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Research Proposal

Context and Justification

I am a choral director, working in both a school setting and a church/community setting. When I began my MA pathway, my intention was to focus on my work in schools with adolescents and changing voices. As I progressed through my MA journey, I became intrigued by the research on singing for health and wellbeing, and wanted to explore how that might impact my work with adolescents and adults. As my goal is to use my research to help develop an inclusive and accessible community choir, I decided to conduct my final work-based learning project with adult participants. I have worked with adult singers in various settings for the past 15 years, so I plan to utilize my connections with former choir members as a starting point to identify participants.

There are a number of studies indicating that choral singing can have a positive impact on social and emotional wellbeing (Bailey and Davidson, 2002, 2003, 2005; Skingley, Martin and Clift, 2005; Pavlaku, 2009; Livesey, Morrison, Clift and Camic, 2012; Allison et al, 2020; Helitzer, Moss, and O'Donoghue, 2022). Some studies suggest that singing can also facilitate social bonding and create strong feelings of connection with other participants (Bailey and Davidson, 2005; Livesey, Morrison, Clift and Camic, 2012; Judd and Pooley, 2015) and also may help serve as a powerful “ice breaking” tool with groups of strangers (Pearce, Laundry, and Dunbar, 2015, pg. 496). I am undertaking this project to gain a deeper understanding of what factors of community choir participation have a positive impact on the social and emotional wellbeing of singers.

Although this research project will not involve piloting a community choir, I aim to use my learning from this study to aid in developing a choir in my community. As much of my learning has focused on work with adolescents and advocating for music in schools, it will be valuable to my practice to shift my focus to adult singers for this final module of my MA.

Intended Impact

Research in this area will aim to uncover strategies and best practice for developing and leading a community choir that feels truly inclusive and accessible to a wide range of singers. I hope for my research to answer the following questions:

1. What makes singers feel comfortable participating in community choirs?
2. What makes singers feel uncomfortable participating?

3. How can choir be used to facilitate a positive impact on the social and emotional wellbeing of participants?

Relevant findings in singing for health research will be explored, which has ramifications for me as a researcher practitioner based in the United States. As this is a field of research that is not prominent in the United States, this research could help bring awareness of this field to my American colleagues.

Outlined Intention

Research will begin with a thorough review of existing literature on my research topic. Relevant literature from my previous study on the impact of group singing on the social and emotional wellbeing of members of the LGBTQIA+ community participating in a community choir will serve as a starting point for my literature review. Focus for this study will shift to which elements of group singing have the greatest positive impact on the emotional and social wellbeing of community choir singers. Learning in my previous module suggests further examinations of the impacts of:

- Choir leader personality and traits (Helitzer, Moss, and O'Donoghue, 2022),
- Repertoire style and difficulty (Palkki and Caldwell, 2018; Southerland, 2023),
- Ability levels in the choir (Pearce, Laundry, and Dunbar, 2015),
- Integration of social activities into rehearsals (Clift, Manship and Stephens, 2017),
- Gender identities of other choir members (Graf, 2016; Helitzer, Moss, and O'Donoghue, 2022).

Surveys will be sent out to local church and community choir directors to collect preliminary data and help identify participants for interviews and focus groups. Surveys will also be sent to adult members of choirs I have directed in the past 10 years, but efforts will be made to select participants with whom I do not have an existing relationship. Surveys will be distributed online, allowing for participants outside of my current geographic location (Denscombe, 2014). The aim of the survey will be to identify a sample that is diverse in age, gender, and years of choral experience. A separate survey will be sent to choir leaders to investigate their perceptions.

After participants are identified through surveys, semi-structured interviews will take place through zoom, over the phone, or in-person, depending on participant location and preference.

The use of one-to-one interviews will allow for a deeper exploration of participants perceptions and will allow for the participants to share their experience in a more open-ended format. A semi-structured interview has been selected rather than a structured interview in order to allow for additional questioning to arise from the conversation (Gill et al, 2008).

If possible, focus groups may be used as an additional research method, allowing for the collection of data from group conversation facilitated by the researcher (Morgan, 1996). A focus group could be a useful means of data collection in this study as participants can provide feedback to one another through further questioning and responses to the experiences of others (Kitzinger, 1995).

Each interview will be recorded and transcribed for coding and examination (Bell and Waters, 2018). An internet-based service will be utilized to transcribe interviews, and then accuracy will be checked and adjustments made accordingly. Recording of semi-structured interviews and focus groups can be helpful for note taking as answers can often be detailed, descriptive and lengthy (Gill et al, 2008).

Transcriptions from interviews and focus groups will be stored in a password protected Google document. Additionally, a journal will be kept to document findings, thoughts and questions as the research progresses. This documentation of my learning journey will be a valuable tool for reflection and drawing conclusions from the data (Gray, 2004).

Below is an intended outline of my work on this project with deadlines:

Task	Deadline
Decide Research Topic and Questions	Jan 2024
Submit Proposal	Feb 2024
Read Relevant Literature	Feb 2024
Write Literature Review	April 2024
Develop surveys and send to tutor for approval	March 2024
Send surveys	March 2024
Compile Results and Narrow Participants for Interviews	April 2024
Schedule Interviews	May 2024
Transcribe and code interviews	May/June 2024

Write findings section of paper	June/July 2024
Submit Draft to tutor	Aug 2024
Final Paper and Presentation	Sept 2024

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Ethics and Insider Research

As a choral practitioner conducting research with choir members from choirs I currently lead and choirs I have led in the past, this project will involve insider research (Costley et al, 2010). While insider research comes with advantages, considerations must be made to mitigate bias. It can be helpful to take a “preventative approach” (Unluer, 2012, p. 6) by acknowledging the potential for bias and other ethical concerns from the start of the research project.

Other ethical considerations include maintaining participant privacy and anonymity. Audio recordings and notes will be stored in a secure, password protected folder in google drive. Cloud storage allows for the files to be protected by a passcode, but also accessible to the researcher from various locations (Bell and Waters, 2018). At the conclusion of the study, all audio recordings will be deleted.

Expected Learning Outcomes

- To gain a deeper understanding of ways in which singing can positively impact social and emotional wellbeing.
- To learn what motivates adults to join volunteer choirs and what makes them stay.
- To examine how the role of a choir leader impacts the experience of participants.

The Project

Introduction

During my MA studies, I have studied a range of topics, primarily concerning the adolescent voice. As a middle and high school choir teacher, this seemed like the appropriate course of study for my practice. I realized during my studies that there were gaps in my knowledge of working with volunteer adults, another important part of my current practice. This led to my inquiry into the motivational factors impacting adult participation in volunteer choirs. As a church choir director, this study will have a great impact on my practice.

This research investigation is an extension of my studies in module 5 exploring the potential social and emotional benefits of choral singing. Given the growing body of evidence supporting claims that choral singing can have benefits for social and emotional health (Pavlaou, 2009; Livesey, Morrison, Clift and Camic, 2012; Skingley, Martin and Clift, 2016; Young, 2018; Batt-Rawden and Anderson, 2020), I became interested in exploring what motivates adults to take the time out of their busy lives to participate in choir.

Lifelong Musical Participation

The encouragement of lifelong participation in music making has been the topic of discussion and research amongst music educators for decades (Choate, 1968; Myers, 2008; Boswell, 2022). Studies have found that high percentages of community choir singers participated in choral ensembles in high school (Tipps, 1992; Selph & Bugos, 2014), leading to suggestions that music educators should take the primary responsibility for encouraging lifelong participation in music from a young age (Choate, 1968).

In examining early motivations for participation, studies suggest that teachers and parents have the greatest impact on encouraging children to participate in music ensembles (Harrison, 2007; Selph & Bugos, 2014; Orton and Pitts, 2019). This provides further evidence that early experiences with music participation may encourage participation into adulthood. It must also be considered that negative experiences with music in childhood may deter adults from participating (Turton & Durrant, 2002; Pitts & Robinson, 2016).

Adult Choral Singing in the United States

A survey conducted by Chorus America (2019) estimated that 32.5 million US adults participate in regular choral singing. These results showed an increase in participation from their previous

survey (2003). The same study estimates that there are 12,000 community choruses (volunteer and professional) and 216,000 religious choirs in the United States, providing ample opportunities for adults to participate in choral singing nationwide. A study by the *National Endowment for the Arts* (2002) indicates that choral singing is the most popular arts activity amongst adults in the US. This can be partially attributed to the fact that choir is the most accessible form of group music making, allowing for a range of abilities and levels of experience (McCoy, 2013).

Despite the number of American adults who regularly participate in choral singing, studies show church choir singing has declined in recent decades. The *National Congregation Survey* (2019) examined a representative sample of United States congregations in four waves from 1998-2019 to track changes in worship trends over time. Findings document a decline in congregations with a choir, from 54% in 1998 to 42% in 2019. This follows trends of worship service styles becoming increasingly informal, making choirs obsolete in many congregations (Chaves and Andersen, 2014).

