

Implications of Grouping Adolescent Boys in Chorus

Fitting Square Pegs into Round Holes: The Vocal and Social Implications of Various Groupings
of Seventh & Eighth Grade Boys in Chorus

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Abstract

The purpose of this historical and empirical study is to investigate the ways in which music educators approached teaching boys with changing voices in the choral setting throughout history, in addition to the ways in which adolescent boys have been placed in voice sections in the middle and junior high school choral setting. Following a historical analysis, this study surveyed twenty-three current and former middle and junior high school choral educators and collected data on the vocal and social benefits and disadvantages the respondents observed when they placed boys with changing voices in the same voice section as girls in comparison to when they were placed in the same voice section as other boys. Many respondents found a variety of benefits and disadvantages when adolescent boys were placed in both settings – with girls and with boys only – but the social benefits were more substantial when boys were placed with other boys. While the vocal benefits associated with placing adolescent boys with girls matched the philosophies advocated in twentieth century choral education literature, nonetheless many survey respondents found vocal benefits to placing boys with other boys. In this study, the terms “boy” and “male” refer to gender identity, rather than sex assigned at birth, except for the sections that denote otherwise.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this historical and empirical study is to explore the ways in which boys ages twelve to fourteen – typically seventh and eighth grade – are grouped in the middle school and junior high choral setting. Historical data is collected for the purpose of identifying the various approaches choral music educators have used in the past fifteen centuries to place boys with changing voices in various voice sections in a choir. Subsequently, this study examines the social-emotional characteristics of seventh and eighth grade boys to provide insight into how seventh and eighth grade boys function in a classroom and in society, generally. After evaluating the history of seventh and eighth grade boys in the choral setting, this study will review the findings of a survey administered to twenty-three current and former middle school and junior high school choral educators in which the educators provided insights into the strategies they employ for grouping seventh and eighth grade boys in chorus and the vocal and social benefits and disadvantages they have observed from these approaches. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the historical and current approaches to grouping boys ages twelve to fourteen – the time of greatest voice change (Barham, 2001, p. 3) – in chorus, alongside the observed vocal and social-emotional implications of these groupings to provide clear insights for music educators as to the vocal and social-emotional benefits and disadvantages of various approaches to the placement of seventh and eighth grade boys in the middle and junior high school choral setting.

Rationale

As a middle school choral educator, I have read a wide variety of literature and employed various strategies to provide my middle school male students the best choral experience possible.

My goal is to set the foundation for my male singers to experience the greatest success possible vocally, musically, and socially in my choir, therefore, providing them a truly meaningful and impactful choral experience. During my time studying music education and vocal performance as an undergraduate student at Temple University, I was taught that the best approach to teaching boys experiencing voice change is to have them sing almost exclusively in *falsetto* and head voice until the voice changes fully in the late teens (Freer, 2009, p. 62). The approach my instructors recommended – to have changing male voices sing predominantly in head voice and *falsetto* – was informed by the observation that males with changing voices feel more confident singing with their newly developed chest voice, therefore they will bring the chest voice too high into the upper register, which can result in heavy and unhealthy singing. However, my instructors recommended that the best way to develop a healthy head voice and approach to the upper register is through the use of *falsetto*. In order to employ this approach practically in the middle school choral setting, I often had to place my male singers with unchanged and changing voices in the soprano and/or alto sections, which often negatively affected their self-perceptions of their developing masculinity (Barham & Nelson, 1991, p. 16). Hence, I observed that my male singers with unchanged and changing voices were much less likely to sing fully and experience social bonding in the choir, because, as they put it, and as research into the topic has shown, they felt “self-conscious” and “embarrassed” by their changing voices, at least more so in comparison to the girls’ experience singing through a voice change (Orton & Pitts, 2019, pp. 45-46). Hence, I felt that I hit a fork in the road – either I continue to employ the strategies I was taught during my music educator training and do what I know is best vocally for my male students with changing voices, or I employ strategies in conflict with what I was taught and have my male singers sing all together so they can experience great social bonding in the choir and, later I found, greater

motivation to sing and sing fully, though they may not be singing in the most healthy and vocally “correct” manner. Upon reflection, I began to think that perhaps what is purely vocally “correct” from a pedagogical standpoint – having changing male voices sing mainly in head voice and *falsetto* – was too narrow an approach, because it did not inherently take into account the social and communal function of choral singing, which, perhaps, may be more important to a middle school boy’s choral experience than his singing with completely “proper” vocal technique (Orton & Pitts, 2019, p. 48). Thus, came my inspiration for this study: I wanted to examine how educators past and present group their boys in seventh and eighth grades – the time of greatest voice change, on average – and what my fellow choral music educators past and present found in their tinkering with the placement of males with changing voices in the middle school choral setting. Hence, this study can present to future choral music educators, particularly new teachers, what they might expect as they consider how they will group their middle school boys in chorus. Thus, future choral music educators – particularly new teachers – will have the guidance on the practical implications of grouping middle school boys in chorus that I did not have as I entered this wonderfully challenging and rewarding choral setting when I began my career as a middle school choral music educator.

Expected Findings

The historical portion of this study examines the various approaches educators have used when working with boys with changing voices. Since this study investigates approaches dating back to antiquity and then journeys through the twenty-first century, I expect to find a vast range of approaches to working with boys with changing voices in the choral setting. The empirical portion of this study was conducted through a survey administered to current and former middle school choral music educators from various regions in the United States of America. Therefore,

due to the demographic variety the survey respondents teach, I expect to find a wide range of opinions and observations on the vocal and social consequences of various approaches and groupings of middle school boys in the choral setting. However, since middle school boys often prefer to be in proximity to the same sex (Houtte, 2021, p. 359), I expect that the respondents will report a greater level of social bonding and motivation when boys are grouped in the same voice section as compared to spreading boys among voice sections with female singers. Yet, due to the nature of the type of repertoire that inherently must be employed when boys are grouped in the same voice section at the middle school level – SAB or three-part mixed voicing – and the range requirements associated with this repertoire, I expect that survey respondents will report less desirable vocal outcomes when boys are grouped in the same voice section as compared to when boys are grouped with female singers; when boys are grouped with female singers, the range requirements of the repertoire encourages them to sing in their head voice and *falsetto*, which is generally regarded as the preferred way to develop a boy's vocal technique (Barham, 2001, p. 25).

Chapter 2: Pedagogical Approaches, Social Characteristics of Adolescents, and a Comparison of Mixed- and Single-Sex Ensembles

Definitions

Gender: “Gender refers to a way of being, doing, learning, and living in society.”

Sex Assigned at Birth: “‘Sex’ is distinct from ‘sexuality’ and refers to the whole physiological and biological components of male and female human beings,” (Savoie, 2009, p. 26).

History of Boys with Changing Voices in Choral Music Settings from Antiquity to the Mid-Twentieth Century

Children have participated in choral ensembles for nearly 1,500 years (Friar, 1999, p. 26). The earliest known examples of boys’ singing in choral ensembles dates back to the time of Pope Sylvester’s inauguration of the *Schola Cantorum* (Stockton, 2015, p. 76). It was true then as it is now – the issue of teaching the changing adolescent voice was and still is a subject of great consideration and research (Freer, 2009, p. 62).

Originally, boys trained to sing for Catholic worship services. Interestingly, Early Choir Masters opposed the notion that boys should sing in *falsetto*, because they thought it sounded “artificial like the voices of women.” Early Choir Masters’ prejudice against the use of *falsetto* resulted in the use of castration when a boy turned age eight or nine in order to ensure boys could sing “pure high tones throughout their life.” The first evidence of *castrati* dates back to 2000 B.C. *Castrati* rose to their greatest popularity in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but began to lose popularity in the eighteenth century. However, even after the fall of the *castrati*’s popularity, the use of unchanged voices in lieu of women’s voices remained the trend in sacred music until the twenty-first century (Stockton, 2015, p. 76).

Beginning in the nineteenth century, Manuel Garcia, a famous voice teacher, advocated for the notion that boys with changing voices should not sing during the voice change process, because he believed singing through the voice change would be dangerous and potentially harmful to the voice. Garcia supported the notion that, instead, boys should wait to sing until the voice fully settled (Stockton, 2015, p. 76). However, it is important to note that Garcia's contemporary, British laryngologist Sir Morell Mackenzie, believed that, in fact, the voice change was gradual and it was beneficial to encourage boys to sing throughout the voice change. Yet, Garcia's philosophy dominated the field of choral music education through the twentieth century until the 1950s. Garcia's philosophy of resting the male voice until the voice had fully settled became known as the "British Model," (Stockton, 2015, p. 77). In fact, Garcia's philosophy was simply a continuation of the historical practice of removing boys from choirs at the first sign of voice change, which was commonplace for thousands of years prior to Garcia's teachings (Friar, 1999, p. 26). Garcia's "British Model" was so widely followed that Emil Behnke and Lennox Browne's late nineteenth-century survey of one-hundred-ninety choirmasters and school teachers revealed that ninety-six percent of the respondents believed it was, indeed, harmful for boys to sing through the voice change (Stockton, 2015, p. 77).

Garcia's "British Model" remained popular throughout Europe, but philosophies began to change when music teachers from Europe visited American public schools in the early 1900s and observed adolescent boys participating in choirs alongside girls in junior high school choral programs. European music teachers brought home their observations of American junior high school choral programs and by the 1930s, particularly in Britain, an increasing number of choirmasters allowed boys with changing voices to remain in choirs and sing through the voice change; however, British choirmasters continued to exclude girls from choirs (Friar, 1999, p. 27).

Finally, the practice of excluding boys from singing through the voice change truly began to change in the 1950s when British choirmaster, Duncan McKenzie, introduced his alto-tenor plan for educating adolescent boys through the voice change (Friar, 1999, p. 26).

Twentieth-Century Approaches to Boys with Changing Voices in Middle and Junior High School Choral Settings

In the 1950s, choral music educators began to conduct research into the male voice change process. Using their newfound biological and physiological understandings of the voice change process, middle and junior high school choral educators began to develop approaches for categorizing males with changing voices (Friar, 1999, p. 27).

Duncan McKenzie, an English choirmaster, was the first known leader in the field of choral music education to write about working with the male changing voice. He wrote *Training the Boy's Changing Voice* in 1955, which he based on his North American colleagues' experiences with and observations of their choral pedagogy. Following McKenzie's writings, the first influential articles supporting boys' singing through the voice change using empirical evidence appeared in music educator journals; one of the first such studies was a series of articles published by John Cooksey, a conductor at California State University, entitled, "The Development of a Contemporary, Eclectic Theory for the Training and Cultivation of the Junior High School Male Changing Voice," (Friar, 1999, p. 27).

Irvin Cooper's "Cambiata Concept" appeared in the 1960s and encouraged the use of repertoire that best suits the range of the changing male voice in order to avoid voice cracking (Stockton, 2015, p. 75). Cooper's research and pedagogy supports the current practice of arranging and transposing repertoire in the middle and junior high school choral setting in order to best serve the ranges of singers with changing voices, as he once wrote, "no attempt should be

made to make the voice fit already existing music. The music should be made to fit the voice,” (Stockton, 2015, p. 78). Additionally, Irvin Cooper popularized the use of the term “cambiata,” meaning “changing note,” to describe boys with changing voices; the term “cambiata” is widely used today to categorize boys with changing voices, (Stockton, 2015, p. 78).

