

**Predictors of Engagement and Motivation for Fifth and Sixth Grade Males  
in Choral Music**

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ADOLESCENT MALE ENGAGEMENT IN CHORAL MUSIC

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**Abstract**

This qualitative research study explores the motivations and factors of engagement for fifth and sixth grade males when deciding whether or not to enroll in a choral music ensemble. I utilized a triangulation research method including a survey of music teachers across the state of Wisconsin, a survey of fifth and sixth graders in my school district, and six interviews of fifth and sixth grade males for a closer look at their music experiences and perspectives. Findings include the importance of social-emotional skills, such as students' connection with their teacher/director and peers' perspectives and support, along with the role of scheduling and elective choices. Additional considerations included varied motivational factors among rural, suburban, and urban communities, along with opportunities for the future, including expanding voice change education and community music opportunities.

*Keywords:* choral music, male singers, retention, motivation, engagement, voice change

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## **Chapter I: Introduction**

My research was driven by an interest in what motivates upper elementary students who identify as male to remain in, or join, a choral music ensemble. In teaching for 15 years in a rural Wisconsin school district, I have noticed that an apparent disengagement develops among many upper elementary males before they have ever experienced a choral ensemble. In Wisconsin and nationwide, numbers of female singers often outweigh those of male singers in school choral ensembles. I am interested in what others do to bridge this gap, and what factors are at play in different communities. I suspect that identity development among students, along with the culture built around general and choral music within a school or community, play into these perceptions. In utilizing qualitative data from both upper elementary male students and music teachers across Wisconsin, I believe we can better understand how to welcome and engage young male singers in our choirs across rural, suburban, and urban school districts.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this thesis is to help other general and choral music teachers build a culture of inclusivity around their choral music programs, where all students see themselves represented and valued in music education. I hope music teachers will gain ideas and opportunities they can offer their students to help during this transition, when most students are moving from a required general music class into elective courses. Students benefit indirectly by feeling more comfortable in a choral music environment through the actions and opportunities presented by their music teachers during this transition. This study will contribute to the base of growing knowledge of how to connect with our adolescent students and represent their identities and ideas in our classrooms. The specific research question this thesis seeks to answer is: what educational, community, and personal factors motivate fifth and sixth grade males to participate

in choir, and which factors have the biggest influence on these students' perceptions of choral music?

### **Importance of the Study**

The information in this thesis will be of value to music teachers who wish to build a program that motivates, engages, and retains male singers, particularly if their community has struggled to balance genders in their ensembles in the past. This information will also help teachers in rural, suburban, and urban areas better understand what may affect male students' motivations in their communities. This research can also positively impact relationships between music teachers, administration, and guidance departments as these entities work to build schedules and elective options that are accessible to more students. This study can also help those who teach future music educators as they prepare for jobs in different types of communities.

My research findings will add literature to the broader issue of accessibility in music education. How do music educators ensure that all students have a sense of belonging and feel welcomed in their program? The findings will also add to literature regarding identity development in adolescents. Learning what motivates a student to take choir can also represent what helps students feel a sense of belonging and positively supports their self-concept. Lastly, this research establishes a broader base of information from students directly, rather than only the ideas of teachers or researchers.

### **Definition of Terms**

This study discusses CMP, or Comprehensive Musicianship through Performance, which is a music education philosophy developed in Wisconsin by music educators, based on the idea that students' experiences in music are more complete, impactful, and long-lasting when they are a part of the process of learning and interpreting history, context, and meaning in their music (Sindberg 2012). Another idea discussed is UDL, or Universal Design for Learning, which is a methodology based on Universal Design in architecture, aiming to remove barriers to learning and include simple accommodations for all students, rather than only applying accommodations after the fact to those students who have an identified area of need (CAST 2018). Lastly, although scholars such as Henry Leck (2009) have utilized a more accurate and supportive term, expanding voice, to describe male voice change, I will utilize the term changing voice as this is what most scholars and students are familiar with.

In conclusion, in Chapter One I gave information on the purpose of this study, my research question, the importance of the study, and a definition of key terms. In Chapter Two, I will provide a review of literature related to this study.



## **Chapter II: Review of Related Literature**

In the previous chapter, Chapter One, I introduced this study about motivations of upper elementary males in choir. In Chapter Two, I will review literature related to my study of adolescent males in choral music. Scholars agree that a gender disparity exists in most school and community choirs throughout the country, and many have researched ways to mitigate this discrepancy and motivate males to continue singing throughout middle and high school. I have organized my review of the literature into the following sections: 1) best educational practices for reaching and including all students in music education; 2) research relating to changing voice and other male-specific topics in choral music; 3) research on social and community impacts on local music education programs. In the first section, Best Practices, I will provide information on methods and strategies that can help music teachers cultivate inclusion of males in choir, which are often best practices for students of any gender. These practices will include research on Comprehensive Musicianship Through Performance (CMP) and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and their implementation in choral music. In the second section, The Changing Male Voice, I will provide research on how educators can best support their male students and maintain motivation to sing throughout vocal change, including the importance of being knowledgeable about voice change stages and accessible music for boys during voice change. In the third section, Community and Music Culture, I will discuss research on social factors, gender issues, and ideas from community music that support more gender equity in local choral music programs.

### **Best Practices**

In this section, I will present information from scholars who study effective teaching methods for adolescent male singers (Freer 2007, 2009a, 2011, 2012, Harrison and Young 2017, Williams 2012), from other scholars about the teaching methodology of Comprehensive Musicianship Through Performance (Jenks and Swiggum 2013, 2015, Sindberg 2009, 2012, WMEA 2016, O'Toole 2003), as well as researchers of Universal Design for Learning (CAST 2018, Eagleton 2018, Fuelberth and Todd 2017, Glass, Meyer, & Rose 2013, Hourigan 2015, Knapp 2020, McCord 2013, Schuelka, Johnstone, and Thomas 2019, Shaw 2019, WI DPI, Music ConstructED). Although researchers have not published much information linking the three concepts, many best practices align among teaching adolescent males effectively and incorporating the methodologies of both Comprehensive Musicianship through Performance and Universal Design for Learning. Both CMP and UDL encourage educators to engage their learners in meaningful ways, providing opportunities for student ownership, goal setting, personal growth, expanding students' world views of both music and life. Although not gender-specific, these ideals can be applied to effectively teaching young males to help them feel empowered and motivated to keep singing.

*Effective Teaching Methods.* In the following section, I will detail research from multiple authors who have studied effective teaching methods for recruiting and retaining adolescent males in choir. One important aspect of retaining young male singers is to utilize effective teaching methods to include, motivate, and train these singers to help them find success. Patrick Freer has published decades of research detailing the needs and best practices of teaching middle level singers. Specific to males, he presents that teachers need to adapt their repertoire and teaching styles to better serve and include male singers. In addition, he recommends changing

activities every 12-13 minutes and including physical activity, competition, timed activities, and possibly holding a small object for focus (2007). In 2009, Freer detailed six boys' experiences in school choirs, describing how flow experiences increased motivation for young male singers. These experiences combined acquired skill with perceived challenge, clear goals, immediate feedback, and personal investment in the task. In another study, Freer (2011) described educators' struggles to prioritize either the performance or the pedagogy world within their teaching. His belief is that both worlds are equally important, and one cannot succeed without the other. Freer's 2011 article also pushes us to recognize that traditional performing ensembles should only be the nucleus for a much larger network, including groups using non-traditional instrumentation and non-performance-based offerings, connecting to more students' lived experiences. Freer's 2012 research focuses on the individuals we teach, and argues that teachers need to maintain the individualism of their male students to help them transition from middle school to high school, while also building a positive relationship between the student and the teacher. He recommends having younger males visit the high school to sing and build connections with older male singers to help the young singers see themselves as part of the existing peer group. He also presents an important reminder that the conductor's response to a boy taking a year(s) away from choir will impact whether they ever return to choral singing in the future.

Harrison and Young (2017) align with Freer in many ways in their ideas for choral directors to help young males feel welcomed and comfortable in their classroom. They recommend that quality pedagogy (for either gender) includes helping students recognize and understand their improvement along the way, understanding the stages of voice change, giving students leadership opportunities, giving students opportunity for physical movement, and

providing students with older male singing role models. Williams' 2012 research was largely aligned with Freer's research, but focused instead on female choir directors; research shows that female directors do not recruit or retain males as well as male directors. Their suggestions included collaborating with male faculty, utilizing male vocal models, and using successful teaching strategies to connect with male singers.

*Comprehensive Musicianship through Performance.* One effective organizational and curricular strategy for teaching choral music is Comprehensive Musicianship through Performance (CMP), which is a framework for organizing choral learning, including teaching the history, compositional intent, and heart or message of each piece. Wisconsin CMP educators Jenks and Swiggum wrote both in 2013 and 2015 about the importance of crafting affective outcomes and searching for quality repertoire. They argue that a great piece of music does not need to be difficult, but needs to have content, emotion, and heart that is satisfying for students and the conductor to work on for weeks or months at a time. They believe that quality repertoire selection is one of the music educator's most important tasks. Laura Sindberg's 2009 research included a historical recounting of the major events that led to the 1977 meeting of music educators and researchers that grew into the Comprehensive Musicianship movement. She details the steering committee and original members of the CMP committee from the 1977 meeting at Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisconsin. One main goal of the committee was to broaden the teaching and learning in bands, choirs, and orchestras away from solely performing standards. The Wisconsin Music Educators Association, or WMEA (2016), maintains similar scholarship regarding the history of CMP, developed through Tanglewood Symposium, the formation of the CMP committee, and work through Lawrence University.

Aligned with Jenks, Swiggum, and Sindberg, Patricia O’Toole (2003) wrote one of the original textbooks for CMP educators, detailing each of the five points of the CMP model (Repertoire Selection, Analysis, Outcomes, Strategies, Assessment) and how each is interconnected and fluid in relation to the others. O’Toole challenges each educator to be a different kind of teacher: many new choral compositions pushed by music publishers are not quality repertoire, and putting repertoire through the five points of CMP analysis can help evaluate the quality of each piece of literature. She reminds educators that the process gets easier and faster, and eventually will become second nature to teachers who practice the CMP model regularly. Furthermore, Sindberg’s 2012 research expands upon her 2009 article into a full-length book that explains each point of the CMP model in detail. She reminds us that CMP is not prescriptive, rather, it is simply a framework for planning. A few of her ideas include interviewing older friends and family members about their musical influences, or having students write a soundtrack or list of songs important to them and why.

*Universal Design for Learning.* Another curricular design method with a positive impact on all students, including young male singers, is Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Multiple sources outline the UDL framework within a general education context, which aims to proactively remove barriers to the learning process and anticipate natural variability among learners, rather than retrofitting accommodations after the fact (CAST 2018, Eagleton 2018, Shaw 2019, Music ConstructED, WI DPI). UDL focuses on the three main principles: engagement, representation, and action/expression. The engagement principle, centered in the affective network of the brain, is known as the “why” of learning. The representation strand, based on the brain’s recognition network, is referred to as the “what” of learning. The action/expression strand is based on the strategic brain network and is referred to as the “how” of

the learning process. UDL helps teachers provide multiple means of engagement, representation, and action/expression in the learning process to increase student motivation, add options for demonstrating learning, and ultimately to create stronger academic connections for students.

Some scholars study Universal Design for Learning specifically through the lens of special education, while others focus on UDL through the lens of music education. Schuelka, Johnstone, and Thomas (2019) give many examples for using UDL with special education students in the general education setting. They describe how UDL acknowledges different materials, curriculum, and instructional techniques as barriers to learning, rather than students' needs or learning styles being seen as a problem to overcome. McCord (2013) describes her experience using the Orff methodology to incorporate UDL into the general music classroom. She learned that by presenting lesson content through multiple veins (kinesthetic/tactile, aural and visual), students with disabilities were able to be engaged and successful by learning in their own, most effective format. Glass, Meyer, & Rose (2013), arts educators and UDL founders, explain the distinctiveness of each human brain and relate the three main principles of UDL to arts education. They explain how learner variability is reflected in how students perceive elements of the arts, how they express themselves, and how they are engaged and motivated in the arts. They also remind readers that UDL is not intended only to increase accessibility for students with a disability, but rather to give options to all, proving that no student is more worthy than any other. "What we envision through the integration of the arts and UDL is a better form of education—full and complex, cognitive and emotional, and rich with culture and human expression" (Glass, Meyer, and Rose p. 117).

Fuelberth and Todd (2017) detailed possibilities for incorporating Universal Design for Learning into the choral classroom, including changes to classroom procedures, performances,

and inclusiveness. To increase student ownership and investment, they recommend making students more active in the rehearsal process by selecting repertoire, leading warm-ups, and participating in small group activities and assessments. They also recommend adding informal performances, or informances, to an ensemble's schedule to increase access for both musicians and audience members who may feel less comfortable with traditional concerts, usually due to lack of prior access or experience for these groups.

Hourigan (2015) and Knapp (2020) both studied the intersections of special education, music education, and UDL. Knapp developed a non-traditional "Modern Band" class where students played acoustic, electronic, and technological representations of instruments such as iPads, allowing all students to be included in a rock band. Ryan Hourigan specifically uses UDL to accommodate students with disabilities in music, arguing that many performance-based ensembles at the secondary level leave no entry point for exceptional learners, including prerequisite classes and audition requirements. In addition, students with disabilities are sometimes not ready to join a performance ensemble at the traditional entry points (fifth or sixth grade) and should have a way to gain access later in their school career.

Whether an educator finds success teaching middle level males through well-established best practices, Comprehensive Musicianship through Performance, Universal Design for Learning, or another method, students of any gender can be engaged, appropriately challenged, and motivated by a teacher who provides options and opportunities for authentic learning within a performance-based ensemble. Students do not want to be just a number within our ensembles, and these best practices and methodologies can encourage and empower young males (and all genders) to keep singing, develop soft skills, and build a larger world view through music education.

### **The Changing Male Voice**

This section discusses literature concerning singing participation during voice change (Bazzy 2010, Beale 1991, Fisher 2009, 2014, White & White 2001, Weinrich 2022, Beynon-Martinec 2019, Killian & Wayman 2010) and the physiology of the changing male voice (Freer 2016, Collins 2012, Ashley 2009, 2021, Killian 1997). Most scholars agree that adolescent male singers should be specifically educated about their changing voice and what is occurring at each stage. In recent decades, scholars have mostly agreed that boys should be taught how to sing correctly and healthily through their voice change, rather than resting their voices in the middle years as was commonly done during the height of European boy choir popularity.

*Singing during voice change.* Beale (1991) studied Manchester Boy Choir conductor Adrian Jessett's philosophy of keeping boys singing through voice change, rather than "resting" the voice as was common practice in earlier boy choirs. He also stressed the importance of training the boys' ears and musical skills, so they learned how to sing in tune by increasing their ability to identify what each interval should sound like. Jessett also stressed the importance of other technical elements for teaching singing, such as posture, breathing, listening, and tone production. Fisher (2009) studied a more historical approach, evaluating earlier theories on voice change, such as from Garcia and Mackenzie. Mackenzie believed the voice change was gradual, and boys should sing through changes under careful supervision; Garcia, however, believed that overuse during voice change would lead to permanent damage and recommended that the voice be rested during adolescence. Fisher also notes that Garcia's theory of voice "breaking" was widely accepted through most of the 20th century, until more modern practices emerged. Then in 2014, Fisher furthered his research, using Cooksey's voice change classification system to study sixth, seventh, and eighth grade male singers. Interestingly, the vast majority of eighth grade



students (87.88%) were considered to be going through voice change, much higher than sixth grade (45%) or seventh grade (48.15%) total percentages.

Other scholars use Cooksey's voice change stages to make recommendations to choral directors on how to best address changing voices. Killian & Wayman (2010) give a detailed overview of Cooksey's six stages and recommend that teachers educate their male students on which stage they are in and which will come next, helping boys to know which changes are expected at each stage. Killian & Wayman also recommend frequent individual range testing, along with careful repertoire selection based on singers' current ranges, including revoicing and changing notes when needed. Similarly, White & White (2001) encourage educators to empower young male students to gain confidence and acceptance within their choir and peer music group. These authors recommend single-gender choirs when possible, but also believe in educating an entire SATB mixed choir on boys' changing voices. In addition, they recommend teaching vowel modification differently to males and females to help changing voices focus on creating their best sound in all registers, including changing voice males opening the vowel toward the bottom of the range and closing progressively as they ascend. Another interesting study in single-gender choirs was Bazy's 2010 research with upper elementary boys. Bazy randomly assigned male singers either to a single- or mixed-gender ensemble and observed their progress over time. Although the single- and mixed-gender groups showed no other statistical differences, the single-gender male choir showed a sudden, quantifiable increase in singing participation, which the authors concluded was due to singing with like voices and gender, even at such a young age. Weinrich (2022) also used Cooksey's stages, but applied them to a study researching pitch breaks in changing male voices. The study found that pitch breaks increased in frequency as the male moved from Stage 0/1 toward Stage 4, but also that breathiness was noted to increase in the same

stages. This natural breathiness during voice change is important for voice teachers and choral directors not only to remember, but to explain to their singers. Beynon-Martinec (2019) agreed that boys should be able to sing freely throughout their voice change stages, but she specifically developed the Whole Voice Approach to safely guide students through voice change. The Whole Voice Approach encourages boys to study and maintain their head voice while simultaneously developing their baritone voice. The training aims to develop both vocal technique and their changing vocal musculature.

