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Student and Teacher Insights on Male Participation in High School Choral Ensembles

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ABSTRACT

There are many factors that affect male participation in high school choral ensembles such as schedule conflicts, peer pressure, social stigmas, and negative past choral experiences. The purpose of this study was to improve male recruitment and retention in high school choral groups by gathering student and teacher insights on the topic. The study surveyed males in grades 9-12 who participate in their school's vocal ensemble(s). These choral students (encompassing several schools within a single region) identified personal contributing factors to their participation in these ensembles. Multiple choral directors within this region were also interviewed to gather their methods of recruitment and retention. For the majority of students, their main motivation for participating in a choral ensemble was a genuine love for music and singing. Both students and teachers agreed that choosing relevant and engaging repertoire is important to keep male students excited about singing.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Rationale

The age old problem frequently arises in conversations with school choral directors: “There are never enough males!” This has been an ongoing trend in school, church, and community choral groups, but the researcher has personally experienced it in the high school setting and will focus on that here. Male enrollment in school choral ensembles is a relevant topic for all choral music educators regardless of years of experience. This topic can be frequently found at music education conferences, in professional journals, and in conversations between directors. Choral music educators can easily collect male retention strategies during pre-service training and throughout a career. However, the amount of existing strategies can be overwhelming. It is also difficult to know which remain effective as each school district is unique and adolescent culture is always evolving. This study will collect firsthand insight and strategies from four choral teachers, as well as gather input from male students in school choral ensembles. It will also compare previously presented strategies for male recruitment and retention in school choral groups, and equate such strategies with the teacher and student insight.

Purpose

This study aims to improve male enrollment and retention in high school choral ensembles. Extant research on this topic gives choral music educators perspective on proven effective strategies. In this study specifically, a student survey and multiple interviews with choral teachers will reveal trends of why high school males continue to participate in their school choral ensembles and how this relates to effective teacher strategies. The research synthesis,

survey, and interviews will allow choral music educators to be aware of trends with their male students today and understand how to create choral experiences that are inviting to all students.

Background

This study will survey high school males who participate in their school choral ensemble(s). Students will answer multiple choice and open ended questions concerning reasons why they participate in a school choral group. Students will also have the opportunity to share thoughts on low male enrollment, its effect on a choral ensemble, and suggestions on how to increase male enrollment in the future. The student sample for this survey will be comprised of students within the region of two counties. In addition to the student survey, four high school choral teachers within said region will be interviewed.

Expected Findings

The researcher predicts that the strongest reasons for continued male participation in a school choral group will be due to a strong community in the ensemble, positive student rapport with the school choral director, and the fact that students have other friends in the group. In the teacher interviews, the researcher expects that the directors will have a similar insight when they discuss their programs. In conversations with other music educators, the correlation between music participation and family support is frequently discussed. The researcher therefore expects the majority of students who take the survey to report that music participation is supported in their homes. A further hypothesis is that students will select a number of the multiple choice reasons why other males would want to quit their school choral ensemble. From experience, the researcher predicts that “dislike of the music chosen” and “negative relationship with the teacher/director” will receive more responses than the other options. The researcher believes that

most students will identify low male enrollment as negatively affecting an ensemble due to limiting repertoire and causing other male singers to question their involvement.

Chapter 2: Perceptions and Strategies

Definitions

For the purpose of this study, “high school” will be defined as grades 9-12, and the terms “chorus,” “choir,” and “choral ensemble/group” will all be used interchangeably. These terms may refer to non-auditioned singing groups as well as audition-based singing groups. The study will focus on high school students who identify as male. In a traditional high school level choir there are four main voice parts: soprano, alto, tenor, and bass. Most students who identify as male typically sing the tenor or bass voice part, but this is not always the case. Choirs that consist of soprano and alto voices are commonly referred to as “treble choirs” and choirs with only tenors and basses as tenor-bass choirs. Ensembles that are made up of the four main voice parts are referred to as “mixed” or “SATB” ensembles. Finally, the term “adolescent” will be synonymous with the term “teenager.”

Male Choral Participation

Elpus (2015) conducted a nationwide study, the first since Gates (1989), which showed consistent trends of male and female choral participation. From 1982-2009 across ten cohorts, data showed that choral enrollment in American high schools was typically 70% female to 30% male. This data is both helpful and perplexing. It is helpful as it provides choral teachers with a benchmark of comparison to other schools in the country. However, it is baffling that “no amount of attention paid to this issue has seemed to ‘move the needle’ on a nationwide scale, local successes notwithstanding” (Elpus, 2015, pp. 96-98). One may observe several elements to best understand this issue and make possible improvements. First of all, there are reasons why enrollment might be skewed concerning gender. Secondly, many professionals have conducted studies that gather choral singers’ perceptions of the issue. Thirdly, there are teachers’ insights

on male recruitment and retention that result from years of experience, which are beneficial to note. Each of these elements and surrounding research will be explored.

Possible Reasons for Low Male Enrollment

Adolescents encounter many struggles including peer pressure, societal expectations, as well as internal questions of who they are and who they wish to become. Singing and choir by nature require vulnerability and introspection--two ideas that do not fit into a traditional view of masculinity. Maunu (2019), when discussing how singing relates to sensitivity, states: "The problem is that young men recognize this correlation before even entering a choir room and thereby decide that because "choir equals emotion," certainly "choir must be weak" (p. 64). The typical overabundance of females in school groups is also problematic. Many schools have too many females for the mixed choir and therefore offer an additional treble ensemble. Not only is this not an effective advertisement for males to join a school choral program, but females may therefore receive more opportunities to sing in school than males (Elpus, 2015).

Additionally, there is the issue of peer pressure and bullying. Elpus and Carter (2016) conducted a study of bullying with adolescents who participated in a school music ensemble. In this study, students who participated in music or theatre ensembles were placed in the same category, compared to non-music and theatre students. The results stated that female music and theatre students were 41% more likely to be bullied in person than their non-music and theatre counterparts. Male music and theatre students faced an additional 20% risk of in person victimization than female students in music or theatre groups. Furthermore, male music and theatre students faced a significant greater risk to be cyberbullied than males not in music or theatre groups. Elpus and Carter state, "Increased perceived risk of victimization by bullying behaviors may be one systematic reason for the relative lack of males in American choral music

education” (p. 13). Elpus and Carter later note that bullying within these groups of students is “overcome by the developmental benefits of music ensemble and theatre participation in secondary schools” (p.14). Music ensembles are typically safe places where students are accepted. However, such data as outlined above and perceived bullying connected to music ensembles can easily deter students from participating (specifically males in choral groups).

Choral Singers’ Perceptions

Though the above elements make it difficult to encourage males to participate in school choral groups, it is important and helpful to consider males’ perceptions firsthand who have participated in various choirs. A commonality of choral participants (regardless of gender) is a love for singing and specifically singing in a group setting. In a case study of fourth and seventh grade students in a school choir, the majority viewed group singing as the most enjoyable part of the choir experience--more than rehearsing for a concert or performing a concert (Ehrlin, 2016). In another study, adult members of different community choirs also valued group singing above other elements of the group. They also viewed a choir’s social life as essential to their enjoyment of the group (Einarsdottir & Gudmundsdottir, 2016).

For males specifically, many have positive experiences that inspire them to continue participation in choral ensembles. Boys in elementary and middle school groups described choir as fun, a form of community, and a place that affects self-confidence. Students also believed that choir allows students to be more disciplined in their other classes (Ehrlin, 2016). For older students, males may even develop an enjoyment for singing after joining an ensemble. “High school choral singers similarly reported that they initially joined with their friends, but the motivational emphasis eventually turned toward healthy competitiveness and the development of personal musical/vocal skills” (Freer, 2014, p. 96). Even though females typically outnumber

males in choir and many of the male participants know how peers perceive their participation in a singing group, males still continue to participate. Choir offers them something that many do not wish to give up easily. One student remarked: “Yes I’ve been bullied...being part of the chorus means you’re more feminine...I go to the chorus because it doesn’t matter there” (Freer, 2014, p. 97). Students of any gender frequently find refuge in choir--from the community, from the team-centered atmosphere, and from the caring nature of their choral teacher. In a study on building community in choir and student perception of their school ensemble, individuals perceived that their choir teacher genuinely cared about them: “Each and every one of us, she knows who we are. She wants to see us succeed” (Parker, 2016, p. 9).