During the course of the twentieth century, many choral music educators developed their own unique approaches to categorizing and grouping boys in the middle and junior high school choral setting based on research and experience working with adolescent singers. Some of the most notable choral music educators to develop categorization processes were, as mentioned previously, Duncan McKenzie and Irvin Cooper, in addition to Frederick Swanson, John Cooksey, Kenneth Phillips, and Terry Barham alongside Darolyne Nelson; these approaches ranged in utilization from three to six labels for boys with changing voices (Barham & Nelson, 1991, pp. 6-7). Duncan McKenzie developed his “alto-tenor” plan, which divided boys into six categories: Soprano 1, Soprano 2, Alto, Alto-Tenor, seventh-grade Baritone, and eighth- and ninth-grade Baritone (Cooksey, 1977, p. 11). Meanwhile, Irvin Cooper advocated the use of four categories including, Sopranos (unchanged voices), Cambiata (first change), Baritones (boys in the second change), and Bass (boys with changed voices) (Stockton, 2015, p. 80). Frederick Swanson, the retired director of the Moline (Illinois) Boys’ choir, divided boys into only three categories: Boy Alto, Tenor, and Bass (Barham, 2001, p. 21). John Cooksey, a former Professor of Music and Choral Director at the University of Utah, utilized six categories: Unchanged, Mid-Voice I, Mid-Voice II, Mid-Voice IIA, New Baritone, and Settling Baritone (Barham & Nelson, 1991, p. 7). Kenneth Phillips, Professor Emeritus at the University of Iowa, was the only of the various influential choral directors to use solely male-associated terms in his six categories: Tenor I (unchanged), Tenor II (changing), Tenor (newly changed), Baritone (changing), Bass

(changing), Bass-Baritone (newly changed) (Barham, 2001, p. 22). Finally, Terry Barham and Darolyne Nelson outlined four categories and incorporated the term “cambiata” into their labels: Treble, Cambiata I, Cambiata II, and Baritone (Barham & Nelson, 1991, p. 7).

Interestingly, in 2001, Barham conducted a survey of American middle and junior high school choral educators and found that the vast majority of choral educators used the terms Tenor, Baritone, or Bass in their choirs to categorize their boys with changing voices. At the time of Barham’s survey, only twenty-one percent of the respondents employed the term “cambiata” (p. 19). In Chapter Three, this study will present the findings from its survey and will comment on whether this trend has changed or remained constant.

A Brief Overview of the Male Voice Change Process

At this time, it is important to note that in this section of the study, the term “male” refers to sex assigned at birth, rather than gender identity, because this section involves a discussion of biological processes that naturally occur when hormonal secretions activate puberty (Freer, 2009, p. 65). Later in this study during the discussion of social characteristics of adolescent boys, the term “male” will refer to people whose gender identity is “male” with disregard to their sex assigned at birth. The purpose of the changing meaning of the term “male” is to provide a clear understanding of the difference between the biological processes that persons who were assigned “male” at birth experience as compared to the social characteristics and conflicts that persons who identify as “male” experience. While the issues faced by the LGBTQIA+ community are of absolute importance, the scope of this study is narrow and is focused simply on the biological processes persons assigned “male” at birth experience and the social characteristics displayed by adolescent persons that identify as “male.”

Adolescent voice change begins at the onset of puberty (Cooksey, 1977, p. 13), prompted

by hormonal changes in the body that may begin as early as fourth grade (Freer, 2009, p. 65).

Adolescent voice change accompanies the development of primary and secondary sexual characteristics, like the growth of facial and pubic hair (Cooksey, 1977, p. 13). However, it is important to note that puberty, and voice change, concurrently, begins at different times in different males with some beginning the process of puberty at age nine or ten while others do not begin to experience puberty until age fourteen (Freer, 2009, p. 65).

During puberty, the male vocal folds experience increases in length and thickness. The average male experiences a drop in vocal range of about an octave, sometimes more, due to an average increase to the vocal folds of about ten millimeters. Meanwhile, female adolescents experience a voice change that is more impactful to the quality of the voice rather than range. The difference between the male and female voice change experience is important because males tend to feel a greater difference in the sensation of vocal coordination as compared to females, which choral educators must consider when selecting repertoire and employing their general approach to teaching their choir (Freer, 2009, p. 61).

Increased breathiness and physical signs of strain in the upper register are often the first symptoms of voice change (Barham & Nelson, 1991, p. 8). Young men going through the voice change process will experience a rapid descent in the lower limit of the vocal range with a much more gradual descent of the upper limit of the vocal range; the rapid descent of the lower limit of the vocal range is a possible explanation for why the voice change often seems so rapid (Freer, 2009, p. 63). In the choral setting, male voices may alternate between Baritone and Cambiata II as they proceed through the voice change (Barham & Nelson, 1991, p. 10). However, research confirms that all normal healthy boys process through the same sequence of stages during voice change, with some even rebounding to higher pitch levels after the final stage of the process

(Freer, 2009, p. 65). In order to encourage healthy vocal production and development of the upper register, a plethora of research advocates that boys with changing voices should use only the head voice and *false*to to sing in the upper register (E₄ to C₅ on the piano) rather than using chest voice, which can encourage straining and unhealthy vocal production (Barham, 2001, p. 10).

One of the most frustrating symptoms of the voice change process is the phenomenon known as “cracking.” The renowned middle school choral educator, Patrick K. Freer (2009), provides an explanation for voice “cracking”:

“the cracking in adolescent boys’ voices is largely a result of laryngeal muscles growing at different rates, coupled with some thickening of the vocal folds. This effect can be somewhat minimized by encouraging boys to sing prior to and throughout the voice change, helping boys adjust to the new vocal techniques required by their developing vocal musculature, and encouraging them to sing with their new voice as well as their *false*to when it becomes available to them” (pp. 65-66).

Furthermore, voice “cracking” can be worsened and increase in occurrence if the voice is forced to sing in the “wrong” pitch range (Cooksey, 1977, p. 13). The challenge of the changing vocal mechanism is a potential explanation for why adolescent boys feel as though they get worse at singing during puberty, even though they are simply experiencing a profound change in their vocal instrument (Freer, 2016, p. 80). Furthermore, boys often tend to drop out of chorus, because they suddenly feel as though they are no longer “good at singing” due to the voice change (Freer, 2016, p. 81). Therefore, it is crucial to explain the voice change process to adolescent males to increase their understanding of their voice change experience, which will allow them some agency over their voice change (Freer, 2016, p. 79).

Interestingly, the voice change process for a majority of boys is greatest between the ages of twelve and fourteen, but begins to lessen between the ages of fifteen and eighteen (Barham & Nelson, 1991, p. 8). Since the peak of voice change for many boys is during the middle school years – seventh and eighth grades, on average – the voice change must be foremost in the minds of middle and junior high school choral music educators. Furthermore, middle and junior high school choral music educators should anticipate facing a wide variety of stages of voice change among their seventh-grade male singers (Freer, 2009, p. 65).

An understanding of what to expect from the voice change at each middle school grade level can empower choral music educators with the knowledge needed to best support their male singers with changing voices. In sixth grade, boys have mostly treble ranges, but they may begin to show obvious signs of voice change later in the school year. In seventh grade, students often begin the school year as treble singers, but the boys tend to quickly gain access to the pitches below middle C on the piano. By the spring concert, seventh grade singers will often need three-part mixed repertoire and the choral educator can expect boys to sing on each part of the three-part mixed repertoire. In eighth grade, choral music educators may find that they need SATB music with limited ranges for the lower voices (Freer, 2009, pp. 13-14). Middle and junior high school choral music educators with a thorough understanding of the voice change process can find strategies and approaches to best support their changing male singers.

Social Characteristics of Adolescent Boys and Implications in the Choral Music Setting

Moving forward, this study will employ the terms “boy” and “male” with regard to a person’s gender identity rather than a person’s assigned sex at birth due to a focus on the experiences of persons who identify as male, not persons who may have been assigned the male sex at birth but currently identify their gender as something other than male.

Although the male experience in choir is inherently a musical one, it is of crucial importance to consider the social characteristics middle and junior high school choral educators can expect from their adolescent male singers. Since the choral setting is by nature social and communal, the relationship between a boy's musical and social experience will constitute his overall choral experience (Orton & Pitts, 2019, p. 41).

Marshall & Neuman (2012) explain the relationship between the physiology and social nature of puberty: "[while] puberty manifests as physical and chemical changes, adolescence is generally associated with psychological and social changes," (Marshall & Neuman, 2012, p. 21). Therefore, while adolescent male singers are experiencing confusing vocal changes, they face a concurring conflict as they are working through psychological and social changes. Additionally, adolescence generally begins around age twelve or thirteen, smack dab in the middle of a student's middle and junior high school experience (Marshall & Neuman, 2012, p. 21). Hence, choral music educators must consider the psychological and social challenges adolescent singers face in order to best support them in the middle and junior high school choral environment.

Many teens are embarrassed by sudden, and often times unwanted, body changes associated with puberty, which include "squeaky" voices, body and facial hair, weight gain, and pimples (Marshall & Neuman, 2012, p. 27). Furthermore, Patrick K. Freer, a prominent middle school choral educator, found through his research into the experience of adolescent boys in chorus that many young and post-pubescent boys constantly compare their bodies to their future selves (Freer, 2011, p. 35). Not only are adolescents concerned with their personal biological changes, they are also constantly facing unrelenting peer pressure to conform (Marshall & Neuman, 2012, p. 27). Marshall & Neuman (2012) also found that adolescents increasingly behave in ways that match their gender as their sex-role identification cements (p. 125).

Furthermore, adolescents have a strong need to belong to a group, increasingly seek peer approval more so than adult approval, and sometimes have painful memories of being teased and mistreated by their peers (Marshall & Neuman, 2012, p. 87). Hence, the psychological factors at play during adolescence explain why middle and junior high school-aged males might hesitate to sing with girls and sing in general, for fear of being seen as doing something associated with girls (Savoie, 2009, p. 28).

Identity construction is a major feature of adolescence (McLean et al., 2010, p. 166). Part of the process of identity construction is choosing a peer group (Marshall & Neuman, 2012, p. 88). It can be argued that the voice part into which a middle school boy is placed effectively becomes his peer group in choir, as he is spending the duration of choir rehearsals with those in the same voice section. Hence, it is no wonder why middle school boys might hesitate to be grouped with girls in choir, and why this can negatively affect their overall choral experience. Furthermore, Mieke Van Houtte (2021), a Belgian sociologist, found in her research that boys “[have] only to look and be slightly different from the norm to be accorded inferior status. Boys are penalized for gender-role transgressions more consistently and more severely than girls,” (p. 358). Therefore, choral music educators cannot and must not overlook the social implications middle school boys face when they are placed in various voice sections in chorus. A boy’s choral experience does not occur in a musical vacuum: social factors are very much at play in the choral classroom (Savoie, 2009, p 28).

Finally, it would be negligent for middle and junior high school choral music educators to focus only on the musical factors at play in an adolescent boy’s choral experience. While current events have brought a wider understanding of the role gender plays in society, the fine arts have

not fully escaped the pressures adolescents face to conform to gender roles. As Alan Savoie (2009) writes:

“A major problem with boys in fine arts education relates to such insidious socio-cultural gender stereotypes – ‘social expectations traditionally specific to a gender.’ Boys tend to turn away from ‘feminine-identified’ disciplines because of peer pressure, including ‘homophobic comments...often used by young people to insult boys who do not exhibit ‘male appropriate’ behaviors. Many boys often refuse to become fully involved in the arts for this gender-related reason,” (p. 28).

