

MOMENTS OF MUSIC:
A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY IN A METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHORUS

By
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A MASTER'S THESIS PRESENTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS IN MUSIC EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Making music in collaboration with others has impacted the strength, development, and connection amongst people throughout American history. Community music ensembles can strengthen social bonds and improve collaboration between citizens. Developing interest and skill in choral singing can provide an avenue for social connectedness in adulthood, as well as reduce stress throughout adolescence. This qualitative study focused on participants' professed benefits from voluntary participation in a community chorus and the effect of rehearsal participation on perceived stress and/or energy level. The study was situated in a non-auditioned community choir in a densely populated metropolitan suburb in Northern Virginia. Data was gathered through an online survey, semi-structured interviews and participants' journal responses. The findings reveal benefits and motivational factors for participation in an amateur music ensemble as a focused leisure activity. Reported benefits of participation include stress reduction, increased mental focus and energy, community connection, director's focus on life-long learning, and personal skill development. The findings also revealed mixed responses to the impact of opportunity for socialization in rehearsal. This research identifies two impediments to participation in a community music ensemble: work or family responsibilities, and the negative influence of an audition process. These findings indicate that participation in adult community music ensembles is greatly influenced by earlier music ensemble experiences.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Increased cognition and improved social connectedness in marginalized populations has been linked to participation in choral singing.¹ Few studies, however, have investigated the benefits of choral singing for working adults. Choral music programs foster educational values such as strong work ethic and collaboration.² The *Choral Impact Study* released in June 2019, shows choral singing in America is stronger than ever, with more than 54 million Americans singing in choruses.³ The percentage of Americans singing has also risen over the past decade, up to 17% from 14% in 2008. Even with this promising data, choral opportunities for children and youth have declined.⁴ This is important as results of this study reveal that participation in elementary and high school choral ensembles was a key factor in participation in choir as an adult.

This qualitative case study explored the motivations of current participants to attend ensemble rehearsals. The results of the study may be used to inform amateur musicians about the benefits and uses of participation, whether as member or audience, of the community choral experience. The findings may be used to introduce potential choir members to the physical and psychological benefits of choral singing while building stronger bonds between people in their community. Discovering the motivations of adult amateur musicians to participate in choral ensembles can assist directors in strengthening these ensembles. Additionally, high school and

¹ Marianne Judd and Julie Ann Pooley, "The Psychological Benefits of Participating in Group Singing for Members of the General Public," *Psychology of Music* 42, no.2 (2014): 269.

² Rita Ferrer, Joan Puiggalí, and Montse Tesouro, "Choral Singing and the Acquisition of Educational Values," *International Journal of Music Education* 36, no. 3 (2018): 336.

³ Grunwald Associates LLC and Chorus America, *The Chorus Impact Study: Singing for a Lifetime*, accessed November 23, 2019, <https://www.chorusamerica.org>.

⁴ *Chorus Impact Study*, Chorus America, 19.

college music teachers may use this data to inform students of the importance of participation in ensemble music throughout life, regardless of one's intended career path. Research into the motivations of amateur singers to attend rehearsal is important as a potential tool to managing stress. Preventive strategies which increase physical and mental well-being have a positive impact on the individual. Individuals comprise communities, therefore physically and mentally healthy individuals positively impact the health of a community.

This collective case-study⁵ will be used to determine what ways, if any, choral singing impacts people in a dense, high-pressure metropolitan community with noted high levels of stress and reduced time for leisure activities due to work and family responsibilities. The participants are members of the Vienna Choral Society, a non-auditioned community chorus in a Northern Virginia suburb. Chorus members are predominantly amateur musicians who work in a variety of civilian and government roles. With limited time for leisure activities, participants choose to attend a two-and-a-half-hour rehearsal each week, plus dress-rehearsals and performances four times each year. They volunteer their time and supply their personal music and concert attire. Participants also contribute financially through a membership fee and help advertise the concerts through social media, friends, and family. The membership fees are used to support rehearsal and performance location rental expenses. The Vienna Choral Society also conducts the "Friends of VCS" membership drive to help cover expenses. Hiring additional instrumentalists to enhance the concert program is also funded through this membership drive.

⁵ John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Method Approaches*, 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing Company, 2018), 136.

Background

This research project is centered on amateur participation in community music ensembles. Published literature addresses the formation and impact of ensemble music in American civil society. In existing research studies, it is noted that participation in music ensembles impacts social bonds (interpersonal) and improves quality of life/health (intrapersonal). By incorporating different choruses in collaboration on special occasions, community music ensembles can include inter-generational and inter-cultural social groupings. These ensembles can be formed in schools, in the workplace, and in the community.

Statement of Problem

Research conducted by the American Psychological Association (2018) with an online survey of 3,458 respondents, ages 18+, revealed that personal stress levels are on the rise.⁶ To better understand this statistic it is important to recognize the stress that originates during school years and what coping strategies are learned. Only half (50 percent) of Gen Z reported having effective coping strategies to manage their stress.⁷ This study takes place in Fairfax County, a densely populated Virginia suburb, which has the largest school district in the Washington DC metropolitan area.⁸ In the Fairfax County Public School 2017 Youth Survey, 46 percent of students surveyed reported experiencing high stress levels in the previous 30 days.⁹

⁶ American Psychological Association, "Stress in America: Generation Z. Stress in America™ Survey," (2018): 7.

⁷ Ibid., 6.

⁸ "Virginia Counties by Population," https://www.virginia-demographics.com/counties_by_population, accessed May 4, 2019.

⁹ *Fairfax County 2017 Youth Survey*, accessed April 13, 2019.

The Northern Virginia (DC Metropolitan) community is politically¹⁰ and culturally¹¹ diverse. It supports a larger job base than Maryland or the District of Columbia, and several of the highest income counties in the nation.¹² Due to the proximity to Washington DC, many participants are employed in fields connected to the national political landscape. A 2018 study conducted by the American Psychological Association found that 62 percent of American adults report the current political climate to be a significant source of stress,¹³ and this political division is creating communication barriers and challenges to community well-being.¹⁴ In the literature review (chapter 2), several examples demonstrate how communities worked together through forming amateur music ensembles to increase collaboration amongst the populace. Musical collaboration could still bring people together and bridge the political divide.

Purpose

By identifying adult motivations to commit to weekly chorus rehearsals in a perceived high stress environment, directors and community organizers can establish best practices for increased participation. This information can then transfer to assist elementary and secondary music educators as they work to instill an appreciation and skill for singing in their young

¹⁰ 2016 Presidential General Election Data Graphs, Virginia, <https://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/datagraph.php?fips=51&year=2016&off=0&elect=0&f=0>, accessed October 30, 2019.

¹¹ Laura Alcocer, "NOVA's Diversity Continues to Blend Cultures," *The Banner*, December 8, 2016, <https://commons.marymount.edu/tbanner/2016/12/08/northern-virginia-one-of-americas-biggest-melting-pot/> accessed October 30, 2019.

¹² U.S. Census Bureau, 2018.

¹³ American Psychological Association, "Stress in America: Generation Z. Stress in America™ Survey," (2018): 7.

¹⁴ Judd and Pooley, "Psychological Benefits," 271.

learners. Developing interest and skill in choral singing can reduce stress as well as provide an avenue for social connectedness in adulthood.

Significance

The findings of this study may provide data for music educators, parents, and community organizers to gain financial support from school board members and legislators at the local, state and national levels. This data can help those in decision-making positions gain further insight into what motivates people to participate in choral music and what benefits members derive. This understanding can help focus resources towards providing choral opportunities in the community. As the United States seeks common objectives amongst a diverse citizenry, support of choral music ensembles could provide an avenue to increased understanding across cultural and political divides.

Research Questions and Sub-Questions

This thesis is focused on participation in an amateur community choral ensemble. The interview process also included the participant's elementary and secondary school music involvement. The overarching questions presented in this research include:

1. What factor(s) motivate working adults in a fast-paced metropolitan community to participate in a volunteer amateur chorus?
2. What benefits, if any, do adults in this metropolitan suburb derive from participation in a volunteer community choir?
3. What element(s) of this community choir (Vienna Choral Society) encourage them to remain members?

The semi-structured interview process included gathering background information on early music experiences, and included questions pertaining to the physical/psychological impact (Intrapersonal) and the community/social impact (Interpersonal) of participation in weekly choral rehearsals.

Physical/Psychological (Intrapersonal)

1. How do participants describe their overall work/life stress level, if any, and their energy level before and after rehearsal?
2. How do participants describe the impact, if any, on their mood and/or energy level before and after rehearsal?

Community, Social Impact (Interpersonal)

1. What prior singing experience, if any, have participants had?
2. How do participants describe their daily commute for work?
3. How is it different, if at all, on rehearsal day?