Participation in choirs can be a normal experience for males if it is a part of their home experience and their early school experience. Powell (2016) conducted a study about male choral students past, present, and future identities. The researcher found that males who experience music at home are more likely to participate in a school choir. One student, when talking about singing with his family, stated: “Me, my brother, my dad--that is what we do--that’s a big part of me” (p. 63). Another student who was interviewed discussed that his family “loved big choirs” and this inspired him to join his school ensemble when he was young (p. 63). Similarly, one uses past and present experiences at school to inform future decisions at school. Regarding choir, students who have had a positive experience in their school choir at a young age are more likely to continue participation as they get older (Powell, 2016). And, if choir participation is a common activity for males in school when they are young, they are more likely to keep this perception as they mature. One high school student reflected on his choral participation as a boy: ““The foundations of how to sing were laid when I was in primary school’ and because of the school culture ‘it was normal for everyone to join the band and the choir””

(p.63). A different participant (an adult male in community choir) shared, “The school I went to was a boys’ school and it was just a natural thing that there was singing” (p.63). Both family support and positive school choir experiences are ideal. However, educators can typically only have influence on the latter. By striving to create positive choral experiences for young singers, educators are shaping their students’ future musical perceptions.

It is equally important to understand males’ negative perceptions of choir or motivation for quitting. Awareness of negative experiences may allow choral teachers to prevent male students from quitting, help better recruit males in the future, and improve the narrative of low male enrollment. It is important to consider the value of male singing role models and the effect of the lack thereof. In one study, males who quit their school choir were polled as well as males who continued to participate. The majority who quit claimed to not have a male singing role model. But notably, 86% of the students who remained in choir stated that they did have one (Freer, 2014). Simply not having a role model may unfortunately add to the reason for a male to quit choir after participating for a number of years. But allowing young singers (even high school students) to be exposed to other, older males who sing, might be the inspiration that one needs to continue.

It is also significant to consider voice change for adolescent males. When young males go through puberty (in the United States this lasts from about age 8-16), the vocal mechanism is affected. Voice change itself lasts for about three to six months, but vocal instability can last anywhere from one year to three years (though three years is not typical). Generally, the male voice becomes mature and the process is mostly complete by age 15 (Ware, 1998). When a male’s voice goes through the changing process, several things happen. The entire vocal mechanism grows--the lungs expand, the vocal-folds lengthen, thyroid angling increases, and the

neck and chest are enlarged (Sataloff, Spiegel, & Emerich, 1997). As a result, a male's natural singing range becomes lower and he also experiences jumps between the head and chest registers (Ware, 1998). Information on the young male voice was first researched in the 1930s and '40s and before this, the adolescent male singer was an enigma. "Scant information was available previously, primarily because of the prevailing belief that adolescent males should simply refrain from singing while nature ran its course" (Ware, 1998, p. 266). It can be difficult for a choral teacher to know how to teach adolescent male singers in the middle school years into early high school while their voices are undergoing such a transition. However, the first steps should be to fully understand the process (thanks to current research) and to help males understand some of what is occurring. Because of the wealth of information regarding voice change that is available today, males should not be discouraged from singing during or due to this anatomical period.

Frustration or misunderstanding about one's voice change can influence male singers to stop choral participation. Freer (2014) surveyed and interviewed 85 males from England, Ireland, Greece, and Spain between the ages of 12 and 18 who participated in their school choir or had previously participated but quit. A percentage of these males stated that they considered themselves to be "unsuccessful singers" (p. 95). Each of these individuals indicated that they would have been interested in learning more about the process of voice change. One student withdrew from singing during his voice change and recalled, "A lot of boys think [voice change is] a big mystery. This is the problem. Maybe this knowledge could help, because a boy could understand that singing in a choir would be good for his voice" (p. 95). Another student shared a similar thought:

"If boys were taught to use their voice instead of just saying 'get louder, sing higher, get quieter, do this do that,' it would help a lot. Most boys who quit choir were never taught

how to do that stuff and they'll probably never sing again. Sometimes it's like the performance is more important than the person" (p. 95).

A little information regarding the change has the potential to intrigue young male singers, and also save them from possible discouragement about their voices.

Several young males also admitted feeling shame about their voice while it was changing. One student shared: "When I got to year six and my voice started cracking, my teacher took my part away when I couldn't sing the high notes. I even had it learnt by heart. So, music became something I wasn't good at anymore" (p. 98). Another choral student perceived that "boys with changing voices hindered the musical product" (p. 98). Although many young males share this perception, it is possible for shame to be avoided. In the study mentioned above, multiple male singers spoke about just wanting to be "good at what they do" and feeling "proud of their choir" (p. 99). Other students suggested that they wanted to sing repertoire that they could have success with, and that would be enjoyable for most choir members to sing. If adolescent male singers are educated about their voice change, encouraged, and given opportunities to be successful in the ensemble, they have a higher chance of continuing their participation.

Choral Educator Strategies

The full picture of male involvement in school choral groups is incomplete without choral educator input. These first hand experiences and strategies are beneficial to both novice and experienced teachers. And though every school culture and group of students differs, one can still gain insight from what other educators have learned.

Many educators have found that students wish to be cared for and to feel that they are accepted. Not only is this a natural human desire, but it translates in the choral ensemble and is applicable with any gender. Parker (2016) interviewed several Midwestern choral teachers

focusing on how each educator created and sustained community in their ensembles. One teacher described taking time to become acquainted with students on an individual and small group level. This educator referred to the students as individuals rather than a “plural body” (p. 12). Because of this mindset and care, the educator perceived that the students enjoyed the choir community. Current choir members seemed to feel a sense of belonging in the ensemble, and students outside the ensemble seemed to understand it was a group that was always open to new individuals. In an ideal situation, a choral ensemble is a place where all members feel accepted and cared for, and interested outside observers feel that they can join at any time. In such an inviting ensemble, male students might feel more eager to join and continue singing in school, and female students would certainly benefit as well.

Other choral educators have specific tactics to recruit and retain males in their groups. Luethi (2015) discusses the importance of intentionally recruiting and keeping the male singers in mind. A recruitment calendar is a place to start. One can plan for informal performances in the lower grade levels or gatherings where younger students can meet older students, and ensure that these events occur during the year. Luethi also emphasizes the importance of singing male role models for the choir members, team building within the ensemble, and rehearsals that are open to the school while students are choosing classes for the following year. Musically, it is necessary to be intentional with the male singers. “Technical exercises and repertoire that reflects their specific male abilities and vocal development help create an inclusive environment” (p. 4).

Many choral directors may be familiar with the suggestion to use sports references and comparisons in rehearsals to better engage the men. This can be effective because many adolescent males participate in and enjoy sports. And in general, the connection to one’s other

interests may make the choral setting more relatable and interesting (regardless of gender). One can easily present a choir as a “team,” similar to many sports (Parker, 2014). The team mentality allows students to feel that they are part of a community or family, which understandably attracts many to joining a sports team or other group activity such as choir. Sports analogies may be an interesting way to explain vocal warm ups, the importance of rehearsal, the role of each choir member, and a number of other components.