It is simply the case that middle and junior high school choral educators must face the physiological, psychological, and social conflicts alongside their adolescent singers in order to help these adolescents have the most musically and socially successful middle and junior high school choral experience possible. Therefore, middle and junior high school educators may need to employ the flexibility to step outside of the most traditionally accepted notions for educating adolescent singers and perhaps, in some circumstances, give more weight to the social factors at play in a choir in comparison to the musical ones; this might include placing a trans boy in the Baritone section even if his voice still has biologically female characteristics, or placing a seventh grade changing voice in the Baritone section even if it is not perfectly ideal for his vocal range (Savoie, 2009, p. 28).

Comparing the Musical and Social Benefits and Disadvantages of Single-Sex and Mixed-Sex Ensembles

Extensive research demonstrates that girls greatly outnumber boys in a vast majority of middle school choral programs (Freer, 2007, p. 28). Hence, the way in which middle and junior high school boys are grouped in chorus is of great interest. Choral music educators might

investigate how they handle the gender discrepancy if it is present in their choirs. Furthermore, an investigation into whether mixed-gender or single-gender ensembles provide the greatest benefits musically and socially for adolescents is worthwhile. The research data in this study found an overall greater range of musical and social benefits reported by choral music educators utilizing the single-gender model, which may largely be due to the fact that boys tend to be more negatively impacted by their difficulties in singing with a changing voice in comparison to girls (Orton & Pitts, 2019, p. 48). However, there are crucial benefits inherent in the mixed-gender model, including the fact that single-gender ensembles are not possible in some schools.

Benefits of Single-Gender Choral Ensembles at the Middle and Junior High School Level

Dr. Nathan Dame of the University of Kansas found in his 2019 dissertation several interesting insights comparing the success of schools with single-gender ensembles as compared to those with mixed-gender ensembles in their male recruitment efforts. Dame's research reports that boys who attended single-sex schools were more than twice as likely to pursue interests in art, music, drama, and foreign languages compared with boys of comparable ability who attended mixed-sex schools (p. 52). Furthermore, Dame (2019) found that single-sex choirs improved the motivation levels of males at the elementary and middle school level in the choral environment (p. 54). Patrick Freer (2007), found that teachers reported a decrease in behavior problems when adolescent boys and girls were physically separated (p. 30). Additionally, Dame (2019) found that directors of middle and junior high school choral ensembles reported enrollment increases after dividing choirs into single-gender ensembles with one school experiencing an increase from three to thirty-nine male students in choir after moving from mixed-gender to single-gender ensembles (pp. 54-55).

Interestingly, Dame (2019) also reports that homogenous ensembles have been found to “positively impact the psychosocial issues related to the culture and popularity of singing,” (p. 54). Furthermore, single-gender ensembles may assist choral directors in the selection of repertoire that more closely caters to the physiological and psychological needs of their students with changing voices (Dame, 2019, p. 54). Perhaps the relationship between adolescent males and females is at the root of the benefits of single-gender ensembles. As Barham (2001) notes in her research, one middle school choral educator stated, “[adolescent] boys are masses of paranoid hormones that can be totally intimidated by females,” (p. 13).

Benefits of Mixed-Gender Ensembles at the Middle and Junior High School Level

Extensive research does not provide many obvious social and musical benefits of utilizing the mixed-gender model in the middle and junior high school choral setting. However, it is important to note that many prominent choral music educators recommend that even single-gender ensembles pursue mixed-gender choral experiences in order to expose singers to the greatest variety of choral repertoire. Otherwise, adolescent singers might not sing a large portion of the choral canon (Freer, 2009, p. 13).

Furthermore, it is simply not possible for some choral educators to utilize the single-gender ensemble model due to scheduling or systemic constraints at their schools. However, there are still many ways in which middle and junior high school choral educators can achieve some of the benefits of single-gender ensembles even in a mixed-gender ensemble setting. Patrick Freer (2009) recommends working with boys and girls separately when possible, placing boys closest to the teacher, or simply moving boys to one side of the risers all together rather than placing them in the middle of the ensemble (pp. 30-90). Additionally, choral music educators should avoid placing a single boy in a female voice section. Instead, they should place

the boy next to the other boys in the choir, even if they are of different vocal categories (Barham & Nelson, 1991, p. 23). Finally, Barham (2001) recommends that in the mixed-gender ensemble setting, single-gender sectional rehearsals can still afford some of the benefits of single-gender ensembles, thus providing a “safe” environment in which adolescent boys can experiment with their changing voices together and create a bond, which will ultimately benefit them when they return to the mixed-gender setting (pp. 14-17). Ultimately, middle and junior high school choral music educators must remain flexible and take into account the wide range of complexities and factors involved in teaching the adolescent choir in order to achieve the greatest musical and social outcomes – the greatest choral experience – for their adolescent singers (Freer, 2007, p. 33).

Chapter 3: Survey Methods, Results, and Findings

Survey Methods

A survey was conducted to collect data for this study in order to explore the musical and social implications of various groupings of seventh and eighth grade boys in the middle and junior high school choral settings. The survey was administered using an anonymous Google Form and was made available to many choral music educators via school district email communications and social networking sites. The survey was open for twelve days and received twenty-three responses. An anonymous Google Form was used to protect the privacy of respondents, while also allowing them the opportunity to respond without worrying about judgement. Current and former middle and junior high school choral educators were selected as the respondents, because the survey was conducted during the summer months when K-12 school was out of session. Additionally, the interest of this study was more so in music educators' observations of the vocal and social behaviors displayed by their male singers, rather than the experience of male singers in chorus. The age range of seventh and eighth grade was selected, because the peak of voice change for most boys is between the ages of twelve and fourteen, which correlates to the average age of seventh and eighth grade boys (Freer, 2009, p. 65).

Some questions in the survey were multiple choice, while others were open-ended. The survey mainly focused on teachers' observations rather than their opinions. While the questions were intentionally phrased in an objective manner, for example – “what vocal benefits did the male singers display when they were placed in the same voice section as female singers?” – some respondents gave answers that were more subjective in nature rather than objective data reporting. However, the final question in the survey, “please briefly explain your approach for

how you group seventh and eighth grade male singers in choir over the course of a typical school year,” was asked in order to provide insight into the way a respondent might use a variety of approaches to grouping seventh and eighth grade male singers during the course of a single school year. For example, a respondent might use a different approach for the winter concert season, at the beginning of the school year, and then use another approach for the spring concert season if they notice an increase in voice change in their students.

The purpose of the questions in the survey was to collect data on the social and vocal implications of grouping middle school boys in various ways in the choral setting in order to best inform middle and junior high school music educators on the vocal and social outcomes they can expect when grouping boys in various ways. Hence, music educators can make decisions that best suit the needs of their singers – whether that is a decision that must consider vocal outcomes more so than social outcomes or vice-versa. The full results and responses of this study are available in Appendix A.

Survey Results and Findings

The first six questions of the survey provided background and demographic information about the participants. Additionally, the Google Form was designed to remove any respondents who did not fit the desired respondent population: current and former middle and junior high school choral educators who taught seventh and eighth grade male singers. Additionally, the gender identity of each respondent was collected in order to allow for potential comparisons in the ways music educators of various genders approach grouping seventh and eighth grade boys in chorus. The remaining questions were open-ended and asked the respondents to provide their observations of the vocal and social benefits and disadvantages the male singers displayed when

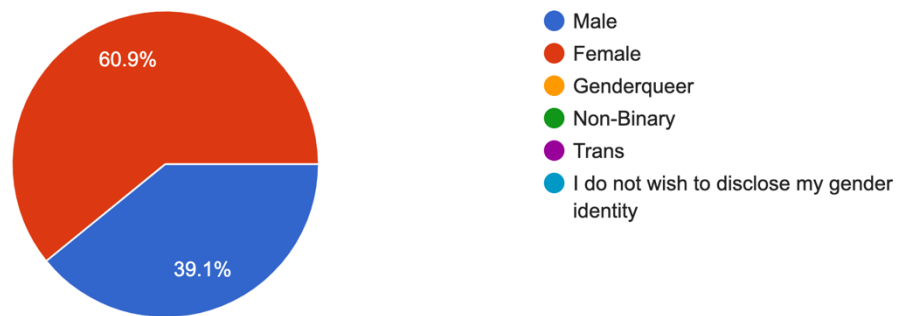
they were placed in the same section as female singers and when they were all (or almost all) placed in the same section (a male-only voice section).

Question 1

What is your gender identity?

What is your gender identity?

23 responses



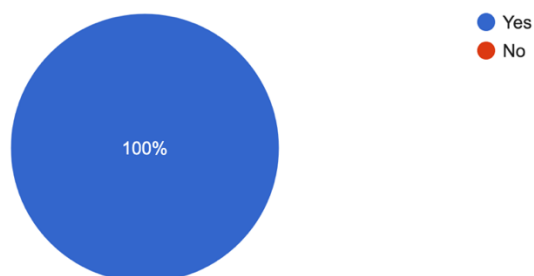
The respondents only fit into two of the five gender identities available for selection. Fourteen of the respondents identified themselves as female (60.9%), while nine of the respondents identified themselves as male (39.1%).

Question 2

Do you teach choir?

Do you teach choir?

23 responses



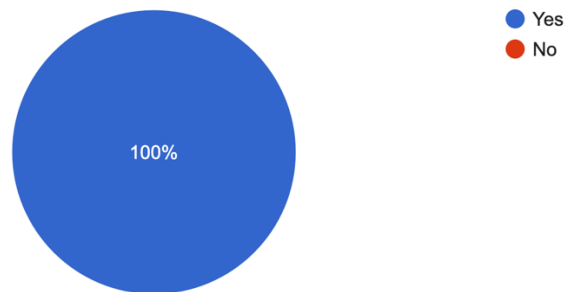
All respondents (100%) indicated that they teach choir.

Question 3

Do you teach (or have you taught) AT LEAST ONE of the following: 7th Grade Choir, 8th Grade Choir, and/or combined 7th & 8th Grade Choir?

Do you teach (or have you taught) AT LEAST ONE of the following: 7th Grade Choir, 8th Grade Choir, and/or combined 7th & 8th Grade Choir?

23 responses



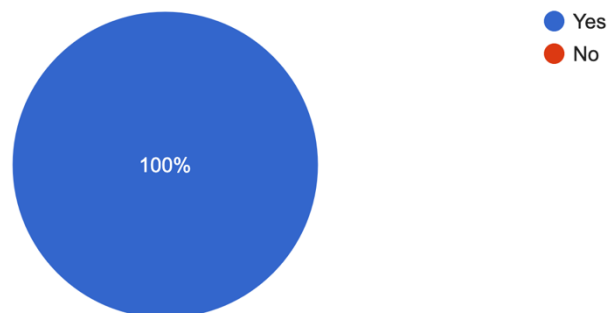
All of the respondents (100%) indicated that they teach, or have taught, at least one of the three choices: seventh grade choir, eighth grade choir, or a combined seventh and eighth grade choir.

Question 4

Does your choir include male singers?

Does your choir include male singers?

23 responses



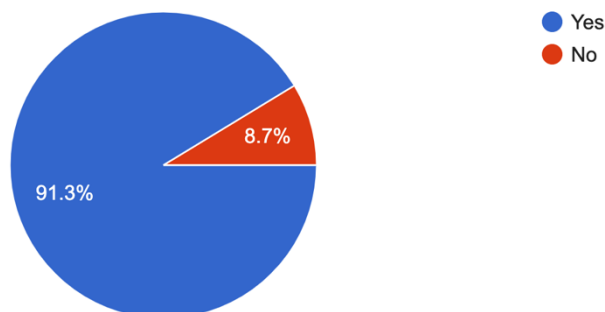
All of the respondents (100%) indicated that their choir includes male singers.