Similar findings reveal that singing in church choirs has declined in the UK as well. In 1950, the *Survey for English Church Music* estimated the average church choir size was 20 singers (Ashley, 2006) compared to an average of 14 singers in 2004 (Freke, 2004). This suggests that this decline is not exclusively an American phenomenon. While these studies indicate changes in church choirs, no existing studies were found documenting participation trends in community choir singing.

Literature Review

While studies have documented that choral participation can have positive social and emotional benefits for participants (Pavlaou, 2009; Livesey, Morrison, Clift and Camic, 2012; Skingley, Martin and Clift, 2016; Young, 2018; Batt-Rawden and Anderson, 2020), there is limited research examining the motivations of adults to participate in choir. Many relevant studies on the benefits of choral participation have been conducted with specific populations including older adults (Coulton et al, 2015; Skingley, Martin and Clift, 2016; Corvo, Skingley and Clift, 2020; Allison et al, 2020) men living in homelessness (Bailey and Davidson, 2002, 2003, 2005) and adults living with mental health conditions (Clift and Morrison, 2011; Dingle, Brander, Ballantyne and Baker; 2012; Clift, Manship and Stephens, 2017; Corvo, Skingley and Clift, 2020). While this research may provide insight into the motivations of adults to participate in choral ensembles, there are currently a lack of studies examining the benefits and motivations

of working adults and healthy adults (Selph & Bugos, 2014; Redman & Bugos, 2018). This literature review will examine pertinent research in the singing for health field as well as the music education field and aims to synthesize findings to explore factors motivating adults to participate in volunteer choirs. Motivational factors adults' motivation to participate in choirs may be linked to the perceived social and emotional wellness benefits of singing (Redman and Bugos, 2018).

The potential motivating factors impacting adult participation in choirs which will be explored in this review are:

1. Social/Emotional Influences
2. Musical Influences
3. Skill Development
4. Impact of the Choir Director
5. Impact of Other Choir Members

Social/Emotional Motivations for Choir Participation

Findings relating to the social/emotional benefits of singing may provide insight into the factors that motivate adults to participate in choirs. In a review of relevant literature, Boswell (2022) identified seven studies dealing specifically with community choir participation and noted “purely social motivations for participation appear to some extent in every study of the topic” (p. 60). A study by Goodrich (2019) examining participation motivations for adult community band members found that the social aspect was more motivating than the musical components of participating. Studies by Darrough (1990) and Selph & Bulgos (2014) had contradictory findings, indicating that the social motivations were secondary to the musical motivations for choir members.

Relevant studies in the Singing for Health field suggest that group singing may promote feelings of social connectedness (Pavlaou, 2009; Livesey, Morrison, Clift and Camic, 2012; Skingley, Martin and Clift, 2016; Young, 2018; Batt-Rawden and Anderson, 2020). Social benefits include participation in social networking through singing (Livesey, Morrison, Clift and Camic, 2012), an opportunity to meet others (Pavlaou, 2009) and a way to make new friends (Clift, Manship and Stephens, 2017). Participants in a study by Helitzer, Moss and O'Donoghue (2022) suggested that the people in their choir felt like an extension of their family, suggesting a deep personal connection may be established by singing with others. Lagace et al (2015) found that singing broke down barriers to social connection that manifested from mental illness, providing further

evidence that singing can promote meaningful connections amongst participants. These studies suggest that the ability to make social connections and friends may be a motivator for choral participation.

Pearce, Laundry, and Dunbar (2015) found that singing may help facilitate social connections faster than other group activities. The researchers named this phenomenon the “ice-breaker effect” (p. 508) and found that group singing led to more rapid increases in levels of “closeness” (p. 498) compared to non-singing activities. Research by Weinstein et al (2015) suggests that levels of social closeness from choral singing may be impacted by the size of the group. They found social closeness was higher in smaller groups compared to larger groups, but suggested this may grow over time no matter the size of the group.

Findings in additional studies suggest that participating in a choir can foster a sense of belonging in participants, providing additional benefits for social and emotional wellbeing (Bailey and Davidson, 2003; Livesey, Morrison, Clift and Camic, 2012; Dingle, Brander, Ballantyne and Baker, 2012; Judd and Pooley, 2013; Clift, Manship and Stephens; Young, 2018). In Bailey and Davidson’s (2003) study with a group of homeless men, participants expressed that the positive feelings associated with belonging to the group were more important to them than the quality of their performance. Similarly, a study conducted with adults living with mental illness found that the sense of belonging and acceptance contributed to their positive experience singing in choir (Dingle, Brander, Ballantyne and Baker, 2012).

Musical Influences and Motivations

While the social elements may motivate some adult choir participants, others may be motivated by purely musical factors. The enjoyment of singing has been found as a primary motivation in many related studies of adult motivations to participate in music ensembles (Boswell, 2022; Rensink & Hoff, 2009; Ramson, 2001; Selph & Bugos, 2014). Selph & Bugos found that the enjoyment of singing was the primary motivator for non-working adults in their study, compared to adults working full-time jobs who were more motivated by the opportunity to be challenged and develop their skills.

Singers may be motivated to join choirs based on the quality of the choir’s performance. Auditioned community choir members may be more likely to be motivated by the “aesthetic appreciation” of high level musical performance (Redman and Bugos, 2018, p. 702). Some research suggests that age may be a factor in motivation based on musical “aesthetics” (p.

702). Selph & Bugos (2014) found that young adult choir participants were motivated by the opportunity to develop their skills, compared to older participants were motivated by the “aesthetic benefits of choral experience” (p. 43). A study by Bailey and Davidson (2005) suggests that socio-economic status may also be a factor in musical motivation. Middle class community choir participants in Bailey and Davidson’s (2005) study place a higher value on striving for a high level of musical achievement, compared to homeless participants who found more value in the social connection. Additionally, while the act of performing may be a motivation to participate, there are studies suggesting that the rehearsal process may be a more meaningful part of the process for some singers than the performance (Bailey and Davidson, 2003; Young, 2018).

Skill Development

Studies have found that participation in choral singing may have cognitive benefits as well (Lagace et al 2015; Livesey, Morrison, Clift and Camic, 2012; Allison et al, 2020), meaning continued skill development may be a factor motivating adults to participate. Benefits may be related to the act of learning and developing new skills (Livesey, Morrison, Clift and Camic, 2012) and may appeal to adults seeking to continue learning (McCoy, 2013). This suggests that some singers may be motivated by the challenge of learning new repertoire and developing vocal skills.

A study by Selph & Bugos (2014) suggests that motivations based on skill development may differ based on employment status. They found that adults working full time were primarily motivated by skill development and continued education, compared to non-working adults whose primary motivation was musical enjoyment. Although their study was based on employment status rather than retirement, it could suggest that retired adults may be more motivated by musical fulfillment.

Participation in singing can also lead to increased feelings of self-confidence (Allison et al, 2020; Helitzer, Moss and O'Donoghue, 2022) and boost overall self-esteem (Pavlaou, 2009). Some studies suggest that choir can also be a useful tool for reducing stress (Pavlaou, 2009; Judd & Pooley, 2013). A study by Judd and Pooley (2013) examined the impact of group singing on amateur adults who were already participating in community choirs. All participants expressed positive feelings associated with singing, with one participant expressing that it was a “valuable tool” for dealing with the stresses of daily life (p. 274). A longitudinal study by Clift and Morrison (2011) found that group singing helped reduce feelings of anxiety, suggesting that group singing

may be a useful means of improving mental health. For example, a participant in Clift, Manship and Stephens' (2017) study expressed that singing gave them something to look forward to each week, which improved their overall sense of emotional wellbeing. These findings suggest that adults may choose to participate in choirs as a means of stress reduction.

Influence of the Choir Director

The conductor of a choir may play a key role in the experience of the choir members (Bell, 2004; Garrett, 2012; McCoy, 2013; Judd & Pooley, 2013; Helitzer, Moss and O'Donoghue, 2022) and therefore the impact of the director on participant motivation should be examined. The personality of the choir director is often viewed with equal importance as their musical skills and experience (Bell, 2004). Garrett (2012) found that it is important for the director to be intentional about fostering personal connections with singers, indicating that being an approachable director can contribute to supporting the continuing education of adult singers. Judd and Pooley (2013) similarly found that the choir leader's personality can impact the overall tone of the group in a positive or a negative manner. In addition to personality, participants in Helitzer, Moss and O'Donoghue's (2022) study expressed the need for a choir leader to be reliable and committed, stating that reliability can make singers more comfortable.