On the other hand, Palkki (2015) provides a unique viewpoint for engaging males in choir. Though the article is geared toward educators of tenor-bass ensembles, the mentioned strategies are applicable to any choral educator. “Choral conductor-teachers can be part of a shift that shows male students that the most important thing is to be true to themselves and not to conform blindly to antiquated stereotypes” (p. 33). The researcher argues that not all of the males in choir will fit the traditional masculine stereotype. There will be males who might struggle socially in school, be wrestling with their identity, or enjoy activities besides sports. With this in mind, Palkki gives a few suggestions to choral educators. First, one should consider the unique interests and hobbies in the ensemble. “Sports analogies could be balanced with jokes and also references to dance, film, theatre, visual art, popular music, or television shows” (p. 33). In the context of a mixed choir, this also applies to the females in the ensemble who have a range of interests and would not appreciate the exclusive use of sports analogies. Second, repertoire should model a “spectrum of masculinities” (p. 30). Whether directing a male chorus or a mixed chorus, one should choose repertoire that men can identify with, but not assume that all men only want to sing pirate songs and barbershop quartets. Third, the text of repertoire matters. “...Choral conductor-teachers should study lyrics carefully before choosing to teach them...an appropriate question becomes: what do the lyrics say about gender roles and

masculinity?” (p. 30). Lastly, choral directors should choose gender pronouns carefully, especially when discussing romantic texts (Palkki, 2015). Overall, it is important to remember that the group of males in choir is made up of individuals with different identities, personalities, and interests. Each male student should feel that his unique qualities are accepted and celebrated in the ensemble.

For decades, male participation in school choir ensembles has been much lower than female participation (Elpus, 2015). There are many elements that may contribute to this such as the perception of singing being “vulnerable” and therefore “weak” (Maunu, 2019), fear of being bullied by peers (Elpus & Carter, 2016), or males’ loss of interest during a frustrating period of voice change (Freer, 2014). Though there are several obstacles to recruiting and keeping males in school vocal ensembles, it is not a hopeless cause. Choral music educators should be aware of the strategies presented by other educators as well as recorded student input on the matter to best support the young men in their ensembles and encourage their future participation.

Chapter 3: Detail of Study and Research Findings

Overview

To best understand the issue of low male enrollment in high school choirs and add to extant research, the researcher collected current student responses via an online survey as well as current teacher responses via spoken interviews. The overall purpose of the survey was to understand reasons why males continue participating in chorus through high school and to understand their thoughts on low male enrollment. The survey was a Google Form consisting of eight questions and it was to be answered by high school males who were currently enrolled in their school choral ensemble(s). It contained multiple choice and open-ended questions, though the open-ended questions were optional. The researcher hoped to collect at least 50 responses, as it was uncertain how many students would take the time to complete it. After emailing the electronic survey to 10 choral teachers within two county regions, the teachers shared it with their male choral students and a total of 80 responses were collected between October and January. One teacher was not able to access the form, and one teacher had 25 students complete it on paper, so the researcher manually inputted those responses. The survey questions were as follows:

What is your current grade in school? (Multiple choice)

How many years have you participated in a school chorus ensemble? (Multiple choice)

Is music participation supported in your home? (Multiple choice)

What are your reasons for being in your school chorus ensemble(s)? Check ALL that apply. (Multiple choice in the form of checkboxes)

What is your PRIMARY reason for being in your school's chorus ensemble(s)? (Multiple choice)

In your experience, why may another male student want to quit participating in a chorus ensemble? Check ALL that apply. (Multiple choice in the form of checkboxes)

(If you have a small number of males in your ensemble) Does it negatively affect the group? If so, how? (Open-ended)

Any suggestions for chorus teachers to help male students feel welcome and want to keep singing in the group? (Open-ended)

The second component involved teacher interviews. Their purpose was to gather insights on recruitment and retention strategies for males in high school choral groups, as well as aspects of their programs that attracted males. Four teachers, who teach in the same two county regions as the students who were surveyed, were interviewed. One interview was conducted in person, and the other three on the phone due to time availability. The interview questions were as follows:

Tell me about your program in general.

Do you do anything to recruit males for your program?

Do you do anything to keep males in your program once they join?

What are your thoughts on your current male to female ratio in your program?

What impact does your current ratio have on your program (positive or negative)?

What do you think males might be drawn to most about your program?

Do you know of any reasons why males might typically leave the program after participating for a number of years?

Survey Findings

Out of 80 male students who completed the online survey, 15 were in ninth grade, 23 in tenth grade, 19 in eleventh grade, and 23 in twelfth grade. Concerning participation, one student had participated in a school choral group for one year or less, 31 students had participated for two to four years, 26 students had participated for five to seven years, and 18 students had

participated for more than seven years. Within this group of students, 75% of the participants answered that music was supported in their home (60 students), 18% answered that music was sometimes supported in their home (14 students), and 8% answered that it was not supported in their home (6 students). See Appendix A for survey charts.

The next few questions were multiple choice, beginning with: “What are your reasons for being in the [chorus] ensemble?” Here, students could select multiple responses. The purpose of this question was to prompt students to identify their reasons for participation, and give choral teachers an idea of what males may be drawn to about their programs. Their options were:

We get to go on fun trips

There is a close community in our ensemble(s)

I like the teacher/director

I like to sing/am interested in music

It is an easy A for my GPA

It is a nice break from academic classes in the day

My friends are in the ensemble

Other (open-ended)

The most popular response was “I like the teacher/director” (82%), followed by “It is a nice break from academic classes in the day” (80%), and “I like to sing/am interested in music” (76%). The other options received the following amount of responses: “My friends are in the ensemble” (69%), “It is an easy A for my GPA” (52%), “There is a close community in our ensemble” (41%), and “We get to go on fun trips” (24%). A small number of students (9%) wrote in their own response under “other.” These open-ended responses included:

“Need chorus to be in [select ensemble]”

“Want a good part in the musical”

“Singing is my escape from reality”

“I learn a lot of skills that help me in life”

“Music is just fun in general, sort of a therapy”

The next question asked “What is your primary reason for being in your school’s chorus ensemble(s)?” Students were given the same options as the previous question, but now they could only select one response. The purpose of this was to identify trends for males’ main reason for participating. The most popular response was “I like to sing/am interested in music” (53%). The other options were chosen much less. “I like the teacher/director” and “it is an easy A for my GPA” received 8%; “it is a nice break from academic classes in the day” was selected by 6%; “my friends are in the ensemble” was selected by 5%; and “there is a close community in our ensemble” and “we get to go on fun trips” were each selected by 1%. Some of the students who took the survey on paper left this question blank (14%). Several students chose the “other” open ended option to this question (4%) and their responses included:

“I LOVE TO SING!”

“Singing is my escape from reality.”

“Music is a powerful form of art that can touch a primal sense in our brains, and can bring anyone together.”

The following question was: “In your experience, why may another male student want to quit participating in a chorus ensemble?” The researcher intended to gather possible negative perceptions or experiences in choral ensembles from this question. Students could select multiple responses out of the following options:

Negative relationship with the teacher/director

Pressure from friends not to participate

Pressure from family not to participate

Pressure from coaches or other teachers not to participate

Having difficulty singing as his voice is changing

Dislike of the music chosen

Dislike of having to read music

Other (open-ended)

Each option was chosen at least once, and the most popular response was “dislike of the music chosen,” selected by 65% of participants. Other popular responses were “pressure from friends not to participate” (53%) and “having difficulty singing as his voice is changing” (51%). The remaining responses were as follows: “dislike of having to read music” (46%); “negative relationship with the teacher/director” (36%); “pressure from coaches or other teachers not to participate” (22%); and “pressure from family not to participate” (18%). Several students (16%) chose the open-ended “other” option, and there were a few common themes in their responses: students not being interested in singing and/or music (7%), there being a negative social stigma with singing (3%), and that students just joined for the credit or their GPA (3%). Other open-ended responses were:

“It’s hard to sing extremely high and still blend.”

“Just did it for the credit”

“Starts to fail the class because he isn’t doing anything”

The following question was open-end and asked, “(If you have a small number of males in your ensemble) Does it negatively affect the group? If so, how?” The purpose of this question was to gather students’ perspectives on low male enrollment in their own ensembles. The open-

ended nature of the question allowed students to elaborate more on their individual opinions with the topic. It was not a required question, as the researcher assumed that some students may not have a small number of males in their ensemble or think that the male to female ratio affects the group. Out of the 80 participants, 66 responded to this question. Most responses fell to the “yes it negatively affects the group” (28 responses) or “no it does not negatively affect the group” (24). The remaining 14 responses stated opinions such as “it depends” or acknowledging both yes and no. For example, one response that did not fall strictly in the “yes” or “no” category was: “The number of males in our ensemble is pretty healthy, but through other ensembles I can see what a lack of male singers can do...”