Question 5

Have you ever placed male singers in the same voice section as female singers?

Have you ever placed male singers in the same voice section as female singers?

23 responses



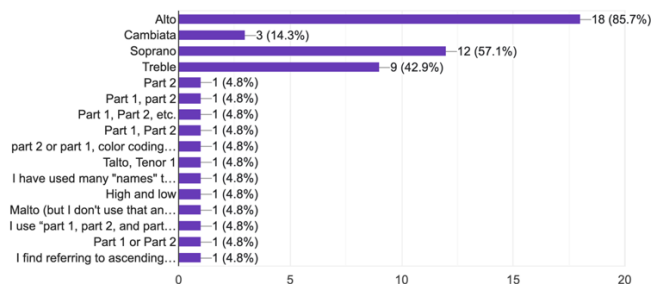
Twenty-one (91.3%) of the respondents indicated that they have at some point in their careers placed male singers in the same voice section as female singers, while only two of the respondents (8.7%) reported that they have never placed male singers in the same voice section as female singers.

Question 6

What name or names did you use for male singers that sang in the same voice section as female singers? Check all that apply: Alto, Cambiata, Soprano, Treble, Other

What name or names did you use for male singers that sang in the same voice section as female singers? Check all that apply:

21 responses



The most common names the twenty-one respondents used for male singers that sing in the same voice section as female singers were Alto (eighteen respondents, or 85.7%, used this name), Soprano (twelve respondents, or 57.1%, used this name), Treble (nine respondents, or 42.9%, used this name), and Cambiata (three respondents, or 14.3%, used this name). The other names respondents provided included Part 1, Part 2, Color Coded Terms, Talto (meaning tenor plus alto), and others. Most of the respondents use traditional, feminine-gendered terms for choral voice parts regardless of whether their groupings include singers who identify as male.

Question 7

What vocal benefits did the male singers display when they were placed in the same voice section as female singers?

Figure 1, pictured below, provides a summary of some of the most common responses.

The complete responses can be found in Appendix A:

Figure 1

“More people on their part so better pitch matching”
“...led to a more natural transition [in the voice change]. If the voice had changed...it also is a benefit socially and vocally”
“...helped the males start to sing in a more appropriate (higher) range”
“They could sing with confidence in their current range”
“They were more apt to match the singing around them instead of trying to drop the octave as changing/changed voices”
“The clearest benefit is the ability to hear their pitches reinforced by those around them”

“They felt more comfortable singing in the physiologically appropriate register for them at the time. Freshly mounted cambiata or baritones will sit near sopranos so they can sing the melody down an octave and get used to their new voices”
“Easier for them to sing the part, higher music success rate”
“Male singers whose voices have not changed are not trying to sing lower than their range”
“They do not have to attempt to sing pitches that are too low for their range. They have better models for tone and blend around them.”

Many respondents found that the main benefit vocally for male singers placed in the same voice section as female singers was that they had proper vocal models, which assisted them in matching pitch in a range that was appropriate for their voices. Often, the respondents explained that the male singers placed in the same voice section as female singers had either unchanged or changing voices, therefore they were encouraged to sing in an appropriate range for their voices, rather than “feel the pressure” to sing low notes or in an inappropriate octave for their voices.

Question 8

What vocal disadvantages did the male singers display when they were placed in the same voice section as female singers?

Figure 2, pictured below, provides a summary of some of the most common responses.

The complete responses can be found in Appendix A:

Figure 2

“...sometimes the female parts go TOO high and then the males get discouraged again when they can’t hit the higher notes.”
--

“I think sometimes especially with 8th graders, they have felt like they should be singing the lowest part because that is what is traditional and they can feel embarrassed if they are not singing that part. Since our choirs typically have all genders in all of the parts and we base the part they are singing on their vocal range it is normally not a huge issue.”
“Some were uncomfortable initially, but were assured that when their voice changed that they could choose to move to the tenor section, if they wanted/were ready”
“Sometimes they felt uncomfortable even after talking about range”
“I can’t think of any”
“Not too many that I noticed. Maybe they felt like it made them seem more “feminine”?”
“Identity issues. Depends on song content and how you address the group”
“In higher registers, the boys sometime have a hard time blending their timbre with the surrounding members. Any other vocal disadvantages were more the result of social factors (lack of confidence and thus breath support and vocal energy)”

The respondents had a wide range of observations for this question. Mainly, respondents indicated that the only vocal disadvantages displayed were those caused by range issues (the vocal parts going “too high” for the voices) and social issues (identity, feeling “feminine,” feeling embarrassed for not singing the “low part”). The vocal disadvantages caused by the vocal parts going “too high” or out of a singer’s range were purely vocal in nature, however the other vocal disadvantages reported did not have to do with a singer’s vocal technique or production, but rather negative impacts on their singing due to social pressures to sing in a more “masculine” manner (“sing low,” “sing lower parts,” felt “feminine” when singing the higher parts).

Question 9

What social benefits did the male singers display when they were placed in the same voice section as the female singers?

Figure 3, pictured below, provides a summary of some of the most common responses. The complete responses can be found in Appendix A:

Figure 3

“...there are often behavioral issues when all of the boys are together. These issues tend to go away when the boys aren’t all together”
“Opportunity to get to know more people of another gender”
“I think having the male voices with the female voices in the middle school helps the entire group socially. The students are able to get to know other students they may not normally hang out with and since they have all decided to join chorus they have that in common”
“I’m not sure there were social benefits other than if those boys were still very friendly with the girls in their section, that this was another opportunity to be with those friends”
“I always put all male singers together, like putting sections next to each other so male altos are next to male tenors, so male singers would feel more comfortable. Not sure of social benefits.”
“Depends on the kid – each is different. I have had lone 8 th /9 th grade boys in alto sections, and for those particular kids, they are very comfortable, have alto friends, aren’t self-conscious about it”
“Socially I didn’t see any benefits”

<p>“It depends entirely on the kid. Some kids don’t mind singing with mostly girls, or even prefer it, while others are embarrassed and don’t sing out because of it. Sometimes it is hard for the male singer to make friends if they are not surrounded by similar peers”</p>

<p>“They were treated as tokens or pets. Not sure this was a good thing.”</p>

The respondents’ answers to this question were incredibly mixed. Some respondents found great social benefits from grouping male singers with female singers (“helps the entire group socially,” “boys’ behavioral issues tend to go away when they are not all grouped together”), while others were unsure of the social benefits, or even found there to be mainly negative outcomes (“they were treated as tokens or pets. Not sure this was a good thing”).

Question 10

What social disadvantages did the male singers display when they were placed in the same voice section as female singers?

Figure 4, pictured below, provides a summary of some of the most common responses. The complete responses can be found in Appendix A:

Figure 4

<p>“Some boys did not like singing the same voice part as the girls – they felt isolated from the rest of “the boys”</p>
--

<p>“I personally can’t think of any disadvantages”</p>
--

<p>“They have showed disappointment when they are not in the same part as their friends, but that has nothing to do with them singing a higher part”</p>
--

<p>“Some would be extra self-conscious”</p>

<p>“None. But that was because of classroom culture”</p>
--

“There was occasional teasing reported. I used it as an opportunity to talk about how everyone’s voice changed at a different time and there was no right or wrong time/voice part in choir”
“Sometimes they would not socialize and withdraw. Sometimes they would barely sing”
“You can tell with some kids that it doesn’t jive with their self-image. If I’m not sure, I’ll ask what they prefer”
“I started scheduling classes by gender a few years ago”
“None that I have seen”
“Some definitely are embarrassed and have a hard time making friends, making it less likely for them to sing out or continue with the group.”
“They want to stay under the radar”

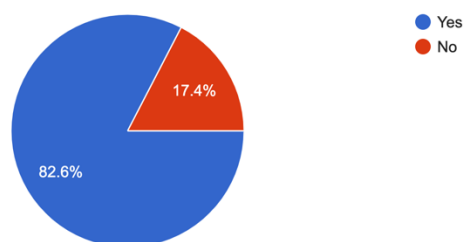
The respondents’ answers to this question were much less mixed than in the previous question. Interestingly, many respondents observed that boys would “stay under the radar,” “barely sing,” or “feel isolated from the rest of ‘the boys’”. However, some respondents reported that they did not observe any social disadvantages from grouping male singers with female singers. It is of particular interest that those who observed negative social outcomes reported severely negative outcomes, while others seemed to observe none at all or were sure to establish a supportive group culture to attempt to prevent negative social outcomes.

Question 11

Have you ever grouped all (or almost all) of your male singers in the same voice section?

Have you ever grouped all (or almost all) of your male singers in the same voice section?

23 responses



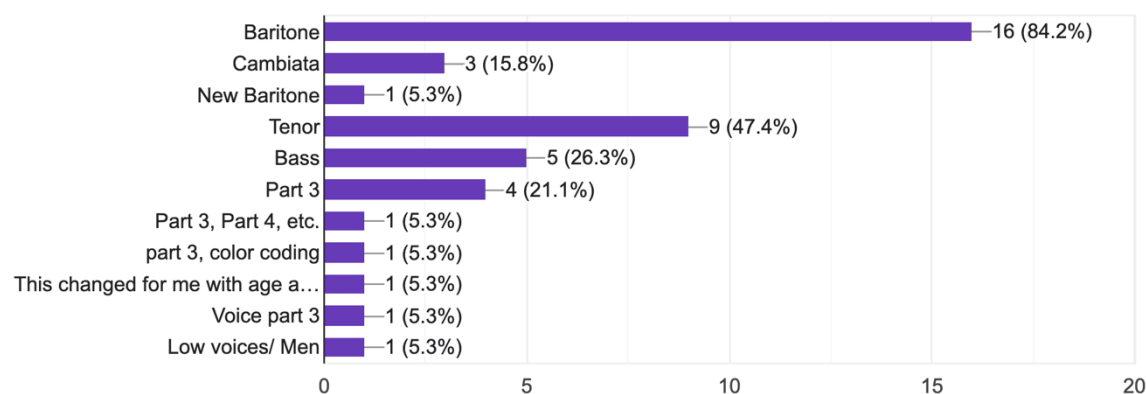
Nineteen (82.6%) of the respondents indicated that they have grouped all, or almost all, of their male singers in the same voice section, while four (17.4%) of the respondents reported they have never grouped all, or almost all, of their male singers in the same voice section.

Question 12

What name or names did you use for male singers when you place all (or almost all) of them in the same voice section? Check all that apply: Baritone, Cambiata, New Baritone, Tenor, Bass, Other

What name or names did you use for male singers when you placed all (or almost all) of them in the same voice section? Check all that apply:

19 responses



The most common names the nineteen respondents used for their male singers grouped in the same voice section were Baritone (sixteen, or 84.2%, used this name), Tenor (nine, or 47.4%,

used this name), Bass (five, or 26.3%, used this name), Part 3 (four, or 21.2%, used this name), and Cambiata (three, or 15.8%, used this name). Some of the other names used were Part 3, Voice Part 3, and Low voice/men. Most of the respondents use traditional, masculine-gendered terms for choral voice parts.

Question 13

What vocal benefits did the male singers display when they were all (or almost all) placed in the same voice section?

Figure 5, pictured below, provides a summary of some of the most common responses. The complete responses can be found in Appendix A:

Figure 5

"Singing on pitch in the correct octave"
"Students with changing voices were able to hear the notes they should be matching and match vocal quality of changes voices"
"When all of the male students are together, I can make sure that they're singing a part that really fits their voices/ranges. I typically can't do that when the male students are mixed with the female students."
"Better balance with the SA sections of the choir- better overall product"
"They were more apt to sing out earlier."
"Most develop a camaraderie with others in the section. This leads to more comfort singing and more willingness to take risks (ex. going for that "high" note that WE know they can sing but THEY think they can't"
"When I switched to scheduling by gender the boys were not outnumbered by girls in class. I could focus on the voice change."