4. How do participants describe their motivation to attend rehearsal after work or other responsibilities?
5. What benefits, if any, do adults derive from participation in a volunteer community choir?
6. What relationships, if any, have developed as an outcome of participation in the choir?
7. What element(s) of this community choir encourage them to remain as members?

Hypothesis

Participation in a choral ensemble activity has a positive impact on the social, physical, and mental state of participants. If access to choral ensembles is increased, then the ability to effectively manage stress experienced by individuals who participate will be increased. When compared to pre- rehearsal, improved mood and reduced stress should be experienced during and as a result of the rehearsal. The improved mood and stress reduction, experienced during rehearsal, motivates the participants to continue to attend rehearsal regularly, even though they may have challenges in getting to rehearsal and other obligations required of their limited leisure time. Motivation for participation in amateur volunteer choral ensemble are increased quality of life through greater stress management.

Definition of Terms

The term “community music” needs to be defined as it applies significantly to this study.

Community: a unified body of individuals: such as¹⁵

- a: the people with common interests living in a particular area
- b: a group of people with a common characteristic or interest living together within a larger society
- c: a body of persons of common and especially professional interests scattered through a larger society
- d: a body of persons or nations having a common history or common social, economic, and political interests
- e: a group linked by a common policy
- f: an interacting population of various kinds of individuals (such as species) in a common location

Community music does not refer to any specific musical genre or ensemble type and includes both instrumental and choral groups. Community music ensembles produce music for the people, of the people, and by the people.¹⁶ Community music ensembles are often supported by a civic, educational, or religious organization.

Ensemble: a group producing a single effect: such as concerted music of two or more parts¹⁷

This research study is focused on choral ensembles primarily comprised of amateur singers.

Amateur: one who engages in a pursuit, study, science, or sport as a pastime rather than as a profession¹⁸ The term *amateur* is only a descriptor, not a qualitative term. According to Bennet

¹⁵ Merriam-Webster, “Dictionary by Merriam-Webster.”

¹⁶ Peter W. Dykema, “The Spread of the Community Music Idea,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 67 (1916): 218–223, www.jstor.org/stable/1013509.

¹⁷ Merriam-Webster, “Dictionary by Merriam-Webster: America's Most-Trusted Online Dictionary,” Accessed December 8, 2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Reimer in his book *A Philosophy of Music Education: Advancing the Vision* (2003), the amateur musician “engages in a musical role for the sheer delight and satisfaction it affords rather than as a professional career.”¹⁹ Crawford and Hamberlin (2013) state that the term ‘amateur’ recognizes the motivation to play (love of music) and does not infer a lower level of skill.²⁰ Access to participation in a choral ensemble requires neither the purchase of an instrument, nor the ability to read musical notation, though knowledge of musical notation is a definite asset.

Intrapersonal: occurring within the individual mind or self²¹

Interpersonal: being, relating to, or involving relations between persons²²

Praxis/praxial: the exercise or practice of an art, science or skill²³ According to educator David Elliott, participatory music making and listening is different than presentational music making and listening.”²⁴ Elliott defines this difference in that music goals will flow from the musical challenges faced in the moment, thus creating a much more engaging need to know.²⁵

¹⁹ Bennet Reimer, *A Philosophy of Music Education: Advancing the Vision* 3rd Ed. (Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River New Jersey, 2005), 253-54.

²⁰ R. Crawford and L. Hamberlin, *An Introduction to America's Music* 2nd ed (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2013), 51.

²¹ Merriam-Webster, “Dictionary by Merriam-Webster.”

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ David J. Elliott, *Music Matters* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 71-72.

²⁵ Ibid., 433.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to examine existing literature highlighting the significance of physical and psychological effects of participation in a community choral ensemble. The availability of literature concerning the impact of participation in a “community” music ensemble is abundant. The wealth of available information is due to the increased interest in positive effects on physical and psychological health participation in choral singing provide. Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method research methods have been used to explore unique groups of participants who share common features such as geography, socio-economic status, and physical or psychological challenges.

This literature review begins by exploring the foundation and historical significance of community music ensembles in American civil society. The review then turns to uses of ensemble music making among civilians and soldiers held captive overseas. It is an examination of the social impact of community music ensemble participation. The review is focused on the intrapersonal impacts including physical and psychological effects of participation in a community choral ensemble. Each of these sources contributes to an understanding of appropriate research methods to reach informed understanding of the impact of choral participation.

Ensemble Music in American Civil Society

Making music in collaboration with others has impacted the strength, development, and connection amongst people throughout American history. Colonial settlers borrowed old world

dances designed as courtly affairs and brought them to the enjoyment of all.²⁶ Making music together was an integral element in gatherings of these new communities. Lyrics began to reflect the experiences of life not just in the colonies, but even more localized to specific areas of the new world.²⁷ Unlike most musicians in Europe who were hired by churches or aristocrats and earned their living from their musical skills, colonial Americans played instruments for sheer enjoyment and recreation.²⁸ Musicians organized their own concerts, found a hall or a barn, invited the public, and provided a musical experience with a mix of styles and ensembles.

The historical roots of American music education began in the church. Because of the demands of everyday life in the New World, the quality of singing the Psalms and hymns began to decline as each song leader made alterations to the psalmody and hymn melodies.²⁹ By the beginning of the 18th century, most settlers could not read musical notation. Recognizing the need for music instruction, church leaders organized singing schools to support the church service.³⁰ Singing schools were prevalent throughout the 18th and 19th century and began in the Boston area. Led by a ‘singing master,’ lessons focused on basic vocal technique and literacy in musical notation. The instructional emphasis was on the improvement of sacred music production in church services. These group sessions were held two or three evenings per week and typically lasted two months. Singing schools provided social and recreational activities as

²⁶ Crawford and Hamberlin, *An Introduction to America's Music*, 48.

²⁷ Elizabeth Barkley, “Roots of European American Music Traditions” in *Crossroads: The Music of American Cultures*, (Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt, 2015), 10.

²⁸ Crawford and Hamberlin, 44.

²⁹ Michael Mark and Charles Gary, *A History of American Music Education* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), 70.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 68.

well as vocal improvement.³¹

Lowell Mason, known as the father of music education in America, stated, “Church music must be simple, chaste, correct, and free of ostentation.”³² This comment demonstrates the divide of music practices in Colonial America from the ways of Baroque and Classical music in Europe at the time. As the population grew, instruction and access to music became a civic responsibility. In the first half of the 19th century, music education in elementary schools was primarily vocal music and was supported by music supervisors who traveled from school to school. These music supervisors were considered specially qualified employees and earned the same amount as male principals.³³

In New York City in 1885, a European-style music conservatory was founded by the entrepreneurial efforts of Jeannette Meyers Thurber.³⁴ Thurber’s profound dedication to music education, coupled with her love of music and managerial skills established this “National Conservatory of Music” as one of the finest postsecondary institutions in America.³⁵ The Conservatory was funded by Thurber and other patrons and though never successful at obtaining federal funding, Thurber repeatedly attempted to garner Congressional financial support.³⁶

³¹ Richard Crawford and David Warren Steel, "Singing-school," Grove Music Online, 31 January 2014, accessed 8 January 2020, <https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-1002257284>.

³² Vernon M. Whaley, “Lowell Mason: Father of Music Education in America” Presentation, Liberty University Online, 2018.

³³ Mark and Gary, 173.

³⁴ Emanuel Rubin, "Jeannette Meyers Thurber and the National Conservatory of Music," *American Music* 8, no. 3 (1990): 296-325, doi:10.2307/3052098.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 296.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 302.

At the end of the 19th century, college students could pursue musical involvement on their own time, but few universities offered a degree plan in music education. In 1865, Oberlin College was the first to offer a degree in Music Education, and the Potsdam Normal School (Later SUNY) established the first program to train public school music teachers.³⁷ In 1915, W.J. Baltzell writes of the significant changes occurring in the perception of music study in institutions of higher learning. Opera singer David Bispham was receiving an honorary degree from his Alma Mater and spoke to the changes that had taken place since he started a glee club at Haverford College in 1876. Bispham suggested in his address at the ceremony where he received the honorary degree in 1914, that during his college years music was “tolerated as a means of entertainment or diversion for the young men...but was not considered as having any claim upon the serious study of the educated man, or as offering a satisfactory and honorable career for the college graduate.”³⁸

In 1921, the United States Congress considered a proposal to fund a National Conservatory of Music. In the 1924 Congressional subcommittee hearing on the proposal, reference is made as to the uses of music in the society, with the example of various companies (American Steel & Wire Co., Winchester Repeating Arms Co., and Western Electric Co.) who “use mass singing or employ bands as a means of creating enthusiasm, entertaining their people, and stimulating good nature.”³⁹ This comment supports the perceived benefits of collaborative

³⁷ “The History of Music Colleges in America,” <https://www.bestcollegereviews.org/history-music-colleges-america>, accessed August 8, 2018.