With the first open-ended question, most responses clearly stated “yes” or “no.” Of the 24 responses that answered some form of “no it does not negatively affect the group,” there was a variety in the explanations. A few students simply wrote “no” and did not elaborate, but most responses were more detailed. Multiple students supported their answer by explaining that their ensemble has an adequate number of males so therefore does not have an issue. Other responses had a variety of explanations. One student wrote, “No because it makes [males] work harder to be good,” and another stated, “I’d say no because it makes the small amount of males stand out.” Further “no” responses included:

“No, because it just makes sure that you know the music.”

“No, we’re all fairly strong singers”

“No because you can teach them how to sing out...”

“No, the group usually adapts and creates an appropriate sound per the amount of people. (More from the males, less from the females.)”

Of the 28 responses that stated “yes it negatively affects the group,” some only stated “yes” but most were more detailed. There were a few common responses such as discouraging males in the group from singing loudly, affecting the music that an ensemble can work on, creating an imbalanced sound, and forcing students in the group to sing a voice part that is out of their comfort level or ability. Some of the “yes” responses included:

“Yes, as the males provide a nice background to most pieces of music with the low notes. Without males, the music would feel a little bland.”

“Yes; the group rarely hits the right notes.”

“Yes! Small male groups can hold their own very well in an ensemble, but that’s only if they participate fully. Small sections can lead to people not wanting to sing because they might be heard too clearly.”

“Yes, not a lot of people singing and we are overpowered by the girls.”

“Yes. As I have experienced in a choir group of 3 baritones, our parts just sounded horrible compared to the other voice parts.”

The second open-ended question and final question of the survey was, “[Do you have] any suggestions for chorus teachers to help male students feel welcome and want to keep singing in the group?” The purpose of this question was to give participants the opportunity to share their thoughts on improving male enrollment in high school choral groups. As high school chorus students, most of the participants have sung in a school ensemble for multiple years and have experienced males leaving the group for various reasons. Their responses could affirm the existing research on this issue, or present new suggestions that might be beneficial to choral educators. This question was not required as the researcher assumed some students would not have any suggestions. There were 56 students who answered this question, and most of the

responses could be organized into four common ideas: repertoire, encouragement, male friends/role models, and interactions.

Of the responses that mentioned repertoire, students suggested that choral music should be “more recent,” “more upbeat,” and in an “appropriate range.” One student proposed allowing males to have more of a choice in the ensemble’s repertoire, and two students suggested including more tenor-bass songs that would feature the male section.

There were multiple ideas with the responses which involved encouragement. One student wrote:

“Reassure that this is not professional, that it is okay to make mistakes especially if your voice is changing and/or cracking. I would make my male students feel welcomed by telling them if they are interested in singing, strengthening their voice, or if they love music in general then please stay so [they] can have a place to feel welcomed and not judged.”

Other responses mentioned “being nice,” giving a “warm welcome, stressing that “everyone matters,” “voice cracking is completely normal,” and that “singing can be for anyone.”

Additionally, one student wrote, “Make an extra effort to make choir the “better” place to be. Lots of stuff that makes guys leave is happening outside of choir...”

Multiple students discussed the importance of male friends and role models. One student wrote, “Make sure the basses and tenors are well connected with each other;” another student suggested to “have older male students be there for the new ones;” and, one student wrote: “try to introduce [male students] to other male chorus students. Try to make them feel comfortable and welcomed.” One student elaborated on this idea:

“It is all about friends. As long as you have other male friends in chorus, chances are you stay in it. When a guy is the only guy in that group it is where things start to fall apart for him socially. Singing isn't considered cool and when you are having to lone wolf it in the class it can dampen your mood.”

Lastly, many students suggested how to best interact with the male students in the ensemble. Some students suggested the manner in which teachers work with male singers such as “finding their specific voice [range]” and singing “slow for them so they can understand.” One student discussed the importance of meeting “one on one if a student is not getting a piece.” Others wrote about concern for a student’s individual person rather than just the music part. One student said: “listen to what he’s saying,” and another wrote “reach out to a student who seems off.” Finally, one individual shared “our teacher is more of a friend to us and makes us feel welcome and ready to sing.”

Interview Findings

Four teachers were interviewed for this study, and each teacher taught within the two county regions of the survey participants. Mr. A. has taught in his current high school for almost four years, and had taught in another school previously. His program offers three choral groups: a mixed group for ninth and tenth grade students (males make up 15% of the participants), a concert choir for tenth to twelfth grade students (41% males), and a smaller audition based ensemble (50% males). Mr. B. has taught in his current high school for almost 21 years and had taught in another school previously. He directs a mixed choir composed of ninth to twelfth grade students (33% males) as well as a smaller audition based ensemble (30% males). Ms. C. has taught in her current district for 13 years and previously taught in another school. Her program offers three SATB choirs: an entry level group (14% males), a mid-level group open to students

by director's recommendation (50% males), and an auditioned modern a cappella ensemble (47% males). Ms. D. has taught in her current district for 27 years and teaches seventh to twelfth grade. Her high school choral program consists of a ninth to twelfth grade choir (39% males) and a select audition based choir (45% males). See Appendix B for interview summaries.

Each interview was unique as all four teachers discussed different facets of their choral programs and intentionality with the male students in those programs. But, there were also many commonalities between these educators. First of all, the choral offerings were fairly similar in each school. Each program offered at least an open ensemble (that anyone can participate in) and a select ensemble for which students must audition. Each teacher discussed a small tenor section or lack of a tenor section in at least one of their groups, narrowing what music the group can sing or preventing those students from wanting to sing confidently. All four teachers received the same questions concerning recruitment, retention, and reasons that male students may leave, and many of these responses involved common themes.

Recruitment

When asked about recruitment, Ms. D. and Mr. B. both discussed exposing male singers to other male singers. Ms. D's select ensemble has the tradition of performing for the younger schools in the district each December. She explained that this is especially important for the middle school students to experience before they transition to the high school. Mr. B. shared a similar thought that males' participation is more dependent on peer presence than it is with females. He stated, "Upperclassmen guys are the best influence for the younger ones."

Mr. B. and Ms. C. each shared how they go out of their way to interact with male students who are not in their ensembles. Mr. B. mentioned visiting the cafeteria occasionally and talking with students there. He sometimes even talks with male students who had taken chorus

in the past, and jokingly teases them. He has created a rapport with male and female students in the school that allows this to be normal and enjoyed by students (even if they are not currently enrolled in chorus). Ms. C. has also used the cafeteria for recruitment. When her choral groups have a bake sale type fundraiser, she takes the leftovers to the cafeteria. She finds groups of students she knows who are around students she does not know. After sharing the baked goods, she introduces herself to the others and starts a dialogue about possibly joining a choral group. Ms. C. has taken this a step further and started an informal club for any males interested in singing. After school, the men sing a tenor bass arrangement for 30 minutes and once they're finished, they can eat doughnuts that she has purchased. Ms. C. described how this has been an effective recruitment tool: "It became this fraternal thing...It was all about the friendship and finding joy in togetherness."

Retention

All four teachers discussed appropriate repertoire as a way to encourage males to continue participating in their choral ensembles. Mr. A. talked about the importance of fun and engaging music choices specifically for his ninth and tenth grade ensemble. He has witnessed males join this ensemble to fulfill a music credit, but continue participating after the credit has been fulfilled because they enjoyed the experience. Mr. B. mentioned "throwing them some bones" and giving his male students some "dude music" (music that they find relevant and exciting).

On a different topic, three of the teachers talked about sports in relation to their male students. Ms. D said that choral teachers should not have a "sports or music mentality." Her school has had a healthy number of males in the choral program and she thought it was because students can comfortably participate in both sports and music. Both Mr. B. and Ms. C shared

how they attend their students' games and use this as another way to connect with these individuals. Mr. B. also added that being at odds with the sports departments seems to hurt programs and he is intentional about showing his support there.