The respondents provided a plethora of positive outcomes they observed when all or almost all of their male singers were placed in the same voice section. Many of the respondents' observations match those discussed in Chapter Two of this study: ability to focus on the voice change, more camaraderie, and greater confidence in singing ability, among others.

Question 14

What vocal disadvantages did the male singers display when they were all (or almost all) placed in the same voice section?

Figure 6, pictured below, provides a summary of some of the most common responses. The complete responses can be found in Appendix A:

Figure 6

"Losing falsetto quicker"
"Not matching pitch as much"
"Some students whose voices were unchanged had some difficulty reaching the baritone notes of a typical SAB arrangement"
"Non-changed voices would force themselves to sing lower to keep up with their male counterparts"
"Male altos or soprano are put on the edges so they can still stand with the baritones but sing their parts. But sometimes get confused"
"It was pedagogical. Some voices were not correct for the range."
"Projection was down when the music dipped too low. It's so difficult to find range-appropriate rep for middle schoolers."

The respondents reported that the main vocal disadvantage they observed when placing all, or almost all, of their male singers in the same voice section was that some unchanged or changing voices would force themselves to sing at the low extremes of their range; however, one respondent noted that this was a pedagogical choice. Another respondent noted that this simply was a choice they had to make, because of the difficulty in finding range-appropriate repertoire for middle schoolers.

Question 15

What social benefits did the male singers display when they were all (or almost all) placed in the same voice section?

Figure 7, pictured below, provides a summary of some of the most common responses. The complete responses can be found in Appendix A:

Figure 7

“Camaraderie”
“Increased confidence being with their same gender peers. Not feeling self conscious about changing voices in front of girls”
“There are typically twice as many female students as male students in my choirs. The male students feel a sense of solidarity when they're together. They sometimes feel singled out or like "one of the only boys" when they're placed in sections with female students.”
“I think it benefits the male singer socially to be with other singers who may be experiencing the same vocal struggles. We can talk about it as a group and they can feel like they are not the only one.”
“Working together, building friendships, encouraging each other, experiencing empathy.”
“Support and reduced stigma”

“Despite my best efforts to provide a safe space across the board, and to promote utopian voice groupings, I can't deny that there is a certain camaraderie that typically develops among "the guys." That said, the camaraderie can still develop and be achieved with the same kids during breaks and outside choir.”
“They were more themselves and happier”
“They had a real strong team bond and gave high praise for those who would take risks.”

Respondents provided a plethora of social benefits they observed when they placed all, or almost all, of their male singers in the same voice section. Many respondents reported that they observed increased “camaraderie,” “reduced stigma,” “empathy,” “happiness,” and “praise for those who would take risks.” It is of particular interest that throughout the data collected, respondents reported camaraderie, confidence, and bonding at higher rates from grouping boys in the same voice section as compared with the rates in which those same outcomes were observed when boys were placed in the same voice section as girls.

Question 16

What social disadvantages did the male singers display when they were all (or almost all) placed in the same voice section?

Figure 8, pictured below, provides a summary of some of the most common responses. The complete responses can be found in Appendix A:

Figure 8

“None”
“Not sure”
“None that I have observed they seem to enjoy it”

“Sometimes would cause behavioral issues”
“If one boy decides he didn’t want to sing out it affected all the boys”
“Boys that tend towards female friend groups missed out having those friends in class”
“Chatty and goofy”
“Distracted”
“Sometimes singers tend to mess around too much when they are with their friends”

The respondents’ answers for this question were much more mixed as compared to the previous answer regarding social benefits. About half of the respondents reported that they did not observe any social disadvantages, while others reported that they observed the potential for distraction, “goofiness,” and “messaging around.” Interestingly, one respondent noted that some boys who tended towards female friend groups “missed out on having those friends in class;” this is a response that warrants further investigation for future studies that examine how singers who do not conform to traditional gender roles – in this case preferring peers of the opposite biological sex – may have unique experiences in the middle and junior high school choral setting.

Question 17

Please briefly explain your approach for how you group 7th & 8th grade male singers in choir over the course of a typical school year.

Figure 9, pictured below, provides a summary of some of the most common responses. The complete responses can be found in Appendix A:

Figure 9

<p>“I listen to each singer individually and try to place them in the most appropriate section.</p> <p>Unchanged voices sing together with part 2/girls altos”</p>
<p>“I assign them based on where their vocal ranges fall, and as their voices change I change their part assignment.”</p>
<p>“Most of my pieces are SAB arrangements and I pick ones where the range is accessible for most 7th and 8th grade boys. If there are boys with changed voices where the parts are too high I occasionally have them sing melody down octave or might program some more SATB for that particular group in the spring”</p>
<p>“Male students will often be placed in Part 2 or 3 depending on their range. This is fluid and the students can shift between sections as the year progresses. I also have students who were born female but now identify as male or nonbinary. I encourage those students to sing whichever part feels right/reaffirming for them, which often leads to those students singing Part 3.”</p>
<p>“For our select ensemble, students audition blindly and they are placed into parts based on their vocal range and tone quality. These parts may change based on specific needs for a song or as their voice changes throughout the year.”</p>
<p>“If someone had a voice change during the year they could change sections or I would even rework harmonies to make it more comfortable for their changing voice. Important to be sensitive to this time for them!”</p>
<p>“Briefly? Ha. I'll try! 7th grade Winter Concert-all singers sing unison 2pt. Changed voices sing melody down octave. 7th grade Spring Concert-SAB divisi. Confident baritones sing B. Newer baritones sing S down an octave. Instrumental support given for B part. ALL SINGERS-INCLUDING GENDER FLUID/NONBINARY KIDS-SIT self selected WHERE</p>

THEY MOST COMFORTABLY IDENTIFY AND WHERE THEY FEEL THEIR VOICE IS STRONGEST 8th Grade Winter and Spring Concert SAB true divisi (fingers crossed) *True treble voices switch between melody and harmony”

“I have a separate choir for boys, but I’m rethinking this given gender identity amongst middle school kids being so fluid. I’m planning on having a treble choir and a “changing voice choir”. Both groups will have three voice parts low middle high”

Overall, the respondents had very similar philosophies and approaches to grouping seventh and eighth grade boys in chorus. The vast majority of respondents reported that they voice checked their students at least once during the school year. Many respondents frequently placed their boys in a voice section that fit their vocal range, however some would check with a boy before placing him in a section that fit him more vocally than socially; if the boy reported that he would prefer to sing in the more socially desired voice section, the respondents would commonly oblige. Additionally, many respondents reported that they would change their male singers’ voice section placements throughout the year as their voices changed or began to change.

Chapter 4: Conclusions

Key Findings

The inspiration for this study was the wide variety of approaches for grouping middle and junior high school males in the choral setting. It was clear through discussions and learnings during undergraduate and graduate study and real-world application that each approach to grouping boys with changing voices had a range of vocal and social benefits, but also had inherent vocal and social disadvantages. The friction between what is philosophically best for adolescent boys from a purely vocal pedagogical lens and what might be best for them socially in the choral setting is likely to challenge middle and junior high school vocal educators for years to come.

Based on my experiences as a middle school choral music educator, I expected the results of the survey to be mixed with some respondents finding great reason for placing boys in the same voice section as girls regardless of the social outcomes in order to best serve their unchanged and changing voices, while other respondents would find that in many cases the social benefits of placing boys in the same voice section regardless of voice status would serve the whole ensemble best.

Indeed, the findings of this study reflect mixed observations by the respondents. Many respondents observed vocal outcomes that matched those evidenced in background research performed for this study: often changing voices had an easier time matching pitch and singing in a healthy manner when they were placed in the same voice section as girls, while changing voices placed in the same voice section as other boys with changed voices may “push” the voice out of its comfortable range and tessitura. Interestingly, the social outcomes that the respondents observed also matched those found in the background research conducted for this study. Many

respondents found that boys had a great sense of camaraderie when they were all placed in the same voice section regardless of vocal status, while boys who were placed in the same voice section as girls often faced negative peer relations, reluctance to sing fully, or required focused intervention on the part of the teacher to develop an ensemble culture that was supportive of boys in the hopes that the culture could overcome the gender conformity issues the boys faced in traditionally female-gendered voice parts.

Finally, many respondents noted the importance of continuously voice checking boys with changing voices in order to move them into voice parts that are most appropriate for them. This might include placing a boy in the tenor section (or the “part 2” section when using non-gendered labels for voice parts) at the beginning of the school year and then placing him in the baritone or bass section later in the school year (or the “part 3” section when using non-gendered labels for voice parts). The final finding to note is that some respondents mentioned a current phenomenon choral educators face: gender non-conforming and trans students. The respondents who mentioned working with gender non-conforming and trans students expressed that they will place said student in a voice section that makes the student feel most comfortable with regard to their gender identity even if that conflicts with the student’s vocal status.

Implications for the Practice of Music Education

Pedagogical approaches for teaching adolescents to sing through the voice change will likely always require flexibility, creativity, patience, and understanding on the part of the middle and junior high school choral music educator. Due to the uniqueness of the voice change experience for each child, and considering many choirs include dozens, if not hundreds, of students, middle and junior high school choral educators will always face a choir of students at

potentially dozens of unique stages of voice change. Music educators will always need to consider both the vocal and social outcomes of the various ways they group their singers and must identify whether the vocal or social outcomes are of more importance to the goal of the ensemble.

In this study, it is difficult to ignore that many of the responses received provided more substantial weight to the vocal and social benefits of grouping middle school boys together, regardless of voice status. While this is in conflict with the research conducted by McKenzie, Cooper, Barham, and others in the late twentieth century, it is possible that, again, times are changing and music educators must be ready to adapt. It is the case, indeed, that many adolescent students experience puberty earlier than in previous generations, therefore facing greater peer pressure to conform at younger ages (Freer, 2009, p. 66). The middle and junior high school choir does not occur in a vacuum – choral directors must consider not only the musical environments in which their students live, but also the social pressures they face as they enter the choral classroom each day. Therefore, this study suggests that, in some communities, it may be most beneficial for the whole ensemble product and the budding social identities of its adolescent boys that choral educators allow for the flexibility of placing middle school boys in the same voice section even if it is not technically the best place for them to be through a purely vocal pedagogical lens. After all, if there is one thing to be learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, both musical and social success is critical to the health of a choir and a choral program. It is also important to note that the main purpose behind the philosophy of placing boys in the same voice section as girls is to keep them singing in their head voice and *falsetto* through the voice change – this can still be accomplished in single-gender voice sections or ensemble settings through

vocal exercises that focus on developing the head voice and *falsetto* during warm-up exercises and rehearsals.