Conflict can arise in community choral groups when the director's goals are at odds with what the choir members desire out of the choral experience (McCoy, 2013). Therefore, it is suggested that the choir director focus on the needs of the group, even if it means sacrificing their own musical and artistic ideals.

Influence of Other Choir Members

Since choir is a place where people can make strong social connections (Pavlaou, 2009; Livesy, Morrison, Clift and Camic, 2012; Skingley, Martin and Clift, 2016; Yount, 2018; Batt-Rawden and Anderson, 2020), singers may be motivated to join choirs based on the social dynamics of the group. Studies suggest that the social aspect of choir is a motivating factor starting from a young age (Freer, 2015; Watson, Rubie-Davies, Hattie, 2019) and continuing into adulthood (Shim & Sim, 2020).

Some singers may be more motivated to participate in choirs made up of people with whom they share common beliefs or identity (Graf, 2016; Skingley, Martin and Clift, 2016; Helitzer, Moss and O'Donoghue, 2022). For example, participants in a study by Skingley, Martin and Clift (2016) expressed that they enjoyed the fact that group singing allowed them to make social

connections with like-minded people with whom they shared similar interests. Participants in Rohwer's (2010) study indicated that there were spiritual motivations to their participation in church choir, with most participants sharing that the opportunity to pray together as a choir was important to their experience.

Studies by Graf (2016) and Helitzer, Moss and O'Donogue (2022) found that singers may feel more comfortable participating in choirs in which others share their gender identity. In Helitzer, Moss and O'Donogue's (2022) study female-identifying singers expressed greater feelings of safety participating in an all-female choir, sharing that they would not feel the same level of comfort participating in a mixed gender ensemble. Similarly, Graf (2016) found that male-identifying singers may be more likely to join an all-male due to increased feelings of social bonding. These findings are interesting considering the fact that many choral groups are shifting away from gender-specific choirs in favor of more inclusive options (Cates, 2020).

Motivations for Non-Participation

To identify motivations for participation in choral singing, it may be useful to examine the reasons adults choose to not participate in music ensembles. Turton & Durrant (2002), Harrison (2007) and Pitts & Robinson (2016) found that negative musical experiences in childhood may deter adults from participating. This is consistent with studies finding that many boys lose interest in singing around age 14 (Demorest, 2000; Zemeck, 2010; Orton and Pitts, 2019) and could explain why women outnumber men in many community choirs (Boswell, 2022; Redman & Bugos, 2019).

Busy life circumstances or lack of local opportunities may impact adult participation in music ensembles (Cavitt, 2005; Rohwer & Rohwer, 2012). Participants in Rohwer & Rohwer's (2012) study suggested that younger people may not have the time to commit to participating. Selph & Bugos (2014) found that young adults in their 20s may be easier for choirs to recruit than adults in their 30s and 40s. This may be attributed to the fact that younger adults may seek to continue choral participation after graduating college, but participation may become more challenging as family and career commitments become more present (Pitts and Robinson, 2016). Additional factors may include anxiety surrounding auditions and concerns of declines in skills and ability (Burch, 2016). These findings suggest that there may be people in the community who want to join community ensembles but experience various barriers to participation.

Methodology

In order to select an appropriate research approach, it is crucial for the researcher to first examine the “philosophical worldview assumptions they bring to the study” (Creswell, 2014, pg. 34). The researcher’s worldview, or paradigm, is influenced by their beliefs about reality (ontology), knowledge (epistemology) and values (axiology) (Kawulich, 2012). These philosophical foundations help the researcher to develop a methodological framework for their research (Costley et al, 2010). Some paradigms represent a fixed worldview which influences the research methods for a study (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). For example, positivist researchers often employ quantitative methods while constructivists often utilize qualitative methods (Kawulich, 2012).

Mixed methods research allows the researcher to utilize both qualitative and quantitative research, allowing the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the research topic (Bell and Waters, 2018). Mixed methods research can allow for a mixture of worldviews (Creswell, 2009) and is often aligned with pragmatic or transformative paradigms (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006). A pragmatic paradigm places the focus on the research question (Feilzer, 2010) and then utilizes any available approaches to answer the question (Creswell, 2014). It is for these reasons a pragmatic paradigm was selected for this study.

Methods

Mixed methods research relies on multiple forms of data collection and can help researchers feel more confident in the “accuracy of finding by using different methods to investigate the same subject” (Denscombe, 1998, p. 147). Mixed methods research can have the benefit of allowing the researcher to analyze data more deeply, but can also make the process of data collection and analysis more time consuming (Denscombe, 1998). Qualitative and quantitative data do not always necessarily hold equal weight in mixed methods research (Denscombe, 1998), but the researcher must establish a clear rationale for conducting mixed methods research (Creswell, 2014).

This research project followed an “explanatory sequential mixed methods” design (Creswell, 2014, p. 44) in which quantitative research was conducted and analyzed first. Quantitative data analysis yielded findings and questions that helped develop the qualitative research which was later conducted (Creswell, 2014), allowing for the qualitative research to “develop on findings” of the quantitative research (Denscombe, 1998, p. 152).

The methods utilized for this study include:

- Literature Review
- Survey
- Focus Groups

Literature Review Process

The literature review for this project first began by exploring relevant studies in the singing for health field. Building off learning from a previous research module, studies examining the social and emotional benefits of singing were used as the starting point for the literature review. It was hypostasized that the social and emotional benefits of singing may be linked to the key motivating factors for participation. Systematic reviews of the literature were examined to further identify key themes (Randolph, 2009) followed by “footnotes chasing” (Bates, 1989, p. 1) to identify relevant research studies.

Database searches were then conducted to identify research more specifically linked to the motivational factors impacting adult participation (Bell and Waters, 2018). Key phrases used were: *adult choir participation*, *adult community choir*, *adult church choir*, and *adult motivations for singing*. A few papers were identified, but specific peer-reviewed literature on adult motivations appeared to be limited. There were PhD theses and other grey literature (Lawrence et al, 2014) identified during this process, which proved to be relevant.

Additional database searches were expanded to identify research relating to adult musical participation in instrumental ensembles, to examine if there may be possible links in motivations for adult choral participation. The process of “footnote chasing” (Bates, 1989, p. 1) was continued until “a point of saturation” had been reached (Randolph, 2009, p. 7).

Survey

Survey research can provide a “quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population.” (Creswell, 2014, p. 41) Surveys can be used in research to collect “fairly straightforward information” (Denscombe, 1998, p. 167) and are typically utilized for large scale data collection (Cohen et al, 2007). Success can be dependent on the “response rate, completion rate and validity of responses” (Denscombe, 1998, p. 167). Due to the time involved in completing surveys, researchers should be thoughtful of their length (Bell and Waters, 2018) Respondents will need to be motivated to

complete them and may be motivated by previous interest and investment in the topic (Denscombe, 1998).

For this research project, most questions were asked using 5-point likert scale responses (see Appendices E and F) in order to determine the “strength of feeling (...) towards a given statement” (Bell and Waters, 2018, p. 201). All items on the survey were exclusively closed questions in order to limit the amount of time that respondents would need to invest in completing the survey and encourage higher response rates (Denscombe, 1998). The survey was created in Google Forms, which aided in keeping all data organized in a cloud-based system (Bell and Waters, 2018). Internet-based surveys allow for researchers to more easily access a wider sample, but also require additional ethical considerations (Cohen et al, 2007). To mitigate ethical risks, all respondents signed a statement at the start of the survey in which they were assured that their privacy would be maintained and made aware that they could withdraw consent at any point during the study (Cohen et al, 2007).

Participants for this study were all adult volunteer singers currently participating in community and/or church choirs. In order to recruit participants, a letter of invitation was sent to choir directors, inviting them to share the survey with the singers in their choirs. In cases where choirs consisted of paid singers and volunteers, directors were asked to share the survey only with volunteer choir members. 122 surveys were returned, but only 120 were completed. All participants provided consent to participate and were notified that participation in the study was voluntary.

This survey mostly utilized convenience sampling, due to the ease of access (Cohen et al, 2007). Surveys were primarily sent to choir directors and choir board members with whom the researcher already had a pre-existing relationship, with the exception of one community choir. In an effort to obtain a diverse sample (Bell and Waters, 2018) surveys were sent to choirs in the Southeastern and Northeastern United States representing a range of communities and encompassing a variety of choir types. Participants in this study were recruited from 8 choirs in the United States: 4 church/religious choirs, 2 auditioned community choirs and 2 non-auditioned community choirs. The choirs participating in the study include:

1. **Choir A:** A church choir in an urban city center in the Southeastern United States.
2. **Choir B:** A church choir in a suburban region in the Southeastern United States.