³⁸ W. J. Baltzell, “The American College Man in Music,” *The Musical Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (1915): 624, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/738070>, accessed July 31, 2018.

³⁹ Subcommittee on S. 1320; Committee on Education and Labor, Senate, “*National Conservatory of Music*,” 68th Cong., 1st sess., 1924, accessed November 23, 2019, <https://congressional-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/congressional/docview/t29.d30.hrg-1924-eds-0002?accountid=12085>.

music making as a means to bring people together.

Music became a part of the regular curriculum of the Boston Public Schools in 1838 through the leadership of music educator Lowell Mason.⁴⁰ Music ensembles in the general community flourished through educators such as Peter Dykema. While attending the University of Michigan, Peter Dykema pursued music as a hobby alongside his major in English literature, French and German languages. Dykema started a freshman glee club, sang in a quartet, served as soloist at one church and played the organ for another.⁴¹ As editor of the *Music Supervisors Journal* (later titled *Music Educators Journal*) Dykema frequently wrote about the impact that group singing could have on the community, such as his article in a 1915 issue, "A Community Christmas: Suggestions for Town Christmas Celebrations."⁴² Dykema recognized that people are more motivated to participate in ensemble singing when they engage in an activity because of personal desire, rather than being required to participate by others. Dykema connects this desire of working from one's own convictions to the democratic society which built the United States.⁴³ At the beginning of WWI, Dykema was teaching at the University of Wisconsin and was director of the Madison Choral Union. Dykema had a desire to serve the nation and support the war effort, so he took a leave of absence to work for the War Department. He served as a song leader and supervisor of music for the Commission on Training Camp Activities from 1918-19.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ https://hymnary.org/person/Mason_Lowell, accessed April 20, 2020.

⁴¹ Peter Dykema, letter to Edward Bailey Birge (May 1932) in Eisenkramer, 44.

⁴² Peter W. Dykema, "A Community Christmas: Suggestions for Town Christmas Celebrations," *Music Supervisors' Journal* 2, no. 2 (1915): 9-16, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3383122>, accessed August 1, 2018.

⁴³ Peter W. Dykema, "Some Fundamental Questions about Music Reading," *Music Educators Journal* 35, no. 1 (1948): 24, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3386971>, accessed July 31, 2018.

⁴⁴ John W. Beattie, "The Unknown Peter Dykema," *Music Educators Journal* 37, no. 6 (1951):12, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3387389>, accessed July 30, 2018.

This desire to serve the country demonstrates the importance Dykema placed on the ability of music to raise morale and produce esprit-de-corps.

Prior to World War II, music education in the United States centered on expanding student's artistic sensibilities by focusing on the art form of European composers.⁴⁵ However, during the midst of economic depression in 1932, leading educator James Mursell challenged music educators to put aesthetic pursuits above drilling technical skills in the article "We Need Music."⁴⁶ Because of the reduction in available work, local governments supported community music ensembles to fill newly available leisure hours.⁴⁷

With the invasion of Poland in 1939, the focus of music as an art form and the devotion to musical internationalism began to wane.⁴⁸ Author J. Scott Goble in "*Nationalism in United States Music Education during World War II*" reflects on ways articles in the *Music Educators Journal* reinforced the concept that community music would serve to unite people behind the war effort.⁴⁹ During the war, musicians answered the call to improve morale by forming amateur music ensembles in the community.⁵⁰ Music teachers also encouraged upper school students to fill community music leadership roles.⁵¹ However, more leadership positions were needed than

⁴⁵ J. Scott Goble, "Nationalism in United States Music Education during World War II," *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education* 30, no.2 (2009):108, accessed August 1, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40215356>.106.

⁴⁶ James Mursell, "We Need Music," *Music Supervisors' Journal* 19, no. 2 (1932):11, accessed November 22, 2019, www.jstor.org/stable/3383762, DOI: 10.2307/3383762.

⁴⁷ Peter W. Dykema, "Music in Community Life," *Music Supervisors' Journal* 20, no.4 (1934): 34.

⁴⁸ Goble, 103.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 108.

⁵⁰ Peter W. Dykema, "The Music Teacher and Public Service," *Bulletin of the Music Teachers National Association* 7, no.1 (1942): 9.

⁵¹ Archie N. Jones, "Community Singing Goes to War," *Music Educators Journal* 29, no.1 (1942): 41, accessed September 18, 2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3386341>.

musicians could fill.

In “Community Singing Goes to War,” written by Archie Jones and published in the September 1942 issue of the *Music Educators Journal*, the author focused on ways that music teachers could make a greater impact by recruiting more citizens to serve as music leaders for community ensembles. Though Jones includes two musical qualities (sense of rhythm and a voice which can be heard) to his short list of qualifications; he states that the primary factor in successfully leading a community choral ensemble is humor. Jones writes, “He (the director) must be able to keep the singers cheerful...keep them laughing and in the spirit of singing...be able to turn a criticism into a compliment, and provide the incentive to further effort through good humor.”⁵² The author downplayed the need for the leader to be a trained musician, stating “the object of community singing is not the excellence of the musical attainment but the spirit engendered by the experience, which may or may not be a musical one.”⁵³ Once these non-musician leaders are found, the author suggests that music teachers gather and train them in the specific tasks of a community music director. This article is a call-to-action for music teachers. Though Jones consistently refers to ‘he’ in the list of qualifications, the author also states that most of the music teachers are women, and so not of use to the Army as fighters. Jones insists music teachers not wait to be asked to volunteer. Jones also encourages music teachers to seek support for forming community choirs from churches, clubs, and schools.⁵⁴ This article impresses upon the reader that the war “...will be won by people who volunteer for service in whatever

⁵² Jones, 39.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 41.

capacity they are best fitted.”⁵⁵

Ensemble Music During Stressful Experiences

Author Guido Fackler (2010) conducted an extensive study on the role of music amongst prisoners held in Nazi concentration camps. He reported that camp guards regularly ordered prisoners to sing while marching, during formation for roll-call, and sometimes during punishment, performing music in such a way as to intimidate and ridicule themselves and attack their own cultural identity.⁵⁶ Authorities at the camps also required prisoners to form music ensembles (primarily choral), which were used to “frame camp rituals, to fulfil propaganda purposes or to drown the screams of the victims.”⁵⁷ However, prisoners also voluntarily created music. Self-directed music-making was not only a coping mechanism for the extreme atrocities experienced, but also served to remind themselves of their humanity with artistic and aesthetic values beyond the life-threatening prison camps in which they were attempting to survive.⁵⁸

Helen Colijn’s autobiography, *Song of Survival: Women Interned* (1995) is a descriptive account of her family’s experience being held in a Japanese internment camp in the Dutch East Indies.⁵⁹ Colijn describes how Australian, English, and Dutch women prisoners implemented simple rituals and special events to help them survive the loneliness and trials of imprisonment. Excitement and anticipation surrounded the rehearsal preparations for a special one-time musical

⁵⁵ Jones, 41.

⁵⁶ Guido Fackler, "Cultural Behaviour and the Invention of Traditions: Music and Musical Practices in the Early Concentration Camps, 1933-6/7," *Journal of Contemporary History* 45, no. 3 (2010): 608.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 610.

⁵⁹ Helen Colijn, *Song of Survival: Women Interned* (Ashland, Oregon: White Cloud Press, 1995).

event to be held on December 27, 1943. Norah Chambers, who had been an orchestral student at the Royal Academy in London, organized and led a ‘vocal orchestra’ where participants were able to sing the instrumental lines of musical works they knew from memory, though they did not share a common language for communication.⁶⁰ A few prisoners did not join the choir because they thought that singing would require too much energy, however members of the chorus reported that they “gained energy by singing.”⁶¹ Helen’s sisters both participated in the chorus, and as Helen heard the familiar melodies, she was transported to happier places and times.⁶² Notably, the concert raised the spirits of participants, audience members, and even a prison guard who had come to interrupt the gathering.⁶³

While amateur choral music has been a successful concept to bring together people and produce change, author Kerz-Welzel (2016) emphasizes there is no singular definition for a ‘community’ musical ensemble. Community music outlets attempt, “to be different, inclusive and accessible for everyone, not depending on either musical or intellectual talent.”⁶⁴ Ethnomusicologists assert that ‘community music’ can transform societies and people and it occurs from a natural longing for connection.⁶⁵ This claim is exemplified in the actions of 150 members of the United States Congress spontaneously breaking into song on the East steps of the Capitol on September 11, 2001. Only a few hours after evacuating the Capitol building due to

⁶⁰ Colijn, 135.

⁶¹ Ibid., 131.