Reflection and Future Research

As a middle school choral music educator, even though I am blessed to work in a school district with a thriving music program, wonderfully creative and passionate music educators, and a supportive administration, I constantly face the pressure to work against the gender norms present in my particular school community that imply to boys beginning in the third grade that singing is “for girls.” Originally, when I began my career as a middle school choral music educator, I tried the approach I was taught in college that boys should be placed in the voice section that allows them to use their head voice and *falsetto* most often rather than placing them in a voice section that encourages them to use their chest voice, no matter the cost or repercussions. Then, one day in rehearsal I tried standing in the middle of the choir, next to a boy placed in the Soprano II section (but he was labeled as Cambiata I) and found that this boy, even though he was a very naturally gifted singer, refused to sing. I asked him why he refused to sing, and he said, “I’m next to all the girls. It’s awkward.” After that experience, a lightbulb went off, and I thought, “why am I still doing what my professors said, even though it’s creating a negative choral experience for my male singers?” Perhaps it can be the case that research performed in academia, by well-meaning and illustrious choral directors like Duncan McKenzie and Irvin Cooper, will not be practical for every real-world situation. That same year, I tried grouping all of my boys in the same voice section, regardless of voice type, and found a massive positive increase in each boy’s experience in choir. All of the sudden boys who I could never hear were the loudest in their section. The boys were bonding, they were singing – they were having fun. After all, isn’t choir supposed to be about having fun while singing? Shouldn’t

enjoying the experience of singing trump the *proper* experience of singing? Do we want adolescent boys to sing just for one year in a proper manner, or do we want them to sing for the rest of their lives because they enjoy it so much? Using this approach, and after creating an extracurricular, single-gender ensemble called, *ManChoir* (thank you, Temple University, for the inspiration), my male enrollment more than doubled from around twenty-five boys in chorus my first year to sixty-two boys in my upcoming fifth year of teaching middle school chorus.

None of this is to say that there is one correct way to approach working with middle and junior high school singers. Each choral director will have their own goals for their ensemble. Every choral director will face a unique school community. For some, what will work best is placing changing and unchanged voices in mixed-gender voice parts. For others, they will find that placing boys in the same voice section regardless of voice type will prove most successful for their choir. This study simply aims to show that there are vocal and social implications to all approaches to teaching adolescent singers and both types of outcomes must be considered by middle and junior high school choral music educators in order to serve the musical and social function of choral singing.

It would be valuable for future research to survey adolescent boys and explore their personal experiences when singing in a voice section with other girls compared to their experience singing in a voice section with the same gender. Additionally, it is likely the case that choral educators will increasingly need strategies for serving students who are gender non-conforming, trans, and queer in the choral setting, as these students have an additional set of challenges to face in the often confusing and complicated social environment of middle and junior high schools.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Full Survey

MMED 795 Thesis Project Survey

This survey is anonymous.

This survey will take less than ten minutes to complete.

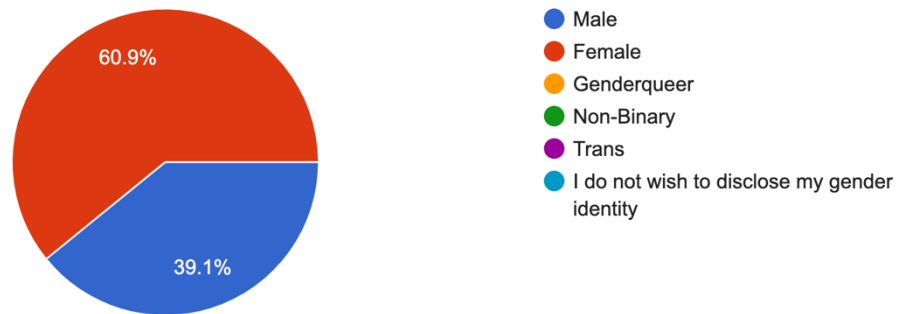
In this survey, the terms "male" and "female" refer to gender identity, not sex assigned at birth.

This survey will explore the vocal and social benefits and disadvantages 7th & 8th grade male singers display when they are grouped in various ways in the middle school/junior high choral setting.

1.

What is your gender identity?

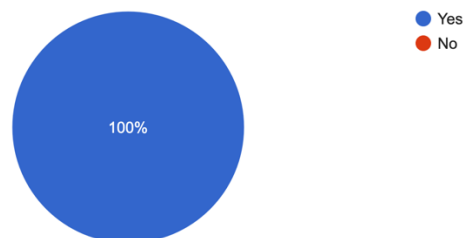
23 responses



2.

Do you teach choir?

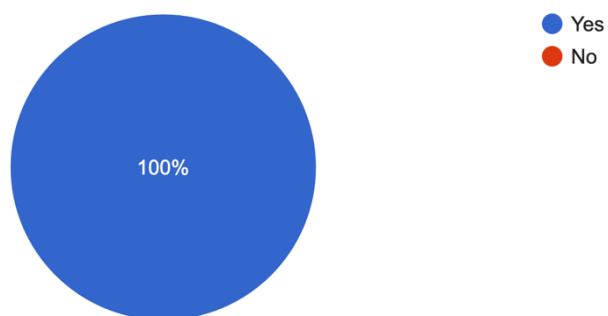
23 responses



3.

Do you teach (or have you taught) AT LEAST ONE of the following: 7th Grade Choir, 8th Grade Choir, and/or combined 7th & 8th Grade Choir?

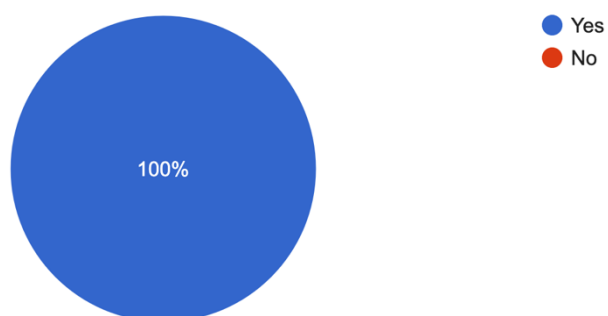
23 responses



4.

Does your choir include male singers?

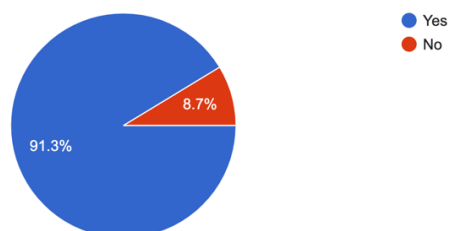
23 responses



5.

Have you ever placed male singers in the same voice section as female singers?

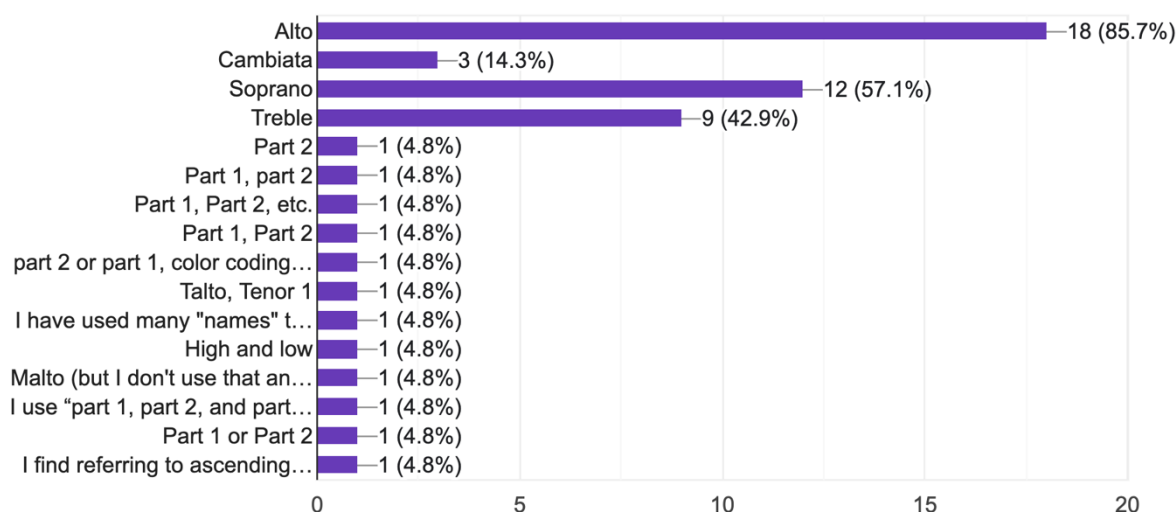
23 responses



6.

What name or names did you use for male singers that sang in the same voice section as female singers? Check all that apply:

21 responses



7.

What vocal benefits did the male singers display when they were placed in the same voice section as female singers?

21 responses

More people on their part so better pitch matching

If their voices hadn't changed and they were comfortable staying in alto/soprano it led to a more natural transition. If their voice had changed but they were more comfortable in alto soprano singing in falsetto it also is a benefit socially and vocally

They were able to sing their part and experience success!

Some of my male students have a REALLY hard time accessing their "singing" voice or sing at the absolute bottom of their range. Placing the male students in the same section as female students helped the males start to sing in a more appropriate (higher) range.

Better fit for vocal range led to greater success and more enjoyment

I believe they feel more confident singing with other singers that are singing in the same octave. They do not feel like they have to struggle to sing lower when their voices haven't started to change. In my experience the female singers tend to be a lot louder since they are more confident since their voice is not changing at that age and the male singers sing out more because they can hear them. If a male singer begins to struggle with singing higher as the year progressed, they are offered the chance to switch to a lower part or sing down an octave when necessary so they can continue singing with the members that they are comfortable singing around. I have female singers that sing the traditionally male parts as well so there is always a blend of male and female singers in all of the parts.

They could sing with confidence in their current range.

They were more apt to match the singing around them instead of trying to drop the octave as changing/changed voices.

They were able to match pitch more comfortably and blend better

Comfortable singing in appropriate range.

Appropriate voice range!

Voice placement is decided by range not gender. This is a non issue. I don't even think I ever talked about it.

The clearest benefit is the ability to hear their pitches reinforced by those around them.

Sop usually has the melody and it is easier to hear. This all works until their voice changes, then we transfer to sab

They felt more comfortable singing in the physiologically appropriate register for them at the time. Freshly mounted cambiata or baritones will sit near sopranos so they can sing the melody down an octave and get used to their new voices.

They felt more comfortable singing in that range and didn't feel pressured to sing "low notes"

Easier for them to sing the part higher musics success rate.

Male singers who's voices have not changed are not trying to sing lower than their range.

In a playful way, it boosted male singers confidence in their upper-range. We had playful contests in which my male singers would try to sing the treble part louder/better than the ladies. This was always mutually beneficial.

They do not have to attempt to sing pitches that are too low for their range. They have better models for tone and blend around them.

Ease in learning and performing

8.

What vocal disadvantages did the male singers display when they were placed in the same voice section as female singers?

21 responses

None

Trouble with switching octaves

I haven't found any

None really. A boy that hasn't gone through puberty and have their voice drop is simply a boy that hasn't yet. Honestly, I feel like this question is the same as saying "what vocal disadvantages

did female singers with pre-pubescent breasts display when they were placed in the same voice section as female singers with post-pubescent breasts.

As a downside to my previous answer, sometimes the female parts go TOO high and then the males get discouraged again when they can't hit the higher notes.

I think sometimes especially with 8th graders, they have felt like they should be singing the lowest part because that is what is traditional and they can feel embarrassed if they are not singing that part. Since our choirs typically have all genders in all of the parts and we base the part they are singing on their vocal range it is normally not a huge issue.

Might have to be switched quickly/learn a new part due to voice change.

Some were uncomfortable initially, but were assured that when their voice changed that they could choose to move to the tenor section, if they wanted/were ready

Sometimes they felt uncomfortable even after talking about range.

I can't think of any

Theoretically a part of their voice could go under-utilized if the need for it never arises out of the music they are singing.

None. They tell me when they are ready to try the lower part, or I suggest that it is time. No one should feel awkward for any part sung. I have the kids switch around parts quite often so they can find their comfort zone

Sometimes not sure which octave to use. Which is not actually a problem, except for the confusion. In late stage voice change, both octaves are accessible.

Not too many that I noticed. Maybe they felt like it made them seem more "feminine"?