3. **Choir C:** A non-auditioned community choir in an urban region in the Southeastern United States.
4. **Choir D:** An audition community choir in an urban city center in the Southeastern United States.
5. **Choir E:** A church choir in a suburban region of the Northeastern United States.
6. **Choir F:** An auditioned community choir in a suburban region of the Northeastern United States.
7. **Choir G:** A church choir in a suburban region of the Northeastern United States.
8. **Choir H:** A non-auditioned community choir in a rural region of the Southeastern United States.

62% of participants indicated that they currently participate in one choir, while 38% participate in multiple choirs (see Table 1).

<i>Table 1: Choir Types Represented</i>		
Choir Type	Number of Participants	Percentage
Church/Religious Choir	23	19.17%
Auditioned Community Choir	13	10.83%
Non-Auditioned Community Choir	39	32.50%
Church/Religious Choir and Auditioned Community Choir	8	6.67%
Church/Religious Choir and Non-Auditioned Community Choir	34	28.33%
Audition and Non-Auditioned Choir	1	0.83%
Church/Religious Choir, Auditioned Community Choir and Non-Auditioned Community Choir	2	1.67%

The majority of participants self-identified as white (90%) and female (77%) and did not have children living at home with them (91%). When analyzing employment status of participants, 45% were employed full-time, 45% retired, with the remaining 10% employed part-time, unemployed or declining to answer (see Table 2).

Table 2: Demographic Information of Survey Participants		
Age	Number of Participants	Percentage
18-24	4	3.33%
25-34	21	17.50%
35-44	10	8.33%
45-54	10	8.33%
55-64	19	15.83%
65-74	39	32.50%
75-84	16	13.33%
85+	1	0.83%
Gender Identity	Number of Participants	Percentage
Female	92	76.67%
Male	27	22.50%
Non-Binary	1	0.83%
Ethnicity	Number of Participants	Percentage
White	109	90.83%
Black or African American	2	1.67%
Hispanic	2	1.67%
Asian/Pacific Islander	1	0.83%
Other	5	4.17%
Prefer Not to Answer	1	0.83%
Community Type	Number of Participants	Percentage
Urban	30	25.00%
Suburban	73	60.83%
Rural	17	14.17%
Married?	Number of Participants	Percentage
Yes	70	58.33%
No	49	40.83%
Prefer Not to Answer	1	0.83%
Children Living at Home?	Number of Participants	Percentage
Yes	11	9.17%
No	109	90.83%
Employment Status	Number of Participants	Percentage

Employed Full-Time	54	45.00%
Employed Part-Time	9	7.50%
Unemployed	2	1.67%
Retired	54	45.00%
Prefer Not to Answer	1	0.83%
Number of Years Participating in Choir	Number of Participants	Percentage
0-10	26	21.67%
11-20	31	25.83%
21-30	17	14.17%
31-40	12	10.00%
40+	34	28.33%

Focus Groups

After collecting survey data, focus groups were scheduled with participants to further explore research questions. Focus groups are useful for collecting qualitative data and generating themes in research (Cohen et al, 2007). “yield collective rather than an individual view” (Cohen et al, 2007, p. 376). Focus groups were chosen over one-on-one interviews as a method of collecting qualitative data because they allow access to a wider range of participant opinions in a more condensed time frame (Denscombe, 1998). This proved to be a valuable tool for data collection in this project. Focus groups followed a semi-structured format in which questions were prepared around key themes, but topics were explored in greater detail based on participant responses and discussions (Gill et al, 2008). This allowed for the exploration and discovery of “information that is important to participants but may not have previously been thought of as pertinent” to the researcher (Gill et al, 2008, p. 291).

67 participants initially expressed interest in participating in focus groups. Participants who expressed interest were sent a form to indicate scheduling availability for discussion, yielding 23 available participants. Three participants signed up and did not attend their scheduled meetings, so 20 participants ultimately took part in focus groups. Five focus groups took place over a four-day period. One focus group was conducted in person and the remaining four were conducted online using Zoom. Focus groups were recorded, transcribed and coded for analysis (Bell, 2007).

Since the size of the focus groups can have an impact on the data collection, each group was kept small (Cohen et al, 2007), with groups ranging from three to five members. The smallest group proved to be the most challenging to moderate as two of the participants already knew one another, which may have impacted data collection (Cohen et al, 2007). Although several other focus groups also had participants who already had connections, this did not present the same issues in slightly larger groups. This in-person focus group was conducted with members of the same church choir following one of their rehearsals. Since they all knew one another, they were comfortable sharing their experiences.

80% (n=16) focus group participants identified as female, 15% (n=3) identified as male and 5% (n=1) identified as non-binary. 85% (n=17) identified as white, while 5% (n=1) identified as Black/African American and 10% (n=2) selected “other” when indicating their ethnicity.

The majority of focus group participants were over the age of 55 (65%, n=13) with the highest representation from the range of 65-74 (n=7). 50% (n=10) were currently employed full time, 45% (n=9) were retired and 5% (n=1) were unemployed at the time of this research (see table 3).

Table 3: Focus Group Demographics		
Gender Identity	Number of Participants	Percentage
Female	16	80%
Male	3	15%
Non-Binary	1	5%
Ethnicity	Number of Participants	Percentage
White	17	85%
Other	1	10%
Black/African American	2	5%
Age Range	Number of Participants	Percentage
18-24	1	5.0%
25-34	3	15.0%
35-44	1	5.0%
45-54	2	10.0%
55-64	3	15.0%
65-74	7	35.0%

75-84	3	15.0%
Employment Status	Number of Participants	Percentage
Employed	10	50%
Unemployed	1	5.0%
Retired	9	45.0%

In terms of the choirs that focus group participants were currently participating in, 40% (n= 8) were participating in just a church choir and 35% (n=7) were participating in both a church choir and a non-auditioned community choir.

Table 4: Choirs Represented (N=20)		
Choir Type	Number of Participants	Percentage
Church/Religious Choir	8	40%
Auditioned Community Choir	1	5%
Non-Auditioned Community Choir	2	10%
Church/Religious Choir and Auditioned Community Choir	2	10%
Church/Religious Choir and Non-Auditioned Community Choir	7	35%

Ethics and Insider Research

As this research was conducted within my own professional community and practice, it is considered insider research (Costley et al, 2010). This research investigation was undertaken with the goal of professional growth (Costley et al., 2010), therefore my passion for the topic is an advantage to the research (Saidin and Yaacob, 2016). However, with insider research there are challenges to considered, including the conflict of interest (Costley et al., 2010) and the potential for bias (Unluer, 2012). Insider researchers should take a proactive approach in approaching research with an awareness of the potential for bias, and make efforts made to examine research from every possible perspective (Unluer, 2012).

There were additional ethical considerations to be considered with this project, including collecting all data in an ethical manner (Bell and Waters, 2018). The aims of the study were

clearly communicated in writing to participants at the beginning of the study (Gray, 2004). Participants were asked to give informed consent (see Appendix B) and were ensured that they could withdraw from the study at any time (Cohen et al, 2007).

Participant anonymity was maintained by assigning them numbers and removing their names other identifying information from the research report (Cohen et al, 2007). Focus groups were recorded for transcription purposes and then saved in a password protected folder. All audio recordings will be deleted at the conclusion of the project.

Data Analysis

The first phase of data analysis involved analyzing survey results. After initial analysis of survey data, findings were organized based on demographic groups for comparison (see Appendix G, H, and I). The data was then analyzed and compared to determine if there were any significant differences in findings based on age, employment status or the type of choir in which participants were involved at the time of the study.

Findings from the survey aided in the preparation of questions for semi-structured focus groups. At the conclusion of each focus group, notes and thoughts were maintained in a reflective diary (see Appendix K). As focus groups were transcribed, additional reflections were documented in the diary. Initial sorting of qualitative data involved applying codes to focus group transcripts utilizing a “deductive analysis process” (Bingham, 2023, p. 5) in which broad topics were selected in alignment with the aims of the study (Saldaña, 2013). This phase of organizing data aided in “filtering out” any data which was not relevant to the research question (Bingham, 2023, p. 5). Broad categories were selected based on reflective diary entries that were maintained following each focus group. Broad categories of motivations to participate included:

1. Musical/Repertoire Motivations
2. Social Motivations
3. Director Motivations/Leadership Qualities
4. Motivations to Quit

After the data was organized by categories, it was examined further to search for patterns and themes (Bingham and Witkowski, 2022). This phase of data analysis followed an inductive coding process as themes emerged from a deeper examination of the focus group transcripts (Saldaña, 2013). The following themes emerged in this phase of analysis:

1. Musical/Repertoire Motivations
 - a. Musical Aesthetic Motivations
 - b. Pride and Feelings of Accomplishment
 - c. Continued Learning and Growth
2. Social Motivations
 - a. Development of Close Personal Relationships/Friendships
 - b. Camaraderie with Others (During and Outside of Rehearsal)
 - c. Intergenerational Connections
3. Director Motivations/Leadership Qualities
 - a. Interpersonal skills
 - b. Musical Skill
 - c. Leadership Style
4. Motivations to Quit
 - a. Vocal or health decline
 - b. Issues with the Choir Director or Other Choir Members

Findings

Musical/Repertoire Motivations

When participants were initially asked what motivates them to participate in choir, many expressed that they participate simply because of the enjoyment of singing. In fact, 99.2% (N=120) of survey respondents indicated that the “enjoyment of singing” was a primary motivator to participate. Other top motivators revealed in the survey included “camaraderie with other choir members” (77%), “the challenge of learning something new” (75%) and “high quality performance” (71%). Focus group conversations allowed for deeper discussions of motivations including socializing, meeting new people, developing vocal skills, and the fulfillment of accomplishing something challenging.