All of the teachers discussed making connections with their male students and being positive and encouraging to them. Mr. A. talked about not always sending a "troublemaker" to the principal's office, hoping to make a positive connection with him. Ms. D. shared that she is positive and encouraging to all of her students, but is especially intentional with the younger males first beginning in her program. Mr. B. talked about making connections with his students concerning their hobbies and interests, and doing this strictly with recruitment in mind. Ms. C. discussed having a "welcoming vibe." She added, "They have their own little corner of the building where they can go and be themselves...and I'm not sure they really feel that way outside the music wing...Once they're there, they're there forever."

Reasons for Leaving

The four teachers were asked to share their thoughts on why males might choose to leave their choir program. Both Ms. D. and Ms. C. explained how many or most of their high school males end up staying in the program once they join. Ms. D. added, along with Mr. B., that scheduling is a common factor in males not continuing to participate in a choral ensemble. They both also mentioned a vocational and instructional program, common in this region, where students may take classes and receive training (separate from their school campus). Because this involves students not being present in their regular campus for the full school day, it prohibits some individuals from participating in chorus classes.

Two teachers also discussed negative perceptions of singing. Mr. A. talked about students possibly leaving the program because of the idea that singing is feminine. Ms. C. also

mentioned this perception. However, she talked about it as being an outside perspective. She discussed how her male students understand the fallacy in that negative perception once they join her ensemble(s).

Both student survey responses and teacher interview responses have added to the larger picture of male enrollment in high school choral groups. Trends within both groups will hopefully allow choral educators to best encourage and support the males in their ensembles.

Chapter 4: Summary and Conclusion

Summary

The goal of this study was to improve male enrollment and retention in high school choral ensembles by understanding student perspectives and effective teacher strategies. To best understand both groups, an online survey was sent to high school male students who currently participated in their school choral ensembles(s), and interview discussions were held with current high school choral teachers to gather their insight. Eighty high school students completed the survey and four teachers participated in the interviews. Both student and teacher responses, among other topics, discussed the importance of choosing relevant and engaging repertoire for the ensemble, allowing male singers to be influenced by other male singers, and fostering a welcoming environment in the group.

Discussion

In the student survey, participants could first select multiple options behind the motivation in singing with their choral ensemble. In this case, the most popular response was “I like the teacher/director.” In the following question, students were given the same multiple choice options but could only select one response. For this question, the most popular selection was “I like to sing/am interested in music.” These results signify that student-teacher rapport plays an important role in students’ motive to join and continue participating in a choral group. And, a majority of students choosing to sing in their school choirs are there because they simply like to sing or enjoy music.

Out of the survey participants, 75% answered that music participation was supported in their home, 18% answered that it was sometimes supported, and only 8% answered that it was not supported. This aligns with previous research, that music participation or support at home

allows it to be a natural part of one's school experience (Powell 2016). This may be a frustrating idea in the topic of recruiting and retaining males in choral groups, because it is a factor in which choral educators have no control. However, this can also serve as a valuable reminder that only so much can be done to improve the issue. Many choral teachers work tirelessly, thinking of new creative ways to boost male participation in their groups. There is significance in intentionally recruiting, but there is also value in appreciating the male students who are present and striving to encourage them.

The four teachers who participated in the interview discussion were all choral educators with multiple years of experience in the field. While each teacher had at least one ensemble with the typical percentage of males (30%), several had a much higher percentage. This signified that the teachers had developed effective strategies for male recruitment and retention in their choral programs. There were a few topics that were discussed by both the teachers in their interviews and by the students in the open-ended portion of the survey. First was the topic of allowing male singers to be connected with other male singers. Multiple student responses discussed connecting newer males with older ones in the ensemble, and two teachers echoed this thought in the interviews. Secondly, students and teachers both discussed the importance of a welcoming, encouraging environment to support the males in the ensemble. Most choral educators foster such an environment instinctively, but it is important to be intentional about communicating that all students are welcome and accepted. Thirdly, the matter of choosing engaging and relevant repertoire proved to be important in the students' perspectives as well as the teachers' shared strategies. When students were faced with the multiple choice question, "why may another male student want to quit after participating in a chorus ensemble?" the majority chose the option "dislike of the music chosen." This opinion was also affirmed in the final open-ended question

when students could give teachers suggestions for improving male enrollment. Several suggestions involved choosing music that is “more recent” or “more upbeat.” All four teachers also discussed relevant music selections when talking about keeping male singers in their programs. From this data, one may view repertoire choice as an important decision when considering the males in the ensemble. Of course, a healthy program needs a balanced selection of pieces, but it would be beneficial to learn what the male students are interested in singing and incorporating such pieces each concert or year.

When students were asked about other males wanting to leave a chorus ensemble, there were notably several other popular responses (besides dislike of the music chosen). Other popular responses were “pressure from friends not to participate,” “having difficulty singing as his voice is changing,” and “dislike of having to read music.”

Peer pressure is a reality in high school and, as found in previous research, there can be a negative stigma for males who choose to participate in music ensembles, especially choir (Elpus, 2016). Equally important to note, students selected “pressure from coaches/teachers to quit” and “pressure from family to quit” much less than “pressure from friends.” Choral educators should be aware that much of the pressure to leave a choral ensemble (or not join in the first place) will come from peers rather than other sources. The next popular response, concerning difficulty with voice change, is another common hindrance for young men. As discussed in the teacher interviews and student open-ended responses, one suggestion for this issue is to connect younger male singers with older male singers. A balance of this tactic along with educating men about their voice change (Freer, 2014) could improve the discouragement that accompanies it. The other popular response, “dislike of having to read music,” is more difficult to avoid. Learning music theory and practicing sight reading can be tedious and may deter any student who enjoys

singing but does not care for the academic demands of an ensemble. When combined with other negative factors that male students experience, this could be a deciding factor in making them quit. Choral educators should simply be aware of this opinion and attempt to make the academic portions as engaging as possible. Just as it would be foolish to program only “fun and upbeat” songs, it would not be sensible to abandon skills such as sight reading.

Toward the end of the survey, students were asked “(If you have a small number of males in your ensemble) Does it negatively affect the group? If so, how?” The responses were fairly evenly split between “yes it negatively affects the group” and “no it does not negatively affect the group.” The “yes” responses aligned with some of the thoughts that teachers shared in the interviews. For example, smaller sections of males can hinder them from being confident and singing their parts loudly enough. The “no” responses were interesting because they were more unexpected. Students answered that a smaller amount of males in the ensemble can challenge them to work harder, know their music better, and listen more carefully to their part in the overall balance. Of course, it would be ideal to have ensembles where men make up 50% of the total. But when this is not the case (as it typically is not), it is encouraging to know that the males present can accept the task of working harder and possibly even enjoy the challenge.

Conclusion

The researcher’s expected findings for this study matched some of the study’s results, but not all. Students did not choose “there is a close community in our ensemble(s)” nearly as much as expected when asked why they participated in a choral group. But many did choose “I like the teacher/director” for this question as predicted. Other aligned results were the correlation between music participation and music being supported at home, as well as dislike for chosen repertoire being a reason for males to quit. Contrarily, having a negative relationship with the

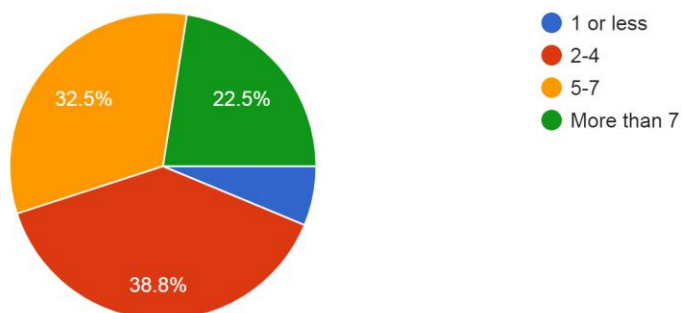
teacher was not a popular response for males wanting to quit as the researcher anticipated. Most surprising, however, was that about half of the student participants did not think low male enrollment negatively affected their ensemble.