⁶² Ibid., 136-37

⁶³ Ibid., 138.

⁶⁴ Alexandra Kertz-Welzel, "Daring to Question: A Philosophical Critique of Community Music," *Philosophy of Music Education Review* 24, no. 2 (Fall, 2016): 118.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 114.

unprecedented terrorist attacks and the fear of more to come, Congress members' hearty singing of "God Bless America" lifted the spirits of participants and witnesses alike.⁶⁶ For those participating, those who witnessed this moment, and the millions around the world who read about it, this impromptu eruption of patriotic music was a demonstration of unity across the expansive political divide and communicated the resolve of the nation. A reporter for an Australian newspaper witnessed the event and wrote, "they stood shaken and tearful on the steps of the Capitol, their love of nation and all that it symbolizes plain for the world to see."⁶⁷ Just a few months after these terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, an article in support of encouraging this kind of musical collaboration was published in *The Choral Journal*. In the article, titled "Get America Singing-Again!" the author Charles Facer suggested involving audience members in community sing-alongs to help assist the healing process for the nation at large.⁶⁸

Social Impact (Interpersonal)

Interpersonal impacts include socialization between chorus members, and connection between the chorus and the patrons who attend the concert programs. Though research involving participants who share a common challenge such as health issue or socio-economic situation is plentiful, studies have not often been conducted amongst participants without such unifying factor. In music education, the praxial philosophy focuses on music as an active and interactive process. Author and music educator David Elliott (*Music Matters*, 2015) emphasizes that "music

⁶⁶ History, Art & Archives, U.S. House of Representatives, "The Singing of "God Bless America" on September 11, 2001," <https://history.house.gov/Historical-Highlights/2000-/The-singing-of-“God-Bless-America”-on-September-11,-2001/> accessed November 17, 2019.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Charles Facer, "Get America singing – again!" *The Choral Journal* 42, no. 7 (2002): 43-44. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23554370>.

is an inherently social activity, particular to the customs and rituals of a specific group of people.”⁶⁹ Educator and musician Peter Dykema supported this understanding a century earlier. Dykema used his role as editor of the *Music Supervisors Journal* (title changed to *Music Educators Journal* in 1934) to inform the membership and frequently wrote about the impact that group singing could have on the community. Dykema closely tied community music to uplifting ideals and furthering the connection between citizens and encouraged all people to participate.⁷⁰

Robert Putnam (2007) conducted an extensive study on the impact of cultural diversity on conflict or contact theory. Putnam found that people in culturally diverse communities are more likely to ‘turtle’ – to withdraw into their own home - triggering social isolation.⁷¹ Putnam’s finding is important to this research study, as the study is conducted in a densely populated and culturally diverse metropolitan area.

Researchers have also explored the impact of community music on the interpersonal relationships in socially challenging situations. Dingle, et al (2012) applied Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) in a qualitative, semi-structured interview research study of the personal experiences of 21 adult choir members in Australia who were in treatment for chronic mental health problems.⁷² Chronic mental health issues can increase social isolation and emotional detachment, and though some medications improve of symptoms, these medications

⁶⁹ David J. Elliott, *Music Matters* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015): 84.

⁷⁰ Dykema, "A Community Christmas," 11.

⁷¹ Robert D. Putnam, “E Pluribus Unum: Diversity and Community in the Twenty-First Century. The 2006 Johan Skytte Prize Lecture,” *Scandinavian Political Studies* 30, no. 2 (June 2007): 149, doi:10.1111/j.1467-9477.2007.00176.x

⁷² Genevieve Dingle, Christopher Brander, Julie Ballantyne, and Felicity A. Baker, “‘To Be Heard’: The Social and Mental Health Benefits of Choir Singing for Disadvantaged Adults,” *Psychology of Music* 41, no. 4 (2013): 408, doi:10.1177/0305735611430081.

do not address the social/emotional interactions challenges which result in social disadvantage.⁷³

Participants were interviewed at the beginning, middle, and end of the twelve-month study.

Three main themes emerged from this study. The first theme is focused on the intrapersonal level and includes a participant's perception of stress, energy, and emotion. Karen (first interview): "your endorphins are flying, your hands are buzzing. It's a good thing for the body and mind to do. If you are feeling down, I definitely feel better because the body switches on everywhere."⁷⁴ Improvements in mood and relaxation were noted within the first month of rehearsals. Many choir members reported that singing helped them reduce stress. Bob (first interview), "it's like a release of anxiety and pressure. Generally I feel comfortable. Singing makes you feel relaxed."⁷⁵ Paul (first interview), "I'm inclined to worry about things. The choir can help to break the cycle."⁷⁶ Not all responses were positive. One respondent (Tina, second interview – after experiencing the first performance) shared that she felt "very stressed. Very scared. Certain of singing wrong notes and at the wrong time. Agitated. Had to not think about it – try not to think about it at all or it was too much. Too much adrenalin."⁷⁷ However, a majority of interview responses revealed an overall positive impact on health and social connectedness from participation in the chorus.

Though the subject of spirituality was omitted from the prepared interview questions, some participants reported feeling a spiritual impact as a result of singing in the choir. Brooke (first interview): "it lets those emotions out – I believe it gives it to a higher power because I'm a

⁷³ Dingle, et al., 406.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 413.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

Christian.”⁷⁸ Another participant (Karen - second interview) shared, “it’s healing my creative soul. It’s healing my spirit. It’s the most normal life I’ve lived in a long time.”⁷⁹

The second theme emerging from Dingle’s study involved interpersonal connections. This includes connectedness within the choir, connection with local community, connection with an audience, and improved social functioning. Jillian (first interview) stated, “Yes, I don’t get as crabby as I used to . . . I’m more tolerant . . . I’m learning to be more at ease in myself and not judgmental of others. To be more open to people in every walk of my life. All sorts of people make the world go ‘round and learning not to be so wrapped up in ‘me’.”⁸⁰

The third theme emerging from this study involved functional outcomes affecting daily life, including a reduction in need for medication and subsequent increased work opportunities. Participants related these outcomes to their activity in the choir. Pauline (third interview) stated, “I’m applying for a permanent part time job, which I wasn’t able to do before.”⁸¹ When asked about changes in work capacity, Jillian (third interview) responded, “Yes. My support worker thinks I’m more than capable of getting some part-time work. A few days a week paid work.”⁸² Jack (second interview) shared, “it’s a steadying influence. It’s helped me in making routines.”⁸³

The findings of this study demonstrate the importance of offering patients who need mental health assistance a variety of community-based strategies that go beyond the usual institutionalization solution. The conclusions of this study are consistent with social identity

⁷⁸ Dingle, et al., 413.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 415.

⁸¹ Ibid., 416.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

theory. According to social identity theory, forming an identity as a member of a group can provide emotional and health benefits. Identifying oneself as being a part of a group reduces personal uncertainty.⁸⁴

Physical/Psychological Impact (Intrapersonal)

Intrapersonal impacts include an individual's perceptions of physical and emotional changes during and following participation in a choral ensemble. The historical onset of music as a mode of therapy began with Greek philosopher Pythagoras, but the first researched uses of music as therapy were during the convalescence of WWII soldiers.⁸⁵ Improvement on morale was an unexpected finding in the study. Since then, behavioral and psychological research has explored the effect of singing on mood and stress.⁸⁶

As political and societal stresses began to build in the late 1950s, music educators began to turn away from the traditional school function of cultural conformity in which music had been situated and look for ways in which music affected the individual. Financial challenges in the 1960s resulted in the 'arts' (music, visual arts, dance) looking for rationale to support arts education for its own sake and not as a mechanism to advance conformity. The success of the National Science Foundation's curriculum development in the late 1950s led to the Yale Seminar in 1963 at which musicians and scholars met to discuss problems facing music education.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Michael A. Hogg, Dominic Abrams, and Marilyn B. Brewer, "Social Identity: The Role of Self in Group Processes and Intergroup Relations," *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 20 no. 5 (September 2017): 574, doi:10.1177/1368430217690909.

⁸⁵ Marianne Judd and Julie Ann Pooley, "The psychological benefits of participating in group singing for members of the general public," *Psychology of Music* 42 no. 2 (2014): 269.

⁸⁶ E. Valentine, and C. Evans, "The effects of solo singing, choral singing and swimming on mood and physiological indices," *British Journal of Medical Psychology*, 74(2001): 118.

⁸⁷ Mark and Gary, 399.

