed choir as an activity for girls.

Finally, students associated the word *singing* with performance, often disregarding their experiences with casual singing—in the car, in the shower, among close friends, on the practice field, in the hallway, on the stage. Regardless of participants' experiences with choral singing, all participants sang in casual situations. Therefore, the essence of this study was that male high school students' perceptions of choral singing are disconnected from their perceptions of casual singing. Regardless of prior musical experiences, self-perceived abilities, social influences, or perceptions of choral singing, high school males are predisposed to sing given the right circumstances.

Implications

Although this study was unique to the participants at Waters Bend High School, the results provided further insight into the perspectives of high school males regarding choral participation. As this study was largely influenced by the missing male phenomenon, several implications are related to the recruitment and retention of male singers in middle school and high school. However, given the limitations of the study (e.g., limited non-choir participants, omitted questionnaire responses), the recommendations for future practice and research should be considered with some degree of scrutiny. In other words, the results of this study do not provide sufficient evidence that lead to concrete solutions to the missing male phenomenon.

One such implication relates to the incorporation of gender-separate choirs. Students indicated an improvement of the choral experience moving from mixed choir at the middle school level to Men's Choir at the high school level. Several students noted that Men's Choir helped to overcome shyness and to encourage active participation from all singers. As suggested by Kennedy (2004), students might benefit from this separation at the middle school level if the option is available. The inclusion of voice-part-separate ensembles might also help to diminish the stereotype that singing is for girls by acknowledging a specific choir designated for male singers. Rather than separate by gender, however, separation by voice part might provide a more inclusive model for those students who do not fit the gender binary. Rather than using "men's choir" and "women's choir," choirs might be labeled as "bass choir" and "treble choir." That said, separated ensembles may also alienate students from one another. Therefore, a separated approach might also include mixed ensemble extra-curricular or curricular opportunities that are inclusive of all students.

Mr. Holt, a respected male choir director, had established a strong choral program with a decent number of male singers; however, female enrollment in his choirs far exceeded that of male enrollment. This observation implies that the presence of a male choir director may not necessarily be the solution to recruiting and retaining students. Rather than focusing on the gender of the director, educators might focus the inclusion of male singers as role models. While modeling might be used in the choir classroom to encourage male participation to continue, modeling should be visible to *all* students to assist with recruitment. For example, consider inviting an all-male a cappella group to an all-school function, rather than a choral function alone. Let the missing males know that choir is not only for girls.

Participants in this study expressed a universal enjoyment of singing within their own personal comfort zones. Given that students are predisposed to sing within comfortable settings and situations, educators might consider strategies to increase comfort. Something as simple as casual-but-uniform concert attire might help to change others' perceptions of choir. Educators can provide diverse singing opportunities to be more inclusive to those students who prefer a more casual setting for singing. This is not to say that choral educators should do away with concerts, since those students who are currently enrolled in choir are still likely to enjoy that type of performance experience. Rather, an expanded view of vocal music in school might help to expand the population of students who enroll in vocal music.

Suggestions for Future Research

The present study revealed that students without ensemble experience tended to attribute musical success to ability. Although Asmus (1986) and Legette (1998) both assessed the relationships between effort and ability, more research is needed that distinguishes between the perceptions of students with ensemble experience and those without ensemble experience. Additional research could include an investigation of what constitutes a singing-friendly comfort zone for students, especially for those who are not enrolled in choir. Which males sing casually? Under what circumstances? With whom? Regarding high school male perceptions of choral singing, more research is needed that addresses males who have never been in choir as well as males who have dropped out of choir. Research that examines male perceptions of choir might also include never-been students from a variety of social classes.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL TO CONDUCT RESEARCH



OFFICE OF THE VICE CHANCELLOR FOR RESEARCH

Office for the Protection of Research Subjects
805 W. Pennsylvania Ave., MC-095
Urbana, IL 61801-4822

Notice of Approval: New Submission

October 30, 2018

Principal Investigator	Bridget Sweet
CC	Michael Brand
Protocol Title	<i>Factors That Influence Adolescent Males' Decisions to Enroll or Not To Enroll in Choir</i>
Protocol Number	19207
Funding Source	Unfunded
Review Type	Expedited 6 7
Approved Subparts	D
Status	Active
Risk Determination	no more than minimal risk
Approval Date	10/30/2018
Expiration Date	10/29/2021

This letter authorizes the use of human subjects in the above protocol. The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed and approved the research study as described.

