

Individual Vocal Practice Habits of Barbershop Chorus Singers: A Mixed-Methods Investigation

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Module 3 Project Presentation**

Introduction

Background

- My area of voice pedagogy practice/research interest is barbershop ensemble singing
- Previous research has studied musical practice habits in populations like expert vocalists, university music students, and instrumentalists (Araújo, 2016; Byo and Cassidy, 2008; Hallam, 1995; Hallam, 2001; Hallam *et al.*, 2020; Nielsen, 2004; Pike, 2017; Summit and Weidner, 2022).
- Research focusing specifically on vocalists in individual practice settings is limited, and that which does exist focuses on professional/expert vocalists.
- Anecdotally, most barbershoppers are avocational singers
 - Many lack substantial vocal training outside of their barbershop experience
 - Previous research on professional/expert vocalists may not translate well to this population.



VOCAL
CONFLUENCE

Introduction (cont.)

Justification and Aims

- Discern strengths and areas of opportunity for growth in the effectiveness and efficiency of barbershop chorus singers' individual vocal practice
- Allow barbershop chorus leaders, like myself, to develop strategies to offer singers additional education and resources to address these opportunities for growth.
- Address a gap in the literature by exploring the following research question among adults who sing in one or more barbershop choruses:

What are the individual vocal practice habits of barbershop chorus singers outside of chorus rehearsal in terms of time, structure, objectives, strategies, and resource usage?

Introduction (cont.)

Methodology/Methods

- **Philosophical Foundation**
 - Barbershop singing is an art form whose technique/pedagogy is informed by science
 - Pragmatic paradigm approach informed by both postpositivist and constructivist approaches is appropriate
- **Mixed Methods**
 - Literature Review
 - Survey
 - Qualitative Interviews
- Data collected:
 - Quantitative data on many aspects of participants' vocal practice, including on questions utilizing Likert-Type Scales (Sullivan and Artino, 2013).
 - Collecting open-ended responses in the survey and from interview participants.

Data Collection

Survey

- Based on Summitt and Weidner's (2022) Vocal Practice Survey (VPS), with select modifications made to make it more applicable to a barbershop audience.
- Administered via Google Forms and collected responses from November 14-30, 2024.
- Invitations distributed in two ways:
 - Posted survey link in two barbershop community Facebook Groups
 - "Let's talk (barber)shop"
 - "Barbershop Harmony"
 - Emailed 1,147 chapters of the three largest barbershop organizations:
 - Barbershop Harmony Society (BHS)
 - Sweet Adelines International (SAI)
 - Harmony, Incorporated (HI)
- Received 226 complete responses

Survey Exploring Individual Vocal Practice Habits of Barbershop Chorus Singers

As part of his MA Voice Pedagogy coursework, Josh Gogware is investigating the individual practice habits of barbershop chorus singers through the University of Wales Trinity St. David (UWTSd) and the Voice Study Centre (VSC), under the guidance of David Cane. Your participation will help to reveal strengths and areas of opportunity for growth in the effectiveness and efficiency of barbershop chorus singers' individual vocal practice and will allow barbershop chorus leaders to develop strategies to offer singers additional education and resources to address these opportunities for growth.

This survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete and will accept submissions through November 30, 2024. Participating in this study is voluntary and you are free to change your mind and stop at any point. However, in order for your responses to be included in the results, you must complete the entire survey and select 'Submit' at the end. Please only complete the survey once.

The researcher attained ethical approval from UWTSd and is committed to following ethical guidelines, minimizing risk, and ensuring participant confidentiality. There is a small risk that you may find some of the questions sensitive and they may cause emotional discomfort. All data will be kept in a password-protected cloud storage only accessible to the researcher. All participants will be given a unique identifier to ensure confidentiality and this list will be kept securely in a password-protected folder. All files will be deleted upon the researcher's completion of the module.

If you have any questions about the research, you may contact Josh Gogware via email at 2219777@student.uwtsd.ac.uk. Thank you very much for your input and cooperation!

By continuing with this survey you hereby acknowledge the following:

- I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time.
- I understand that I can refuse to answer questions without any consequence other than my answers will no longer contribute to the results.
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I understand that participation in this phase of the study involves completing a survey, featuring both multiple-choice and open-ended questions.
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this study.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this study my identity will remain anonymous.
- I understand that under freedom of information legislation, I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.
- I understand that I am free to contact the researcher to seek further clarification and information.