*Physiology of the changing male voice.* The authors' ideas in this section mostly align with those described above in the previous section, "Singing During Voice Change," but these studies focused more on students' own bodies and how their changing voices work. A 2016 Patrick Freer study aimed to study any lasting impact of Cooksey's work at his own institution, the London Oratory School, by interviewing both continuous and non-continuous choir-participating students. Although the study did not directly prove a strong lasting effect from Cooksey, it did outline boys' perceptions of their own voice change to show a pattern that even experienced choir singers felt a loss of control and autonomy during their voice change. Freer reiterated Cooksey's point that although all boys essentially go through the same voice change process, the experience is greatly affected by boys' experiences in singing before and during the change. Similarly, Ashley (2009) promotes healthy vocal models in all ranges and registers, and he believes that cultural norms and the media have shifted to promote only certain vocal ranges (i.e. boys shouldn't sing too high). Similar to previous authors, Ashley also encourages teachers to educate boys on their own vocal stages, give them appropriate repertoire, and treat them with respect. Ashley (2021) updates his earlier paper to look more closely at ages of major voice change during puberty. Similar to Fisher (2014), Ashley argues that through his

research, the age of 14 is most significant for voice change in the majority of boys, coinciding with eighth and ninth grades in the United States. He adds that statistics showing earlier puberty may be exaggerated, resulting largely from societal and popular trends rather than physical changes. Collins (2012) is largely in agreement with Ashley on rehearsal techniques; Collins recommends using the head voice as a vocal model for the lower ranges in a top-down approach. He argues that the head voice should be exercised before, during, and after voice change and is also an advocate for same-gender choirs. Lastly, Collins goes further to recommend using serious texts with Tenor-Bass choirs, rather than cute or popular texts, and pushes educators and composers to include more multicultural and classical texts for Tenor-Bass choirs.

Killian (1997) surveyed male adults and male adolescents who identified as musicians or non-musicians regarding their own voice change. He found that singers knew more about their voice change than non-singers, and adolescents remembered more than men. However, most men used terms such as “break” or “crack” to describe their change, while more adolescents used words like “voice change”, which also reflects shifts in scholarly work over the last century. Killian calls for more research into boys’ feelings and perceptions about their own voice change, rather than just academic perspectives from scholars and teachers. Williams and Harrison (2017) remind us that when experiencing growth, muscle mass is increased before strength; therefore, male singers will experience a temporary lessening of coordination, pitch range, and/or vocal agility during voice change.

Current academic researchers agree that boys who are going through voice change should be educated in how their voice works and which voice change stage they are currently in. Regular voice testing, single-gender choirs, use of both high and low ranges, and appropriate repertoire can all help young males feel confident and motivated throughout their voice change.

Educators should expect and plan for their singers' temporary loss of range, breathiness in the voice, and regular range shifts for multiple years as their singers' voices change. Lastly, the role of the educator should not be overlooked as they set expectations and create a culture where boys can feel empowered, valued, and successful throughout their middle level years.

### **Community and Music Culture**

Best practices and voice change education certainly impact a young male's musical experience in school, but his musical influences and role models, along with societal norms and gender stereotypes, can also impact his motivation towards music. This section discusses literature concerning the roles that societal gender norms, family, friends, musical role models, community experiences and opportunities play in boys' motivation to sing. Some scholars discuss choir participation through the lens of gender differentials in America (Hawkins 2015, Lucas 2011, Pineda 2017, Freer 2008, Watson, Rubie-Davies, & Hattie 2017, 2019, Hansen & Sears 2019, Lehman and Dumais 2017, Morris 2008). Others research various social and organizational constructs in choirs (Bleess 2021, Elpus and Abril 2011, Denison 2017, Freer 2009b, Keating 2004, Stupple 2007b, Williams and Harrison 2017). Other scholars recognize the influence of community music-making (Stupple 2007a, Bucura 2023, Bartleet & Higgins 2018, Rickson & McFerran 2014, Thwaites 2014).

*Gender Differences.* Certain scholars have conducted research focusing on factors that affect males' enrollment in school choirs. Hawkins (2015) noted that the long-standing issue of unbalanced numbers of men and women is due to multiple interrelated factors, including "stereotypes, identity formation, maturation issues (physical, vocal, emotional, developmental, and cognitive), and psycho-socio decisions made within a gendered and hierarchical context of

schooling” (Hawkins, 2015, p. 4). In his study, Hawkins worked with middle and high school choir directors to develop plans to recruit and retain a more equal balance of men to women in their choirs. Hawkins is unique in that his research promotes balancing mixed-gender ensembles versus pursuing single-gender ensembles. Pineda’s 2017 research compared motivations and influences between male and female students in upper elementary school. He concluded that in his urban setting, girls showed more favorable attitudes toward future choir enrollment, singing, and participation in choir than boys. Another study focused on influential factors for young males in choir (Lucas 2011) involved interviews and surveys with approximately 100 seventh and eighth grade males. Lucas concluded that most boys had enrolled in choir because they found it fun or thought they were good singers, and fewer boys were influenced by peer pressure than how much they enjoyed singing. Many boys also noted support from music teachers, non-music teachers, and family members as a contributing factor towards taking choir. However, boys noted less support from the athletic coaches at their school. Patrick Freer weighed in with a 2008 article regarding male voice change as a publication topic within the first 100 years of the Music Educators Journal. Using Music Educators Journal as a representation of many music educators’ ideas and concerns nationwide, Freer mentions that the journal first began researching male voice change as early as 1918. He believes that this publication correctly promoted teaching voice change stages to students, but also pushed some inaccuracies, such as the need to make choral music feel more masculine, along with the idea that basses produce more hormones than tenors.

Morris (2008) presents research on rural high school boys and the intersections of masculinity, identity, and school opportunities. He argues that young men in rural areas may no longer hold an identity of “breadwinner” through hard manual labor, and may need to secure

masculinity in their identity through avenues such as sports or hunting. His interviews show how academically high-performing students are more often involved in the arts and music, but academically able boys are often viewed as non-masculine; in addition, high-performing girls are not scrutinized socially to the same extent as high-performing boys, who are, in this school and many other rural schools, labeled as feminine, weird, nerdy, or even gay.

Watson, Rubie-Davies, & Hattie (2017, 2019) collected research on perceived gender roles and stereotypes for adolescent males in New Zealand choirs. Their 2017 research focused on gender stereotype threat in music education, where young males experience feelings of anxiety and lower performance in music due to their peer's perceptions and expectations of gender conformity. Their 2019 research presented different types of masculine identity, arguing that society reinforces hegemonic masculinity as the most influential form of male gender expression. Males are measured by this perceived identity even though it is demonstrated by a numerical minority, which is damaging to young men in music education. In addition, this focus on masculinity creates and reinforces inequitable, subordinate roles for females within an ensemble.

Hansen & Sears (2019) present important considerations on gender and sexual diversity in music education, the ideas of which must be considered hand-in-hand with research exploring lower male participation in music education. These scholars warn against the hypermasculinization of Tenor-Bass choral music, overly romantic or heteronormative lyrics, and promoting a competitive or sports-minded team attitude toward singing. Their research also urges teachers to consider how gender stereotypes in voice parts (males who have natural Soprano or Alto ranges or females who have natural Tenor range), instrumentation (encouraging all genders on all instruments), or even gendered comments in rehearsal are addressed when

discovered. In a society where 65% of LGBTQ students avoid participation in extracurricular activities for fear of being bullied or ostracized, directors must look at the gender norms and stereotypes their groups might be reinforcing.

In addition, Lehman and Dumais (2017) showed that participation in extracurricular activities resulted in increased odds of bullying for male students, while participating in music courses resulted in increased odds of bullying for students of any gender. However, participation in varsity athletics resulted in a lower risk of bullying for all students. They remind us that although music courses are proven to be academically challenging and culturally enriching, students often lose social capital by participating in these courses due to stereotypical and dominant cultural codes.

*Social/Organizational Constructs in Choirs.* The following authors have studied the organization, demographics, and composition of music ensembles in relation to male participation. Elpus and Abril's 2011 research showed a few current trends in the demographics of music ensembles: first, fewer students are participating in a music course now than in 2004, and even fewer than in the 1990s. Second, and in line with other scholars in this review, more females than males participate in high school music classes, which is represented mostly in the disparity between genders in choral and vocal ensembles. Lastly, students experiencing a lower socioeconomic status are underrepresented in music ensembles, while Hispanic students are largely underrepresented across high school music ensembles. The authors advise music educators to examine how their choir's demographics are representative of their own school and community's demographics; it is up to the director to examine who is underrepresented, identify the reason(s), and work to correct the discrepancy.

## ADOLESCENT MALE ENGAGEMENT IN CHORAL MUSIC

Patrick Freer's research (2009b) of 'Possible Selves' describes how young male singers need to see what their future choir experience will be like, highlighting the importance of working with male role models. He recommends bringing changing voice boys into their high school or future rehearsal space to meet and talk with older male singers, allowing them to envision performing as a changed voice singer. Interestingly, Freer's research showed that most boys who did not remain in choir over the years could not recall a male vocal role model from their childhood or past, whereas the vast majority of boys who did continue in choir could name at least one impactful past male vocal role model.

Molly Bless' work (2021) states that improvisation and informal music-making can be advantageous to the middle level music educator, particularly in a single-gender male ensemble. Bless describes middle level males' desire to be confident and sure of their voice before performing onstage, which is difficult to achieve consistently during voice change. Also, improvising in safe formats during rehearsal can increase self-efficacy and camaraderie among male singers with low risk. Keating's 2004 dissertation proposes a slightly different organizational structure specifically for boy choirs: the treble training choir, senior treble choir, changing-voice ensemble, and tenor/bass ensemble. Their research showed that including a changing voice ensemble was critical to the success and continuity of a young male's journey in choral music. Another scholar, Denison (2017), also studied diverse populations in music education by focusing on boy choirs outside of schools. He expresses that a boy's social voice is as important as his musical voice, and allowing students to express their ideas is crucial. He encourages an atmosphere of curiosity in rehearsal for boys to learn about how their voices work; this curiosity and the resulting discussions can also result in valuable professional development for the teacher.



Stupple (2007b) presents similar ideas to other scholars, such as teaching voice change stages, using single-gender ensembles, and providing male vocal modeling, but a few of her ideas describe the director's presentation and organization. Stupple's research shows that directors can do harm by not teaching enough about the changing voice, or by presenting incorrect information to male students. Stupple also recommends setting aside time for male singers to share their thoughts and feelings, possibly through journaling about their voice change.

Williams and Harrison (2017) speak on the importance of male vocal role models with their longitudinal interviews of boys and young men 10 years apart. In the later interview, many males could identify a parent, relative, or family friend who acted as a musical role model, assisting in their decision to continue singing. Interestingly, they also found two less obvious factors that aided in motivating males to sing: males who had previously played an instrument, along with those who were exposed to a variety of musical genres in earlier years. When considering how to structure a choir for changing voice males, Williams and Harrison's research would support programs that also expose singers to instruments, a diverse range of musical styles, and access to vocal role models.

*Community music-making.* Choral directors, parents, and communities can help raise young people's self-motivation by providing access to musical experiences in the community outside of school to diversify student experience, connect students with musical role models, and create leadership opportunities that can be connected back to strengthen school music programs. Research on the benefits of community music can also help directors increase the effectiveness of school music ensembles. For instance, Lee, Steewart, and Clif (2018) presented research on the benefits of group singing and quality of life, showing through quantitative evidence that group singing benefits singers' physical, social, and psychological health. The authors found a

statistically significant impact in the areas of excitement about life, social engagement, and positive identity. Bucura (2023) found success researching community music workshops in Austria intended for their growing immigrant and refugee populations. Bucura describes the qualities of bonding and bridging that grow through successful community music making. Bonding creates connections of shared characteristics between people; often, those characteristics are easily identifiable, such as religion, race, gender, or age. Bridging, on the other hand, connects people of different characteristics, such as racial, ethnic, or religious identities. In addition, bridging can increase cooperation, meaningful interactions, and the ability for diverse opinions to be treated with respect and value. Trevor Thwaites (2014) researched community music, dance, and drama ensembles to demonstrate the benefits of equal distribution of expertise and power among members, and how a sense of equity builds motivation and trust within an ensemble. Thwaites argues that this skill could be promoted in school and youth ensembles, and he encourages directors to learn more about community ensembles to promote the benefits of lifelong arts participation to their students. Rickson & McFerran (2014) utilize a music therapy approach in their discussion of non-traditional music ensembles and experiences in New Zealand and Austria, stating that traditional music ensembles are often not in existence for the right reasons. Since making music is a human right, the authors recommend communities and schools explore diverse music experiences to motivate students and gain confidence for spontaneous singing and music-making with friends.

In conclusion, Chapter Two includes scholarship regarding best practices for teaching middle level males, information on the changing male voice, and social and community issues in music education. As Williams and Harrison (2017) stated, “boys make a decision not to sing between elementary and secondary school in response to psychological and sociological

messages that singing is not an appropriate activity for males beyond a certain age” (p. 539). To better understand the gender disparity in American choirs, we must research issues surrounding voice change, teaching practices, and social and community factors to determine what causes males to feel like singing is (or is not) an option for them as they enter adolescence. The literature included here forms the foundation of this research because it helps to better examine my research question: what educational, community, and personal factors motivate fifth and sixth grade males to participate in choir, and which factors have the biggest influence on these students’ perceptions of choral music?

In this chapter, I reviewed the literature related to this study focused on best practices, the changing male voice, and social and community factors. Next, in Chapter Three, I will describe the methodology I used to address my research question and the design of the study as well as the procedures used for analysis.

### **Chapter III: Design and Methodology**

In the last chapter, I reviewed the existing literature about best practices for teaching middle level male students, in addition to research on the changing male voice and social and community issues in music education. In Chapter Three, I will explain how I designed this research project and share my methods of analysis. I have created the following subsections for the reader's understanding: Process, Participants, Qualitative Research, Data Collection and Analysis. As I noted in Chapter One, the research question driving this study is: what educational, community, and personal factors motivate fifth and sixth grade males to participate in choir, and which factors have the biggest influence on these students' perceptions of choral music?

#### **Process**

My process for conducting this research began with trying to understand why young male students have strong opinions of whether or not they are comfortable singing as early as fifth grade. My qualitative study, approved by my school district administration (see Appendix A), included three main methods of collecting data. First, I wanted to survey male students in fifth and sixth grade about the factors that were most influential to them as they decided whether or not to sing in a choir (see Appendices B, D, G). From there, I wanted to interview a small group of male students to get an accurate picture of their thoughts and motivations (see Appendix H). Lastly, I wanted to survey Wisconsin music teachers regarding the factors they believed to be most important to young males when deciding whether or not to participate in choir (see Appendices E, F). One hundred and twenty two elementary students completed the Student Survey. Six students accepted my invitation and signed the Minor Assent form to participate in interviews (see Appendix C). I interviewed each participant once, audio recorded the interviews,

and transcribed each of the recordings for analysis. Lastly, 178 Wisconsin music educators completed the digital Music Teacher Survey.

### **Participants**

I selected participants using a triangulation of sampling techniques based on the needs of each qualitative research step. For my student survey, I utilized convenience sampling with students at my school, as I am trying to identify potential solutions for a problem I see in my own school and community. Convenience sampling has been used in research by numerous other scholars, and has been studied further by researchers such as Krupnikov, Nam, & Style (2021), who studied the use of convenience sampling in political science research. Convenience sampling is collecting a sample of participants through ease of access (low cost, near testing site, and/or willing to participate). They argue that although convenience sampling has its limitations, the method can still be beneficial and representative of a broader population (pg. 165-166).

I utilized theoretical sampling for the student interviews as I was seeking a variety of opinions and experiences based on the recommendations of my general music teacher colleague who works with fifth grade students. I selected the sixth grade interviewees based on my knowledge of teaching these students. Because I am trying to understand what factors cause young males to be motivated for, or opposed to, singing and choral music, I chose six interview participants who all were male with a wide variety of backgrounds, experiences, and opinions of singing. After they received a Minor Assent form (see Appendix B), they consented to being interviewed. Theoretical sampling has also been used by many scholars practicing grounded theory in qualitative research across disciplines. Theoretical sampling allows researchers to analyze and code their research, helping determine their next research steps.

McCrae (2016) reviewed advantages and disadvantages of grounded theory and theoretical sampling in nursing journals.

I utilized purposive sampling for the teacher surveys since I sought out those who fit the criteria of a trained music educator in the state of Wisconsin. I reached out to these teachers via an email list from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, in addition to my professional contacts and colleagues. I hoped to survey which factors music teachers believe are most important to young males when deciding whether or not to participate in choral music. I also hoped this sample would be interesting to hold against the data from the student surveys to look for trends, similarities, and discrepancies. Purposive sampling is also used by Campbell, Greenwood, & Prior et al (2020), who concluded that although purposive sampling is used widely because it helps improve the rigor and focus of the research by narrowing down quality participants, novice researchers should be clear and transparent in how they recruit participants to maintain trustworthiness.

### **Qualitative Research**

This study uses Qualitative Research. Qualitative research focuses mainly on understanding how people interact with and interpret their world at a given time and place, because location and society have an effect on how we understand our reality (Merriam 2002). By using qualitative research, I was able to collect data to investigate the phenomenon of gender imbalance in choral music education across our state, nation, and also in my community. My research was informed by phenomenology, a qualitative inquiry method that includes research coming from the study of everyday things and their experiences (van Manen 2017). Although I am interested in how to help my community, the issue of gender imbalance in choral ensembles

occurs throughout our nation. Although some communities do maintain a more balanced gender distribution in choirs, this problem does not have one clear solution. Qualitative research allowed me to ask questions on a variety of topics and compare and contrast trends in the data upon completion. The student and teacher surveys both investigated which factors the participant felt were most important to young males (or themselves, for the male students) when deciding whether or not to participate in a choir. The teacher survey also questioned whether any special opportunities or events existed in their community that positively impacted young males' motivation toward choir, such as a festival, mentor program, or extracurricular activities. The student interviews asked similar questions to the student survey, but with more detail and opportunity for extension. The interviews asked about boys' experiences with general music and singing, along with their comfort level singing in different contexts, such as alone, casually with friends, or while making music with their family.

### **Data Collection**

My research process occurred in three steps so that I could triangulate my results for a more comprehensive qualitative study. Before completing any research, I obtained proper IRB approval, along with approval from the administrators in each of my schools (see Appendix A).

*Music Teacher Survey.* The first of my three research steps was creating and distributing a digital music teacher survey (see Appendix F). Music teachers were first asked their consent to participate with completed information on informed consent linked to the survey (see Appendices B, E). Next, I asked for teachers' email addresses, years of teaching experience in five year increments, and grade/age level of main teaching experiences, from early childhood through college and adult. Next, I asked the size/location of their main teaching experience,

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whether rural, urban, or suburban. then asked teachers to rank 12 elements of music participation for their impact in motivating adolescent males to take, or continue in, a choral ensemble (1 as most important/influential and 12 as least important/influential). These 12 elements were:

- 1) Connection with teacher/director
- 2) Gender of teacher/director
- 3) Ease of scheduling process
- 4) Other elective class options
- 5) Peers' perspectives/support
- 6) Family's musical experience
- 7) Comfort with own voice change
- 8) Childhood music experiences
- 9) Other musical skills/participation (band, orchestra, etc)
- 10) Choral repertoire
- 11) Performances
- 12) Music opportunities in the community.