The Principal Investigator of this study is responsible for:

- Conducting research in a manner consistent with the requirements of the University and federal regulations found at 45 CFR 46.
- Requesting approval from the IRB prior to implementing modifications.
- Notifying OPRS of any problems involving human subjects, including unanticipated events, participant complaints, or protocol deviations.
- Notifying OPRS of the completion of the study.

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

IORG0000014 • FWA #00008584
217.333.2670 • irb@illinois.edu • oprs.research.illinois.edu

APPENDIX B: STUDENT LETTER AND ASSENT FORM



UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

School of Music
1114 W. Nevada Street
Urbana, IL 61801

Dear [redacted] Student,

November, 2018

I am a high school choir director working on my master's degree in Music Education at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. I am looking for [redacted] students to participate in a research study that will examine the perspectives of high school students, regarding participation in choir/singing. **You do not need to be a choir student to participate** – we are looking for current choir students, ex-choir students, AND students who have never been in choir.

This study will require very little of your time. You will fill out an initial questionnaire that will be taken online at your convenience (to be completed by January 11). Following the questionnaire, fifteen students will be selected for an individual interview that should take 15-20 minutes. These interviews will be scheduled according to what fits your schedule. Interviews will be audio recorded so the interview can be transcribed.

If you are interested in participating, please do the following:

- Fill out and sign the attached **assent form**.
- Have a parent/guardian sign the attached **consent form**.
- Seal both forms in the envelope provided.
- Turn them in to Mr. [redacted], the choir director at [redacted], by **December 7, 2018**.
 - If you would prefer to mail your forms directly to the researchers, you may mail them to Michael Brand at 1114 W. Nevada St., Urbana, IL 61801.

If you choose to turn in your forms to Mr. [redacted], please note that he will not open your envelope. Only the researchers will see the information provided on your assent and consent forms.

Participation is completely voluntary. **All students will remain anonymous** throughout any documentation and dissemination of results through research publications and presentations. If you wish to exclude any collected data, or withdraw from the study altogether, you may do so at any time. Choosing not to be in this study or to stop being in this study will not result in any penalty. Your decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your academic standing in any way.

Principal [redacted] will be aware of your participation in the study for scheduling purposes only. Only the researchers – myself and my research advisor – will have access to the data collected during questionnaires and interviews. Following the completion of the study, I am happy to share the results with all participants and parents/guardians upon request.

We will use all reasonable efforts to keep your personal information confidential, but we cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. When this research is discussed or published, no one will know that you were in the study. But, when required by law or university policy, identifying information

(including your signed consent form) may be seen or copied by: The Institutional Review Board that approves research studies; The Office for Protection of Research Subjects and other university departments that oversee human subjects research; University and state auditors responsible for oversight of research. Faculty, staff, students, and others with permission or authority to see your study information will maintain its confidentiality to the extent permitted and required by laws and university policies. The names or personal identifiers of participants will not be published or presented. There are no foreseeable risks associated with this research beyond those risks that students face in a typical day at school.

You may keep this page for your reference. If you have any questions or if you would like to discuss any particular details further, feel free to contact me at mcbrand2@illinois.edu. You may also contact my research advisor, Dr. Bridget Sweet at bsweet@illinois.edu.

If you or your parent/guardian want to speak with someone who is not directly involved in this research, or if you or your child have questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact the University of Illinois Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS). You can call them at (217) 333-2670 or send email to irb@illinois.edu.

I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M C Brand". The letters are stylized and cursive.

Michael C. Brand
Teaching Assistant, Music Education
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
1114 W. Nevada St.
Urbana, IL 61801
mcbrand2@illinois.edu

Dr. Bridget Sweet, PhD
Associate Professor, Music Education
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
1114 W. Nevada St.
Urbana, IL 61801
bsweet@illinois.edu



STUDENT ASSENT FORM

FOR RESEARCH AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Seal this form, along with your parent/guardian consent form in the envelope.
Return the sealed envelope to the choir director, Mr. [redacted] by **December 7, 2018**
OR

Mail the envelope to Michael Brand at 1114 W. Nevada St., Urbana IL, 61801

Student Name: _____

Year (check one): Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior

School-issued Gmail: _____

*Gender Identity: _____

* We ask you to indicate your gender identity because our research will specifically examine how gender is related to student attitudes.

Check ONE of the following:

- I am currently in choir at [redacted].
I have been in choir since ____ grade.
- I was in choir at some point, but no longer sing in choir.
If so, how long were you in choir? From ____ grade to ____ grade.
- I have never sung in a choir

List all social groups/clubs/sports/activities you are involved in: _____

Please indicate your availability **on the back of this page**.