Choral educators can use the findings of this study to understand effective recruitment strategies, to better serve the males in their program, and to gain a healthy perspective on the issue of low male enrollment. Each male student is unique in his interests and personality. It is possible that no one strategy will increase male enrollment drastically in a choral program. However, choral teachers should remain intentional about male enrollment and retention, as many males enter their ensembles with doubts or insecurity and will most likely need more encouragement than female students. Choral educators should not be discouraged when their ensembles are not 50% males, or even if a group drops below the average 30%. There are many factors that affect male participation such as home support, peer pressure, scheduling conflicts, and discouragement from past choral experiences. A reality is that many of the men in one's choral ensemble are there because they love to sing. Educators should always remember to cherish those who are present, striving to affirm, encourage, challenge, and inspire them in any way they are able.

Appendix A: Survey Responses

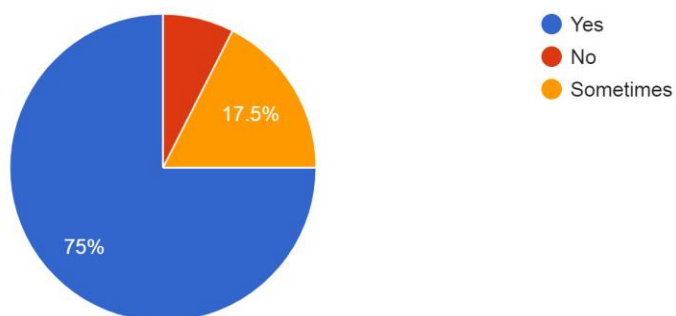
How many years have you participated in a school chorus ensemble?

80 responses



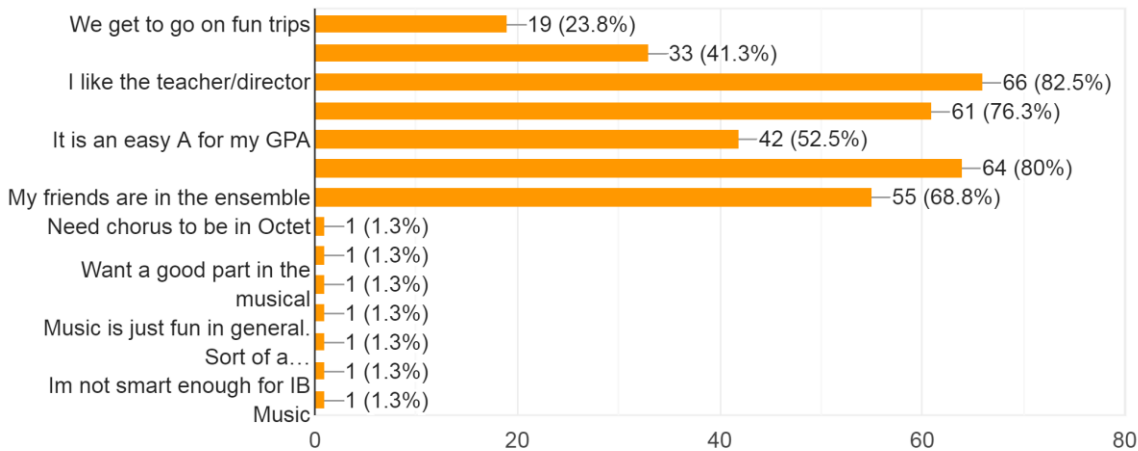
Is music participation supported in your home?

80 responses



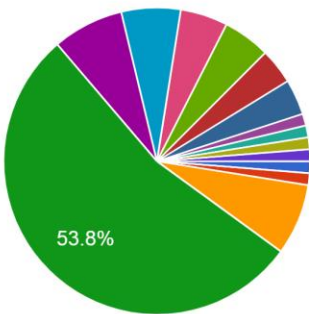
What are your reasons for being in your school chorus ensemble(s)? Check ALL that apply.

80 responses



What is your PRIMARY reason for being in your school's chorus ensemble(s)?

80 responses



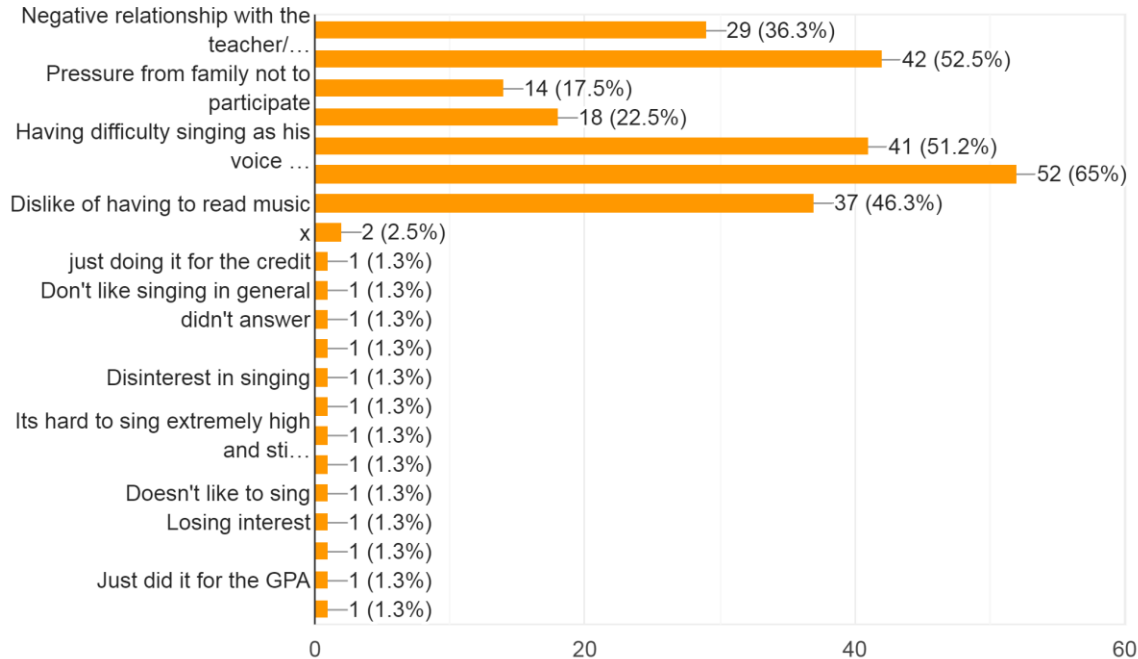
- We get to go on fun trips
 - There is a close community in our ens...
 - I like the teacher/director
 - I like to sing/am interested in music
 - It is an easy A for my GPA
 - It is a nice break from academic class...
 - My friends are in the ensemble
 - paper
- ▲ 1/2 ▼

- x
- paper
- didn't answer
- Music is a powerful form of art that can touch a primal sense in our brains, and can bring anyone together.
- Singing is my escape from reality
- I LOVE TO SING!!!!

▲ 2/2 ▼

In your experience, why may another male student want to quit participating in a chorus ensemble? Check ALL that apply.

80 responses



(If you have a small number of males in your ensemble) Does it negatively affect the group?

If so, how? 67 responses

No

no

It depends if they want to try or not

No, were all fairly strong singers

yes sometimes

No because you can teach them how to sing out and teach them the right ways of singing.

No, the group usually adapts and creates an appropriate sound per the amount of people. (More from the males less from the females.)

yes because few girls are able to or want to sing tenor base and is makes fewer people have to sing louder and often more numbers also increases confidence because it's easier to hold a part in a larger group of people singing the same part as you

More basses would be advantageous to hold down the baselines. Tenors, on the other hand tend to have amazing harmonies that really complete a chord. Sometimes this is hard to hear and our tenors need to really try to bring it out

No because we all still sing and get the work done

no, not if each male does his part and sings well

Not necessarily. However, when not everyone sings it puts those of us that do at a disadvantage

No we have enough people

The number of males in our ensembles is pretty healthy, but through other ensembles I can see what a lack of male singers can do, which is a shame because a male element brings a warm tone to counter the screaming high melodies of the ladies.