Lastly, the end of the survey included two open-ended questions: "Please list any additional factors, not listed above, that you believe impact the choral music participation of students who identify as male." The second open-ended question asked about any experiences, events, programs, or opportunities that increased males' motivation in choir in their district or community. One hundred seventy eight Wisconsin music teachers completed the digital survey.

*Student Survey.* The second of my three research steps was creating and distributing a digital student survey (see Appendix G). First, I contacted parents/guardians with completed consent information and an opt-out process if they did not want their child to participate in the



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survey (see Appendix B). I created a digital questionnaire using our district-approved online platform. The survey asked the student's grade (fifth or sixth) and gender, and was otherwise anonymous. Closely related to the music teacher survey, the student survey asked students to rank 12 elements of music participation with their importance in helping determine whether or not they would consider taking a choir in the future (1 as most important/influential and 12 and least important/influential). These 12 elements were:

- 1) Getting along with my choir teacher
- 2) My choir teacher's gender
- 3) Ease of scheduling process
- 4) Other elective class options
- 5) Support of my friends
- 6) Family's musical experience
- 7) Comfort with own voice change
- 8) Childhood music experiences
- 9) Other musical skills/participation (band, orchestra, etc)
- 10) The type of music sung in choir
- 11) The type of performances held in choir
- 12) Community music opportunities.

Lastly, the end of the survey included one open-ended question: "Which factors, not listed above, would make you more likely to participate in choir?" Students completed the anonymous survey during their music class time, supervised by my general music teacher colleague so I would not influence any results. This survey was completed by 120 students; 60 each of fifth and sixth graders.

*Student Interviews.* The third step in my research was to interview six selected students for more information. I interviewed three students in fifth grade and three students in sixth grade, all of whom were male. To select the fifth graders, I consulted their general music teacher, who selected boys with a wide variety of opinions on singing. I chose the sixth grade interviewees based on my knowledge of them from class to represent a variety of opinions on singing. I met with each of the fifth grade students in the library during their general music class. I met with each of the sixth grade students in the library during a non-structured advisory period. The library afforded us a quiet, but supervised, space to talk. I presented each student with the Minor Assent document, which we reviewed and they signed (see Appendix C). I documented each interview using an audio recorder. I also printed the questions for each student to read along as I read them (see Appendix H). I asked each student the following questions: What have your experiences in music been like outside of school? What have your experiences in music been like in school? What are the musical experiences of your parents, guardians, or family members? How comfortable are you singing by yourself? How comfortable are you singing with your family? How comfortable are you singing with your peers? What factors are most important to you when deciding whether or not to take a Choir class as you get older? If a student was confused by a question or gave a short response, I clarified and tried to add more information. If a student gave an interesting response, I sometimes asked a clarifying or extension question to learn more. At the conclusion of each interview, I asked students if they wanted to tell me any more information and asked if they had any questions for me.

### **Analysis**

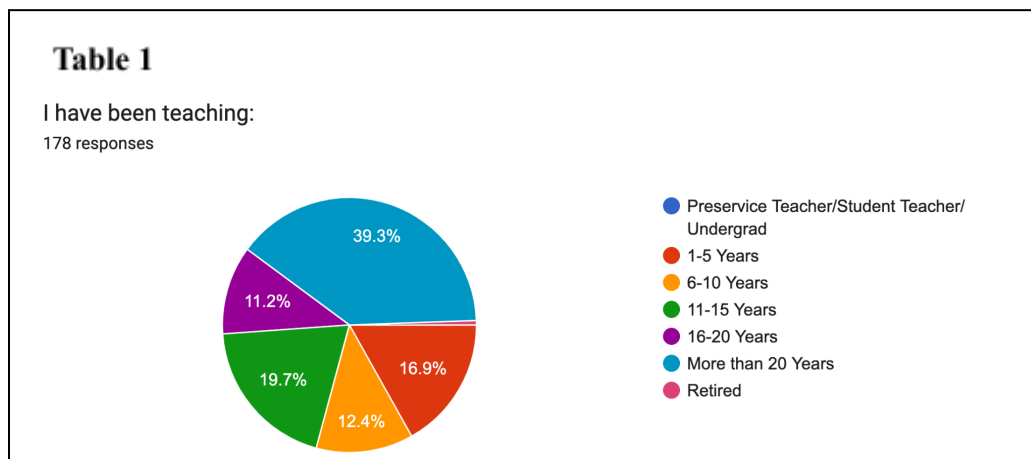
My data analysis plan included looking for trends in the data of the music teacher survey and student survey. First, I combined the raw responses from the music teacher survey into rows of a spreadsheet. I then averaged each factor's responses by finding the mean and rounded each average to two decimal places. Next, I ranked each factor from first through twelfth based on the average, with the lowest mean average representing the most influential factor to that group of participants. I repeated this process for the subsets of data, including choral directors, rural music teachers, rural choral directors, suburban music teachers, suburban choral directors, urban music teachers, and urban choral directors. As the number of participants decreased, the data and averages became less consistent, such as in the small sample pool of urban music teachers. I analyzed the data for trends in comparing the different groups of music teachers. I repeated this process for the student survey with subsets of male, female, fifth grade, and sixth grade students. For the student interviews, I analyzed the student responses for trends and compared each answer among the six participants.

In Chapter Three, I described how I designed this research project, explained each step of my process, and shared my analysis method.

### Chapter IV: Findings

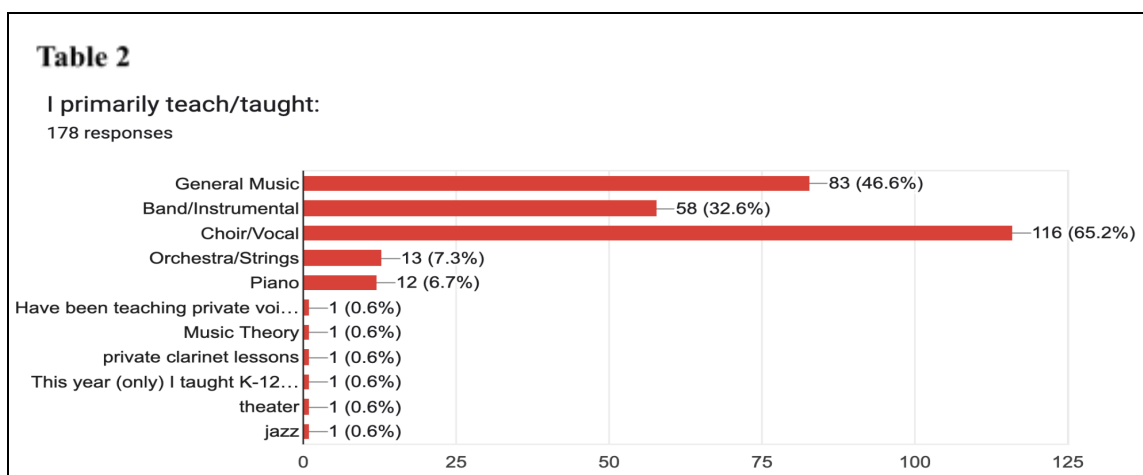
In the previous three chapters, I introduced this study about factors of engagement and motivation of upper elementary school males, including a review of literature related to the study, a description of the methodology, and my approach to analysis. In this chapter, I will report the findings from the data. As described in Chapter Three, I completed three types of data collection in this qualitative study: a music teacher survey, a student survey, and student interviews. I will focus first on the music teacher survey by reporting the data findings based on specific music discipline (all music teachers versus only choral directors) along with geographical area (rural, suburban, or urban). Then, I will report the results of the student survey comparing both fifth and sixth grade along with male and female students. The findings from the six student interviews, completed with fifth and sixth grade males, will be discussed following the results of the student surveys.

*Music Teacher Survey.* One hundred seventy eight Wisconsin music teachers, active or retired, completed the music teacher survey (see Appendix F). Of the 178 surveys completed, 30 teachers reported having 1-5 years of teaching experience, 21 teachers reported 6-10 years of teaching experience, 34 reported 11-15 years of teaching experience, 19 reported 16-20 years of teaching experience, and 70 survey participants had taught for more than 20 years.

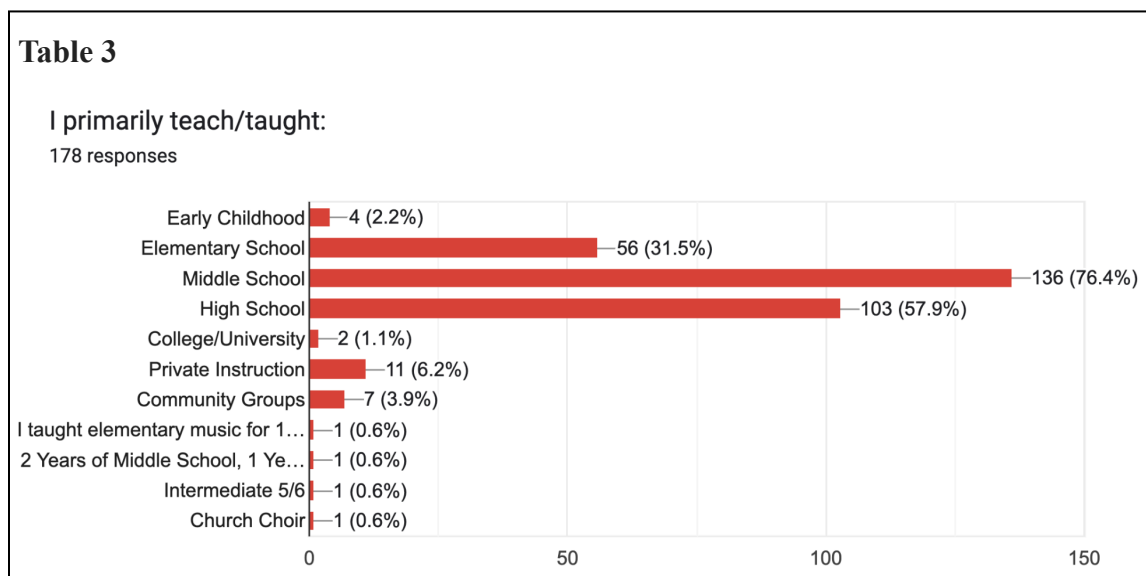


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Participants were also asked to identify their primary level(s) of teaching experience and were able to choose more than one level. Four participants reported early childhood teaching experience, 56 participants had elementary music teaching experience, 136 participants had middle level music teaching experience, 103 participants had high school music teaching experience, 2 participants had collegiate experience, 7 participants had community music directing experience, and 11 participants reported primarily teaching private music lessons.

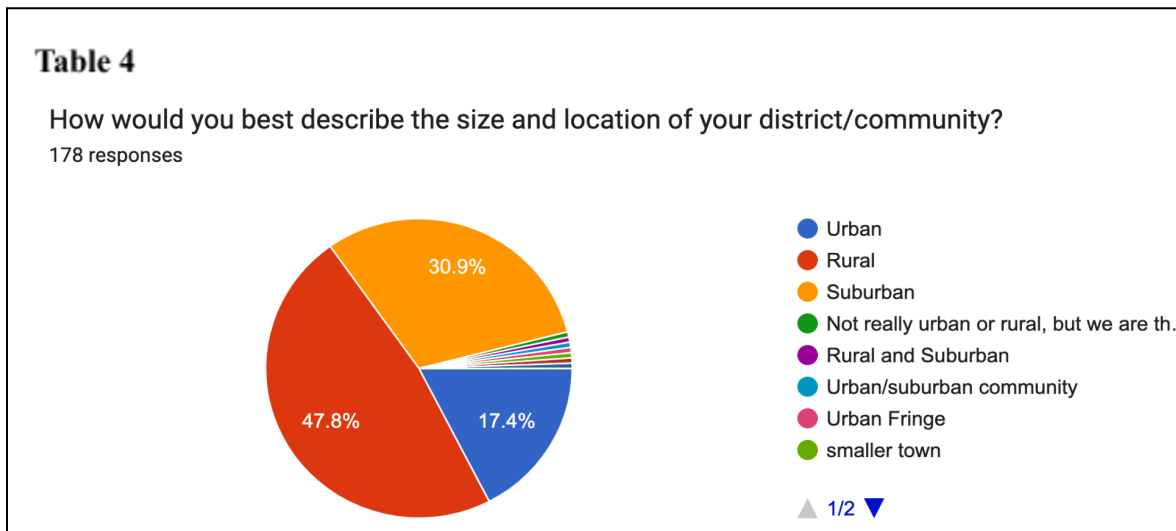


Participants were asked to identify their primary music subject area and were able to choose more than one area; 116 participants taught Choir/Vocal music, 83 participants primarily taught elementary general music, 58 participants taught Band, 13 participants taught Orchestra/Strings, and 12 participants reported teaching piano.



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Participants were asked to identify the geographic make-up of their community as urban, suburban, or rural. 85 participants reported working primarily in a rural location, 55 reported working in a suburban location, while 31 reported working in an urban location.

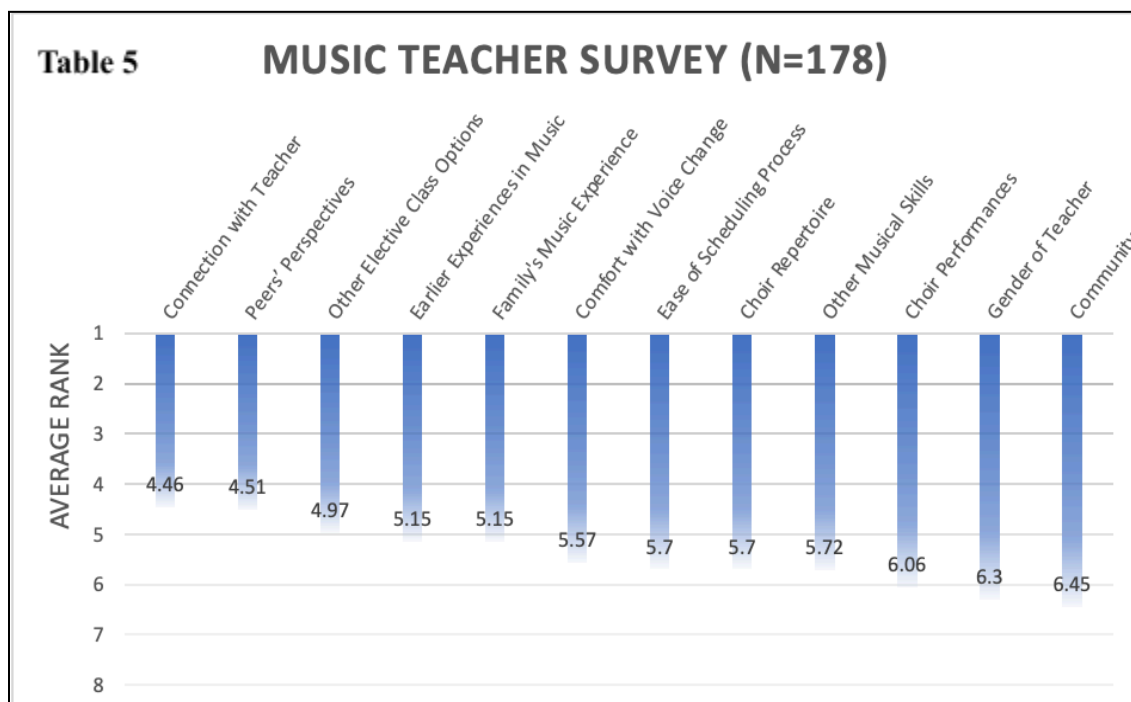


*Findings.* Participants were asked to rank twelve factors potentially impacting male singers' participation and motivation in choral music from most important to least important. A ranking of 1 equated with most impactful/influential, while a ranking of 12 equated with least impactful/influential. Utilizing a 12-point scale allowed participants to rank and assign one factor per numeral. These 12 factors were: connection with teacher/director, teacher/director's gender, ease of scheduling process, other elective class options, peer perspectives/support, family's musical experience, comfort with own voice change, childhood music experiences, other musical skills/participation (band, orchestra, etc), choir repertoire, choir performances, and community music opportunities. Each factor received a numerical response from each of the 178 participants. Those 178 responses were averaged for each of the 12 categories, then each factor was assigned an average value rounded to two decimal places.