_____ (check here) I would like to participate in the research study described above. I understand that if I am selected for an interview, my interview will be audio recorded. I also understand that I reserve the right to withdraw from this research study at any time, prior to the publication of results. A copy of this assent form will be provided to me after the researcher receives it.

Printed Student's Name

Student's Signature

Date

Availability for Interviews

Do you have a study hall?

- Yes, during _____ period.
- No

When is the best time for you to meet for a 15-20 minute interview? (Only some students will be interviewed)

- During my study hall
- Before school
- After school
- Other (specify): _____

APPENDIX C: PARENT LETTER AND CONSENT FORM



UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

School of Music
1114 W. Nevada Street
Urbana, IL 61801

Dear Parent/Guardian:

November, 2018

I am a high school choir director working on my master's degree in Music Education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. I am writing to request your permission for your student to participate in a research opportunity for the field of music education. The purpose of the study is (1) to investigate the internal and external factors that influence male students' decisions to enroll or not to enroll in choir, and (2) to determine how these factors may affect attrition between middle school and high school. This project has been approved by the Music Education faculty and the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Your student does not need to be in choir to qualify for participation in this study. In fact, we are looking for current choir students, ex-choir students, AND students who have never been in choir.

The study will require very little time from your student. All students will fill out a questionnaire that can be taken online at their convenience. This will be sent through their school Gmail. Following the completion of the questionnaire, fifteen students will be selected for an individual interview that should last 15-20 minutes. These interviews will be scheduled according to what works best in your student's schedule and will take place at [redacted]. Interviews will be audio recorded so the interview can be transcribed.

[redacted] (Principal) will be aware of your student's participation in the study for scheduling purposes only. Only the researchers – myself and my research advisor – will have access to the data collected during questionnaires and interviews. Following the completion of the study, I am happy to share the results with all participants and parents/guardians upon request.

Participation is completely voluntary. **All students will remain anonymous** throughout any documentation and dissemination of results through research publications and presentations. If your student wishes to exclude any collected data, or withdraw from the study altogether, they may do so at any time. Choosing not to be in this study or to stop being in this study will not result in any penalty to your child.

We will use all reasonable efforts to keep your student's personal information confidential, but we cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. When this research is discussed or published, no one will know that your student was in the study. But, when required by law or university policy, identifying information (including your signed consent form) may be seen or copied by: The Institutional Review Board that approves research studies; The Office for Protection of Research Subjects and other university departments that oversee human subjects research; University and state auditors

responsible for oversight of research. Faculty, staff, students, and others with permission or authority to see your study information will maintain its confidentiality to the extent permitted and required by laws and university policies. The names or personal identifiers of participants will not be published or presented. There are no foreseeable risks associated with this research beyond those risks that students face in a typical day at school.

If you consent to your student's participation, please sign the attached consent form and give it to your student to turn in to Mr. [redacted], the choir director at [redacted]. Your student will also need to submit the provided **assent form** to indicate their own willingness to participate. These can be sealed together in the provided envelope to ensure privacy. If you or your student would prefer to mail the form directly to the researchers, you may mail them to Michael Brand at the address provided below.

You may keep this page for your reference. If you have any questions or if you would like to discuss any particular details further, feel free to contact me at mcbrand2@illinois.edu. You may also contact my research advisor, Dr. Bridget Sweet at bsweet@illinois.edu.

If you or your child want to speak with someone who is not directly involved in this research, or if you or your child have questions about your child's rights as a research subject, please contact the University of Illinois Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS). You can call them at (217) 333-2670 or send email to irb@illinois.edu.

Sincerely,



Michael C. Brand
Teaching Assistant, Music Education
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
1114 W. Nevada St.
Urbana, IL 61801
mcbrand2@illinois.edu

Dr. Bridget Sweet, PhD
Associate Professor, Music Education
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
1114 W. Nevada St.
Urbana, IL 61801
bsweet@illinois.edu



PARENT CONSENT FORM
FOR RESEARCH AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Please give this form to your student to turn in along with their assent form by **December 7, 2018**.

Students will turn in both forms to the choir director at [redacted], Mr. [redacted].

OR

They may mail both forms directly to Michael Brand at 1114 W. Nevada St, Urbana, IL 61801.

_____ (check here) I give permission for my student to participate in the research study described above. Should my student be selected for an interview, I understand that the interview will be audio recorded for transcription. A copy of this consent form will be provided to me after the researcher receives it.