Participants in the Yale Seminar felt that music education in K-12 was too focused on performance skills.⁸⁸ Noting that many scientists were also musically literate, and since the national curriculum was focused on excellence in science education, participants promoted the aesthetic values of arts education to increase support for its placement in the curriculum.⁸⁹ Aesthetic approaches to music education focus on music as a product; something that can be heard as organized sounds, sometimes uniquely so in various cultures. Musician and scholar Bennet Reimer stated that in order to be musical an activity “must be charged with meanings uniquely available to music.”⁹⁰

The Music Educators National Conference (MENC) organization popularized the findings of both the 1963 Yale Seminar and the 1967 Tanglewood Symposium. The Tanglewood Symposium uniquely demonstrated the importance of professional introspection. Without outside prompting, music teachers met to determine if the current philosophy of music education was meeting the needs of society and what changes, if any, needed to be made.⁹¹ Music educators considered the intrapersonal impact of music education in addition to the technique and performance aspects on which education was originally focused.

In the 1970s, music educators actively debated the aesthetic justification as promoted by Bennett Reimer. The debate centered on whether this focus on providing students with aesthetic experiences would achieve goals which could then be quantified to support the outcomes of music education. Through the political arm of the Music Educators National Conference, all arts

⁸⁸ Mark and Gary, 400.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 399.

⁹⁰ Bennett Reimer, *A Philosophy of Music Education: Advancing the Vision* 3rd ed (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc., 2003), 11.

⁹¹ Mark and Gary, 460.

(including music) were added as part of the ‘core subjects’ in all public schools. This action provided the necessary national and school district support to continue music education funding in the public schools.

Hylton (1981) conducted one of the first investigations into participants’ perceived benefits (‘meaning’) of the choral experience.⁹² For the purpose of his research, Hylton defines ‘meaning’ as a psychological construct with both cognitive and affective aspects, which are manifested through some type of behavior. Hylton’s research utilized open-ended questions of 189 choral students in three Pennsylvania High Schools. Hylton reduced the 420 individual comments submitted to 62 relatively unambiguous statements which were then grouped into four main areas: psychological (relating to the development of self), communicative (reaching out to others), integrative (a desire to join in and participate with others), and musical-artistic (gaining meaning from musical growth and development).⁹³

After additional study of existing writings by educational philosophers, and further evaluation of the pilot group responses, Hylton defined a fifth question area – spiritualistic (reflecting religious reasons for participation). Statements in this category reflected a “feeling that singing and communicating with an audience are religious or spiritual experiences, or ways of expressing spiritual thoughts or feelings.”⁹⁴ Hylton then developed a Likert-style rating format based on a continuum of agreement to the statements (72 statements, ten which were added from the spiritualistic category) which was then piloted at four additional high schools. Two hundred fifty-one subjects participated, rating each statement on a scale from 1-5 to indicate strength of

⁹² J.B. Hylton, “Dimensionality in High School Student Participants’ Perceptions of the Meaning of Choral Singing Experience,” *Journal of Research in Music Education* 29, no. 4 (1981): 287-303.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 290.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

agreement. The results verified all five factor- areas, and a sixth factor was identified. The sixth factor related to the individual's feeling of fulfillment and achievement through choral music experiences.⁹⁵

Blood and Zatorre (2001) conducted a quantitative study in which the researchers used positron image tomography to examine neural response to a musical piece.⁹⁶ The musical selection was chosen by the participant because s/he experienced strong positive emotional associations to the piece of music. Each participant was studied while listening to a 90-second excerpt of their chosen piece, the part of the selection that the participant reported was most inclined to produce the 'chills' response.⁹⁷ Psychophysiological reactions were documented of experiencing 'chills' occurred, with documented changes in heart rate, respiration rate, and brain activity. This result showed that a level of pleasure intensity must be reached in order to experience the 'chill' response. Researchers discovered that the brain activity observed while the participant experienced the music-induced 'chills' effect was like that observed in other brain imaging studies of euphoria and/or pleasant emotions, such as those induced with opioid drugs.⁹⁸

Bartleet⁹⁹ (Australia, 2012) and Bartolome¹⁰⁰ (South Africa, 2018) each applied the case

⁹⁵ Hylton, 291. Note: The criterion used to include this sixth factor was that responses were considered validated when they reached a 0.30, and this factor reached that threshold.

⁹⁶ A.J. Blood and Zatorre, R. J., "Intensely Pleasurable Responses to Music Correlate with Activity in Brain Regions Implicated in Reward and Emotion," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 98 no. 20 (September 2001): 11818, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.191355898>.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 11819.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 11821.

⁹⁹ Brydie-Leigh Bartleet, "Building vibrant school-community music collaborations: Three case studies from Australia," *British Journal of Music Education* 29, no. 1 (2012).

¹⁰⁰ Sarah J. Bartolome, "'We sing to touch hearts': Choral musical culture in Pretoria East, South Africa," *Research Studies in Music Education* 40, no.2 (2018).

study method to research community choral ensembles located in specific geographical areas. Both studies produced similar reports of increased mood and a sense of belonging. Bartolome's collective case study explored choral singing amongst children and youth in five different South African choirs, all located within the hub of municipal government.¹⁰¹ The data for Bartolome's study was collected over the period of one month and utilized hand-written fieldnotes, semi-structured interviews, and observations of rehearsals and performance.¹⁰² This present study conducted in a metropolitan suburb is modeled after the two case studies conducted by Bartleet and Bartolome.

Bailey and Davidson (2002) conducted a qualitative research study of a choir consisting of a group of homeless males in a French-Canadian city.¹⁰³ They wrote two research papers based on this study. The first (2002) focused on the application of flow theory, stating, "the effects of active participation in a musical activity, such as group singing, may provide opportunities to experience the positive effects of mental stimulation and social engagement as described in flow theory."¹⁰⁴ The opportunity to study this group provided a chance to investigate "the possible adaptive characteristics of group singing with a sample of participants who were removed from elitist environs."¹⁰⁵ The choir was formed and led by a soup kitchen volunteer who was frustrated that he was unable to identify any long-term impact in the population he was

¹⁰¹ Brydie-Leigh Bartleet, "Building vibrant school-community music collaborations: Three case studies from Australia," *British Journal of Music Education* 29, no. 1 (2012): 45-63.

¹⁰² Sarah J. Bartolome, "'We sing to touch hearts': Choral musical culture in Pretoria East, South Africa," *Research Studies in Music Education* 40, no.2 (2018): 265-285.

¹⁰³ Betty A. Bailey & Jane W. Davidson, "Adaptive characteristics of group singing: Perceptions from members of a choir for homeless men," *Musicae Scientiae* 6, no. 2 (2002): 221-56. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1177%2F102986490200600206>.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 226.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 229.

serving. He had no training as a music specialist but did enjoy participating in another community choral ensemble. He thought offering a similar positive experience could inspire some in the homeless community to make significant changes to their circumstances. Some of the homeless men had lived on the streets for several years, and some showed symptoms of psychological impairment. The choir was advertised on a simple flyer stating that no previous experience was necessary. The first rehearsal (December 1996) had only three attendees, but participation in the group soon stabilized with 20 participants. From their first performance singing French Carols in the nearby subway, the small choir performed over 1,000 concerts in their first five years. The choir appeared on television, made several CD recordings which were distributed to prison populations, and traveled to perform in Paris, France, where they encouraged other ‘street people’ to form a similar choral group.¹⁰⁶

Bailey and Davidson used interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) to explore the lived experiences of the members of this choir. Seven members of the choir agreed to participate in a single semi-structured interview, each interview lasting approximately one hour.¹⁰⁷ The interview questions were open-ended and spanned from early life experiences through the time of the study (five years of choir). After five years as members of the ‘Homeless Choir’ all seven research participants were in permanent housing and some had part-time employment.¹⁰⁸

Cohen (2009) conducted a comparative research study on the well-being of two groups of male inmates in a minimum-security correctional facility.¹⁰⁹ All participants were enrolled in a

¹⁰⁶ Betty A. Bailey and Jane W. Davidson, “Amateur Group Singing as a Therapeutic Instrument,” *Nordic Journal of Music Therapy* 12, no. 1 (2003): 18-32, DOI: 10.1080/08098130309478070

¹⁰⁷ Bailey and Davidson, “Adaptive characteristics of group singing,” 232.

¹⁰⁸ Bailey and Davidson, “Amateur Group Singing as a Therapeutic Instrument,” 20.

¹⁰⁹ Mary L. Cohen, “Choral singing and prison inmates: Influences of performing in a prison choir,” *Journal of Correctional Education* 60, no.1 (2009):52-65.

substance-abuse treatment program. Cohen used the Friedman Well-Being Scale (FWBS) to measure composite well-being and five sub-scale categories: emotional stability, sociability, joviality, self-esteem, and happiness.¹¹⁰ Cohen then compared the responses between those who participated in the voluntary choral ensemble (experimental group) with non-choral participants (control group) who attended the concert.¹¹¹ Scores of both groups revealed a significant increase in the composite well-being scores.¹¹² Members of the choir were also asked for written responses throughout the nine-week period to the question, “How are you feeling today?” Responses were grouped into two main categories: choir related, and non-choir related; and then categorized into generally positive or negative reactions.¹¹³ Though well-being data is difficult to quantify, coded responses (inter-rater reliability of 100%) demonstrate that the social elements of performing the concert played an important role in the positive feelings of the group participating in the choir.¹¹⁴ The focus on performance elements in addition to regular participation are relevant factors of this research.