Music teachers reported the most influential factor (lowest average score) to be connection with teacher/director (4.46), followed by peers' perspectives/support (4.51), other

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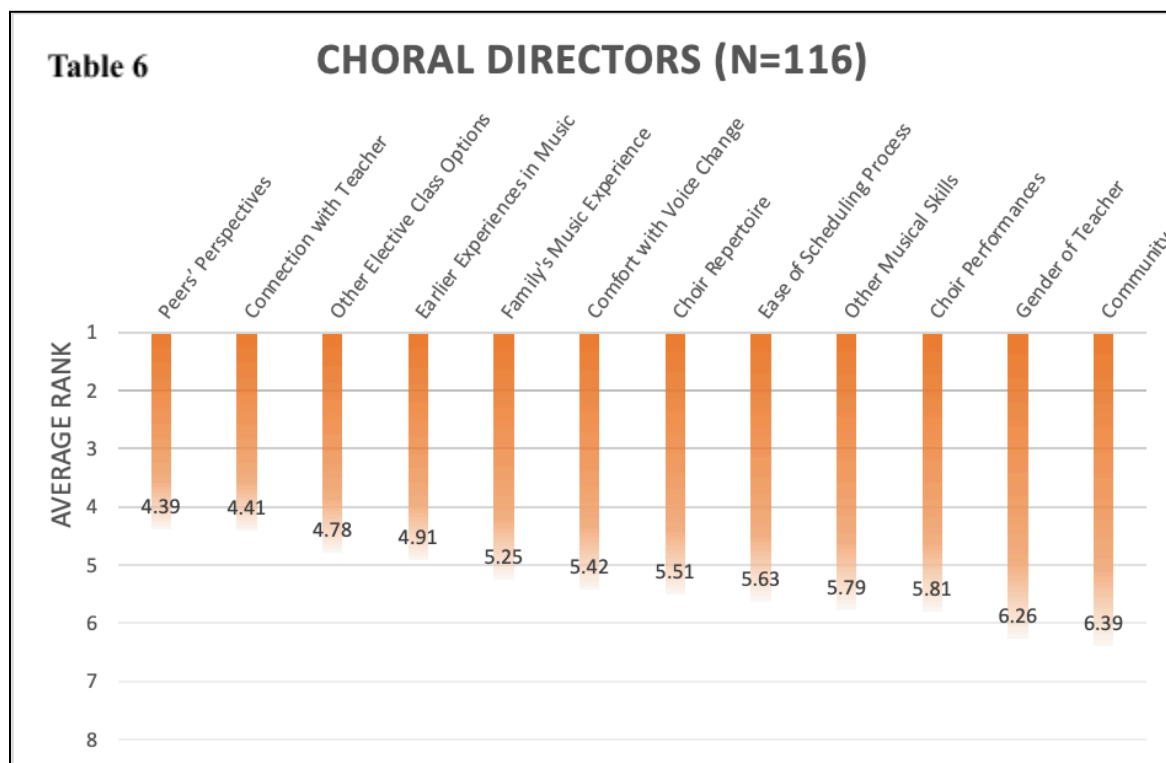
elective class options (4.97), earlier experiences in music (5.15), musical experiences of family (5.15), comfort with own voice change (5.57), ease of scheduling process (5.7), choir repertoire (5.7), and other musical skills (5.72). Least influential factors (highest average scores) were reported to be choir performance opportunities (6.06), teacher/director's gender (6.3), and community music opportunities (6.45).



To investigate further, I removed all other band, general music, and strings teachers to leave only those who primarily taught choral/vocal music (n=116). Choir/Vocal teachers reported their most influential factor (lowest average score) to be peers' perspectives/support (4.39), followed by connection with teacher/director (4.41), other elective class options (4.78), earlier experiences in music (4.91), musical experiences of family (5.25), comfort with own voice change (5.42), choir repertoire (5.51), ease of scheduling process (5.63), and other musical skills (5.79). Least influential factors (highest average scores) were reported to be choir performance opportunities (5.81), teacher/director's gender (6.26), and community music opportunities (6.39).

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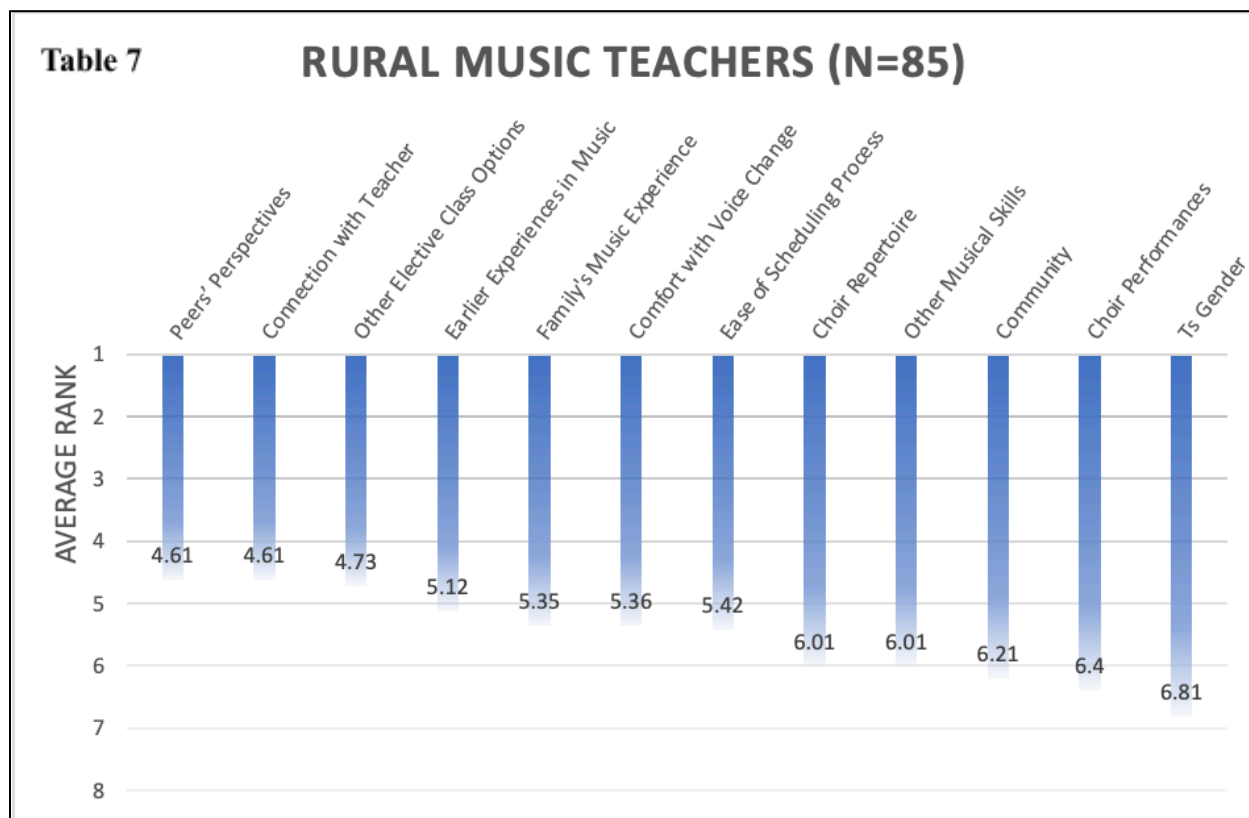
These results ranked similarly to the comprehensive music teacher results (n=178), with the exceptions of choral/vocal teachers giving slightly more importance to peers' perspectives/support and choir repertoire versus the rankings from all music teachers.



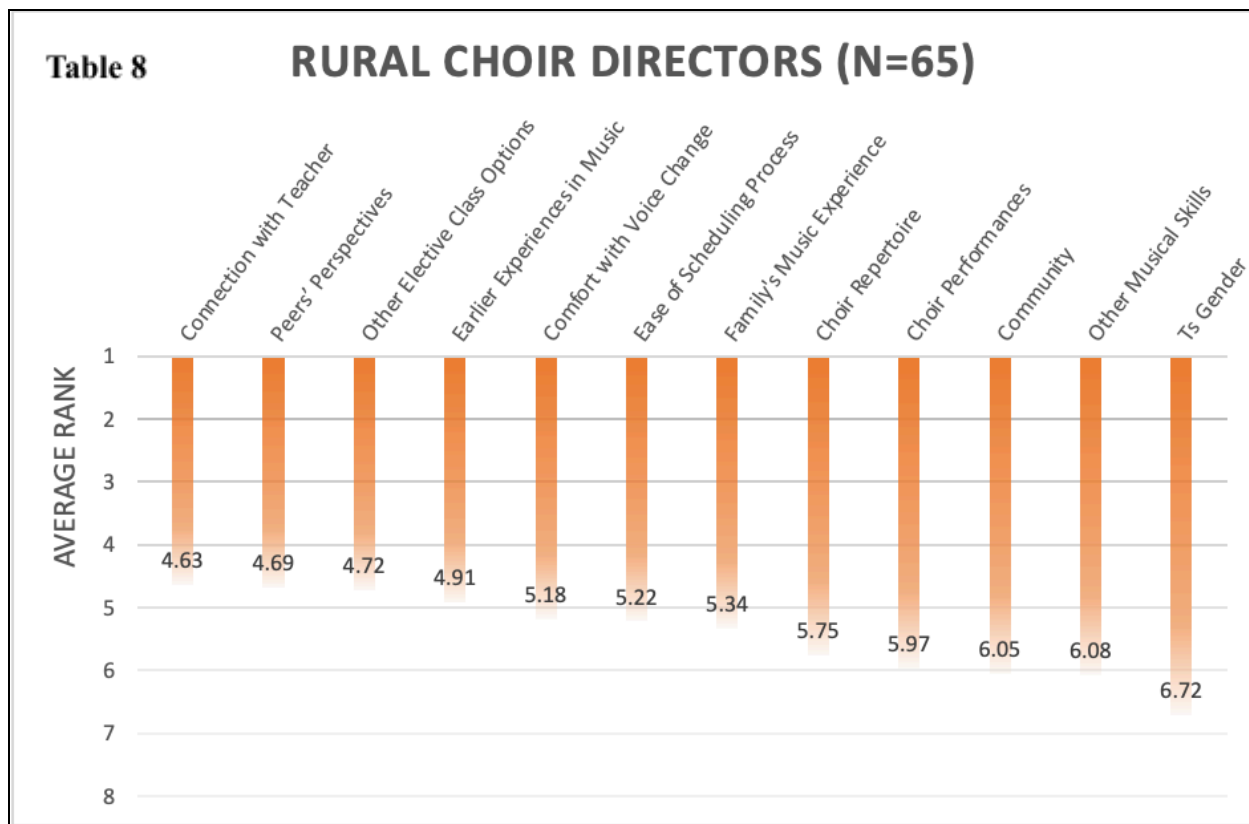
Next, I isolated the results for all rural music teachers (n=85), including band, choir, orchestra, general music, collegiate, community, and private teachers from rural areas. Rural directors ranked their most influential factors as a tie between connection with teacher/director and peers' perspectives/support, with an average of 4.61. These top factors were followed by other elective class options (4.73), earlier experiences in music (5.12), musical experiences of family (5.35), comfort with own voice change (5.36), ease of scheduling process (5.42), and both choir repertoire and other musical skills (tied at 6.01). Least influential factors (highest average scores) were reported to be community music opportunities (6.21), choir performance



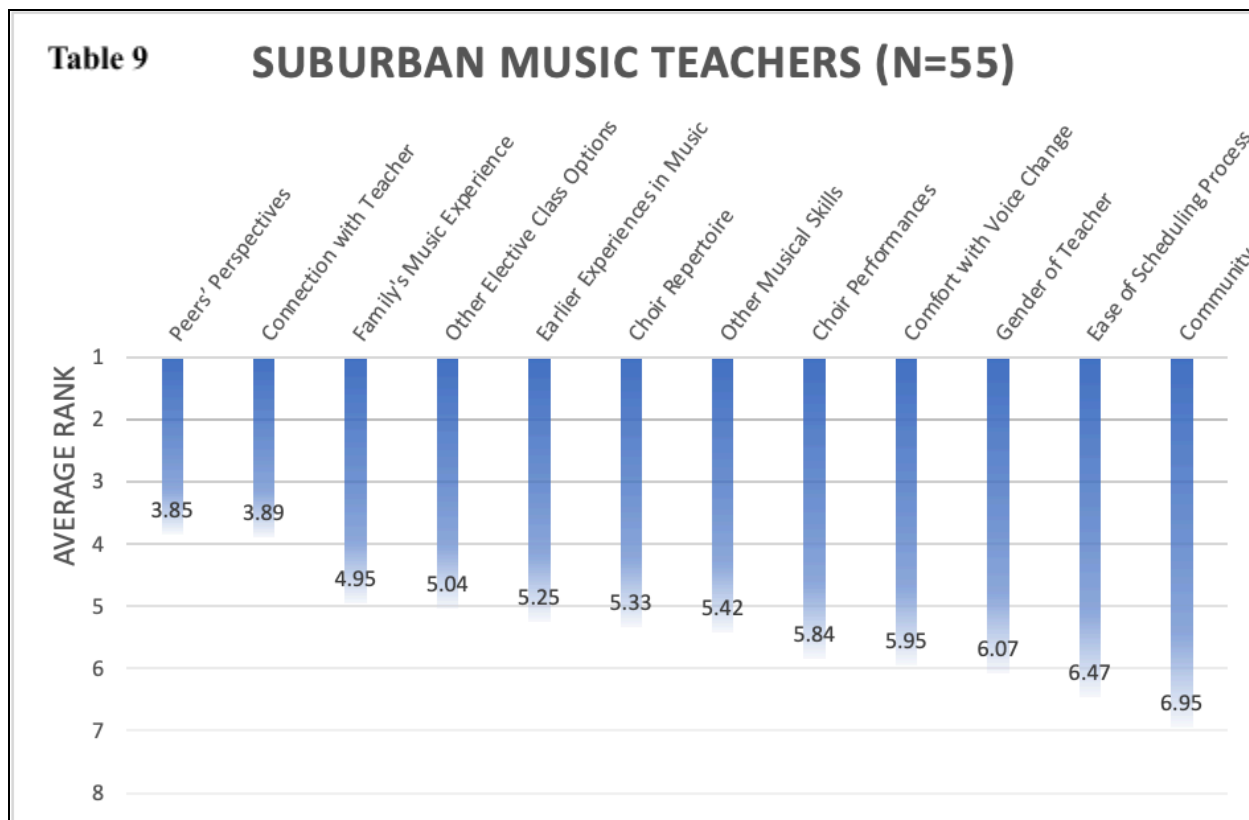
opportunities (6.4), and teacher/director’s gender (6.81). Overall, rural directors were similar when compared to all directors.



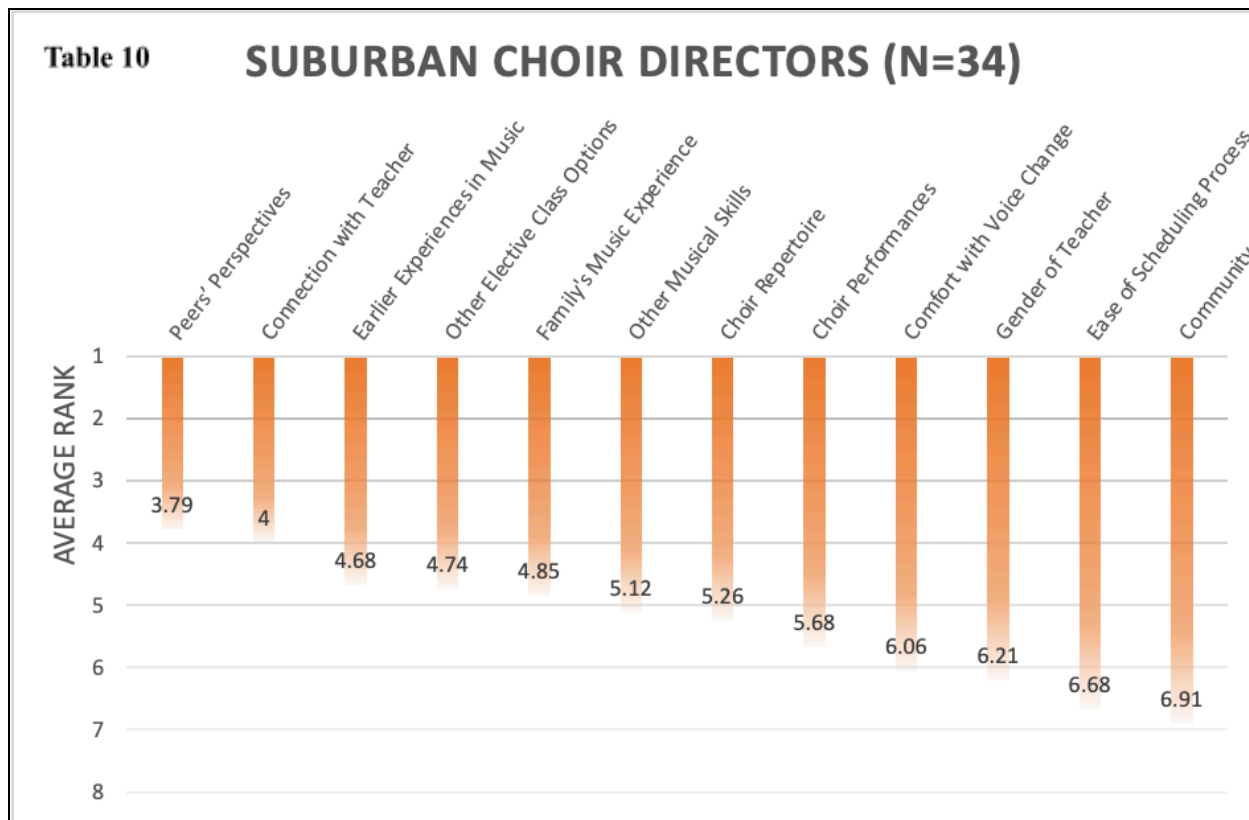
Next, I isolated the choir/vocal teachers from rural communities only (n=65). Rural choir directors ranked their most influential factor as connection with teacher/director (4.63), followed by peers’ perspectives/support (4.69), other elective class options (4.72), earlier experiences in music (4.91), comfort with own voice change (5.18), ease of scheduling process (5.22), musical experiences of family (5.34), choir repertoire (5.75), and choir performance opportunities (5.97). Least influential factors reported were community music opportunities (6.05), other musical skills (6.08), and teacher/director’s gender (6.72). Overall, rural choir directors’ responses ranked very similar to overall rural music teachers’ responses.



Next, I reviewed responses from all music teachers in suburban communities (n=55), including band, choir, orchestra, general music, collegiate, community, and private teachers. Suburban music teachers ranked their most influential factor as peers' perspectives/support (3.85), followed by connection with teacher/director (3.89), musical experiences of family (4.95), other elective class options (5.04), earlier experiences in music (5.25), choir repertoire (5.33), other musical skills (5.42), choir performance opportunities (5.84), and comfort with own voice change (5.95). Least influential factors reported were teacher/director's gender (6.07), ease of scheduling process (6.47), and community music opportunities (6.95). When compared to music teachers in rural communities, music teachers in suburban communities showed an increased value on the impact of family music experiences, childhood music experiences, and choir repertoire.