Discussions in focus groups provided further evidence that enjoyment of singing may be a top motivating factor for adult choral participation. Most participants spoke first about the enjoyment they got out of singing in their choral groups. Participants cited that a “love of music” (Participant 16) motivated them to join their choirs, particularly the opportunity to “make beautiful music that you can't make by yourself” (Participant 15).

These findings are consistent with other studies suggesting that enjoyment of singing may be a primary motivating factor for adult choral participation (Boswell, 2022; Rensink & Hoff, 2009; Ramson, 2001; Selph & Bugos, 2014). Though enjoyment of singing may motivate people to initially join their choirs, additional factors may guide their choices when selecting a choir to join.

In addition, all participants in the focus groups mentioned that they had participated in choirs when they were younger, including involvement in children's choirs, high school choirs, and college choirs. Many of them shared that they have been participating in choirs consistently for most of their lives, while a few mentioned that they returned to singing in choirs after retirement. Some participants expressed that although they had always maintained a desire to participate in a choir, there were times in their lives when it was challenging. For some, fitting choir rehearsals into their schedules was difficult, while others had difficulty finding choral opportunities in their communities. Earlier studies found that it may be a common experience for adults to take breaks from singing during busy times of life (Selph & Bugos, 2012; Pitts and Robinson, 2016), but return when they are older and have more available time. This could suggest a need for flexible rehearsal options for working adults to balance choir participation with their careers and family commitments.

Theme: Musical and Aesthetic Motivations

Discussions with community choir members suggested that they had aesthetic preferences for more challenging repertoire, particularly traditional classical masterworks. This preference for what they considered “high quality music” appeared to be a major motivator for their participation. One participant shared that he loved being able to sing “the classics: Bach and Mahler and Strauss” (Participant 14) and expressed that this was a major motivator for him to join his choir. He also shared that while it was exciting and challenging to sing classical works he had heard before, there was an extra challenge with performing classical works he was less familiar with. He expressed great joy in the process of becoming familiar with a major work and “growing to love it”.

Other community choir singers held similar sentiments, particularly community choir members from larger choirs. One participant shared that she enjoyed her choir because of the director’s “demand for excellence” and the fact that “mediocrity is not allowed” (Participant 15). She went on to talk about the thrilling experience of performing music at a high level in a choir, particularly expressing the joy of “make(ing) beautiful music that you can't make by yourself”. For others, there was sheer joy in being surrounded by the sound of music: “I love being in the middle of all those voices. It's just a wonderful sound” (Participant 16). For these participants, performing classical music or other “high quality” music at a high level appeared to be a major motivator to participate in their choirs. These findings pertaining to community choir singers are consistent with findings from a study by Redman and Bugos (2018) in which singers in an auditioned community choir expressed the importance of the singing high quality repertoire.

It is significant to discuss that focus group participants in this study whose primary motivation was the enjoyment of singing “high quality” music were all over the age of 65. This demographic age group made up 50% (n=10) of the focus group sample, with 9 of those participants being retired. Younger participants tended to focus more on either social motivations or educational motivations. This is consistent with findings in a study by Selph & Bugos (2014) suggesting that younger adults may be more motivated by skill development and older people may be more motivated by aesthetic musical experiences.

Participants in this study from smaller community choirs did not share the same desire to perform predominantly classical repertoire. Participant 13 shared that her choir performs mostly “pop music,” but that there is often a balance of challenging repertoire and easier repertoire.

She acknowledged that different people are drawn to different styles of music and performing, discussing that every choir cannot be a perfect fit for every singer.

Participant 7 also sings with a smaller community choir and shared a desire to perform “great music,” but also expressed enjoyment in the fact that her group performs with choreography and other theatrical elements. These findings suggest that the style of music performed by the choir may be a motivating factor, whether it is “works of old masters” (Participant 10) or contemporary “acapella pieces” from movies or musical theater (Participant 7). Participant 13 perfectly illustrates this finding:

So I think it is about finding a fit for what you're looking for because there's all there's all different ways that you can perform. Right? So you gotta find the thing that gives you joy.

Some participants spoke of the importance of choir as a moment to escape from the stresses of everyday life. Participant 20 even considered it a part of her “self care practice,” sharing that her job can be “really heavy” and that being a part of a musical ensemble has become an important part of her weekly routine.

Some people have danced, some people are athletic. Choir is my thing (Participant 20).

Further examination revealed that motivating factors may be different for those participating in community choirs and those participating in church choirs. When speaking of primary motivations, community choir members were more likely to talk about the importance of the aesthetics of singing beautiful music, whereas many church choir singers had a tendency to focus on the spiritual aspect of singing in a worship service. Participant 7 expressed the feeling that focusing on “the message that you’re giving” and “leading” the congregation in singing gives church choir singers permission to not focus on musical perfection.

If you miss a note, that's fine. And that's a beautiful, kind of mantle to have, I think, different from singing in a community choir (Participant 7).

The theme of spiritual connection emerged as a motivating factor for many church choir members. Participant 8 noted that the ability to be able to “talk about feelings”, “religion” and “emotion” made church choir participation distinctly different from community choir. Other participants shared that they were motivated by the “spiritual connection” (Participant 3) of

singing in their church choirs, with Participant 2 sharing that singing in her church choir helped her feel more connected to others in the church community. She felt difficulty getting “plugged into the community” when she initially joined the church, but felt that choir gave her a place to connect with others. Spiritual connection also emerged as a theme in Rohwer’s (2010) examination of the motivations of church choir singers, further evidencing the potential spiritual impact of church choir participation.

Participants who sing in both community and church choirs felt differently about the separate experience of participating in both. Participant 19 expressed a deep connection to the people in her church choir, many of whom she has been singing with for decades. Although she shared that she was motivated to join her community choir out of a desire for a musical challenge, she remained in her church choir due to the deep spiritual and emotional connections.

You learn someone and how they think and what their abilities are. So you can use your abilities to get better because you have other people that you already know (Participant 19).

Theme: Pride and Feelings of Accomplishment

Being in these groups has been a life changing experience for me. And having music in my life, I can't imagine not. So, I'm so grateful for it. I think it's more than a hobby for me. It's really something that fills my heart (Participant 7).

A major observation made during focus groups was that many participants were noticeably proud to share their choral singing experiences with the others in the focus group. For some these experiences included learning and performing challenging repertoire, for others it included the opportunity to perform in unique and special venues. Many spoke of the significance of the opportunities afforded to them because of their participation in choir. These experiences may be a factor in a singer choosing to remain in choir for an extended period of time.

The sum is definitely greater than the parts. Just a normal person like me who lives in a little tiny house has sung in the Royal Albert Hall and has sung at the Vatican because I'm in these groups. And altogether, we are powerful. We are strong. And it's just... it's extraordinary for just a regular, ordinary, everyday person (Participant 8).

Participant 10 shared that her choir premiered a commissioned work in which they were able to rehearse with the composer. She was noticeably proud to share this, saying “That's when I knew I totally fell in love with the chorus because ... how would this happen to me otherwise? It wouldn't.”

Other participants spoke of the opportunity to travel internationally with their choir each year. While no one indicated that these were motivating factors to join, these experiences may motivate singers to continue participating in their choirs over time.

Others spoke of the satisfaction they experienced from accomplishing challenging repertoire with their choirs. Participant 7 spoke of performing music that was such a challenge that she “literally thought (she) was gonna die... I thought ‘what am I doing? I should bow out.’” She went on to describe the pride she and her fellow choir members felt when they successfully mastered the piece. Participant 11 shared a similar experience, saying that sometimes “it seems like it doesn't all come together for me till dress rehearsal maybe, but it's worth it. ... I just love it.” While no one indicated that these were motivating factors to join, these experiences may motivate singers to continue participating in their choirs over time.

Theme: Continued Learning and Growth

If you don't stretch, you don't grow. And I think that a large part of singing throughout your life is to keep growing (Participant 8).