Identity issues. Depends on song content and how you address the group

The largest learning curve was following the alto line in an SAB/SATB score. I think the disadvantage was mostly on the ladies who could sit low, quiet, and comfortable in their range behind the guys.

In higher registers, the boys sometimes have a hard time blending their timbre with the surrounding members. Any other vocal disadvantages were more the result of social factors (lack of confidence and thus breath support and vocal energy).

None

9.

What social benefits did the male singers display when they were placed in the same voice section as female singers?

21 responses

More talking to others

Depending on the male singer- some have requested and some were fine with it and stuck with it until their voice started changing

My choir is one big happy family, so all male singers have the same social benefits, regardless of their part assignment (SATB).

I would say that this is less of a benefit and more of "avoiding a potential problem". There are often behavioral issues when all of the boys are together. These issues tend to go away when the boys aren't all together.

Opportunity to get to know more people of a another gender

I think having the male voices with the female voices in the middle school helps the entire group socially. The students are able to get to know other students they may not normally hang out with and since they have all decided to join chorus they have that in common.

Got to know more members of the choir

They felt confident because the female singers complimented them often.

I'm not sure there were social benefits other than if those boys were still very friendly with the girls in their section, that this was another opportunity to be with those friends.

I always put all male singers together, like putting sections next to each other so male altos are next to male tenors, so male singers would feel more comfortable. Not sure of social benefits.

Depends on the kid - each is different. I have had lone 8th/9th grade boys in alto sections, and for those particular kids, they are very comfortable, have alto friends, aren't self-conscious about ti.

Not sure

Directing a middle school group really taught me that it was essential to build a group culture that made the answer to this question both important and unimportant. All good choral music is produced from an ensemble that has a nice tone which blends and is balanced. If a "male" singer has the range of a "female" of his same age, and the music requires him to sing the same notes in that part, then he needs to feel comfortable in his contribution. This is an issue of group culture. Do the students feel safe, is the ultimate question.

More maturity not being clustered with their goofy boy buddies

Not sure.

Comfort in being where they are vocally and also being near their female friends.

Socially I didn't see any benefits

They strengthen their range and sing in tune.

The idea of "educational gossip" took place. Kids organically shared more about their experience with the material, and actually discovered/examined some pretty profound observations.

It depends entirely on the kid. Some kids don't mind singing with mostly girls, or even prefer it, while others are embarrassed and don't sing out because of it. Sometimes it is hard for the male singer to make friends if they are not surrounded by similar peers.

They were treated as tokens or pets. Not sure this was a good thing

10.

What social disadvantages did the male singers display when they were placed in the same voice section as female singers?

21 responses

Probably not having topics discussed that they were interested in

Some wanted the camaraderie of the male section and I was happy to oblige.

My choir is one big happy family, so all male singers have the same social benefits, regardless of their part assignment (SATB).

I personally can't think of any disadvantages.

Some boys did not like singing the same voice part as the girls- they felt isolated from the rest of "the boys"

I have not noticed any social disadvantages from male singers singing a traditionally female part. They have showed disappointment when they are not in the same part as their friends, but that has nothing to do with them singing a higher part.

Some would be extra self-conscious

None. But that was because of classroom culture.

There was occasional teasing reported. I used it as an opportunity to talk about how everyone's voice changed at a different time and there was no right or wrong time/voice part in choir.

Sometimes they would not socialize and withdraw. Sometimes they would barely sing.

You can tell with some kids that it doesn't jive with their self-image. If I'm not sure, I'll ask what they prefer.

I started scheduling classes by gender a few years ago.

This answer will largely be addressed by the one which precedes it. Yes, I have had male singers who have expressed some discomfort in the past (mostly towards the beginning of my career). Conventional wisdom says that "boys" will feel silly in the "girls" section. However, this is simply not true. Experience has shown me that taking the time to build a safe group culture, where the music is at the center, leads to singers moving to the place in the choir where they are needed. That is often different for each song. (And that is a whole other topic: The choral arrangements for middle school singers has been terrible for my entire life. SAB arrangements simply don't work for the average middle school. I teach 5-8. A Junior High typically has 9th graders and this is usually the first time when you might be able to field a choir with a legitimate "Baritone" section--but that is an entirely other issue).

None...but by 8th they are usually sab

None.

None really that I noticed

Sometimes they felt singled out or less masculine

None that I have seen.

Classic stupid boy behavior. In times where there was not an even split of guys singing part 2 and part 3, the few higher splits got some light ridicule for being girly-voices or pre-pubescent. This was always dissuaded before anything consequential was stated.

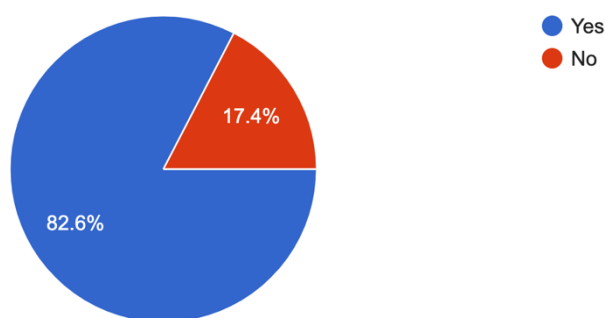
Some definitely are embarrassed and have a hard time making friends, making it less likely for them to sing out or continue with the group.

They want to stay under the radar

11.

Have you ever grouped all (or almost all) of your male singers in the same voice section?

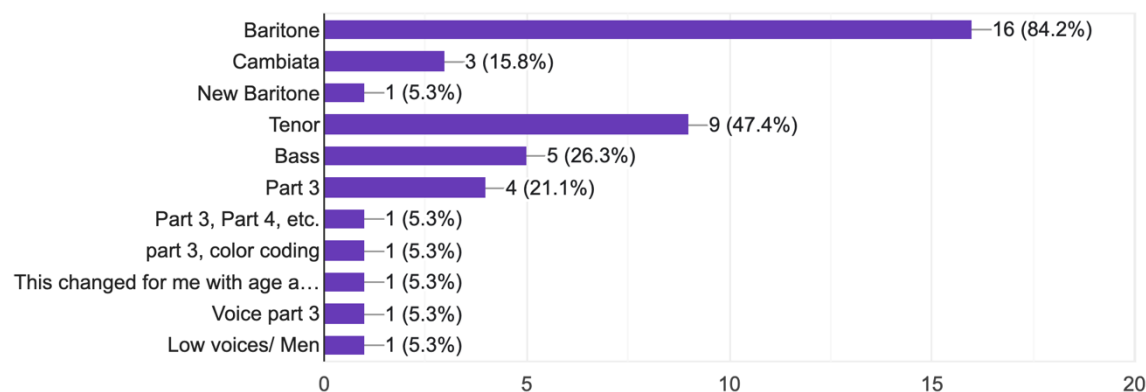
23 responses



12.

What name or names did you use for male singers when you placed all (or almost all) of them in the same voice section? Check all that apply:

19 responses



13.

What vocal benefits did the male singers display when they were all (or almost all) placed in the same voice section?

19 responses

Singing on pitch in the correct octave

Matching pitch in their octave

Students with changing voices were able to hear the notes they should be matching and match vocal quality of changes voices

When all of the male students are together, I can make sure that they're singing a part that really fits their voices/ranges. I typically can't do that when the male students are mixed with the female students.

Better balance with the SA sections of the choir- better overall product

Most of our 8th grade male voices end up in part 3 because they have started to change. Singing lower can be easier for them, but they can struggle with holding onto pitch. The tone quality can also suffer if they try to sing too loud. It is a struggle to find music with a third part that is not too low. I typically try to find part 3 mixed music if I find that the majority of the part 3 singers do not have a strong lower voice. It is beneficial for the singers still gaining their lower notes to hear other students singing them strongly.

Developed a strong sound on that sound

They were more apt to sing out earlier.

The boys liked singing altogether which made them want to work harder overall.

They feel more comfortable singing and take more risks because it's less embarrassing if, for example, their voice cracks while singing.

Vocal confidence, having an example (as a female the men in my group have a hard time hearing their part)

Most develop a camaraderie with others in the section. This leads to more comfort singing and more willingness to take risks (ex. going for that "high" note that WE know they can sing but THEY think they can't)

When I switched to scheduling by gender the boys were not outnumbered by girls in class. I could focus on the voice change.

It certainly helps to "place" notes when everyone around you is singing them, especially when the notes are "new" to the singer (as they often are for boys in the process of finding their ever-changing voices).

Strength in numbers...anchor confidence

Solidarity

I gave them the option to sing in whatever octave they were most comfortable.

Friendships and longer lasting singers

I had a lot of falsetto-dominant boys coming in from 6th grade. Some 7th/8th lit was way too low, but boy they had to try something new to accomplish it.

14.

What vocal disadvantages did the male singers display when they were all (or almost all) placed in the same voice section?

19 responses

Not patching pitch as much

Losing falsetto quicker

Some students whose voices were unchanged had some difficulty reaching the baritone notes of a typical SAB arrangement

It's easy for them to start singing incredibly low at the bottom of their ranges. It makes it harder to get them to sing in a higher, more appropriate range.

Ranges often too high or too low depending on the individual, being labeled “baritone” sometimes made them reluctant to access head voice, despite easily being able to

Some times males singers struggle to sing and match pitch as their voice is changing. They can have a very limited range for quite a long time and they can feel discouraged when they can't sing all of the notes. Some singers can get discouraged when they hear other singers sing the part easily, but with such a limited range this would happen even if they were singing a traditionally female part.

Would not get a chance to develop full range.

Non-changed voices would force themselves to sing lower to keep up with their male counterparts.

If there was one or 2 boys on the cusp of that vocal range I'd still stick them in with the other boys, so occasionally there would be an issue with blend, but not dramatic.

Sometimes they are intimidated by voices that are “better” than theirs. We talk a lot about everyone's voices being in different stages of development so they understand why everyone's voice is different.

Unchanged vs changed voice issues

Some range issues. Some have to fake some notes (either the low ones or the high ones). There can be a tendency to try and sing like the lowest singers in the section.

Not sure

When you are vocally a round peg in a square hole you will sink your section and experience frustration in the process. This is the worst of all possible worlds.

Challenges with hearing harmony.

Male altos or soprano are put on the edges so they can still stand with the baritones but sing their parts. But sometimes get confused.

Some of the parts written much too low. Gave them the option to sing alto if necessary.

It was pedagogical. Some voices were not correct for the range.

Projection was down when the music dipped too low. It's so difficult to find range-appropriate rep for middle schoolers. If you have resources or go-to's I would happily take them.

15.

What social benefits did the male singers display when they were all (or almost all) placed in the same voice section?

19 responses

Comradeship

Camaraderie

Increased confidence being with their same gender peers. Not feeling self conscious about changing voices in front of girls

There are typically twice as many female students as male students in my choirs. The male students feel a sense of solidarity when they're together. They sometimes feel singled out or like "one of the only boys" when they're placed in sections with female students.

Depending on the personalities, there can be improved camaraderie (or unfortunately the opposite)

I think it benefits the male singer socially to be with other singers who may be experiencing the same vocal struggles. We can talk about it as a group and they can feel like they are not the only one.

Strong camaraderie

They felt more confident singing the same thing as other boys- they didn't stick out.

Friendships were formed between boys who were in different social groups.

Working together, building friendships, encouraging each other, experiencing empathy.

Support and reduced stigma

Camradarie with others in same social situation. Team identity

A class of only boys helped them bond together as a team.