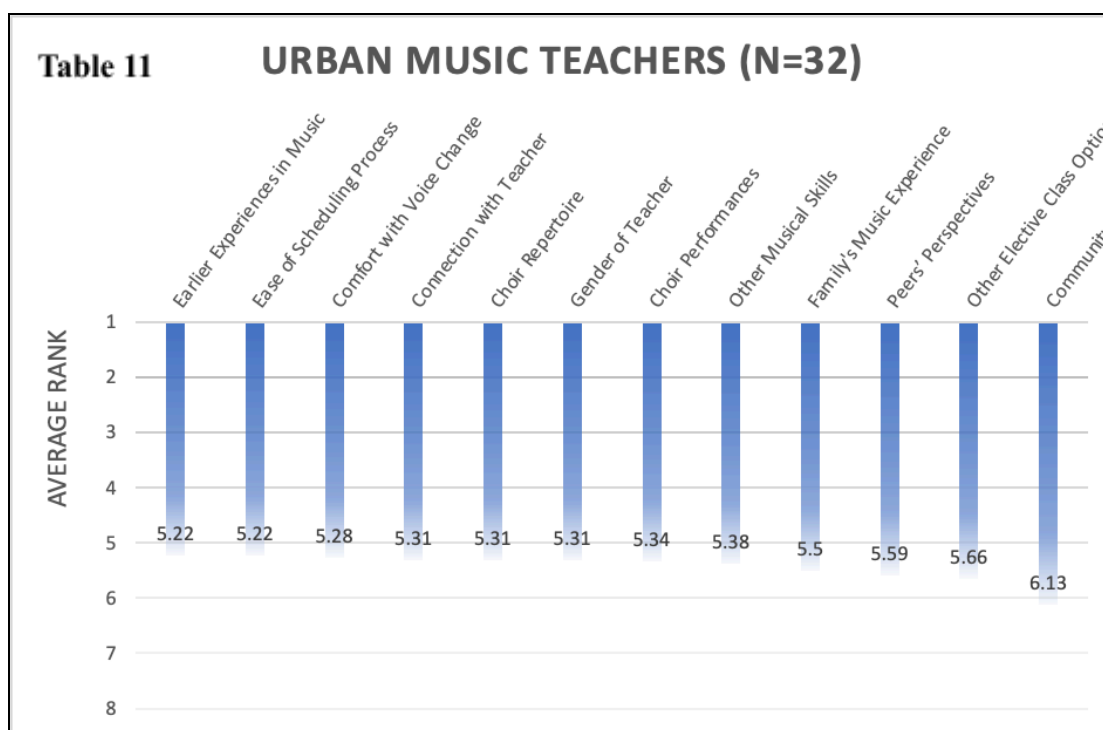
From those results, I isolated the results specifically from suburban choir directors (n=34). Suburban choir directors ranked their most influential factor as peers' perspectives/support (3.79), followed by connection with teacher/director (4.00), earlier experiences in music (4.68), other elective class options (4.74), musical experiences of family (4.85), other musical skills (5.12), choir repertoire (5.26), choir performance opportunities (5.68), and comfort with own voice change (6.06). Least influential factors were reported to be teacher/director's gender (6.21), ease of scheduling process (6.68), and community music opportunities (6.91).



The factors' order of influence was nearly identical for suburban choir directors versus all suburban music teachers, with a slightly elevated impact of earlier experiences in music for suburban choir directors. When compared to rural choir directors, suburban choir directors placed more influence on males having other musical skills in band, orchestra, or piano (5.12, or 6th out of 12) versus rural choir directors (6.08, or 11th out of 12). Rural choir directors, however, placed more impact on ease of scheduling process (5.22, 6th of 12) versus suburban choir directors (6.68, 11th of 12). Rural choir directors placed a slightly higher importance on male students' comfort with their voice change (5.18, 5th out of 12) versus suburban choir directors (6.06, 9th of 12), while suburban choir directors noted a slightly higher importance of musical experiences of family (4.85, 5th of 12), versus rural choir directors (5.34, 7th of 12).

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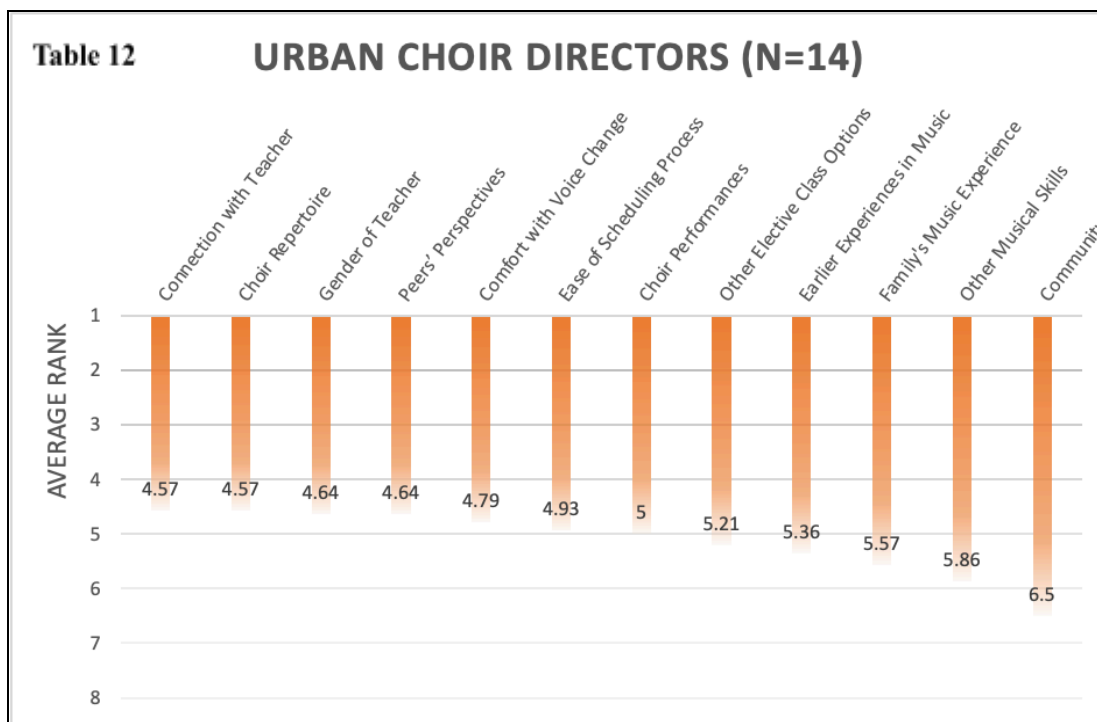
Next, I isolated responses specifically from urban music teachers (n=32), including band, choir, orchestra, general music, collegiate, community, and private teachers from urban areas. Urban music teachers were the smallest sample size in the survey, compared to 85 rural music teachers and 55 suburban music teachers surveyed. Urban music teachers also had the most widely varied findings within their individual results, resulting in the narrowest margins between averages (5.22 for 1st ranked factor to 6.13 for 12th ranked factor). In comparison, suburban music teachers' averages ranged from 3.85 and 6.95, while rural music teachers' averages ranged from 4.61 to 6.81. Urban music teachers reported their most influential factor as a tie between earlier experiences in music and ease of scheduling process (5.22), followed by comfort with own voice change (5.28), connection with teacher/director, choir repertoire, and teacher/directors' gender (all at 5.31), choir performance opportunities (5.34), other musical skills (5.38), and musical experiences of family (5.5). Least influential factors were reported as peers' perspectives/support (5.59), other elective class options (5.66), and community music opportunities (6.13).



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The data for urban music teachers appears to have been affected by a small number of survey participants whose written responses were very different from their ranking of factors, which leads me to believe that they interpreted the survey backwards (12=most important, 1=least important). For instance, one written comment included the importance of their friends' opinions on choir, but "peers' perspectives/support" was rated as a 12. This seemed to correct itself when removing non-choir directors in the data that follows for urban choir directors only.

I isolated the findings from urban choir directors specifically (n=14), a subset of the survey's smallest sample size. Urban choir directors reported the most influential factor to be connection with teacher/director and choir repertoire (both 4.57), followed by peers' perspectives/support and teacher/director's gender (both 4.64), comfort with own voice change (4.79), ease of scheduling process (4.93), choir performance opportunities (5.00), other elective class options (5.21), and earlier experiences in music (5.36). Urban choir directors reported the least influential factors to be musical experiences of family (5.57), other musical skills (5.86), and community music opportunities (6.50). When compared to suburban and rural choir directors, urban choir directors reported the highest influence of choir repertoire (4.57, 1st of 12). Rural choir directors rated choir repertoire at 5.75 (8th of 12), while suburban choir directors averaged a rating of 5.26 (7th of 12). Urban choir directors also reported a heightened value on teacher/directors' gender when compared to rural and suburban choir directors. However, urban choir directors reported less of an influence for musical experiences of family (5.57, 10th of 12) and the students' other musical skills (5.86, 11th of 12).



In comparing results across all domains of the music teacher survey, I reviewed the top rated findings of all music teachers (n=178). Survey participants steadily rated connection with teacher/director, peers’ perspectives/support, other elective class options, and earlier experiences in music as the most influential factors affecting young males’ motivations in choral music. Although sometimes ranked in a different order, these factors were included in the top four ranked factors of all choir directors (n=116), all rural music teachers (n=85), and rural choir directors (n=65). Two of these top factors, connection with teacher/director and peers’ perspectives/support, were also included in the highest rankings of all suburban music teachers (n=55), suburban choir directors (n=34), and urban choir directors (n=14).

Next, I reviewed the rankings for least influential/impactful factors. All music teachers (n=178) consistently averaged the three least influential factors of young males’ motivations in choral music as choir performance opportunities (6.06), teacher/directors’ gender (6.3), and community music opportunities (6.45). Although sometimes ranked in a different order, these

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findings were the lowest ranked factors of all choir directors (n=116) and all rural music teachers (n=85). The factors of teacher/directors' gender and community music opportunities were included in the lowest three ranked factors of rural choir directors (n=65), all suburban music teachers (n=55), and suburban choir directors (n=34). The factor of community music opportunities was also included in the lowest three ranked factors of all urban music teachers (n=33) and urban choir directors (n=14). Community music opportunities ranked within the lowest three ranked factors of all compared survey data, both in subject area and geographical region.

*Student Survey.* The second qualitative data source was a survey of music students from Eagle River Elementary School, part of the Northland Pines School District in Eagle River, Wisconsin. One hundred twenty two music students completed the student survey. Of the 122 surveys completed, 62 were fifth grade students in general music class and 60 were sixth grade students in choir. Participants were asked to identify their gender; 50 selected male and 70 selected female, with two students not identifying a gender.

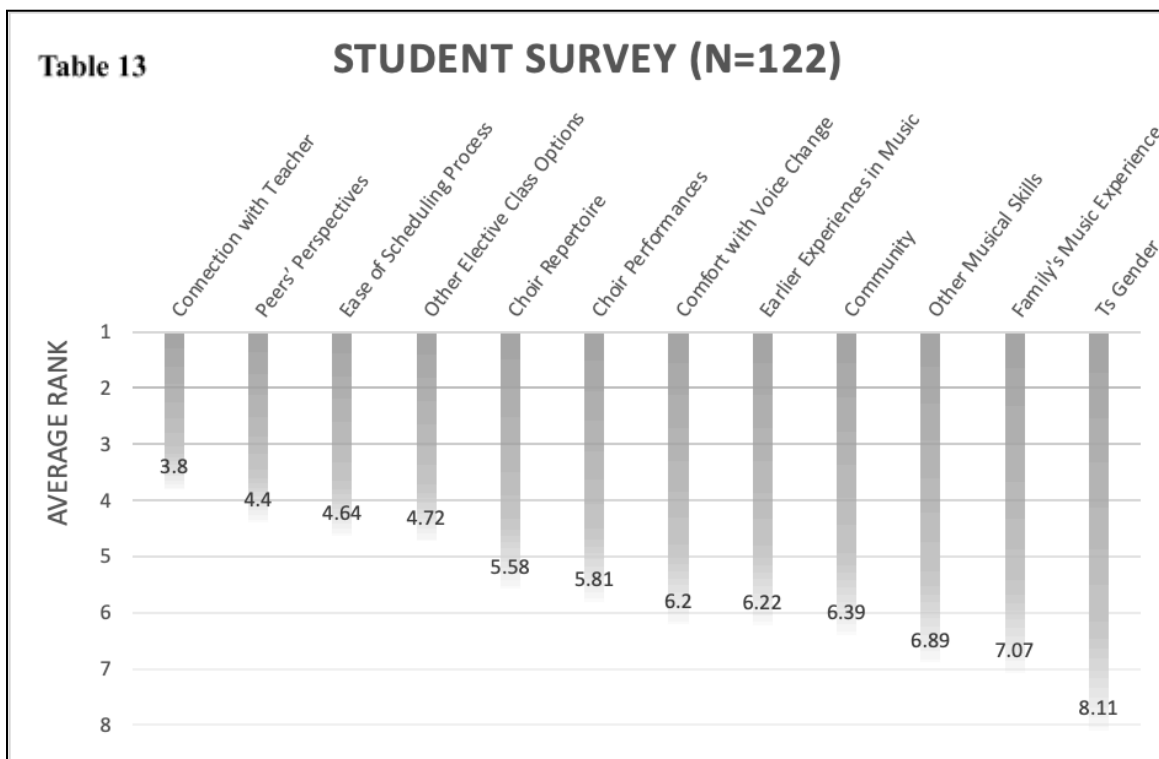
*Findings.* Similar to the music teacher survey, participants were asked to rank the same twelve factors potentially impacting their participation and motivation in choral music from most to least impactful. Whereas the music teacher survey specifically investigated the impact on young males in choral music, the student survey questioned students of all genders to compare findings, both similarities and differences. The 12 factors were the same as the music teacher survey with slight differences in wording for appropriate reading level: getting along with my choir teacher (connection with teacher/director in teacher survey), my choir teacher's gender, ease of sign-up/scheduling (ease of scheduling process in teacher survey), my other elective class options, support of my friends (peers' perspectives/support in teacher survey), music experience



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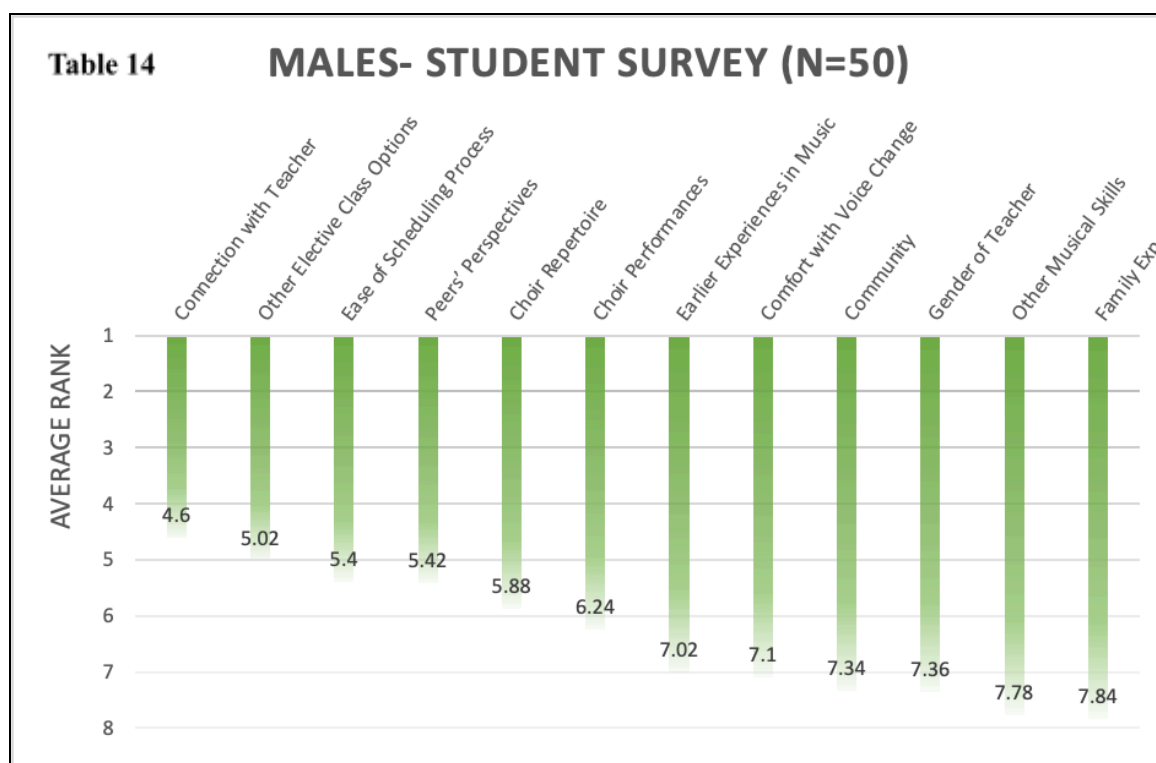
in my family, music opportunities in my community, comfort with my voice change, my childhood experiences with music, my other musical skills (band, orchestra, piano, etc), the type of music we sing in choir, and types of choir performances. Each factor received a numerical response from each of the 122 participants. Those 122 responses were averaged for each of the 12 categories, then each factor was assigned an average value rounded to two decimal places. For clarity, I will use the names of each factor from the music teacher survey in the discussion below.

Students (n=122) responded their most influential factor as connection with teacher/director (3.8), followed by peers' perspectives/support (4.4), ease of scheduling process (4.64), other elective class options (4.72), choir repertoire (5.58), choir performances (5.81), comfort with my voice change (6.2), childhood experiences with music (6.22), and community music opportunities (6.39). Students reported that their least influential factors were other musical skills (6.89), music experiences of family (7.07), and gender of teacher/director (8.11).