Lamont, et al (2018) conducted research with older adults and the researchers now advocate that a community choir could be a cost-effective way of meeting the challenges of an aging population.¹¹⁵ Since this present study is situated in an adult ensemble with many participants at or near retirement age, the data gathered may further support Lamont’s conclusion

¹¹⁰ Cohen, “Choral singing and prison inmates,” 55.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 56.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid., 57.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 60.

¹¹⁵ Alexandra Lamont, et al, “Singing in later life: The anatomy of a community choir,” *Psychology of Music* 46, no.3 (2018): 425.

that forming community choirs that include older adults can help improve health-related quality of life.

Twenge, et al (2018) conducted a quantitative study in which they explored potential connections between increased screen time and increased symptoms of depression.¹¹⁶ The results of the study indicate that social interaction that happens in-person results in more feelings of closeness than communication that happens via electronic means.¹¹⁷ The findings by Lamonte and Twenge each support formation of in-person ensemble experiences to improve physical and psychological health in a community.

The impact of choral music participation has been studied extensively with specific populations experiencing similar health issues. Linnemann, et al (2017) addressed community music and its potential impact on perceived stress.¹¹⁸ They reported that participants experienced a reduction in stress after most rehearsals, though the first performance did produce added stress. Subsequent performances were not reported to increase stress levels as participants seemed to be more comfortable with the experience.¹¹⁹ Their study also found the calming effect increased with longer periods of singing in a choir, which was attributed to increased confidence and familiarity with the repertoire and the ensemble itself.

Abell, Baird and Chalmers (2017) focused on the effect of choral singing in ten patients

¹¹⁶ J.M. Twenge, et al, "Increases in Depressive Symptoms, Suicide-related Outcomes, and Suicide Rates Among U.S. Adolescents after 2010 and Links to Increased New Media Screen Time," *Clinical Psychological Science* 6 (2018): 3–17.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 4.

¹¹⁸ Alexandra Linnemann, A. Schnersch, and U. Nater, "Testing the beneficial effects of singing in a choir on mood and stress in a longitudinal study: The role of social contacts" *Musicae Scientiae* 21, no. 2 (2017): 195-212.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 209.

with Parkinson's disease who sang in a community choir.¹²⁰ Their study applied Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) methodology to inform the data collection and analysis. The results generated six themes: physical, mood, cognitive functioning, social connectedness, "flow-on" effects, and sense-of-self. As the disease progresses, the patient experiences decreased ability to verbally communicate as the deterioration and muscle fatigue impact speech clarity and volume.¹²¹ Nine participants reported improvement in vocal strength and clarity lasting up to three days following rehearsal. Eight participants reported increased energy and motivation to continue an increased level of activity after rehearsal. Improvement in mood and in cognitive functioning were also reported. In the community choir studied for this research project some participants may have health issues which could be positively affected by their involvement.

Reagon, et al (2016) studied various patient groups and the impact of participation in a choir. The research findings indicate singing in a choir positively impacts cognitive ability and health in patient groups.¹²² Reagon, et al (2017) then conducted a mixed-methods observational study which explored effects of participation in community choirs on health-related quality of life (HRQoL) for individuals receiving a cancer diagnosis or family and loved ones of those who have been diagnosed.¹²³ Quantitative data of this six-month long study revealed that patients and those affected (non-patients) experienced reduction in anxiety. While there was no significant

¹²⁰ Romane V. Abell, Amee D. Baird, and Kerry A. Chalmers, "Group Singing and Health-Related Quality of Life in Parkinson's Disease," *Health Psychology*: 36, no. 1 (2017): 55-64. <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1037/hea0000412>.

¹²¹ Nick Miller, Emma Noble, Diana Jones, David Burn, "Life with Communication Changes in Parkinson's Disease," *Age and Ageing* 35, no. 3 (May 2006): 235–239, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ageing/afj053>.

¹²² C. Reagon, et al., "A mixed-method systematic review to investigate the effect of group singing on health-related quality of life," *Complementary Therapies in Medicine* 27 (August 2016): 5.

¹²³ C. Reagon, et al., "Choir Singing and Health Status in People Affected by Cancer," *European Journal of Cancer Care* 26, no. 5 (September 2017): 1-10, doi: 10.1111/ecc.12568.

difference in HRQoL between patients who attended more or less than 50% of rehearsals; the non-patients who attended rehearsals more than 50% presented improvement in overall mental health.¹²⁴

Summary

These 18 research studies and 12 historical documentations confirm that participation in a community choral ensemble can positively impact the social, physical, and psychological aspects of a person's life. The availability of community choral ensembles is important to the health and collaboration of a culturally and politically diverse community. The significance of participation in a community music ensemble as an adjunct treatment for mental and physical ailments has been researched extensively. There is minimal research of the motivation of working adults to participate in such an ensemble. This study aims to explore and analyze the benefits of participation in community music ensembles and identify motivations to consistent involvement.

¹²⁴ C. Reagon, et al., "Choir Singing and Health Status in People Affected by Cancer," 5.

Chapter III: Methodology

Participants and Recruitment

This qualitative research project was an exploratory case study of members in a volunteer community chorus situated in a metropolitan suburb of Washington, DC. The Vienna Choral Society is a not-for-profit musical organization formed in January 1987.¹²⁵ The choir is organized through the collaborative effort of Members, the Board of Directors, the Artistic Director, the Executive Director, and the Accompanist. The Board of Directors are elected yearly from the choir membership. The purpose of the Vienna Choral Society is:

“to be an excellent teaching choir that presents varied programs of high-quality music for public entertainment and personal enrichment, to promote greater appreciation and enjoyment of good music by the general public and to join with other organizations in giving our time and our talent to programs and activities that benefit our community.”¹²⁶

This study focused on the perceived benefits and motivation to consistently attend rehearsals by those choral members who may have limited leisure time due to work or other commitments. Though the focus of the study was on choir members with full-time employment, retired individuals were also included as they reflected on how participation in choir fit with or did not fit with their previous occupation. Participants included men and women, age range 18 - 70+, in generally good health, with varied demands on their time, and with varied levels of previous singing experience. In designing this project, the researcher assumed the participants would include both genders and include persons from 18 – 70+ years.

¹²⁵ Vienna Choral Society. <https://viennachoralsociety.org/about-2/>. Accessed October 29, 2019.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

Procedure

This study involved volunteer participants who manage professional, volunteer, and personal schedules with numerous commitments. The researcher utilized semi-structured interviews to allow participants to describe their previous music experiences and current participation in the Vienna Choral Society. Structuring the line of questioning ensured coverage of topics of interest to the researcher for this study (the interpretive aspect) – including perception of stress related to employment, perception of stress not related to work, commuting to rehearsal, and social connectedness within the ensemble. This study was approached through interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) by focusing on the perceptions and emotions of participants.¹²⁷ Purposeful sampling was applied to ensure the interview process included perspectives of employed participants.¹²⁸

Though a challenge to establish compatible interview times, the total number of interviews exceeded the projected research goal. Data was also collected through two journal response opportunities. A total of 38 journal responses were submitted from 23 different participants. The first journal response question set focused on the perceived stress level and mood of the participant prior to rehearsal and asked the participant to consider what motivated him/her to attend rehearsal. The second journal response question set focused on mood and energy level during and following rehearsal and asked the participant to reflect on his/her motivation to continue membership. Initially, journal responses were sought only from participants who completed the semi-structured interview. However, the researcher discovered that many of the journal responses were contained significant participant insight which enriched

¹²⁷ Dingle, et al., 408.

¹²⁸ Creswell, *Research Design*, 150.

the information gathered through the interview process. The opportunity for journal response was then offered to additional survey participants.

The primary research question focused on exploring each participant's motivations for participation in weekly rehearsals. All data collection methods were reviewed with the faculty advisor prior to implementation. Data was collected by a single researcher utilizing an online survey engine¹²⁹ (hard copy also offered), semi-structured interviews, and participant reflective journals. Participants provided contact information on the survey engine which ensured no duplication of survey entries and allowed follow-up contact to secure interviews.