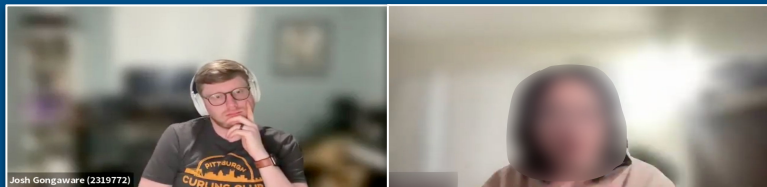
Data Collection (cont.)

Interviews

Table 1: Interview Sampling Stratification

- Randomly selected 3 individuals who were willing to participate in follow-up interviews from each subgroup shown in Table 1
 - Ensured that people with a variety of experiences with vocal instruction at both the individual and ensemble level were included
- Interviewed only the first person from each subgroup to respond via Zoom, for a total of 6 interviews, in December 2024

Subgroup	Voice Lessons Experience	Competition Frequency	<i>n</i>
1	Less than 1 year	Does not compete annually	16
2		Competes annually in a chorus only	28
3		Competes annually in a quartet	15
4	1 year or greater	Does not compete annually	11
5		Competes annually in a chorus only	30
6		Competes annually in a quartet	24



Josh Gongaware (2319772)

Ethical Considerations

Standard Research Ethics Considerations

- University of Wales Trinity Saint David granted ethical approval prior to me contacting participants
- Each participant received a summary of the study and their rights, and confirmed that they understood the information and consented to participate.
- All data collected is stored in secure cloud storage accessible only to me, and will be deleted upon completion of the module.
- Personally-identifiable information (PII) is not used in this or any other writeup of the results.
- Questions were worded in a manner that minimized bias and risk of triggering emotional distress.

Ethical Considerations (cont.)

Insider Research Considerations

- I am a barbershopper myself and have many relationships within the barbershop community
- Many survey responses are anonymous, and I have no prior relationship with most of those who did provide PII
- I took care to frame the survey and interview questions in as unbiased a manner as possible and to try not to lead my research participants toward any particular responses
- I took care to allow the data to speak for themselves, rather than trying to draw conclusions that are consistent with my own personal biases as a barbershopper, coach, and ensemble leader

Key Findings/Discussion

Time/Structure

- Barbershop chorus singers practiced less often and for a shorter duration on average than expert vocalists (Summitt and Weidner, 2022).
- Largely influenced by how busy they are outside of barbershop, with other commitments often taking priority over practice time



"I just don't have time...My kids live with me right now...and my grandkids are like all under the age of seven...I would rather spend time with them than do rehearsal." -Interviewee 1

- About $\frac{2}{3}$ feel they still are able to practice enough to meet their ensembles' musical expectations ($n = 148$) and their own personal goals ($n = 131$)



Key Findings/Discussion (cont.)

Objectives



- Primary motivations for practicing:
 - To learn their music (n = 24)
 - To pursue personal growth as a singer (n = 18)
 - To be a better leader in their ensemble (n = 12),
 - To ensure they meet their ensemble expectations/qualification requirements for upcoming performances (n = 11)
- Barbershop chorus singers are less likely than expert vocalists to vary their practice approach based on upcoming performance needs and expectations or their needs for technical and musical development (Summitt and Weidner, 2022).

Key Findings/Discussion (cont.)

Strategy Usage

Strategy	M	SD	n	<i>Note: Coded responses correspond to None (1), Few (2), Some (3), Most (4), or All (5). 'Not sure' responses were excluded from analysis.</i> <i>***/ † † † Significantly lower/higher than Summitt and Weidner (2022) at 0.01 level of significance</i> <i>**/ † † Significantly lower/higher than Summitt and Weidner (2022) at 0.05 level of significance</i>
Practice with a learning track	3.94	0.98	210	
Rehearse errors until corrected***	3.81	0.98	215	
Listen to audio recordings † † †	3.67	1.21	220	
Repeat whole piece † †	3.58	1.10	215	
Repeat short passages	3.45	1.11	220	
Mark sheet music***	3.37	1.30	223	
Repeat 1-2 Measures**	3.30	1.15	223	
Body movement**	3.14	1.28	215	
Work on memorization separate from technical and expressive practice	3.13	1.27	221	
Work on most difficult sections first***	3.04	1.20	221	
Whole-Part-Whole Practice Approach***	2.97	1.28	214	
Chaining***	2.91	1.30	219	
Use mental practice***	2.84	1.38	215	

Key Findings/Discussion (cont.)