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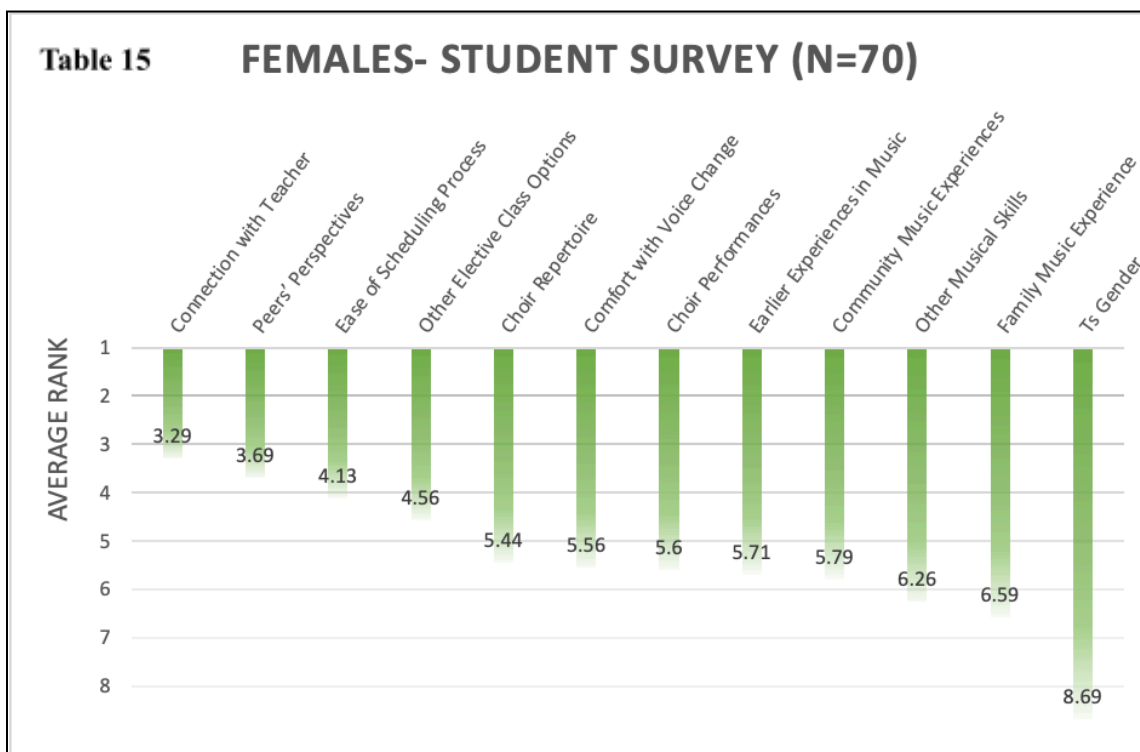
To investigate further, I isolated responses from students who identified as male. Male students surveyed (n=50) reported their most influential factor to be connection with teacher/director (4.6), followed by other elective class options (5.02), ease of scheduling process (5.4), peers' perspectives/support (5.42), choir repertoire (5.88), choir performances (6.24), childhood experiences with music (7.02), comfort with voice change (7.1), and community music opportunities (7.34). Least influential factors affecting male students were reported to be gender of teacher/director (7.36), other musical skills (7.78), and musical experiences of family (7.84).



From there, I investigated survey responses from students who identified as female. Female students surveyed (n=70) identified their most influential factor to also be connection with teacher/director (3.29), followed by peers' perspectives/support (3.69), ease of scheduling process (4.13), other elective class options (4.56), choir repertoire (5.44), comfort with voice change (5.56), choir performances (5.6), childhood experiences with music (5.71), and

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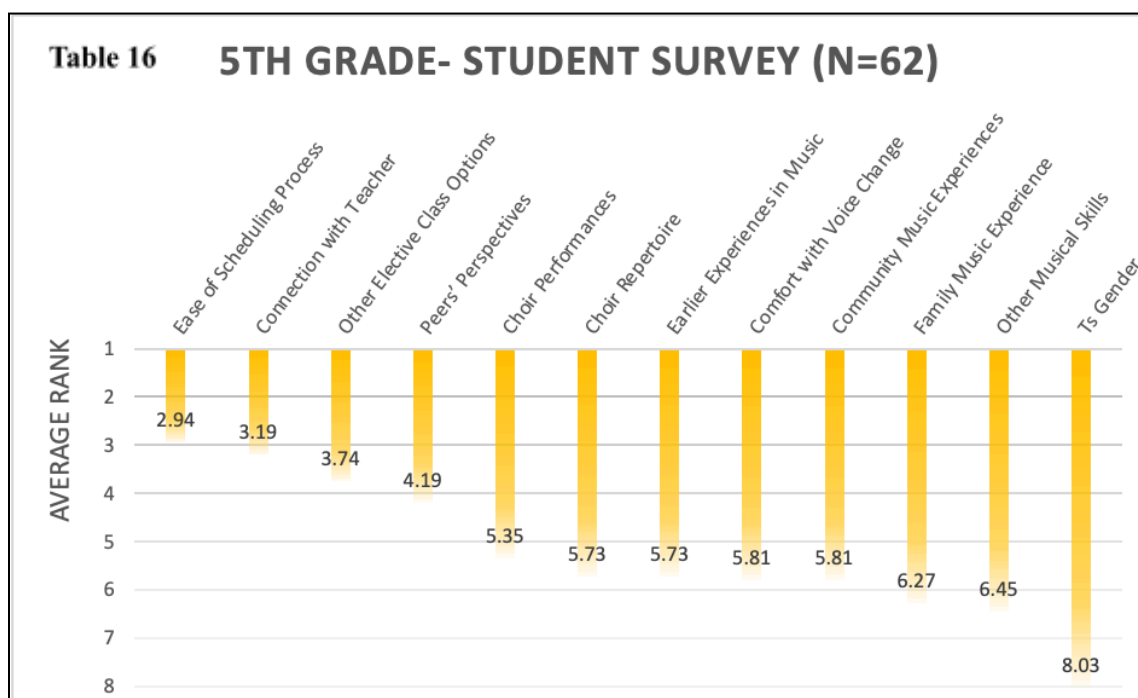
community music opportunities (5.79). Least influential factors affecting female students were reported to be other musical skills (6.26), musical experiences of family (6.59), and gender of teacher/director (8.69). In comparing student survey results between male and female students, both gender categories ranked the same top factors in different orders, including connection with teacher/director, ease of sign-up/scheduling, other elective class options, and peers' perspectives/support. However, female students ranked peers' perspectives/support slightly higher than male students (3.69, 2nd of 12 for females versus 5.42, 4th of 12 for males). Both male and female students identified the same least influential factors: other musical skills, musical experience of family, and gender of teacher/director. Interestingly, female students reported a higher impact of "comfort with voice change" (5.56, 6th of 12) versus male students (7.1, 8th of 12).



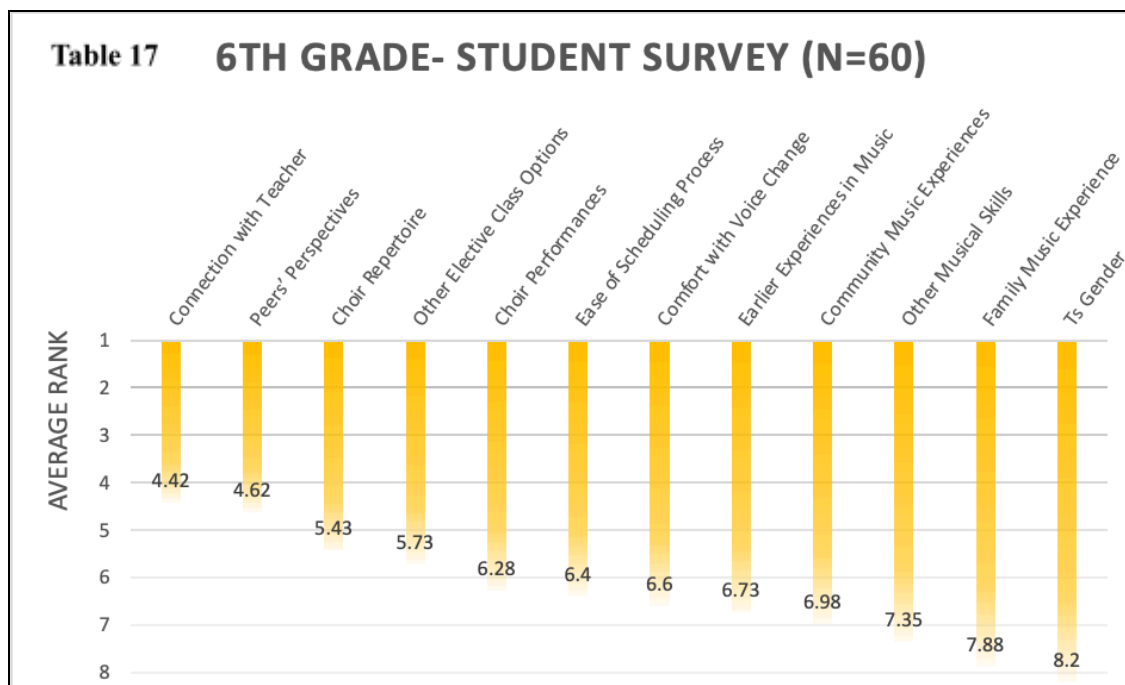
Next, I separated responses for all fifth grade students and all sixth grade students who completed the survey. Fifth grade students (n=62) reported their most influential factor to be ease

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of scheduling process (2.94), followed by connection with teacher/director (3.19), other elective class options (3.74), peers' perspectives/support (4.19), choir performances (5.35), choir repertoire and childhood experiences with music (both 5.73), comfort with voice change and community music opportunities (both 5.81). Fifth grade students reported their least influential factors to be musical experiences of family (6.27), other musical skills (6.45), and gender of teacher/director (8.03).



Sixth grade students (n=60) reported their most influential factor to be connection with teacher/director (4.42), followed by peers' perspectives/support (4.62), choir repertoire (5.43), other elective class options (5.73), choir performances (6.28), ease of scheduling process (6.4), comfort with voice change (6.6), childhood experiences in music (6.73), and community music opportunities (6.98). Sixth grade students reported their least influential factors to be other musical skills (7.35), musical experiences of family (7.88), and gender of teacher/director (8.2).



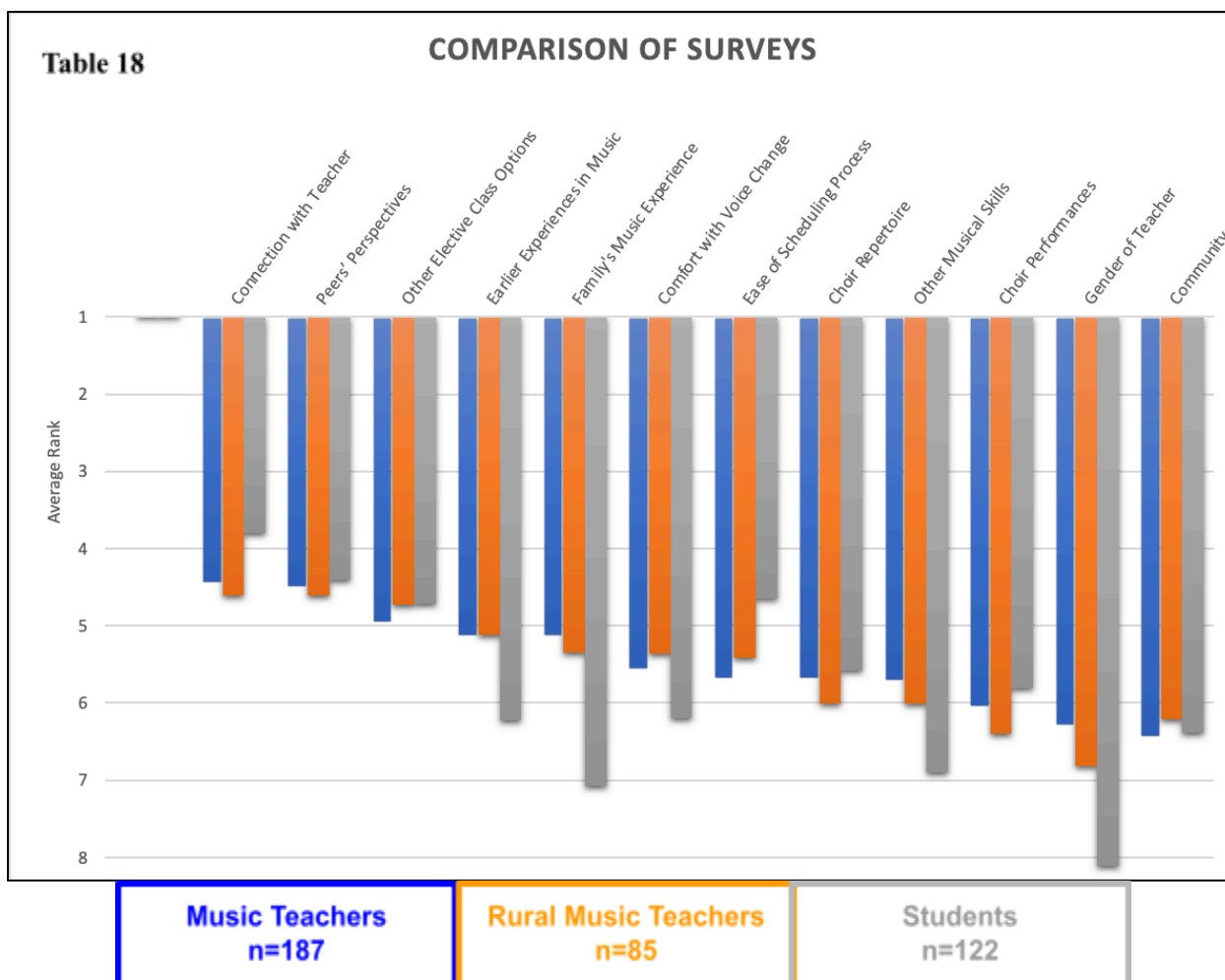
Fifth and sixth grade students responded similarly for their three most influential factors, albeit in different orders: connection with teacher/director, peers’ perspectives/support, and other elective class options. Fifth and sixth grade students also named the same three least influential factors: other musical skills, musical experiences of family, and gender of teacher/director. However, fifth graders reported a greater emphasis on the importance of the scheduling process (2.94, 1st of 12) versus sixth grade (6.4, 6th of 12), while sixth graders reported a higher impact of choir repertoire (5.43, 3rd of 12) versus fifth grade (5.73, 6th of 12).

When comparing the music teacher survey and the student survey, multiple similarities arise. The overall music teacher survey (n=178) and the overall student survey (n=122) named the same top two most influential factors: connection with teacher/director and peers’ perspectives/support. Also, both surveys listed gender of teacher/director as one of the two least influential factors in their responses. However, the surveyed group of students reported a greater influence on the scheduling process (4.64, 3rd of 12) when compared to all surveyed music teachers (5.64, 7th of 12), while the music teachers reported a higher influence of childhood

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music experiences (5.15, 4th of 12) versus surveyed students (6.22, 8th of 12). Also, music teachers felt that family's musical experiences were overall more impactful (5.15, 5th of 12) than students did (7.07, 11th of 12).

Finally, a notable comparison is the results between the student survey and the rural music teacher survey, since the student survey was completed in a rural school district. The rural music teacher survey results, as stated above, were statistically similar to the overall music teacher survey, due to the impact of a larger sample size of rural teachers. Rural music teachers noted heightened influences of childhood music experiences (5.12, 4th of 12) and family musical experiences (5.35, 5th of 12) over the student survey, which was similar to the overall music teacher survey. Rural music teachers gave factors such as scheduling process (5.42, 7th of 12), choir repertoire (6.01, 8th of 12), and types of choir performances (6.4, 11th of 12) lower ranks of importance versus the rural students surveyed. In fact, all subgroups of surveyed students from our rural district (male, female, fifth grade, and sixth grade) reported higher rankings for ease of scheduling process, choir repertoire, and choir performances versus both the rural music teachers' survey and the subgroup of rural choir directors.



*Student Interviews.* As the final step in my research, I interviewed six male students individually. Three students were in fifth grade and three were in sixth grade. Each of these students had already completed the digital Student Survey in their classes. Fifth grade student interviewees were involved in General Music class, which is required for all fifth grade students. Sixth grade student interviewees were selected from the sixth grade choir, which is elective. However, all sixth grade students must choose to be in either band or choir. Students were interviewed in the school library, where they were provided with a printed list of questions (see

Appendix H). In addition, I read the questions out loud and asked relevant follow-up questions when needed. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed following the interviews.

*Findings.* Overall, the interviewees were positive and eager to participate in the interviews. However, most responses were succinct and lacked details, particularly when asked about their likes and dislikes in music class and choir. The question “what have your music experiences been like in school?” mostly elicited short, neutral responses from each of the six participants.

Although students were chosen without knowledge of their family or prior experiences, each of the six students was able to speak about a positive musical experience in their family and/or a meaningful music experience in their past in response to the questions “what have your music experiences been like outside of school?” or “what are the musical experiences of your parents, guardians, or family members?”. Student 1, a fifth grader, mentioned the influence of his sixth grade brother playing the saxophone and hearing him practice at home. This student also mentioned his brother’s experience in band as positive, and noted that his brother enjoyed the social aspect of band and making friends. He also mentioned his parents owning a few instruments at home and informally trying those out through the years. Student 2, a fifth grader, mentioned enjoying drumming in his music class. He also stated the importance of his older brother’s experience in choir to help him learn more about his choices for sixth grade. Lastly, he also mentioned playing on his parents’ guitar at home. He said his friends’ influence was important to him in deciding whether or not to do band or choir next year. Student 3, a fifth grader, talked about his mom’s experience as a bass player in a local band, along with his uncle’s experience playing acoustic guitar, as positive musical influences for him. He was able to identify specific styles of music he prefers, such as rap, funk, and electronic dance music (EDM).



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The sixth grade interviewees had similar positive music and family experiences to report. Student 4, a sixth grader, described his interest in dance as a positive attribute of his music experience. He described his various dance class styles and enjoyment of his annual recital. Similarly, he talked about his mom's experience as a dancer in college having a positive impact on his interest in dance. He also mentioned his great grandmother's career as a choral director offering a positive impact on his interest in music. He described his enjoyment of performing in plays and theater opportunities in our community, such as Missoula Children's Theater. Similarly, he talked about going to professional musicals with his family as a positive experience. When talking about whether or not to enroll in choir in the future, he described his friends' choices and the ability to have choices in repertoire selection as two important factors in his decision. Student 5, a sixth grader, talked about the influence of his two older brothers playing trumpet and trombone, in addition to enjoying playing guitar at home. He spoke of his father's prior experience as a trumpet and horn player. Student 6, a sixth grader, spoke about enjoying past children's theater and church play experiences. He also mentioned his mother's prior experience as a pianist.