Many focus group participants spoke of choir as an important space for them to continue learning and growing. This appeared to be a major motivation for them to continue singing their choirs. The opportunity to learn was a major motivation for many participants, including Participant 18 who described choir as a “free vocal lesson” and Participant 7 who expressed a desire for choir to “feel like it's a class.” Participant 20 shared that the reason that she participates in choir is because “it requires something” of her, stating that it would be “anticlimactic to go and, you know, sing a simple three part harmony and leave.”

This is consistent with survey findings indicating high percentages of participants desiring some degree of repertoire they considered challenging. 24% (n=29) of participants surveyed indicated that they preferred singing in choirs performing music that was challenging and unfamiliar and 72% (n=87) indicated that they preferred some mixture of challenging unfamiliar and familiar music. None of the participants indicated a desire to sing in a choir that performed music that they considered easy.

Some participants spoke of the importance of learning challenging repertoire to engage their brain, also consistent with findings that adults are motivated to join choirs out of a desire to continue learning (McCoy, 2013; Selph & Bugos, 2014). Retired participants, like Participant 6, specified that the challenging music she sings in her community choir is mentally stimulating “very good for (her) brain” compared to the easier repertoire in her church choir. Participant 11, an elementary school music teacher, shared that it was important for her to continue growing as a musician by continuing to have challenging musical experiences after graduating from college.

A common theme among singers who participated exclusively in a church choir was that they desired enough of a challenge to stay engaged but felt that efforts must be made to ensure that the music is attainable for the choir. Participant 12 shared how “defeating” it can feel for a choir to feel underprepared because they are singing music that is beyond their scope of ability.

It's defeating to get into things that are just more than you feel like you can do...
when it's unattainable, you just feel awful... it's pretty demoralizing.

Alternatively, another participant spoke about seeking out a community choir to join because her church choir was no longer challenging enough for her. The lack of challenging music did not make her want to quit her church choir, and she still remained motivated to continue in her church choir due to the connections she had made with the other singers over decades of singing together. The addition of community choir participation satisfied her need for a challenge while still allowing her to stay committed to her church choir.

At this point in my life, I need a challenge. And church choir had gotten to the point it was not a challenge anymore. And I needed that challenge, and I wanted to further my abilities as a singer to develop that more at that point (Participant 19).

These findings suggest that a community choir (auditioned or non-auditioned) may provide a more stimulating, challenging experience for singers, while a church choir may meet the spiritual needs of singers. It must be acknowledged that there are church choir who sing challenging repertoire as well, although that was not the experience of any of the participants in this study.

Social Motivations

Social time with other choir members was considered important by 87% of survey participants. 6% of participants prefer social time during choir rehearsals, while 32% indicated preferences for opportunities to socialize outside of choir rehearsals, and 49% prefer opportunities to be

made available both during and outside of rehearsals. This suggests a need for choir leaders and organizers to create intentional opportunities for social engagement outside of regular rehearsal time.

Many participants in focus groups brought up “choir sanctioned” social events organized by the choir leadership throughout the season. Some examples included:

- Choir organized snack time a few times per season
- Choir outings to sing karaoke
- Choir meet-ups at local bars

One participant serves as the Assistant Membership Director, expressing that she is often in charge of planning the social gatherings for her choir. She indicated that not everyone in her choir participates in these events, but there is a core group of people who show up to socialize no matter what the event may be:

Our chorus is about 180. But you always have, like, the top 50 or 60 that show up. You know, the 180...okay, fine, they're not as committed. But we've got that top 60, and they show up. Doesn't matter what I plan. They always show up, which is great (Participant 18).

Theme: Development of Close Personal Relationships

One survey question asked the participants to consider whether it was important to them to sing in a choir made up of others with whom they share something in common (political affiliation, religion, sexuality, gender identity, etc). 42% of all participants were neutral, while 47% indicated that this was a motivating factor in their participation. When comparing results based on choir type, there were higher percentages of singers agreeing with the statement in church/religious choirs (65%, n=15) and auditioned community choir (69%, n=9) compared to non-auditioned community choirs (18%, n= 7). The results for church choir members are consistent with results in a study by Rohwer (2010), suggesting that connection with others who share common spiritual/religious beliefs may be a motivation for participation.

In non-auditioned community choirs, 46% (n= 18) were neutral while 36% (n=11) indicated that sharing common beliefs or experiences with other choirs members was not important. These findings are consistent with findings in studies by Graf (2016), Skinley, Martin & Clift (2016),

Helitzer, Moss and O'Donogue (2022), suggesting that people may be motivated to participate in choirs in which they can connect with like-minded people.

Many participants spoke of the importance of making connections with other choir members, including the opportunity to make friends with common interests. Participant 20 indicated that it can be “difficult to make friends as an adult,” citing choir participation as a helpful way to make friends with shared interests. This is consistent with findings in study by Clift, Manship & Stephens (2017) in which participants expressed that choir provided a unique opportunity to make friends.

While many felt that choir provides them with an opportunity to make friends and develop social connections, it is important to acknowledge that preexisting friendships and relationships may be an influential factor in motivating adults to join choirs. Several participants indicated that friends recruited them to sing in their choirs: “my friend invited me... and here we are!” (Participant 15). Participant 18 shared that she works really hard to convince her friends outside of choir to consider joining, telling them: “It's so much fun! It's so much fun! You can let all your troubles go away!”

Since church choirs exist as a smaller part of a larger church community, they may provide a unique way for church members to feel more closely connected to their community. Participant 17 pointed out that choir provided a unique opportunity to develop deeper connections with other members of their church community, whereas other small group offerings at the church may only yield surface level interactions. This is consistent with findings in a study by Lagace et al (2015) suggesting that singing may facilitate stronger social connection than other group activities. Participant 17 attributed this to the collective group effort of “working towards a common goal.”

And, you know, I can go to a women's lunch once a month, but I'm sitting next to 2 or 3 people? We have general conversation and then an hour or an hour and a half later, we go our separate ways. But it's not... how can I explain this? We're not working toward a common goal. In choir, we're working together.

Participants shared their feelings that church choirs had a tendency to be small choirs in which “you probably know most of the people anyway. And there's just already a warm feeling of camaraderie or you wouldn't be there” (Participant 8). One participant spoke of the deep connections she had made with the members of her church choir, many of whom she has been

singing with for over 20 years. It was clear in her statement that the people she sings with in church choir each week have become an important part of her life.

Participant 19: You learn someone and how they think and what their abilities are. So you can use your abilities to get better because you have other people that you already know.

While church choir singers voiced the importance of the close relationships they developed in their choirs, others participants suggested that the close connections made in a small church choir may actually make it more challenging for new members to feel like they are part of the group. Participant 18 shared her experience as “the newbie,” expressing that trying to make social connections when she joined a new church choir felt similar to “breaking into a high school clique.” Participant 6 shared a similar sentiment, stating that her choir is “not very attuned to new people”. She went on to point out “if a choir has been together for so long, it’s very easy for them to forget that they need to go do a little extra for new people.”

Participant 19 offered a different perspective as a longtime member of her church choir. She expressed that her small church choir had a difficult time getting people in the congregation to join and shared earnestly a deep desire for others to join her small choir. She did acknowledge the challenges of breaking into an established group and recognized the obstacles that presented. She shared that “it is hard once you have an established group to try to get new people in, but to try to make them feel comfortable enough to stay in the group. And that’s a hard thing to do, especially with us, and we have a very small choir.”

These findings highlight the challenges smaller choirs may face in their efforts to increase membership and suggest a need for choirs to evaluate their process and practice of welcoming and recruiting new members. For church choirs it is also important to analyze the distinction between inviting long time church members to join the choir and welcoming new church members as both scenarios present different challenges.

Although most participants indicated that it was the members of their smaller choirs that did not seem as welcoming, one participant indicated that it was the choir director who did not make an effort to make her feel included. This suggests a need for choir directors to examine their role in making new choir members feel welcome, especially a new member joining a smaller choir with established relationships.

(They) pride themselves on being so attentive and: “Yes, here's your folder!” “Yes, here's a chair!” “Yes, here's your number for where your cubby is!” No. Even though there's somebody ... in charge... you just sort of pick a chair, and then you just assimilate (Participant 18).

Alternatively, a larger choir may offer more opportunities for connections with people. While a singer may not be able to know all the members of a larger choir by name, there may be the opportunity to make connections with others in “sub-groups” that may organically form in the choir. Participant 20 shared that although her choir is made up of about 100 singers, “there are several different pockets of shared interest,” perhaps making it easier for new people to make connections.

These findings could suggest that it may be easier to feel a sense of connection and belonging when joining a larger choir, because there may be fewer close-knit relationships to navigate and more opportunities to find others with common interests.