I don't believe it does, as long as there are enough to hear each other.

Yes because some people don't sing and when someone scream sings you can hear them so easy.

No, we have enough guys

When there is a smaller amount of males in the choir, who are typically tenors or basses, it can make those voice parts difficult to hear and negatively affect the choir

Yes, there aren't many low voices to balance the chorus

Yes, not a lot of people singing and we are overpowered by the girls

no, unless some of them are just singing one low note that is very low the whole time without trying to change to be where the notes are

yes, because it is a little weird to sing when you're in a small voice group

In my opinion, it can negatively affect the ensemble because there won't be enough deep male voices to contrast from higher female voices. However, I don't think it will always negatively affect the group.

We have a small number of males in chorus and the select vocal ensemble. It negatively affects at times because there are so little of us to keep our voice part up.

Yes, stage fright

It does not negatively affect the group. We are still able to be heard.

I don't think it does

In our group we make it work well when there's a smaller group of males but it requires us to sing at our best always.

Not really

It can affect the sound but not the spirit

It doesn't negatively affect, we are good group of guys.

Not if everyone is having fun and likes to sing!

Yes, as the males provide a nice background to most pieces of music with the low notes. Without males, the music would feel a little bland.

No it doesn't

Yes hard to hear us

Yes. At our school we lack a large number of male chorus members. This throws off the balance of the chorus

I don't think personally we have a small number

We have a fairly sized base/tenor section

I don't know

It depends on who they are. If you have a small group of male singers that can be very powerful, and a whole chorus that can adapt to keep the balance, then no problem, but if you don't, it most definitely will weaken your chorus

No, because it just makes sure that you know the music.

Yes because the bass part is barely heard

Yes, it's hard for people to sound good. more people the better it sounds

No, it would only be bad if they don't sing

No because it makes us work harder to be good

I think so

Yes, it throws off the balance.

Yes; the group rarely hits the right notes.

No not really

NA

We are not as loud

Yes. As I have experienced in a choir group of 3 baritones, our parts just sounded horrible compared to the other voice parts.

No, most of them don't sing

It's hard when no one wants to participate

Yes, because it makes guys less comfortable to sing out more which in return makes them all tend to lean more on the quite side.

Need to pun people outside their voice part

I'd say no because it makes the small amount of males stand out

Yes! Small male groups can hold their own very well in an ensemble, but that's only if they participate fully. Small sections can lead to people not wanting to sing because they might be heard too clearly.

Pitches too high

No, balance is harder to find but I think that the male and female parts don't negatively affect the group.

Any suggestions for chorus teachers to help male students feel welcome and want to keep singing in the group? 59 responses

Encourage them and tell them they can be good

Pick a few newer more relevant pieces that kids can relate to, on top of our other literature

Have fun sing cool music

Chorus songs that are more in a vocal range that's comfortable for a lower voice

To interact with them

Find their specific voice, and help them work on a genre that they enjoy singing. From there they can develop a sense for many genres and types of music.

well our chorus teacher is very nice so I'm not sure if there are much more to do maybe use more popular song that they know and would like to sing.

Pick some fun, familiar songs that can push guys into enjoying music

Just keep on doing what you're doing and don't stop believing

sing slowly for them so they can understand

associate with students

The guys only song we did last year was really cool and fun, and made me appreciate chorus more warm welcome

Encourage them, mostly. Obviously a director has to help them along occasionally to produce a good sound, although it's important to stress that everyone matters, even the guys who may not think that they contribute to a collective sound.

Nah I can't think of any.

Encourage them with signing higher.

understand people have other commitments other than chorus

If the student is struggling with a piece, the teacher should meet privately and help him out with understanding the piece.

Picking better songs

It is all about friends as long as you have other male friends in chorus chances are you stay in it. When a guy is the only guy in that group it is where things start to fall apart for him socially. Singing isn't considered cool and when you are having to lone wolf it in the class it can dampen your mood.

Sing more with them and make their part feel necessary (My teacher is doing really well so far.)

Our choir teacher is more of our friend to us, and it makes us feel welcome and ready to sing each class!

Nope just sing

not that I can think of

Reassure that this is not professional, that it is okay to make mistakes especially if your voice is changing and/or cracking. I would make my male students feel welcomed by telling them if they are interested in singing, strengthening their voice, or if they love music in general then please stay so you can have a place to feel welcomed and not judged.

Explain to them that voice cracking is completely normal. From experience, when you get your first voice crack, it's mortifying. Support can help this transition a lot.

Tell them how much fun it is

Make sure the basses and tenors are well connected with each other

If anything looks off about someone or not how they usually are, reach out to them.

More upbeat songs maybe?

No suggestions.

songs that have more bass parts and are a little more deep/slow/cool

Maybe let them choose the music based off of what they feel comfortable singing.

To help them understand and make use of their changing voices and to provide music that is more enjoyable.

Have more modern songs

Get kids started with music earlier and don't make taking chorus feel like a burden or that it has to be done

Very low bass songs lol

Listen to what he's saying

Fun songs

You could allow the entire chorus to pick at least 1 piece that we sing, so we have some influence in the chorus of what we sing.

Not really, I think that there's not much more a teacher could do that they wouldn't already be doing.

sing some only guy songs

Maybe better songs more modern day song

No not really, no one leaves

Be nice

let them sing in deeper voice

Appropriately assigning voice parts and call out other guys in the chorus who are making mistakes (such as singing down the octave) to avoid frustration.

Going over both bass and tenor parts.

Try to introduce themselves to other male chorus students. Try to make them feel comfortable and welcomed.

Be positive always, dancing with vocal warmups is fun, and it puts people out of their comfort zones, and strengthens the choir as a family.

Don't select songs with high notes

Pick song that need lower voices

Not too sure... but I recommend getting males into singing at a young age someway, somehow.

Make an extra effort to make choir the “better” place to be. Lots a stuff that makes guys leave is happening outside of choir. Sometimes however things are unavoidable.

Pick songs that are good

Not much you can really do but show people the singing can be for anyone

Have older male students be there for the new ones

I haven't had any poor experiences with chorus teachers. However, I think it's good to always emphasize trying things even if they might be a little out of range or difficult.

Have lower parts of song

Appendix B: Interview Responses

Mr. A.

- 1. Tell me about your program in general.**
 - a. We have a 9th and 10th -mixed group (entry level)
 - b. Concert choir - 10th-12th grade (and you can't be in it your first year in choir unless you're also in band or orchestra)
 - c. Madrigals - audition based group
- 2. Do you do anything to recruit males for your program?**
 - a. Not, but I should start. There are 6 guys in total in our mixed chorus
- 3. Do you do anything to keep males in your program once they join?**
 - a. If a 9th grade boy joins choir to get credit, I try to pick music they'll enjoy
 - i. Some will stay even if they just take it for credit in the first year
 - ii. I try to make it fun for them
 - iii. You also need to make a connection with them
 - iv. If there is a troublemaker, I don't always just send them to the office
- 4. What are your thoughts on your current male to female ratio in your program? What impact does it have (positive or negative)?**
 - i. The mixed choir is suffering (This year, we're only singing SAB music).
 - ii. For some, this is their first year in choir
 - iii. In Concert Choir, there are 20 guys and a better balance
- 5. What do you think males might be drawn to most about your program?**
 - a. Many audition for Madrigals because they can tour
 - b. Others do it to get vocal training for the musical
- 6. Do you know of any reasons why males might typically leave the program after participating for a period of time?**
 - a. There can be a perception that being in choir is feminine or gay

Mr. B.