When asked "how comfortable are you singing alone?", many of the interviewees mentioned a feeling of slight nervousness or unease. Student 1 stated, "I don't really do it that much because I feel sometimes a little nervous." Student 2 said he was comfortable singing around his family or friends, but not around a lot of people. Student 3 said he was comfortable singing alone but not if other people were watching. Student 4 reported he would sing in front of people but didn't feel overly comfortable doing so. Student 4 also mentioned enjoying singing Disney songs with his friends and singing country music on the radio with his family, but didn't consider those to be legitimate music experiences. Student 5 reported a relatively high comfort

with singing, but prefers to sing along with other people. Student 6 said he prefers to sing with other people, which is what he appreciates about singing in a choir.

When asked what factors would encourage them to participate, or continue participating, in a choir, responses were varied. Student 1 said his brother's influence would continue to encourage him to participate in music classes. Student 2 reported that his friends' preferences would be a contributing factor, but not more than what he wanted for himself. Student 3 mentioned the types of concerts, types of music, and what his friends were doing as important factors. Student 4 said he will be influenced by whether or not he gets some say in the type of music sung in choir. Student 5 said he was surprised by how much singing his choir class entailed this year, and would be more interested in a "more blended" class with instruments. Student 6 said he liked being active in choir and feeling like everyone could be included.

In summary of the student interviews, the six male students in fifth and sixth grade mostly provided short answers that lacked detail when asked about their likes and dislikes of school music experiences. However, they were all able to name positive musical influences in their life, whether family members with music backgrounds or past arts experiences they enjoyed outside of school. They were all able to articulate factors that would encourage them to participate in choir in the future, although their responses were varied. Lastly, students named many personal musical experiences they didn't feel were legitimate, such as singing to the radio, in church, or with friends. Overall, students were positive and eager to please, but did not provide much detail in the interviews.

In this chapter, I discussed findings from the qualitative data sources from this study on motivations and engagement factors for young males in choral music. First, I summarized the 187 responses of the Music Teacher Survey and organized the results in multiple ways, including

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by subject area and type of geographic region. I listed the averages and ranks of influential factors for all music teachers surveyed (n=187), choral directors only (n=115), rural music teachers (n=85), rural choral directors (n=65), suburban music teachers (n=55), suburban choral directors (n=34), urban music teachers (n=32), and urban choral directors (n=14). I compared similarities and differences in findings among the different subject areas and geographic areas. I then summarized the 122 responses of the Student Survey from my rural school district and organized the results in different ways. I listed the averages and ranks of influential factors for all students surveyed (n=120), students who identified as male (n=50), students who identified as female (n=70), fifth grade students (n=62), and sixth grade students (n=60). I compared data findings, both similarities and differences, between the student survey and music teacher survey. Lastly, I discussed the findings from the six student interviews and their connection with findings in the student survey.

## Chapter V: Discussion and Implications

In the previous four chapters, I described my study of engagement and motivation factors for upper elementary school males in choral music, included a review of related research and literature, described the methodology and my analysis approach, and reported the qualitative findings of my music teacher survey, student survey, and student interviews. In this chapter, I will discuss the implications of the data findings, including the essential role of social-emotional learning and the impact of scheduling and electives on student's course decisions. Also included are specific takeaways for choral directors in rural, suburban, and urban areas, along with a discussion of factors that students found more impactful than teachers. I will also report the findings of least important factors in students' course decisions. Lastly, I will discuss implications of this research for administrators, future research opportunities, future music teachers, and the field of music education.

*Impactful Factors.* In completing the music teacher survey and the student survey, two contributing factors stood out as most influential across both major groups surveyed and nearly all subgroups: connection with teacher/director and peers perspectives/support. These two factors ranked first and/or second in the overall music teacher survey (n=187) and the overall student survey (n=162), including the same top two factors in subgroups of all choir directors (n=116), rural music teachers (n=85), rural choir directors (n=65), suburban music teachers (n=55), suburban choir directors (n=34), male fifth and sixth grade students (n=50), female fifth and sixth grade students (n=70), and all sixth grade students (n=60). In addition, urban choir directors (n=14) reported these factors as first and third most influential, and all fifth grade students (n=62) reported these factors as second and fourth most influential. This research shows that the two main factors most impacting males' participation in choral music, therefore, are not

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music-specific at all. The prominence of both teacher connection and peer support show the clear importance of social-emotional skills for our students, their directors, and our classes. Students want to be accepted by their peers and desire to build relationships with those around them. Students also desire a strong connection with their teachers; they want to know they have an important place in our classrooms and make a positive impact on their teachers. With strong peer-to-peer and peer-to-teacher connections, many other related factors become possible within the choral ensemble, such as comfort with safe risk-taking in rehearsal, openness to diverse repertoire, strong classroom management structures, building confidence in performing skills, and working as a team. Specific to male singers, having strong peer and teacher relationships also builds the confidence and safe risk-taking needed to explore their changing voice, make mistakes, and build their skills through correct pedagogy and repeated practice. Denison (2017) states:

Understanding boys' voices doesn't just mean their physiological voice, but their social one as well. A critical pedagogy approach allows all boys, outliers as well as typical singers, to express their experiences and preferences. Repertoire selection also involves using rehearsal time to have boy singers express and explain their voice as they understand it in that moment (Freer, 2006; Harrison, 2010; Kennedy, 2002, 2004). An atmosphere of inquiry in rehearsal can yield particularly powerful experiences for both singer and conductor, and valuable professional growth can come from these discussions. (p. 422)

This research can extend outside of the choral classroom, as I believe these same factors are essential in other music ensembles. I also believe this research is indicative of adolescents in general, no matter the subject matter or situation; peer and peer-adult relationships similarly

impact other academic classes, sports, extracurriculars, work places, churches, and social situations.

This research is validating to music teachers, but likely not surprising, as we see the impact of peer support and connections with our students daily. Music educators have a unique attachment to these factors as fine arts programs are often a vehicle that drive peer support and connection with teachers, rather than the other way around. Music teachers should feel at ease that students also consider these factors to be most important. Although this is not a blanket solution, supporting our students and building strong connections with and among them can sometimes outweigh the frequent challenges of scheduling, administrative policies, district initiatives, lack of prep time, or any other obstacle we face.

Two other important factors recognized in the data were other elective course options and ease of scheduling process. Other elective class options appeared third in the overall music teacher survey (n=187), with the same ranking for the subsets of choir/vocal teachers (n=116), rural music teachers (n=85), rural choir directors (n=65), and fifth grade students (n=62). Other elective class options ranked second for male students (n=50). Fourth place rankings appeared in suburban music teachers (n=55), suburban choir directors (n=34), the overall student survey (n=122), female students (n=70), and sixth grade students (n=60).

Ease of scheduling process was valued highly by students, with a third place rank in the overall student survey (n=122), male students (n=50), and female students (n=70). Fifth graders (n=62) ranked ease of scheduling process as their most important factor, while sixth graders (n=60) ranked ease of scheduling process as their sixth most important factor. However, music teachers did not place nearly as much emphasis on this factor, with sixth, seventh, and eighth place ranks for most subsets of music teachers (overall, choral directors, rural, and rural choir

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directors), along with 11th place (second least important) rankings for suburban music teachers and suburban choir directors. Urban music teachers and urban choir directors ranked ease of scheduling process higher, although those results are less steady due to the inconsistencies in their data.

This data suggests a few relevant comparisons. First, the music teachers surveyed generally do not believe the student scheduling process to be overly influential, while the fifth and sixth grade students surveyed reported that the scheduling process is impactful. Interestingly, the fifth graders in my district, who recently had gone through their first middle level scheduling process to choose sixth grade classes, believed it to be the most influential factor in their decision. Upper elementary students can sometimes feel overwhelmed by the amount of information and course options presented by the student services/guidance department in these scheduling discussions. Occasionally, these processes can also push certain areas over others, such as STEM for job opportunities or world languages for college admissions requirements. Students are pushed into certain mindsets or priorities before the music teacher has even met or worked with the rising grade of students.

Second, this data shows that both teachers and students believe elective class options are influential in boys' decisions whether or not to participate in choir. This factor is heavily related to the scheduling process. For instance, if students are offered multiple opportunities to take elective classes, they are more likely to be able to fit a music class in their schedule. If students are only allowed one elective class at a time, which happens in many districts, they are less likely to keep choosing a music ensemble each year over all other elective choices. As one choral director surveyed stated, "You can only cut the pie into so many pieces before there is nothing left." Even limiting students to one elective class in a single year of school, with more choices in

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preceding and following years, will still drive many students away from a music ensemble in favor of trying something new. They may or may not return in future years, but the consistency of learning is lost. Lastly, as research shows the need for young males to move consistently, such as Patrick Freer's recommendation to utilize high levels of physical movement and change activities every 12-13 minutes (2007), forcing essential courses such as Physical Education into elective positions disproportionately causes adolescent boys not to take a music elective. Music departments, elective teachers, student services/guidance departments, and school administrators must work together to implement a schedule that offers a variety of electives and multiple elective class openings for students to add to their schedule, rather than one elective per year.

*Geographic and Demographic Considerations.* The music teacher survey revealed interesting comparisons between rural, suburban, and urban areas of Wisconsin. Rural music teachers (n=85) reported a heightened importance on ease of the scheduling process when compared to suburban and urban teachers. As a rural teacher for 15 years, I agree and empathize with this concern. Many rural schools in Wisconsin have been experiencing a declining enrollment for some time and are forced to implement measures such as bell schedules with fewer classes, decreased flexibility, reduced number of elective offerings, or overall decline in funding resulting in reduced opportunities. Schools experiencing declining state test scores, possibly as a result of declining enrollment, may also bring changes such as required study halls or extra time in Math and English, also negatively impacting music programs. These factors can impact any elective offering, but likely disproportionately affect music programs which are often incorrectly seen as extra, costly, or lower rigor endeavors. Rural schools often heavily promote programs in the trades, STEM, Career and Technical Education (CTE), or possibly track students into related career paths, such as with the required Academic and Career Planning program



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(ACP) as early as upper elementary school. Although these programs are essential for many students and provide great opportunities, they may force students away from music or at least subconsciously steer them away from fine arts programs that may not directly apply to their possible career path.

Suburban music teachers (n=55), on the other hand, reported a heightened importance of family music experiences affecting males' motivations for choral music when compared to rural or urban music teachers. This impact could be positive when young males' parents have a music background or have participated in private music lessons. Perhaps some young males may also now have access to piano lessons or participate in church music. Suburban families may have closer access to university music opportunities than rural families. Also, suburban families may have more established community music options, such as a boy choir or youth choir in their area. In the additional comments of the music teacher survey, many suburban choral directors described the importance of an all-city, regional, collegiate invitational, or other festival that features the tenor-bass singers in their ensembles. One suburban choral director recommended "out of school opportunities to get involved in at a younger age. If they are connected out of school, they tend to connect in school or re-connect in school if they are only involved in after school activities." Suburban families' higher average income over rural and urban families may also contribute to the ability to afford and access private lessons and paid community music opportunities. This higher average income level may also afford parents/guardians increased ability to continue music as a hobby in their adult lives. However, some suburban music teachers described situations where family experiences, or lack thereof, negatively affects males' motivations. One choral director stated, "guys learn early from their parents that choir is not cool."

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As stated earlier, urban music teachers (n=34) had widely varied answers, possibly due to some user error. When instrumental music teachers were removed, urban choral directors (n=14) had slightly more consistent results. However, one interesting aspect of both sets of data was the importance given to choral repertoire when compared to rural and suburban music teachers. In Wisconsin, urban areas possess greater racial, religious, and ethnic diversity than in rural or suburban areas. Possibly, students in urban areas who are from more diverse backgrounds do not want to sing music they do not feel represented in. Many choral directors struggle with finding balance between teaching repertoire from varied periods of music history, repertoire that is more current to engage and relate to our students, and repertoire from quality, authentic sources that represent the world around us. Urban students may be more likely to feel isolated or underrepresented by eurocentric, male-dominated, sacred, or classical music that is in print and available in many school libraries. Scholars on Comprehensive Musicianship through Performance, such as Laura Sindberg and Patricia O'Toole, would agree that repertoire should be chosen that represents "diverse styles, historical periods, and cultures" (Sindberg, 2012, pg. 22). In addition, quality repertoire should contain the potential for meaningful affective outcomes and a "heart statement", which encourages students to use knowledge from their personal life to impact their understanding and performance of the music (Sindberg 2012). Another consideration of the importance of repertoire in urban schools may be that many of our urban, public schools in Wisconsin are underserved and underfunded, causing difficulty for teachers to update their choral repertoire. One urban choral director mentioned the importance of teachers' "ability to help all students connect their own personal experience with the repertoire," while another recommended "having them sing songs they want to sing, not necessarily choir literature."

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*Findings between Students and Teachers.* Another interesting implication of the data findings were the comparisons between the music teacher survey and the student survey. Although some factors were similar between both groups, such as the importance of teacher connection and peer acceptance, a few factors were rated as more significant to students than to music teacher's perceptions of students' thoughts. My fifth and sixth grade rural students surveyed (n=122) reported a higher importance of ease of scheduling process, choir repertoire, and choir performances when compared to most subgroups of the music teacher survey, including rural music teachers. Here, I believe the students' opinions are echoed by male changing voice scholars such as Patrick Freer, Drew Collins, and Martin Ashley, whose research shows the importance of choosing appropriate repertoire for changing voice boys that accommodates their limited range and encourages flexibility as voices change throughout a concert season. For instance, Collins states "there are three priorities when selecting repertoire: (1) accommodating the ranges of your current ensemble; (2) quality/appropriateness of text; and (3) variety of styles" (2012, p. 36). Students desire to feel represented by the music they perform, such as the survey data shown from urban music programs. Students also enjoy having choice in repertoire selection when appropriate, which is echoed by multiple CMP authors. As Wisconsin Music Standard MP3.R.11.m reads, students will "evaluate and critique musical performances, recordings, and compositions using appropriate music terminology and technology" (WI DPI 2017).

In addition, fifth and sixth grade males may feel uncomfortable singing or performing as their voices begin to change, or they may be more socially aware of the impact of performing in front of their peers in these years. Maybe some students disconnect from traditional K-5 general music concert formats during this time, and music teachers could consider how to engage

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students through performance differently, such as exploring low-pressure informal performances or “informances” instead of formal concerts. Scholars would also encourage teachers to help boys foster ideas of their future selves, such as by connecting them with middle and high school male singers in rehearsals, workshops, or performances. Patrick Freer writes: “Choral music teachers need to provide choral experiences for middle school boys that evoke optimal experiences in the moment while building toward definable musical goals in the future” (2009, p. 351). Perhaps, upper middle school or high school male singers would rank the importance of performances differently than my fifth and sixth graders did, and my survey is only a snippet from one school in a rural area. However, as fifth and sixth grade is typically when a boy will choose whether or not they will participate in a choir for the remainder of their middle and high school years, we must remember the importance of engaging, appropriate, flexible repertoire, fostering possible selves and choral role models, and the role of performances in these crucial upper elementary years.

Two areas consistently recognized as more influential in the music teacher survey versus the student survey were family music experiences and childhood music experiences. Similar to the music teacher survey, I believe both elements are crucial to the motivations of young males when deciding whether or not to continue singing. One factor may even compensate for the other: students who have experienced strong family music experiences at home may feel motivated toward participating in a middle school choir even if they did not feel as engaged in their general music classes. Also, students without strong family music experiences may be included, motivated, and nurtured in a quality general music program where they can see a future for themselves as members of the middle and high school choir. I believe the student survey shows an underrepresentation of these factors due to the age of the students surveyed, rather than

a discrepancy between students and teachers of what is really impactful to young males. Fifth and sixth grade students are not yet far enough removed from elementary school to be able to recognize the impact of their school music program on their motivations, nor are they quite mature enough yet to connect and recognize their family's influence on their decision-making in school. However, teachers should be aware of this inconsistency so we do not unintentionally over-recruit to our programs students who have prior music experience or those who come from families with strong music backgrounds. To do so may unintentionally isolate students without extensive prior or family music experience, particularly those from underserved areas or populations, for that student may flourish in a music ensemble once welcomed and included.

*Least Influential Factors.* Of similar interest to the highest motivating factors for young males in choral music are the findings reported as least influential factors to males' choral music motivations. First, gender of teacher/director was reported as one of the least influential factors (10th, 11th, or 12th) in nearly every major survey and subgroup, such as all music teachers, all choir directors, rural music teachers, rural choir directors, suburban music teachers, suburban choir directors, overall student survey, male students, female students, fifth graders, and sixth graders. This finding is important for lessening preconceived notions of young males primarily seeking out and responding to adult males' guidance and support, such as an athletic coach or another male teacher. Urban music teachers and urban choir directors reported a higher influence of teacher gender (6th and 3rd, respectively), but this may have been due to the inconsistency of the urban directors' data and the small sample size. Personally, I have often wished I could better model a bass clef range and help my male students navigate their voice change by appropriate modeling. The research is reassuring that the most effective teachers of middle level males are

## ADOLESCENT MALE ENGAGEMENT IN CHORAL MUSIC

not exclusively male directors. Female choral directors should not feel limited in their ability to recruit and teach successful and balanced SATB and TB ensembles.

Second, another factor that was often reported as least influential was community music opportunities. This factor was ranked in the lowest three (10th, 11th, or 12th) for all music teacher survey subgroups (all music teachers, choir directors, rural music teachers, rural choir directors, suburban music teachers, suburban choir directors, urban music teachers, and urban choir directors). Students surveyed ranked community music opportunities as 9th of 12 factors in all subgroups (all students, male students, female students, fifth graders, and sixth graders). This finding does not necessarily mean that community music opportunities are unimportant; rather, I believe community music opportunities are an underutilized opportunity in our state that should be encouraged more. Music teachers, particularly in rural and urban areas, might simply be unable to connect their students with quality community music opportunities. Perhaps most of our youth's music-making now takes place in schools, churches, and homes. Community music directors may also be difficult to access, with fewer young people going into the field of music education and K-12 teaching positions difficult to fill. In the music teacher survey, multiple Northeastern Wisconsin teachers noted the importance of the Appleton Boy Choir in positively impacting their male students' views of choral music. Other music educators from the Milwaukee area promoted the positive impact of the "Sing Out" Tenor-Bass Festival held at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Community music is an area that should be explored and encouraged more as it would benefit not only our young male students, but all who participate.