The survey (Appendix A) was offered to all choir members (67 members). The survey was provided in both printed copy and through an online survey engine¹³⁰ to allow for ease of access to participation. The purpose of the survey was to gather general sociodemographic information, determine willingness of further participation in the study, and explore the frequency of perceived stress both in and out of the work environment. The survey also was used to determine if a threshold of sixty percent participation (approximately forty individuals) could be accomplished. Surveys completed in hard copy were subsequently entered onto the survey engine by the researcher. The survey engine provided efficient calculation of results and ease of categorization of participant responses through application of bar graphs. Since the study spanned two choral seasons, some individuals who had expressed interest were no longer available once data collection could begin, and some new members needed to be provided with the initial recruitment information.

The study focused on choir members who maintain full-time employment in careers with

¹²⁹ Survey Monkey, www.surveymonkey.com/r/singer-demo.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

a high level of perceived stress.¹³¹ Participant volunteers signed a consent form before the interview process.¹³² Prior to dispersal, the interview questions (Appendix B) were reviewed by a member of the choral board and no alterations were needed. Though the semi-structured interview process required more time, those who participated were supportive of the research project and eager to share their stories. A total of fifteen interviews were conducted. Fourteen in-person interviews, each one forty-five to sixty minutes long. By request of the participant, one interview was conducted via telephone and lasted thirty-five minutes. While the schedules of those who completed the survey may have limited the total number of people interviewed, the one-on-one interview process provided more descriptive insight than a survey-only design.

Posing clarifying or exploratory statements such as ‘tell me more about that’ added additional depth and clearer interpretation of the impact of choral singing on each participant. Additional data was collected through rehearsal observations and two separate opportunities to respond in a journal format. The journal questions (appendix C) focused on the participant’s perceptions of stress prior to, during, and after rehearsals and perceived benefits, if any, resulting from participation in the choral rehearsal. This collection of descriptive data was expanded by providing these journal opportunities to survey respondents who were unable to participate in the semi-structured interview. Group discussions were considered to determine commonalities but were not feasible due to work and rehearsal demands.¹³³

¹³¹ Creswell, *Research Design*, 162.

¹³² Ibid., 92.

¹³³ Frederick Steier, Juanita Brown, and Flavio Mesquitada da Silva, "The World Café in Action Research Settings," in *The SAGE Handbook of Action Research*, Third ed. (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2015), 212.

Description of Data Analysis

Analysis of the data collected from 45 survey participants produced an overview of statistical data. Out of the 45 survey participants, 15 semi-structured interviews were scheduled. The researcher completed multiple readings of notes taken through these 15 semi-structured interviews, and the 38 journal responses collected from 23 participants. Applying the practice of *focused coding*¹³⁴ this researcher identified codes based on topics of relevance to the primary research questions. The length and quality of descriptions in participant journal reflections were considered in the final analysis. By connecting and grouping these codes, the researcher identified several themes.

The initial description of the research study was presented to the choir by the researcher, outlining the purpose and scope of the research. Second, information about the study was sent via an email from the Choir Administrator. A letter of introduction with details about the researcher and the study was made available to all choir members, and a QR code was provided for ease of access to the online survey. For the next several rehearsals, the researcher set up a display with copies of the survey questionnaire, both journal prompts, and the presentation slides which outlined the research study. The researcher was available for questions from potential participants before and after rehearsals for four weeks.

Reliability across the interview process was ensured by following the same flow of questions across all interviews. Clarifying questions were applied where needed to ensure understanding of the participant's viewpoint. Reliability was increased by providing opportunity for additional insight through two journal responses. To ensure a high response rate, the survey

¹³⁴ Robert M. Emerson, Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* (University of Chicago, 2011), 172.

was administered through a multi-step process.¹³⁵ This process included providing the printed survey for completion in-person at rehearsal over several weeks. The survey was also available to access with a weblink (survey built using Survey Monkey). Additionally, a QR code was created and included in the information sheet so that participants could conveniently access the survey from an internet-capable phone.

Validity of the research was established through multiple avenues. First, validity was ensured through obtaining a “rich, thick description” of participant experiences¹³⁶ by asking follow-up questions during the interview process. Second, validity of the findings increased by including participant accounts that contradict most participant responses.¹³⁷ Third, validity was strengthened by checking with each interview participant to ensure his/her viewpoint was accurately represented in the final analysis.¹³⁸

The researcher considered benefits and drawbacks of utilizing a qualitative software program to organize the data obtained through the semi-structured interviews. Audio recordings were not taken of the interviews, which increased the comfort level of the participants. When repeatedly reading the detailed notes of the interviews, the researcher reconnects to the interview experience, including memory of the tone of voice and body language of the participant. While digital analysis can save time, “software cannot interpret the emotional tone that is often critical to understanding the findings, and therefore neglects to consider the contextual basis of

¹³⁵ Creswell, *Research Design*, 155.

¹³⁶ Emerson, et al, 172.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 201.

¹³⁸ Creswell, *Research Design*, 200.

information.”¹³⁹ *Emotional tone* is defined in medical dictionary as *feeling tone*, or the emotional state that accompanies every act or thought.¹⁴⁰ In addition to body language and eye contact, vocal inflexion adds meaning. Yale University researcher Michael Kraus states, “the voice conveys emotion both through speech content (i.e., what is said) and the linguistic and paralinguistic cues that accompany it (i.e., how it is said).”¹⁴¹ For these reasons, conducting the interviews in person and simultaneously taking notes provided a clearer understanding of participant meaning than utilizing a qualitative software.

¹³⁹ Linda Dale Bloomberg & Marie Volpe, *Completing Your Qualitative Dissertation: A Roadmap from Beginning to End* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2008), 109, doi: 10.4135/9781452226613.

¹⁴⁰ <https://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/emotional+tone>

¹⁴¹ Michael W. Kraus, “Voice Only Communication Enhances Empathic Accuracy,” *American Psychologist* 72, no. 7 (2017): 644-54.

Chapter IV: Findings

This collective case study was used to examine the perceived motivations of participants to attend weekly rehearsals in a metropolitan suburban community chorus. This study focused on what benefits, if any, members derived from voluntary participation in a community chorus and what effect, if any, rehearsal had on their perceived stress and/or energy level. The researcher believed that understanding what participants perceived as benefits of singing in a community chorus could help inform decision-making and support funding for future ensemble music offerings.

This chapter presents the key findings from 45 survey responses, 15 in-depth interviews and 38 journal responses contributed from 23 individuals. The first section of this chapter is focused on the descriptive statistics gathered through the 45 survey responses. The second section of this chapter discusses the major findings which emerged from the 15 semi-structured interviews and the journal responses.

Descriptive statistics of study participants

All participants in this research are members of the Vienna Choral Society (VCS) in Vienna, Virginia at the time of this research study. VCS is a non-auditioned community chorus in a Northern Virginia suburb. Most (44/45 or 98%) of the survey respondents are amateur musicians. The survey focused on education level, employment (full or part-time), commute to and from employment, perceived stress level (both work and non-work related), care-giver responsibilities, and previous singing experiences.

Education

Figure 1 represents the reported educational attainment level of each respondent. 90% of the 45 survey respondents hold advanced education degrees (42% Bachelor's degree, 49% Graduate degree (Masters or Doctorate)).