Theme: Camaraderie with Others (During and Outside Rehearsal)

Many focus group participants spoke of the importance of opportunities to socialize with their fellow choir members, both during and outside of regular rehearsal times. Some gave examples that are organized by the choir leadership, others shared social gathers that emerge more organically amongst participants. Participants 7 and 13 shared that their choir has volunteers provide snacks after each rehearsal, creating a weekly opportunity for connection. Other participants shared that their choirs provided similar gatherings with less frequency.

Participant 8 shared that her choir provided opportunities for choir members to do service projects in the community, expressing that this brought people together. She felt that these opportunities to “work alongside” others to do good in the community “draw people together.”

While socializing was important to most participants, 13% of participants surveyed (n=16) indicated that they did not have a desire to socialize with others in their choirs. Although participants may not seek out opportunities for social connections to extend outside of rehearsals, one participant’s experience suggests that camaraderie can develop with those seated around each other during rehearsal.

I don't get together outside with many of the members of the group, but still to work on a project together and make something really great come out of that is just

thrilling to me... I know my fellow basses quite well and we joke around and get to know each other during the breaks and stuff like that (Participant 14).

This suggests that social connections can emerge organically during choir rehearsals without the need for more intentional social gatherings. Other participants agreed that the rehearsal process provided opportunities to meet new people. Participant 13 felt that the process of “dig(ging) in” to challenging music creates a bond with the people seated around one another. Participant 15 shared that an opportunity for social connection occurs during the final week of rehearsal leading up to a concert, in which “there's lots of downtime, and you just have an opportunity to connect with people that you don't even connect with during the rehearsal because they probably don't sit next to you.” Similar findings emerged in studies by Bailey and Davidson, 2003; Young, 2018), suggesting that bonding during rehearsal may yield meaningful social connections amongst participants.

Theme: Intergenerational Connections

Several participants shared the importance of the choir as a space that facilitates intergenerational connections. This sentiment was shared by participants of various ages, coming from both church choirs and community choirs. Participant 4 said that she liked participating in her church choir because she gets “to be with younger people.” She went on to discuss how significant it was to be able to sing with her children when they were younger, sharing that this was a special bonding experience for her family.

The importance of intergenerational connections was echoed by participants in another focus group as well. Participant 11 mentioned that she was one of the youngest people in her choir and she appreciated the opportunity to develop friendships and learn from people with more life experience. Although she is a music teacher and provides vocal support to some of the singers in her choir, she specifically highlighted the importance of “life lessons” she was able to learn from older adults in her choir.

Creating those relationships that go beyond just talking about music or talking about choral events and supporting each other as humans and learning from one another (...) You know, they all say they tell us, the music teachers all the time “we're learning from you, we're listening to you” (...) I learn a lot of life lessons from them and through those conversations. And so, I think it's a really unique kind of give and take relationship where, you know, they like to say, “You're probably not listening to me and getting much musical help from me.” And I'm like, “okay... but, like, I

learned a lot of life lessons from you.” And that, in some sense, is probably more valuable (Participant 11).

Another participant in the same focus group agreed, but shared her experience as an older person singing with younger people. She felt that the energy of the younger choir members helped to motivate the older singers to continue growing and be better.

I can relate to the thought that sharing life lessons and we have wonderful, talented young people that encourage us to work harder, and, and they're so accepting. So it's just a morale boost every rehearsal (Participant 10).

Director/Leadership Motivations

When asked to consider the impact of the choir director on their choral participation, 94% of survey participants agreed that the personality of the choir director was an important factor when considering participating in a choir, with only 3 participants disagreeing. However, when asked about the value they placed on director experience and degrees, 42% of participants expressed neutral responses while 47% of participants indicated that director experience impacted their decision to join a choir. This suggests that participants may place more importance on the personality of the director rather than the director's experience, consistent with findings in a study by Bell (2000).

Based on focus group discussions, it was clear that the director had an impact on participants' motivations to join their choirs and stay in their choirs. When asked to describe a choir director who would inspire them to sing and make them excited to attend rehearsals, the following descriptive words were used by participants:

- honesty; trained; humor; honesty; funny; personable; outgoing; confident; enthusiastic; demanding; knowledgeable; supportive; clear; respectful

Theme: Director's Interpersonal Skills

Interpersonal skills appeared to be important qualities for a choir director, with honesty and humor emerging as the most important characteristics for many participants. Participant 6 felt that a director has to be funny, sharing that her “director always has funny stories to tell every week.” A sense of humor seemed to make the rehearsal process more enjoyable for participants. Participant 12 shared that if she is “not having fun, (she doesn't) want to bother”.

Also important to participants was a sense of “confidence and enthusiasm” (Participant 8), suggesting that these qualities both inspire singers and make them feel comfortable. Participant 11 went further to suggest that a choir director needs to “know the people in the group” to know what tools and supports they need in order to feel comfortable and successful. Participants in a study by Garrett (2012) felt similarly about the role the director plays in fostering a comfortable and encouraging environment. This could be knowing how to integrate new people into the choir (Participant 11), or recognizing a need for additional support in learning music and participating (Participants 6, 17, 18 and 20).

Some participants felt better participating in choirs where extra support was provided to them to learn their music. Many said that their choirs were made up of singers with a “mixture of abilities” (Participant 20), therefore there are people with varying levels of experience reading music. Examples of supports provided to choir members included:

- Part-predominant audio recordings to reinforce pitches and rhythms outside rehearsals,
- Access to group vocal coaching sessions,
- Recordings to aid in learning pronunciation for works not in English.

Participant 16 shared that his “limited musical training” caused him to struggle with reading music when he first joined choir. He appreciated the extra support and felt that it helped him “(get) a little better over the years.” Although other participants expressed that they also appreciated the access to these supports, they indicated that most people in their choirs “really don’t take advantage” (Participant 18) of these supports.

Several participants expressed a desire for conductors to recognize the special needs of older participants and provide the necessary accommodations to aid in their participation. This includes providing accommodations from people who cannot stand for long periods of time during performances (Participant 8), using a “sound system” (Participant 6) so that directions can be heard and understood by singers with hearing challenges, and providing options for music printed in various sizes to ensure all singers can read their music.

Theme: Director’s Musical Skills

Many focus groups participants spoke of a desire to sing with choir directors who have a high level of musical skill. Participant 14 encapsulated this desire by saying “I look for expertise in both the music and the ability to direct it.” Although focus group participants expressed a general desire for a choir director to be “knowledgeable and trained” (Participant 7), 42% of

survey participants (n=51) were neutral when asked about the importance of the director's experience and training when deciding which choir to join. 30% of participants "agreed" and 16% of participants "strongly agreed" that this was an important factor in their decision.

While participants shared a desire for highly trained choir leaders, many shared negative anecdotes rather than sharing positive experiences. Some participants spoke of experiences working with choir directors who they felt were "not very good at their job" (Participant 13). Lack of experience leading adult choirs caused frustration amongst choir members and Participant 13 felt that it impacted the morale of the group. Similarly, Participant 17 spoke of an experience working with a church choir director whose lack of experience had a negative impact on her choir. She shared that her former director had experience working with trained professionals, but seemed to have difficulty transferring those skills to a small choir of volunteers. These findings suggest that even highly trained conductors may not be a "good fit" (Participant 17) for every type of choral ensemble. It also suggests a need for training and professional development opportunities for choral conductors to learn best practices for leading adult volunteers.

An additional concern raised specifically by church choir singers was that their church choir directors neglected warm ups and vocal technique, often in the interest of time. Church choirs often have to prepare music weekly, compared to a community choir that may have several weeks or months to prepare for each concert. Participants perceived that these differences in preparation time impacted the rehearsal time allocated for vocal development.

It is a disadvantage of being in a church choir that doesn't warm up and doesn't vocally stretch your singing voice or your range (Participant 19).

Participant 18 added that her choir director did not do warm ups because the choir members lacked the interest and the vocal training. Although the choir director is highly trained, he is significantly younger than all the choir members. She seemed to think he "feels uncomfortable" asking them to do something they have never done before.

This highlights some of the challenges a director may face when starting a new position in an established choir, especially a smaller choir. These challenges may not be dissimilar to those experienced by new choir members joining small choirs with strong, established relationships already in place.

Theme: Director Leadership Style

An additional theme in the findings of this research was the leadership style and personality of the director. As previously stated, participants expressed a desire for their choir director to be honest. This desire for honesty appeared to come from a need to trust that the director was going to help the choir achieve their highest possible level of performance. Participant 20 shared that the director of her auditioned community choir is often “brutally” honest. She went on to say that this level of honesty did not bother her, but felt that the “constructive criticism” was necessary to make the choir better: “it’s nice not to suck. So enjoy the honesty.”

Other community choir members shared this desire for “constructive criticism” in their rehearsals. A common theme from community choir participants was that their directors “demand (them) to be good” (Participant 14). Participant 15 appeared to be inspired by the “insistence on excellence” that her choir directors embodied, while also maintaining a sense of humor.