_____ (check here) I would like to receive a copy of the final report.

Please email it to me at: _____

Student Name (printed)

Parent/Guardian Name (printed)

Parent/Guardian Signature

Date

APPENDIX D: QUESTIONNAIRES (DISTRIBUTED VIA SURVEYMONKEY®)

Questionnaire for students currently enrolled in choir

Using the following 1–5 scale, indicate the degree to which you agree with the statements below.

1: strongly disagree 2: disagree 3: neutral 4: agree 5: strongly agree

1. Only some people are capable of singing well.
2. I enjoy singing in choir.
3. I like to sing solos.
4. I consider myself to be a good singer.
5. I am comfortable singing in public.
6. Being in choir helps me to become a better singer.
7. I enjoy the music that we sing in choir.
8. Most of my friends are in choir.
9. I come from a musical family.
10. My non-choir friends support my choice to be in choir.
11. Most male students at [redacted] respect male choir students.
12. Most female students at [redacted] respect male choir students.
13. My voice change was/has been a challenge to deal with.

Please provide a short answer to each of the following:

1. What are some of your hobbies and interests?
2. Describe your experiences in music before high school.
3. For what reason(s) did you choose to remain in choir in high school? If you first joined choir in high school, why did you join?
4. Briefly describe your high school choir experience.
5. What are your post-graduation plans?

Questionnaire for students currently no longer enrolled in choir

Using the following 1–5 scale, indicate the degree to which you agree with the statements below.

1: strongly disagree 2: disagree 3: neutral 4: agree 5: strongly agree

1. Only some people are capable of singing well.
2. I enjoyed singing in choir.
3. I like to sing solos.
4. I consider myself to be a good singer.
5. I am comfortable singing in public.
6. Being in choir helped me to become a better singer.
7. I enjoyed the music that we sing in choir.
8. Most of my friends are in choir.
9. I come from a musical family.
10. My non-choir friends supported my choice to be in choir.
11. Most male students at [redacted] respect male choir students.
12. Most female students at [redacted] respect male choir students.
13. My voice change was/has been a challenge to deal with.

Please provide a short answer to each of the following:

1. What are some of your hobbies and interests?
2. Describe your experiences in music before high school.
3. For what reason(s) did you choose not to reenroll in choir in high school?
4. Briefly describe your middle school choir experience.
5. What are your post-graduation plans?

Questionnaire for students who have never enrolled in choir

Using the following 1–5 scale, indicate the degree to which you agree with the statements below.

1: strongly disagree 2: disagree 3: neutral 4: agree 5: strongly agree

1. Only some people are capable of singing well.
2. I like to sing.
3. I like to sing in public.
4. I consider myself to be a good singer.
5. I don't ever sing.
6. Many of my friends are in choir.
7. I have siblings who sing/sang in choir.
8. I go to choir concerts/events when I am able to.
9. I like the songs that our choirs perform.
10. I would get teased if I was in choir.
11. Most male students at [redacted] respect male choir students.
12. Most female students at [redacted] respect male choir students.
13. My voice change was/has been a challenge to deal with.

Please provide a short answer to each of the following:

1. What are some of your hobbies and interests?
2. What is your impression of guys who sing in choir?
3. Would you ever consider joining choir? Explain why or why not.
4. Would you be in choir if most of your friends were in it?
5. What are your post-graduation plans?

APPENDIX E: GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEWS

Students currently enrolled in choir:

- Tell me a bit about yourself. What are you involved in?
- Describe a typical day in choir?
- Do you think anyone can sing?
- Why did you join choir?
- Have you ever thought of quitting?
- Tell me about your voice change process?
- What does it mean to be a male in choir?
 - Does this differ from middle school to high school?
- Requested pseudonym: _____

Students no longer enrolled in choir:

- Tell me a bit about yourself. What are you involved in?
- Why did you join choir?
- How did you come to the decision not to re-enroll in choir?
- Do you still sing?
- Do you think anyone can sing?
- Tell me about your voice change process?
- What does it mean to be a male in choir?
 - Does this differ from middle school to high school?
- Under what circumstances (if any) would you join a choir today?
- Requested pseudonym: _____

Students no longer enrolled in choir:

- Tell me a bit about yourself. What are you involved in?
- Do you sing?
- Do you think anyone can sing?
- Who sings in choir?
 - Does this differ between middle school and high school?
- Tell me about your voice change process?
- What is your impression of guys who sing in choir?
- How do you think others view guys who sing in choir?
- Under what circumstances (if any) would you join a choir today?
- Requested pseudonym: _____