- 1. Tell me about your program in general.**
 - a. I have two high school choruses
 - i. Senior high, which is 9th-12th grade
 - ii. And Master singers (an auditioned group of about 16 students)
- 2. Do you do anything to recruit males for your program?**
 - a. Yes, but I don't work real hard
 - b. During lunch periods, I sometimes go to the cafeteria and chat with kids. I even tease students that didn't continue in chorus.
 - c. I approach guys and talk, and ask if they sing. I'll tell them to try it if they haven't
- 3. Do you do anything to keep males in your program once they join?**
 - a. I'm a dude and that helps to build rapport
 - b. I love sports and am not at odds with the sports department. That seems to hurt programs.
 - c. We've talked about in balance with this in the newspaper

- d. I'm also an outdoor person, like to hunt and fish which is important for [my town]
 - e. I get to their games and root for them and congratulate them on great plays. This is really a connection that's not about recruiting
 - f. Relating to them is important
- 4. What are your thoughts on your current male to female ratio in your program? What impact does it have (positive or negative)?**
- i. In high school, I have 33% boys (and very few tenors)
 - ii. There are 45% boys in junior high
 - 1. I also sway my general music kids toward chorus
 - iii. It's toughest to recruit guys for the musicals
 - iv. One impact is that the population is falling. But right now, 25% or more of students are in chorus
 - 1. The more dudes you get, the more bad singing you get
 - 2. It's better to have more guys (like we do)
 - 3. I lost a lot to [a career and technical school] (15%)
 - 4. Overall, the more kids involved is positive (but you might do lower levels of music--no level 6s for example, just level 1, 2, and 3)
- 5. What do you think males might be drawn to most about your program?**
- a. We have a reputation, and this is passed down
 - b. Many join to fulfill credit or an easy grade
 - c. Upperclassmen guys are the best influence for the younger ones
 - i. For guys up to seniors, the younger guys are looking to have other guys there with them
 - ii. For guys, joining and staying is more dependent on peer presence than with girls
- 6. Do you know of any reasons why males might typically leave the program after participating for a period of time?**
- a. Scheduling direction- [career and technical school] for example
 - b. Sometimes it's a negative attitude toward singing. You just have to let them go
 - c. A teacher should do music to tweak their testosterone
 - i. You gotta throw them some bones (some dude music)
 - ii. Don't emphasize too much of the feminine music-- many will be turned off
 - iii. The same with shows -never do things like Mamma Mia or Annie
 - iv. Another recruiting tool... pretty girls. But guys won't embarrass themselves

Ms. C.

- 1. Tell me about your program in general.**
- a. We have for 9th-12th grade, 3 curricular choirs. A foundations level that is open to any interested student, a mid-level ensemble that is open by director's recommendation (both are SATB), and then we have a select contemporary a cappella ensemble (about 15 students)

2. Do you do anything to recruit males for your program?

- a. It's kind of strange, but when we have a bake sale (like for a fundraiser) I take what we haven't sold, go into the cafeteria, and find kids that I know sitting with kids I don't know and give them the baked goods.
- b. And, a couple years ago we had an afterschool informal club. We called it dudes and doughnuts. I'd bring doughnuts to school and they'd sing TTB songs that were fun. The deal was, when they were done singing for 30 minutes they could eat all the doughnuts. We also didn't allow any girls in the room. There was a totally new dynamic with these guys.
 - i. It became this fraternal thing. It was all about the friendship and finding joy in togetherness.
 - ii. ...And they loved the doughnuts
 - iii. I've had several young men join chorus out of the blue because I've had a connection with them.
 - iv. For others, I say that you're always welcome to come and check it out and see if it's something you'd like to do

3. Do you do anything to keep males in your program once they join?

- a. One thing is about the repertoire that I select
 - i. I like to have a healthy choral diet in all my ensembles
 - ii. I've found that they're not usually a fan of the lyrical pieces or the ballads, or even some of the show tune selections
 - iii. I try to balance with things like the multicultural pieces that are a little more bombastic and in your face
 - iv. I try to always have that one hook piece that will resonate with them
- b. The other thing is that I try to stay up on sports. It helps that I love the NFL, but I'll also listen to sports radio on the way to school in the morning and throw in topics like that to my tenors and basses in class

4. What are your thoughts on your current male to female ratio in your program?

- a. It's a mixed bag
- b. With the select ensemble, the balance is perfect
- c. The mid-level group, the balance is wonderful. There are 46 students and 23 are guys which is half
- d. With the foundations, it's a lot different. Last year I had 80 students there and only 5 were tenors and basses. This year I have 63 total and there are 9 guys.
- e. One thing is the 8th to 9th grade transition and students don't always know who I am.
- f. I have many students who would say that they identify as a bass, but their voices are actually higher. I've made an attempt to make sure they are singing what they are comfortable singing. This is something that there's not a lot of literature out about right now.
- g. When there's a small number of tenors and basses, they get really insecure. I go out of my way not to isolate those sections because of this. There is safety in numbers at this developmental age
 - i. At concerts, all of the sudden they sing out
 - ii. But it's hard for assessments because they get so withdrawn

- h. I've thought, should I just have a treble chorus instead of the foundations chorus? I wrestle with that.
 - i. One other thing is that the groups meet every day as one group but the select group meets every other day
- 5. What do you think males might be drawn to most about your program?**
- a. It's something that I don't stop to think about
 - b. I think they like to be pushed and the performance component
 - c. The atmosphere in general too... I strive to have a very welcoming vibe
 - d. They have their own little corner of the building where they can go and be themselves. I'm not sure they really feel that way outside of the music wing. I think that's the big draw.
 - e. Once they're there, they're there forever.
 - f. There's a little bit of a culture here that men don't sing. But once they're here, they get it. Not too long ago in the 60s, college guys would get together and sing. And they get it.
 - g. I talk about the NFL kicker that studied vocal performance in college. I'll show them footage of him singing Ave Maria and they go crazy. But they have to get in the door first.
- 6. Do you know of any reasons why males might typically leave the program after participating for a period of time?**
- a. I don't lose them. Once they're in, they're there.
 - b. But there is a disconnect in middle school. Is it because of the voice change? I lose sopranos and altos in the beginning of high school that get discouraged about voice change.

Ms. D.

- 1. Tell me about your program in general.**
- a. I teach 7-12th grade
 - b. Our choirs have always been full of boys
 - c. I've been teaching 27 years here
 - d. One thing that works with 6th grade boys is to encourage them to stay in choir for two weeks. After that they can make the decision to drop if they are on the fence.
 - e. In high school I teach 9-12th grade choir and the Choraliers (an extracurricular group)
- 2. Do you do anything to recruit males for your program?**
- a. Not really
 - b. Younger students are exposed to the Choraliers in December (the group sings for all the schools). The middle school students can see them as well as all schools that come here for high school
- 3. Do you do anything to keep males in your program once they join?**
- a. It just happens
 - b. Being positive and encouraging helps (especially for the younger kids)
 - c. I've brought a high school student (boy) to the middle school rehearsals to help out and demonstrate

4. What are your thoughts on your current male to female ratio in your program?

What impact does it have (positive or negative)?

- i. I have $\frac{1}{3}$ boys (an estimate) and it goes in waves
 - 1. I currently have small tenor section but they are fantastic
 - 2. I always try to get boys to do NYSSMA (solo festival)
 - 3. I also explain to them what NYSSMA can do (help with all county chorus)
 - 4. I do a lot of NYSSMA introduction in the middle school -- it is always a pop song
- ii. For the literature, it must be something that the boys respond positively to, and things that keep their interest

5. What do you think males might be drawn to most about your program?

- a. There's no stigma for participating in choir here because there are so many boys and athletes in our groups
 - i. Try not to have sports OR music mentality
 - ii. Put them in the group (not a choice) for middle school 7th grade

6. Do you know of any reasons why males might typically leave the program after participating for a period of time?

- a. Our 7th and 8th grade group has 110 students this year
- b. Our 9th-12th grade group has 120-130 students
- c. Reasons for dropping are usually
 - i. Leaving after getting their music credit
 - ii. Scheduling conflicts
 - iii. Students attending [a career and technical school] for part of the day
- d. The main reason that students stay is that many like the class

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