These comments suggest that a director can help a choir reach their potential by balancing a demand for excellence with a sense of humor and kindness. Participant 7 shared that she is most motivated to work with choir directors who are “demanding” and “challenging,” but insisted that directors who are “snarky” and resort to methods of humiliation in rehearsals are discouraging.

To further illustrate her point, Participant 7 shared a negative experience she had with an All-State Choir conductor in high school, recalling that the experience was so emotionally upsetting that she will never forget it. Although the incident happened several decades ago, the pain of the experience was still apparent when she spoke to the group. This is consistent with findings in a study by Judd and Pooley (2013), suggesting that the choir directors demeanor and personality may both positively or negatively impact the experience of choir participation.

I remember in All-State, the choir director, a famous guy, pointed out to me in front of 200 people, “You! You’re coming in late in a measure.” And I looked behind me like, me? How can it be? He goes, “Yes, you!” I literally almost couldn’t get through the event. You know? How horrible. So I won’t tolerate that [kind of behavior from a director] (Participant 7).

In contrast to the experience of Participant 7, Participant 14 shared that he was thankful for a similar experience in which a choir director pointed out his mistakes publicly during a rehearsal.

Participant 15, who participates in the same choir, recalled many similar experiences with that same director, alluding to the fact that he had a bad temper: “sometimes he would resort to throwing things at you.” While these kinds of experiences were upsetting to Participant 7, Participants 14 and 15 seemed to find their shared experience amusing.

Other participants shared additional negative experiences with choir directors, usually involving “snarky” comments or raising their voice in a way that was demeaning to others in the room. They recalled the negative feelings they experienced in the moment and shared that it caused people to either leave the choir or consider leaving the choir. Participant 8 recalled a situation in which the conductor made degrading remarks to the accompanist, causing members of the choir to leave because they did “want to be the next one yelled at.”

Participant 13 shared an experience in which her community choir director was also a high school choir teacher, indicating that he seemed to have difficulty making the necessary shifts from working with kids to working with adults. Members of her choir were upset by being “scolded” by the conductor.

When you're working with adults, you have to have a different vibe because, you know, we come at it with a different experience and not wanting to be talked down to (Participant 13).

Several participants recalled the impact that negative experiences with choir directors had on their own personal experience and on the experience of their fellow choir members. While no focus group participant indicated that they had ever left a choir because of a choir director, several shared that they had witnessed a choir director cause people to leave their choir. Participant 4 shared that one bad experience with a choir director made her angry, but she refused to let him be the cause of her quitting the choir: “One of the previous directors ... was, like, pretty toxic, but more that just made me mad. Like... I was here before you, I will be here after you, you know, like I'm not being run off from you.”

Others shared that negative experiences with conductors also took away their excitement to attend rehearsals each week.

The director before our current one was not enjoyable, and I was, you know, ‘this close’ to being done. I got to Wednesday nights, and I was just like, ‘oh, wait. Maybe

I have a fever. Maybe I can't go. Maybe I need to stay home.' Because it wasn't fun
(Participant 12).

This finding suggests that choir directors at all levels should be thoughtful in their approaches and tactics and possess an awareness of the potential they have to impact someone's experience.

When asked to consider the challenges of balancing choir rehearsals with work and family commitments, 49% of all participants found it challenging to commit to attending all choir rehearsals due to other commitments in their lives. In contrast to this, 44% of participants expressed that it bothered them when other choir members did not share their same level of commitment. 47% of all participants prefer being a part of a choir that requires regular participation in order to perform, while 20% prefer flexible rehearsal options and 33% prefer choirs in which they can commit to seasonal participation.

In comparing results based on choir type, 61% of church/religious choir singers (n=14) indicated that they preferred a choir with flexible rehearsal options, while 77% of auditioned community choir singers (n=10) preferred a choir with strict rehearsal requirements. These findings suggest that church choir members may be more likely to have a desire for 64s to be more flexible, while community choir may be more likely to desire a stricter, more demanding environment.

Motivations to Quit

When discussing what factors may motivate them to stop participating in their choir, most participants focused on vocal/health decline. When considering the factors that would make them leave their current choir and seek out another, participants focused on issues with the director.

Theme: Vocal/Health Decline

The most likely thing, I think, that would make me quit would be physical disability.
(Participant 6)

The theme of leaving choir due to a decline in either physical or vocal health emerged primarily from older, retired focus group participants. For some this was due to an awareness of changes they were experiencing with the natural aging of their voice. For example, Participant 18 spoke of the fact that she was once a Soprano 1 in her choir and now struggles to sing the higher

notes. She said this change in her voice “makes (her) sad, but to stop singing (would) make (her) more sad.”

For Participant 16, this was due to acknowledging that she had recently turned 80 and was unsure how much longer her health would allow her to participate. She also said she wasn’t “sure how much longer (her) voice will hold out”. Participant 14 expressed more concern with his voice “dragging down the quality” of the group, stating that he would leave if he felt he was getting in the way of the group’s success. All participants acknowledged the reality of their aging voices, but still maintained a determination to continue participating in choir as long as they could. These findings highlight that a choir director should be aware of the concerns of older singers and develop an understanding of aging voice.

Theme: Issues with the Choir or Choir Director

While vocal and health related concerns may motivate adults to stop participating in choirs all together, participants shared that negative experiences with a choir director or other choir members may motivate them to leave their current choirs.

Specifically, Participant 7 said that she would leave if something “emotionally upsetting” happened with the choir director, or if she “didn’t feel valued”. Other participants recalled situations in which choir members grew frustrated with the director, sharing that while these frustrations did not necessarily make people quit, it seemed clear that singers weren’t having a good experience due to the frustrations. In each of these instances, focus group participants shared that the choir directors they were speaking of left after short periods of time due to “it (not being) a good fit” (Participant 13).

These findings suggest that a choir director should maintain an awareness of the impact they can have on the experience of singers in their choirs. Ensuring participants feel valued and are enjoying their time may be crucial to the longevity of the choir.

Conclusions

This research study has a direct and significant impact on my practice. As a choral director working with adult volunteers, the learning I have undertaken in this study is invaluable. Although I have not used this research to start my own community choir, these findings will inform best practices of leading adult choir in the future.

This goal of this study was to examine what factors impact adult motivation to participate in choral ensembles. Although an aim of my research was to examine differences in motivations for retired adults and working adults, the findings that emerged found more comparisons between church choir and community choir participants. Possible motivations were found in the following categories: Musical Motivations, Social Motivations and Director Motivations. Findings in this study suggest that singing and musical enjoyment may be primary motivators for adult choral participation, with other factors informing what type of choir to join. This was also found in studies by Boswell, (2022), Rensink & Hoff (2009), Ramson (2001), Selph & Bugos (2014).

Key findings suggest:

- Church choir participants may be more likely to be motivated by the spiritual experience, compared to community choir participants who may be more motivated by the musical aesthetics.
- Older participants may be more motivated by “musical aesthetics,” whereas younger participants may be motivated by skill development and social connections. This is consistent with findings by Redman and Bugos (2018).
- Adults may be motivated by repertoire that challenges them and helps them develop their skills.
- Social connections may motivate singers, including opportunities to develop close friends and the opportunity for intergenerational connections.
- The director of the choir may have a positive or negative impact on the experience of singers in a choir and may be a motivating factor.

Finally, findings relating to motivations to stop participating in choir may inform practices for retaining singers. Older participants said that decline in vocal ability or physical health may motivate them to quit choir, suggesting a need to support older singers as their voice ages and provide accommodations for singers with mobility issues. Negative experiences with choir directors may also motivate singers to quit, suggesting that directors should be aware of their impact on the experience of singers.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Study

Although efforts were made to obtain a sample that was diverse in age, geographic location, gender, ethnicity, and geographic location, the sample size was small. Therefore, findings must be examined cautiously and cannot be generalized to the larger population. One aim of this

study was to examine different motivations and challenges impacting retired adults and working adults with or without children living at home. Additional research with a larger sample specifically motivations for adults who are working and have school-aged children living at home may examine ways to bridge the gaps that occur in choral participation for many adults in their 30s and 40s (Selph & Bugos, 2014).

An additional population missing from the research sample was church choir members from more liturgical “high church” traditions, singing more traditional classical repertoire. This missing sample may have impacted findings relating to motivations of adults to participate in church choirs.

Additionally, as all participants were currently participating in choirs at the time of the study, their positive feelings about singing may be considered a bias which may have impacted results. Further study is warranted to examine what factors may motivate non-participants to join choral ensembles. Researcher bias may have impacted results as well. I knew some of the participants from previous or current choirs, which may have impacted some of their responses. Although efforts were made to mitigate this bias, it must still be acknowledged as it may have impacted the data.

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