A third area that was reported as a less impactful factor was students' comfort with their own voice change. This factor was ranked typically between 6th and 9th out of the twelve factors and varied between subgroups without much consistency. I found this surprising since I was

## ADOLESCENT MALE ENGAGEMENT IN CHORAL MUSIC

interviewing many boys experiencing the beginning of voice change and teachers who were well versed in the challenges of teaching changing voices. Perhaps, some of the boys surveyed couldn't yet connect their voice change with discomfort in singing or hadn't experienced much voice change yet, particularly in fifth grade. Perhaps some of the boys who had begun voice change were not open to admitting this was an issue for them, either. Another reason this was surprising was the amount of research connecting to the importance of educating boys about their voice change and the stages of voice changes (Ashley 2009, 2021, Collins 2012, Denison 2017). However, another consideration is that comfort with singing during voice change is closely linked to repertoire, which students consistently rated as more influential. Perhaps they could identify feeling comfortable or uncomfortable with the repertoire being performed, whether their comfort level was affected by voice change or another element of the repertoire itself. Another potential result of voice change comfort is the importance of connection with the teacher/director. A choir director who can help boys navigate their changing voice by providing them with information on the voice change stages, regular range testing, appropriate repertoire and successfully implementing best practices for teaching young males will naturally empower their male singers to feel more comfortable with their voice change. These best teaching practices are aligned with the Universal Design for Learning guidelines as well, such as optimizing individual choice and autonomy, minimizing threats and distractions, and fostering collaboration and community (Glass, Meyer, & Rose 2013).

In review, the discussion above outlines five key takeaways from this study's findings. First, social-emotional learning, such as connecting with teachers and acceptance from peers, is paramount in the success of a choral ensemble with changing-voice males, just as these skills are intertwined with all aspects of adolescence. Second, teachers, administrators, and student

## ADOLESCENT MALE ENGAGEMENT IN CHORAL MUSIC

services/guidance departments should work together to provide a system of electives and a scheduling process where music ensembles are not pitted against other essential electives that may dissuade young male singers. Third, rural, suburban, and urban teachers have different considerations to make for including and motivating young males, and potentially all students in their programs. Study results highlighted the impact of repertoire selection, format of concerts, and students' prior music experiences. Fourth, students from musical families and backgrounds positively impact choirs and music programs, but teachers should be mindful of helping all students access music education at their schools. Lastly, music educators can work to integrate some of the factors ranked as least influential, such as teaching about voice change stages and helping students access (or even create) quality community music opportunities.

*Implications for the field.* This process has helped me immensely as a female choral director in a rural school with fewer males than females in my choirs. Going forward, I am learning to be more aware of incorporating voice change education and stages into my ensembles and regularly voice testing my male singers as they move through voice change. I will also work to expand community music opportunities and connect my students with other generations of singers in our community. Lastly, I feel validated that the social-emotional learning occurring each day in choir rooms is as important as any musical skill taught.

Other music teachers and professionals can benefit from this research, as well. Rural choir directors should advocate for a seat at the table with those who run the scheduling process in their districts to remove barriers for students to access their ensembles. Administrators should be encouraged to support their upper elementary and middle school music teachers, allowing them to work creatively with changing voice males and be open to non-traditional repertoire and types of performances to help male students feel comfortable and supported. Oftentimes, fifth



and sixth grade music teachers teach wide grade bands, including students as young as 4K or as old as high school seniors. More focus and support should be given to help these busy educators navigate pivotal years for adolescent males as students decide whether or not to participate in choir in future years. Furthermore, teacher education programs should recognize the differences of teaching in rural, suburban, and urban schools and seek out practicum and student teaching placements that represent not only different grade bands of music ensembles, but various geographies and demographics, as well.

For the field of music education, I hope the main takeaway of this research is the importance of supporting and connecting with our young students and showing them how to support one another. At a time in American society when social-emotional learning is sometimes misconstrued as an unnecessary or unwelcome addition to public education, these main findings are of paramount importance to young males in choral music and music education as a whole. More research should be done detailing how music teachers and choral directors can support upper elementary school males prior to their main voice change, since boys' opinions on whether or not to sing in a choir seem to form prior to their main voice change.

Throughout this document, I have described my research on the motivations and factors of engagement for fifth and sixth grade males in choral music, presented information from relevant scholarly literature, outlined my research methods and approach to analysis, reported the research findings, and described the implications of the data findings. These findings include the importance of Social-Emotional Learning, the impact of scheduling format and elective choices, considerations for choral directors in rural, suburban, and urban areas, ideas for creative repertoire and performances, and ideas for including voice change education and community music opportunities with our students.

## ADOLESCENT MALE ENGAGEMENT IN CHORAL MUSIC

Each music teacher's situation and job is unique, including our students, school structure, demographic, administrators, schedule, community support, and access to resources. Also important to remember is the diversity of music educators, including our individual past experiences, talents, and interests. This research should remind us that just as we are unique as educators, there is no one-size-fits-all solution to recruiting and motivating male students in our programs. However, doing what music educators do best- caring for our students and nurturing support among our students- is what our students carry with them throughout their day, school year, and into their future selves.

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Appendix A: Administrative Permission for Research



**NORTHLAND PINES  
SCHOOL DISTRICT**

BOARD OF EDUCATION David Weber, President  
Jennifer Payne, Vice President | Chris Petreikis, Clerk  
Erica Lane, Deputy Clerk | Becky Nordine, Treasurer  
Marcia Kittleson, Member | Kelly Roach, Member

Scott Foster, District Administrator

1800 Pleasure Island Road | Eagle River, WI 54521 | Phone (715) 479-6487 | Fax (715) 479-7633 | Web [npsd.k12.wi.us](http://npsd.k12.wi.us)

August 1, 2022

David Barry, PhD  
IRB Chair  
Associate Professor, Sociology  
2100 Main St.  
Old Main 208  
University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point & Extension  
Stevens Point, WI 54481

RE: Masters Thesis Research Study Letter of Approval – Kate Janssen  
Master of Music Education Program

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is written to you regarding Kate Janssen pertaining to her Masters Thesis Research Study titled *“Predictors of Engagement and Motivation for 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Males in Choral Music”*. The Northland Pines School District sanctions this as official research used to help the district understand what factors are most important to students who identify as male when they decide whether or not to take, or continue in, a choral music ensemble. The district understands it will receive a copy of the research and data once it is completed.

In order to complete this research, the District authorizes and designates Kate Janssen as a Northland Pines School District official in the capacity of Co-Principal Investigator helping to conduct research by serving a school district endorsed function. Kate Janssen currently works in the capacity of Director of Choral Music in the Northland Pines Middle & High School; I am certain she would be happy to provide you with her qualifications, credentials and evidence of completion of the CITI Program courses “Humanities Responsible Conduct of Research”; “Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)”; “FERPA for Researchers”; “I-Basic Course”.

Please feel free to contact me should you need any other information at [sfoster@npsd.k12.wi.us](mailto:sfoster@npsd.k12.wi.us) or by phone at 715-479-6487, Option 3, Ext. 1.

Sincerely,

Scott Foster  
District Administrator

The Northland Pines community guarantees rigor, relevance, and relationships to prepare all learners for life.  
ALL staff BELIEVE in ALL students

## Appendix B: Informed Consent Document

### Informed Consent to Participate in Human Subjects Research

#### **“Predictors of Engagement and Motivation for 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Males in Choral Music”**

Dr. Rachel Brashier, PhD, Professor of Music Education at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point (UWSP), and Mrs. Kate Janssen, NPSD Director of Choirs and Graduate Student at UWSP, would appreciate your participation in a research study designed to determine the most influential factors impacting male students' decision to participate, or not, in a choral music class as they get older. You are being asked to take a short online survey. Your participation is completely voluntary. The benefit of this study is a greater knowledge about student motivations and likes/dislikes in choosing whether or not to participate in a choral music ensemble.

We anticipate no risk as a result of your participation in this study other than the inconvenience of the time to complete the survey. While there may be no immediate benefit to you as a result of your participation in this study, it is hoped that we may gain valuable information about building a stronger choral music program where students feel comfortable, accepted, and excited to be a part of.

The quantitative data collected from surveys and interviews will be coded onto a spreadsheet using a number in place of names. We will not release any information that could identify you. All collected data will be kept on my NPSD Password-Protected Drive and will not be available to anyone not directly involved in this study. After the data is analyzed, the raw data will be destroyed so that it cannot be traced back to any names.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Your involvement in data collection for this study may be ended at any time. Once the study is completed, you may receive the results of the study. If you would like these results, or if you have any questions in the meantime, please contact:

Mrs. Kate Janssen  
Director of Choirs  
Northland Pines School District  
715-479-4473 ext. 1406  
kjanssen@npsd.k12.wi.us

Dr. Rachel Brashier  
School of Music Education  
University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point  
Stevens Point, WI 54481  
(715) 346-2227  
rbrashie@uwsp.edu

If you have any complaints about your treatment as a participant in this study or believe that you have been harmed in some way by your participation, please call or write:

Dr. Rachel Brashier  
School of Education  
University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point  
Stevens Point, WI 54481  
(715) 346-2227  
[rbrashie@uwsp.edu](mailto:rbrashie@uwsp.edu)

David Barry, PhD, IRB Chair  
Associate Professor, Sociology  
2100 Main St., Old Main 208  
University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point  
Stevens Point, WI 54481  
715.346.3799  
[irb@uwsp.edu](mailto:irb@uwsp.edu)

## **Appendix C: Minor Assent**

### **University of Wisconsin Stevens Point Assent to Participate in Research**

#### **Title of Research Study:**

“Predictors of Engagement and Motivation for 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Males in Choral Music”

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Rachel Brashier, UW-Stevens Point

**Co-Principal Investigator:** Mrs. Kate Janssen, NPSD

#### **Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?**

A research study is usually done to find a better way to treat people or to understand how things work. This research study is about what motivates kids to participate in Choir. You are being asked to take part in this research study because you are a 5th or 6th grader in Music or Choir classes, preparing to choose elective courses into middle school. Your opinions and experiences are important in, ultimately, helping make a better experience in music for all students.

#### **What should I know about a research study?**

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to do so. It is up to you if you want to participate. You can choose not to take part now and change your mind later if you want. Your decision will not be held against you. You can ask all the questions you want before you decide.

#### **Why is this research being done?**

In this study, I want to find out more about what motivates students to participate, or not participate in, choral music. I am particularly interested in what factors might impact boys and girls differently when deciding to participate in choir.

#### **How long will the research last?**

I expect that you will be in this research study for one short survey (less than 15 minutes), and possibly one interview (20 minutes).

#### **What happens if I say “Yes, I want to be in this research”?**

If it is okay with you and you agree to join this study, you will be asked to fill out a survey about what factors are important to you when deciding whether or not to participate in a choir. Six students will also be randomly selected to answer some additional questions in an interview later on.

#### **Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me?**

There is nothing bad that will happen to you although it is possible you could feel uncomfortable answering honestly. You can skip any questions you do not want to answer and you can stop at any time.

**What happens to the information collected for the research?**

Efforts will be made to limit the use of your personal information, including research study records, to people who have a need to review this information. We cannot promise complete secrecy. However, I will assign each participant a number for my work, so that they don't have their name on a spreadsheet, and I'll report your ideas from the interviews under a different made-up name, which is called a pseudonym.

**Who can I talk to?**

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, about the research, talk to the research team at [kjanssen@npsd.k12.wi.us](mailto:kjanssen@npsd.k12.wi.us) or 715-479-4473 x. 1406. This research has been reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board ("IRB"). You may talk to them at (715) 346-3799 or [irb@uwsp.edu](mailto:irb@uwsp.edu) if: your questions or concerns are not being answered by the research team; you want to talk to someone besides the research team; or you have questions about your rights as a research participant.

**Optional Elements:**

The following research activities are optional, meaning that you do not have to agree to them in order to participate in the research study. Please indicate your willingness to participate in these optional activities by placing your initials next to each activity.

**I agree**

**I disagree**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

The researcher may audio or video record me to aid with data analysis. The researcher will not share these recordings with anyone outside of the immediate study team.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

The researcher may audio or video record me for use in scholarly presentations or publications. My identity may be shared as part of this activity, although the researcher will attempt to limit such identification. I understand the risks associated with such identification.

**Signature Block for Child Assent**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of child**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Printed name of child**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Printed name of person obtaining assent**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of person obtaining assent**

## **Appendix D: Student Survey Recruitment Script**

### **Information on 2023 5th and 6th Grade Music Survey Motivations in Choral Music**

Hello! I am requesting that members of Eagle River Elementary School's 5th Grade Music Classes and 6th Grade Choir voluntarily take part in a study that I am completing as part of my thesis for my Graduate Degree in Music Education from UW- Stevens Point. In this study, I hope to learn more about what factors motivate students to participate in choir. I am curious which factors are most important to students when they decide whether or not to continue in a choral music class.

- To achieve this goal, I will conduct and collect survey data of student experiences, perceptions, and motivations from 5th and 6th graders. I will use mostly multiple choice questions with a few open-ended questions at the end. I will analyze this data in order to better understand how to proceed with the interviews for the next step.
- I will interview a small sample of 5th and 6th graders regarding their student experiences and motivating factors for choral music.
- Lastly, I will analyze/code the resulting data from the surveys and compare/contrast with the coded interview results. I will collect my findings to be presented in my thesis and at a professional music conference.

All legal guardians have been provided with a consent form that will be taken home by students if they would like to participate. Students have also been provided with a Minor Consent form so that they can feel ownership of their participation and also learn about how an ethically implemented research study is conducted. Both forms need to be signed and collected prior to a student being able to participate voluntarily. A student may withdraw from the study at any time for any reason.

If you have any questions or comments please contact:

Kate Janssen  
Director of Choirs  
715-479-4473 ext.1406  
kjanssen@npsd.k12.wi.us

## Appendix E: Music Teacher Survey Recruitment Email

Hello! My name is Katherine Janssen, a graduate student in the UWSP MME program. I am conducting research for my thesis project, "**Predictors of Engagement and Motivation for 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Males in Choral Music**". I hope to research which factors are most important to students who identify as male when they decide whether or not to take, or continue in, a choral music ensemble.

I am requesting that any music teachers (choral, instrumental, general, preservice, private teachers, retirees) voluntarily take part in a short survey as part of my research.

This short survey uses mostly multiple choice questions with a few open-ended questions at the end. I will share the results of my completed thesis, including patterns detected in this survey, with those teachers who participate.

### [Link to Survey](#)

If you have any questions or comments please contact:

Kate Janssen  
715-479-4473 ext.1406  
[kjanssen@npsd.k12.wi.us](mailto:kjanssen@npsd.k12.wi.us)

David Barry, PhD  
IRB Chair  
Associate Professor, Sociology  
2100 Main St.  
Old Main 208  
University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point and Extension  
Stevens Point, WI 54481  
715.346.3799  
[irb@uwsp.edu](mailto:irb@uwsp.edu)

Thank you for your time!  
Kate Janssen

## Appendix F: Music Teacher Survey

### Music Teacher Survey - Motivation in Upper Elementary Males

This short survey aims to collect data on Music Teachers' perceptions of what factors motivate students who identify as male to participate in Choral Music.

Email

I consent to participate in this voluntary study.

For additional information on informed consent for research, read [here](#).

Yes, continue to the study.

No

I have been teaching:

Preservice Teacher/Student Teacher/Undergrad

1-5 Years

6-10 Years

11-15 Years

16-20 Years

More than 20 Years

Retired

I primarily teach/taught:\*

Early Childhood

Elementary School

Middle School

High School

## ADOLESCENT MALE ENGAGEMENT IN CHORAL MUSIC

College/University

Private Instruction

Community Groups

Other:

I primarily teach/taught:\*

General Music

Band/Instrumental

Choir/Vocal

Orchestra/Strings

Piano

Other:

How would you best describe the size and location of your district/community?\*

Urban

Rural

Suburban

Other:

What do you believe to be the most influential factors of male students' involvement in choral music? Please rank each factors from 1 to 12 with 1 = Most Influential and 12 = Least Influential. Please choose only one factor for each ranking.

Connection with Teacher/Director

Teacher/Director's Gender

Ease of Scheduling Process

Other Elective Class Options

Peers' Perspectives/Support

Musical Experiences of Family



## ADOLESCENT MALE ENGAGEMENT IN CHORAL MUSIC

Community Music Opportunities

Comfort with Own Voice Change

Earlier Experiences in Music

Has Other Musical Skills (Band, Orchestra, Piano, etc),

Choir Repertoire

Choir Performance Opportunities

Please list any additional factors, not listed above, that you believe impact the choral music participation of students who identify as male:

Please describe any experience, event, program, or opportunity that you feel contributes positively to the motivation of males in choir in your district/city/etc.

Any additional comments or information:

**Appendix G: Student Survey**

# Student Survey - Motivation in Upper Elementary Choral Music

This form will ask you some questions about the factors that would make you more, or less, likely to participate in a Choir as you get older.

My Grade:

5th

6th

Gender:

Male

Female

What factors are most important to you when deciding whether or not to take a Choir class as you get older? Please rank these 12 factors with 1 = Most Important and 12 = Least Important.

Getting along with my choir teacher

My choir teacher's gender

Ease of sign-up/scheduling

My other elective class options

Support of my friends

Music experience in my family

Music opportunities in my community

## ADOLESCENT MALE ENGAGEMENT IN CHORAL MUSIC

Comfort with my voice change

My childhood experiences with music

My other musical skills (Band, Orchestra, Piano, etc),

The type of music we sing in choir

Types of Choir performances

What other factors (not listed above) would make you more likely to participate in Choir?

Your answer

Any Additional Comments:

## **Appendix H: Interview Questions**

### Interview Questions

\*I'm going to ask you about a number of different factors impacting your singing and music experiences. Please answer as openly and honestly as you can.

1. What have your experiences in music been like outside of school?
2. What have your experiences in music been like in school?
3. What are the musical experiences of your parents, guardians, or family members?
4. How comfortable are you singing by yourself?
  - a. With your family?
  - b. With your peers?
5. What factors are most important to you when deciding whether or not to take a Choir class as you get older?