Despite my best efforts to provide a safe space across the board, and to promote utopian voice groupings, I can't deny that there is a certain camaraderie that typically develops among "the guys." That said, the camaraderie can still develop and be achieved with the same kids during breaks and outside choir.

Comraderie and brotherhood

Solidarity, near friends, mostly comfort.

Camaraderie with their male peers.

They were more themselves and happier

They had a real strong team bond and gave high praise for those who would take risks.

16.

What social disadvantages did the male singers display when they were all (or almost all) placed in the same voice section?

19 responses

None

Not sure

None that I have observed they seem to enjoy it

At this age range especially, grouping all of the boys together makes it so easy for behavioral issues to pop up.

None noticed

Sometimes singers tend to mess around too much when they are with their friends. This can happen in any voice section, but a lot of times if all of the male voices are together than a lot of friends end up together. If they happen to be struggling with being able to sing out because of their voices changing, this can lead to more socializing than normal since they can feel discouraged singing wise.

Sometimes would cause behavior issues

If one boy decides he didn't want to sing out it affected all the boys.

None that I saw

Sometimes they wouldn't work together and encourage each other etc to the detriment of the choir.

A bit of awkwardness and lacking confidence

Can't think of any

Boys that tend towards female friend groups missed out out having those friends in class.

If your group culture isn't strong and a student singer is acutely aware that their voice doesn't "belong" in that section, this could make choir a disorienting and ultimately unfulfilling experience both musically and socially.

Chatty and goofy

Distracted, smelly.

None that I really noticed.

Sometimes they couldn't keep up with the other kids if they had an unchanged voice

Same stupid boy [stuff]. Students who didn't have the notes yet received some light ridicule. Nothing too serious!

17.

Please briefly explain your approach for how you group 7th & 8th grade male singers in choir over the course of a typical school year.

23 responses

I listen to each singer individually and try to place them in the most appropriate section. Unchanged voices sing together with part 2/girls altos

I voice check in small groups all genders and suggest a section. I ask each student to try the section for a few weeks. It after that time they are uncomfortable and want to try somewhere else I allow them to talk to me privately and we figure things out. I have gender fluid kids and non binary or trans kids selecting where they are comfortable- but they usually stick with where I put them after I explain it's for their vocal development and not their gender. I'm careful to allow student who are still uncomfortable to be in a section that they are happiest. Keep them singing! I assign them based on where their vocal ranges fall, and as their voices change I change their part assignment.

Most of my pieces are SAB arrangements and I pick ones where the range is accessible for most 7th and 8th grade boys. If there are boys with changed voices where the parts are too high I occasionally have them sing melody down octave or might program some more SATB for that particular group or in the spring

I typically will have a Part 1, Part 2, and Part 3 in my choirs. You could think of this as Soprano/Alto/Baritone, but I tend to avoid those labels because my students often associate gender with those terms. Male students will often be placed in Part 2 or 3 depending on their range. This is fluid and the students can shift between sections as the year progresses. I also have students who were born female but now identify as male or nonbinary. I encourage those students to sing whichever part feels right/reaffirming for them, which often leads to those students singing Part 3.

First thing we do each year is a voice check for all our singers to assign voice parts. We check (particularly the boys) periodically throughout the year and adjust as needed. We often sing SATB in 7th/8th grade, so the option of two parts for boys does usually make it easier to keep them grouped by gender. However, we don't feel confined by that and certainly have boys who begin as altos.

We have a combined 7th and 8th grade chorus and we only meet once or twice a week during a recap period at the end of the day, so listening to every singer individually at the start of the

school year is not really possible. Typically we start out by singing a little bit of a song and the entire group sings each part together. After we sing through the parts, we ask the students what part they feel most comfortable singing. If they are unsure we will hear them sing privately to determine their part. If we are very unbalanced partwise, we will ask students if they are interested in switching parts to even things out. After a few practices, we move around the sections to make sure that everyone is singing in a comfortable range and if we hear anyone that we feel needs to switch parts we will talk to them. Throughout the year we may switch students into different parts based on how their voice changes and sometime they request a switch and we talk about it. Most of the switches throughout the year end up being for female singers, as most of the male singers choose parts 2 or 3. Every once in a while a male singer will choose part 1 and we make sure that we hear them sing the part right away and if they are struggling to sing higher, we make sure they are moved to a part that is more comfortable for them. Most of the time they chose part 1 because they wanted to sing the melody and not because it was the most comfortable. For our select ensemble, students audition blindly and they are placed into parts based on their vocal range and tone quality. These parts may change based on specific needs for a song or as their voice changes throughout the year.

Currently, I have my male singers in a separate class which has been excellent for their development and for the choir program. I am constantly observing their range/range changes through singing assessments and through listening to their speaking voice pitch. I usually discuss part assignments with individuals to assess their comfort with what they are singing.

I test their voices several times a year. I explain that we place students in sections that best suits their “voice” and not their “sex/gender.” I explain how the voice changes throughout middle and high school to help students understand the purpose of where they are placed.

Boys auditioned with scales to show their range and were placed accordingly. If someone had a voice change during the year they could change sections or I would even rework harmonies to make it more comfortable for their changing voice. Important to be sensitive to this time for them!

I voice test each male singer multiple times throughout the year. I put John Cooksy’s stages of vocal development on a piece of paper and show it to the singers. I use a series of vocal warmups after identifying their speaking pitch in order to find the most comfortable range of their singing voice. Then I show them which stage of development they are currently in on the paper and use it to track their progress for all the years they are in choir.

Prior to Covid when things were slightly different, I would group my strong alto females with my males in something I called part 3. Often I have to rearrange an SSA or SAB to fit the need of that group. There are some exceptions where I would put male singers in part 1 due to unchanged voice and maturity. I would have to take the temperature of that child as there is so much fragility around male singers

7th Grade - first time in middle school in our district. 1st time in a chorus Class. First weeks of class, I'll generally have them sit together, as I do vocal range checks. Then I divide into Tenor 1 (basically alto or higher range), Tenor 2 (3-part mixed range), Baritone (this group is made up of

either true baritones or basses OR those who can't sing in the tenor range at all). In practice, I decide per song (or even parts of song) what each section sings. For 2-part. Generally ALL the Tenors sing Part 2 with Altos. Baritones sing Part 1 with Sopranos in comfortable 8ve. In 3-part Mixed(which I more often use), Sop and Bar often sing part 1, Alto and Tenor 1 often sing part 2, and Tenor 2 often sings part 3. I recheck voices either formally or informally throughout the year. For 8th Grade Chorus (2nd year of chorus, 2nd year in my school), I tend to seat the males who I know/suspect are true tenor/bar/bass together at the start of the year. Those who are unchanged - I mostly know - depending on the kid, they may sit with alto/sops or the males. As I check voices formally at the beginning of the year, I'll divide (usually, if numbers support) into a Bass and Tenor section. Again - unchanged I'll generally put in the alto section, but depending on kid could be sop and could be tenor (for social comfort). In practice, again, knowing each kid's voice is helpful. It is common for me to have a 'high tenor' or 'low tenor' version of a part. I will also often supplement a 'high tenor' part with some altos (but that's a different survey!). Again, I either formally or informally check voices and adjust through the 8th grade year.

I voice test every semester and as needed as I hear their voices change. I group classes by gender and voice students by their range. In 7th grade most of the boys sing in the soprano and alto range.

This is an enormous question and requires a lot of our energy (as I'm sure you know!). First, I voice everyone. My auditions are in June so I know who my choir is in Aug/Sep of the following year. This gives me plenty of time to select repertoire. Most young choir directors shoot themselves in the foot at this critical step. You **have** to pick the right repertoire or everyone is finished before you start. I don't have a "different" approach for my "males" anymore than my "females." The music requires blend and balance. I'll need "X" amount of voices on each part to achieve that. Hopefully, I did my job tailoring our repertoire to what we have. Each piece will need to be customized with regard to voicing. I don't even let my females get settled into "soprano" or "alto." They come to me with all these labels, whether it is from an elementary teacher or a private teacher. These labels are completely arbitrary (in middle school). That may be heresy to say in choral circles but I don't care. I know what works for my program and my kids. Part 1, Part 2, Part 3, etc. Sometimes I screw up and say, "Hey, Sopranos..." Whatever. They know what I mean. Bottom line is I want my kids to think of their voice as an elastic instrument. They should be aware of the bottom and the top. How to get to both. When it might be changing and evolving. You don't always get melody. You don't always get harmony. I keep them switching sections as much as possible (again, back to the problem with choral arrangements: Soprano=Melody, Alto=Harmony, Bass=Mostly inaccessible, etc.) I hope that made sense. Apologies for the stream-of-consciousness. Some of this stuff has been bothering me for quite awhile. Best of luck with this! This is a very interesting and worthwhile area of exploration.

Vocal placement based on range and leadership. Some boys still need to sing melody...but so do some girls. It has to be enjoyable for them...if not then what is the point? I move kiddos depending on range and literature.

Briefly? Ha. I'll try! 7th grade Winter Concert-all singers sing unison 2pt. Changed voices sing melody down octave. 7th grade Spring Concert-SAB divisi. Confident baritones sing B. Newer

baritones sing S down an octave. Instrumental support given for B part. ALL SINGERS- INCLUDING GENDER FLUID/NONBINARY KIDS-SIT self selected WHERE THEY MOST COMFORTABLY IDENTIFY AND WHERE THEY FEEL THEIR VOICE IS STRONGEST 8th Grade Winter and Spring Concert SAB true divisi (fingers crossed) *True treble voices switch between melody and harmony

I like to place all students where they are comfortable vocally. However, sometimes I need a student who is a strong singer on a certain part. I also give the option to sing whatever is most comfortable to them. I am also careful when choosing repertoire to look at the ranges and try to pick things that are where my students are vocally.

7th grade I would pick Sab music, with modified/added bass. Also, I would ask the kids what they would want to cover. If a boy wants to try an alto part it is fine with me, or an alto who wants to sing tenor. Eventually they find the part that is easiest for them

I do not group by gender. I group by vocal ability and voice part.

I try to stay 2 part and give options for octavation. My kids know “..and if the notes are feeling too high for you, what do you do?” “Just sing them down the octave!” This results in kind of a weird soprano part 2/alto baritone doubling soprano balance, but it doesn’t have to sound awesome at the beginning of the year. I try to mix by the holiday concert, some 2 part, some SAB/3 part. By contest, i have a good idea for the ranges of all of my singers, so i split them into three parts. I try to assign rep that is performed as-written to prepare them for high school. End of the year is generally a crap-shoot because we’re singing pop songs. If you remove the expectation of immediate excellence in exchange for meaningful and celebration-worthy progress, you can make some really high-standard music by mid-second semester. PS hi Evan.

It is rare that you have a class or choir that has all of its male singers in a similar range. In the fortunate chance you do, you can opt for voicings that have only one baritone or tenor part. In most cases, I find it better to provide as many voice parts as necessary for kids to sing in a range that is comfortable for them. Often for me, I will make up a bass part for only one or two kids(I don't always bother writing it out, but just make a recording). I find that if you can get the kid to practice, you can always mic them to balance out voicings. Early 7th grade, we be likely to sing 2-part songs (all genders), but some kids sing the octave down on either part. Late 7th grade, I move to 3-part mixed and write baritone/bass parts as needed. 8th grade can be any combination of things from 2-part with octaves, 3-part with baritones added, SATB, or SSATB (a favorite of mine because you can have altos and cambiata sing a relatively comfortable part).

I have a separate choir for boys, but I’m rethinking this given gender identity amongst middle school kids being so fluid. I’m planning on having a treble choir and a “changing voice choir”. Both groups will have three voice parts low middle high

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