Strategy Usage

Strategy	M	SD	n	<i>Note: Coded responses correspond to None (1), Few (2), Some (3), Most (4), or All (5). 'Not sure' responses were excluded from analysis.</i> <i>*** / † † † Significantly lower/higher than Summitt and Weidner (2022) at 0.01 level of significance</i> <i>** / † † Significantly lower/higher than Summitt and Weidner (2022) at 0.05 level of significance</i>
Review the music before starting each practice***	2.80	1.30	224	
Vocally warm up using a predetermined sequence of activities***	2.76	1.35	220	
Imagine yourself as a character or in a situation related to the text***	2.60	1.32	216	
Set goals for the practice session***	2.60	1.29	223	
Alternate slow practice with at tempo practice***	2.60	1.25	223	
End practice by singing completely through current repertoire***	2.53	1.40	220	
Formally self-evaluate***	2.49	1.37	218	
Utilize visual imagery***	2.46	1.34	224	
Speak rhythms***	2.36	1.21	224	
Clap/tap rhythms	2.29	1.17	223	
Practice while playing the piano/keyboard***	2.28	1.21	225	
Record audio of practice to review later	2.28	1.27	224	
Set long term goals***	2.28	1.25	220	

Key Findings/Discussion (cont.)

Strategy Usage

Strategy	M	SD	n
Watch video recordings	2.13	1.08	225
Practice diction separate from melody or rhythm***	2.11	1.11	222
Vary/simplify rhythms***	1.95	1.13	213
Vary/simplify pitch patterns***	1.94	1.19	208
Practice with a metronome***	1.63	0.88	225
Record video of practice to review later	1.58	0.99	224
Vocally cool down at the end of practice***	1.57	0.96	224
Reference a music dictionary***	1.29	0.69	223

Note: Coded responses correspond to None (1), Few (2), Some (3), Most (4), or All (5). 'Not sure' responses were excluded from analysis.

****/ † † † Significantly lower/higher than Summitt and Weidner (2022) at 0.01 level of significance*

***/ † † Significantly lower/higher than Summitt and Weidner (2022) at 0.05 level of significance*

Key Findings/Discussion (cont.)

Resource Usage



Resource	% That Regularly Utilize Resource	<i>n</i>
Learning Tracks	96.0%	217
Chorus Recordings	63.3%	143
Piano	58.4%	132
Pitch Pipe	54.4%	123
Mobile Apps (e.g. TE Tuner)	53.1%	120
Other Ensemble Recordings	35.8%	81
Own Recordings	34.5%	78
Mirror/Phone Camera	27.4%	62
Metronome	20.4%	46
Music Dictionary	1.8%	4
Yoga Balls/Straps	0.4%	1

- About 60% ($n = 139$) sing in a chorus that employs methods to verify that members are meeting the ensemble's expectations and the most common such method employed was individual recording submissions.

Key Findings/Discussion (cont.)

- Learning tracks are valuable tools that facilitate passive learning, but some utilize them for the majority of their practice.

"I will have [learning tracks] on repeat in my headphones while I'm doing my office work. So I absorb a lot of my music that way. And then when I actually do try to sit down and sing through them, I have a bit more of a reference at that point...So most of [my practice] is just listening to [the learning track] on repeat"

- Interviewee 2

- Others use learning tracks sparingly, in favor of more traditional methods of practice.

"Most of my learning is actually [with] the [sheet] music. And then if I feel like I'm already quite confident with it, then I'll sing with the [learning] track without my part; that's my most usage of it...I know people who say they'll play [learning tracks] for hours, or they play [them] in their car - I don't do any of that,"

- Interviewee 6

Limitations

- This study utilized a convenience sample, albeit a fairly large one, and one that appears to be fairly representative of the barbershop chorus singer population across demographics like age and gender identity and barbershop participation variables like organizational membership and barbershop chorus experience.
 - A study with a more rigorous random sampling procedure would yield results that are more likely to generalize across the entire barbershop population.
- Comparisons made to Summitt and Weidner's (2022) results from parts of the survey that I modified should be interpreted with caution, as different wording or response options could have contributed to differences in responses across the two populations.

Recommendations

Barbershop chorus leaders should consider:

- Dedicating time to educate their singers on key areas of individual vocal practice and musicianship such as critical listening, effective music learning and practice strategies, vocal warm ups, and vocal cool downs
 - Prichard's framework (2012) utilizes cognitive and live modeling of these kinds of concepts to facilitate learning
- Providing follow-along resources (e.g. vocal warm up routines, cool down routines, or exercise regimens) to make it as frictionless as possible for their singers to incorporate strategies into their individual practice sessions.
- Implementing a recording policy which encourages members to listen to and evaluate their own recordings to help improve their singers' critical listening skills and help them become more strategic when identifying areas for growth and setting goals for their practice.



Reflection

- Literature review was challenging since there was little previous research I could find directly related to my area of interest
- Overall research process was surprisingly smooth, including recruiting survey and interview participants
- Results were aligned with my hypotheses as an insider in the field
- Assignment word/time limits forced me to be very concise and selective about what to cover

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