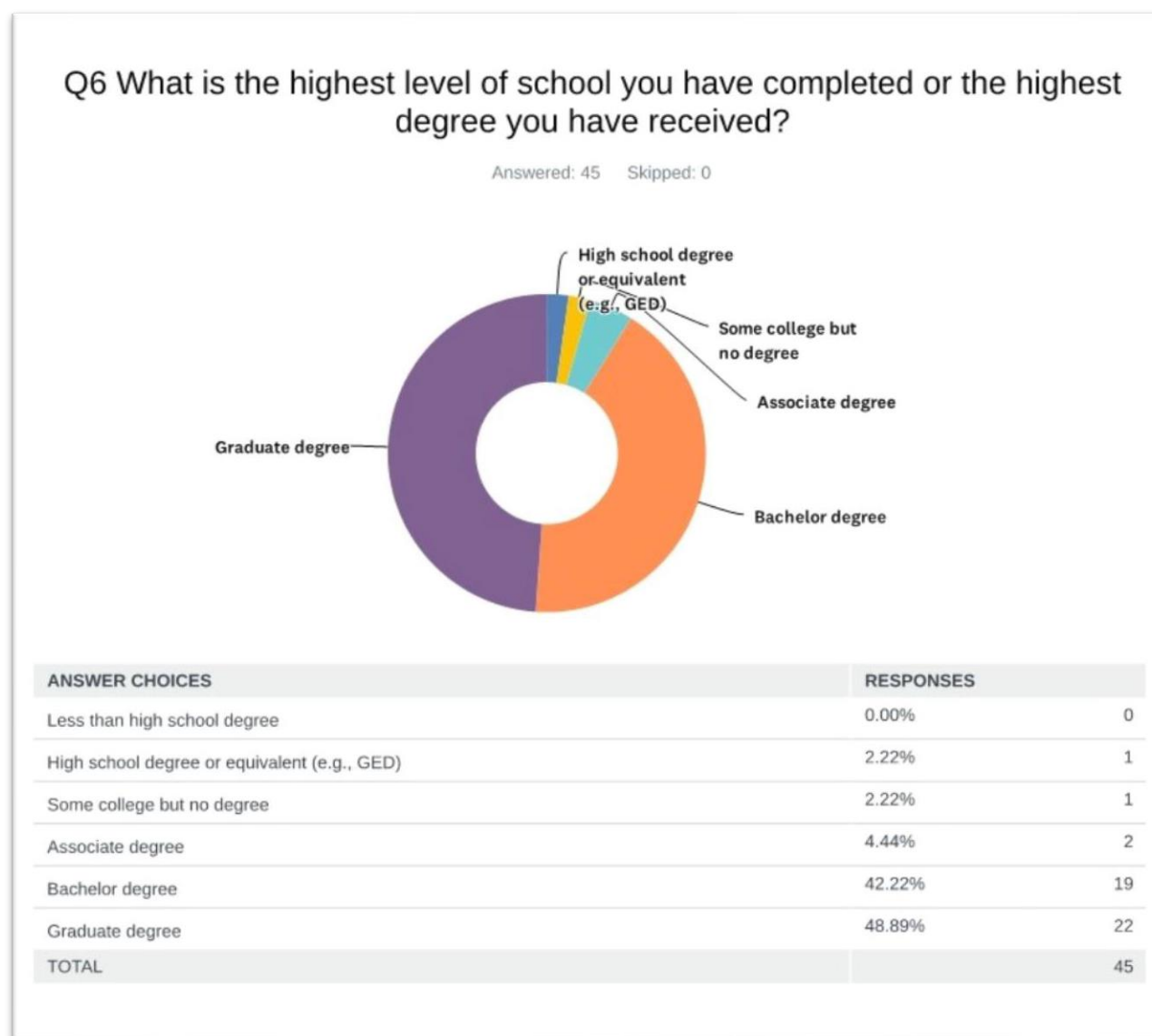


Figure 1 Education Level Completed

Employment and Commute Time

Due to the population density of the community involved in this study, commute times to and from work can significantly impact available leisure time and feasibility of regularly attending rehearsals. Out of the forty-five survey responses, 51% work full time, 22% work part-time, 22% are retired, and 4% are not employed but are looking for work. Of those who are employed, the average commute time is 33 minutes to work, and 36 minutes home from work. The lowest commute time reported was 0 minutes (working from home), and the longest commute time reported was 74 minutes. 12 participants reported commute time from work to home is over 30 minutes. 6 respondents reported the typical commute from work to home is over 60 minutes.

Perceived Stress

Two survey questions addressed the participants' perceived frequency of stress – one in relationship to work stress (figure 2) and one about stress not related to work (figure 3). If the respondent is retired, responses about work stress were disregarded.

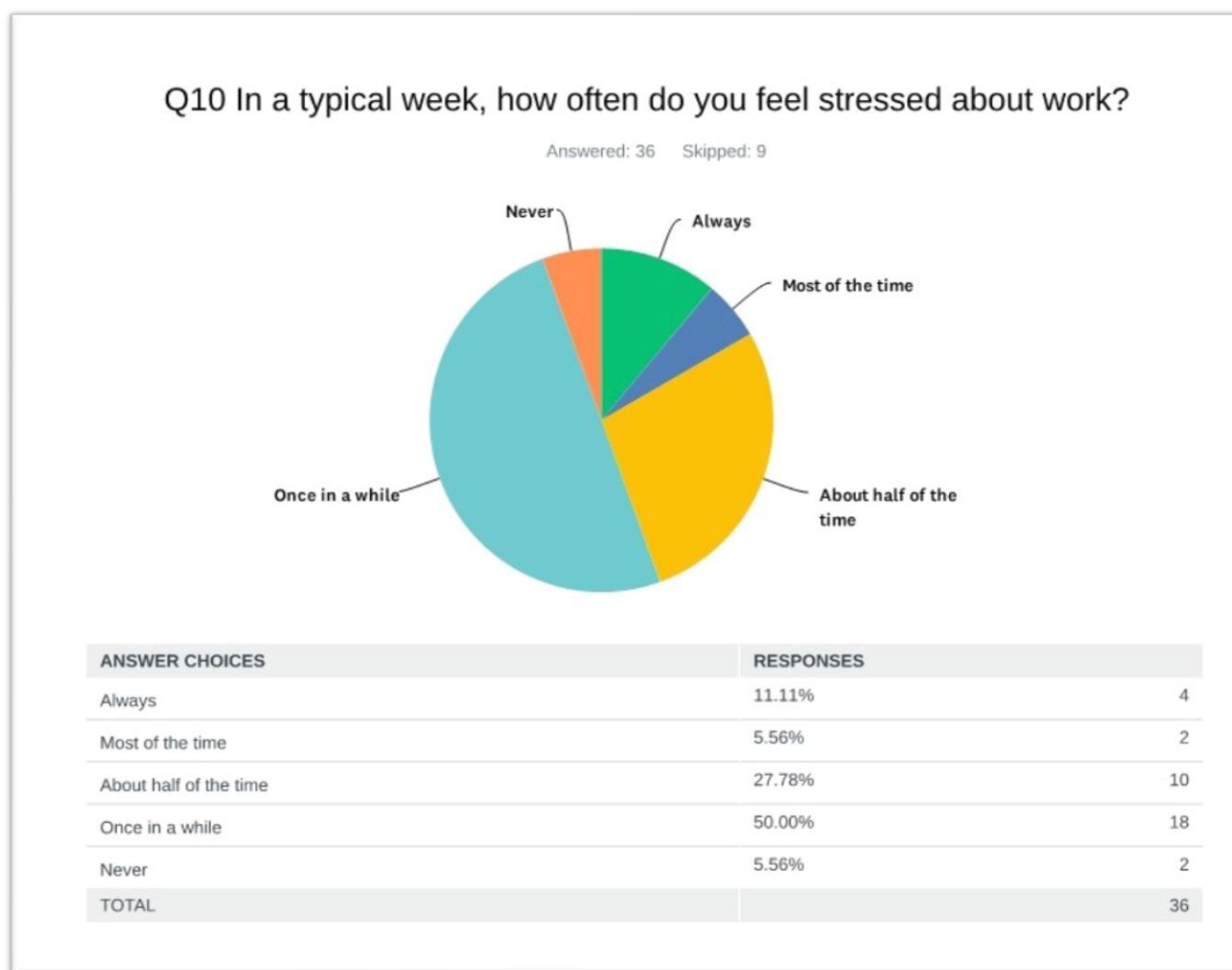
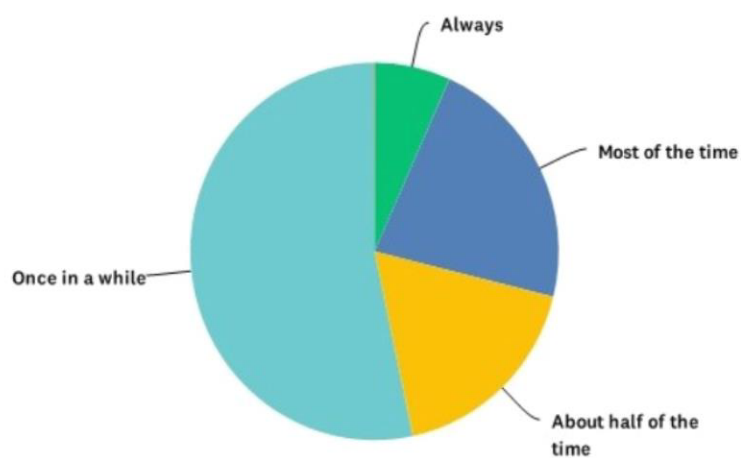


Figure 2 Perceived Work-Related Stress

Q13 In a typical week, how often do you feel stressed about non-work related things?

Answered: 45 Skipped: 0



| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES | |
|------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Always | 6.67% | 3 |
| Most of the time | 22.22% | 10 |
| About half of the time | 17.78% | 8 |
| Once in a while | 53.33% | 24 |
| Never | 0.00% | 0 |
| TOTAL | | 45 |

Figure 3 Perceived Non-Work-Related Stress

Prior Singing Experience

Survey respondents selected each answer that applied to their singing experience from elementary school through post-college (figure 4). The question pertained to school and church and/or community singing opportunities. Over half (55%) of respondents participated in a choral ensemble in elementary school. Sixty percent (60%) participated in a choral ensemble in their high school. Participation dropped during college (42%). Notably, community organizations involve fewer than half the participation of in-school ensembles during the same age range.

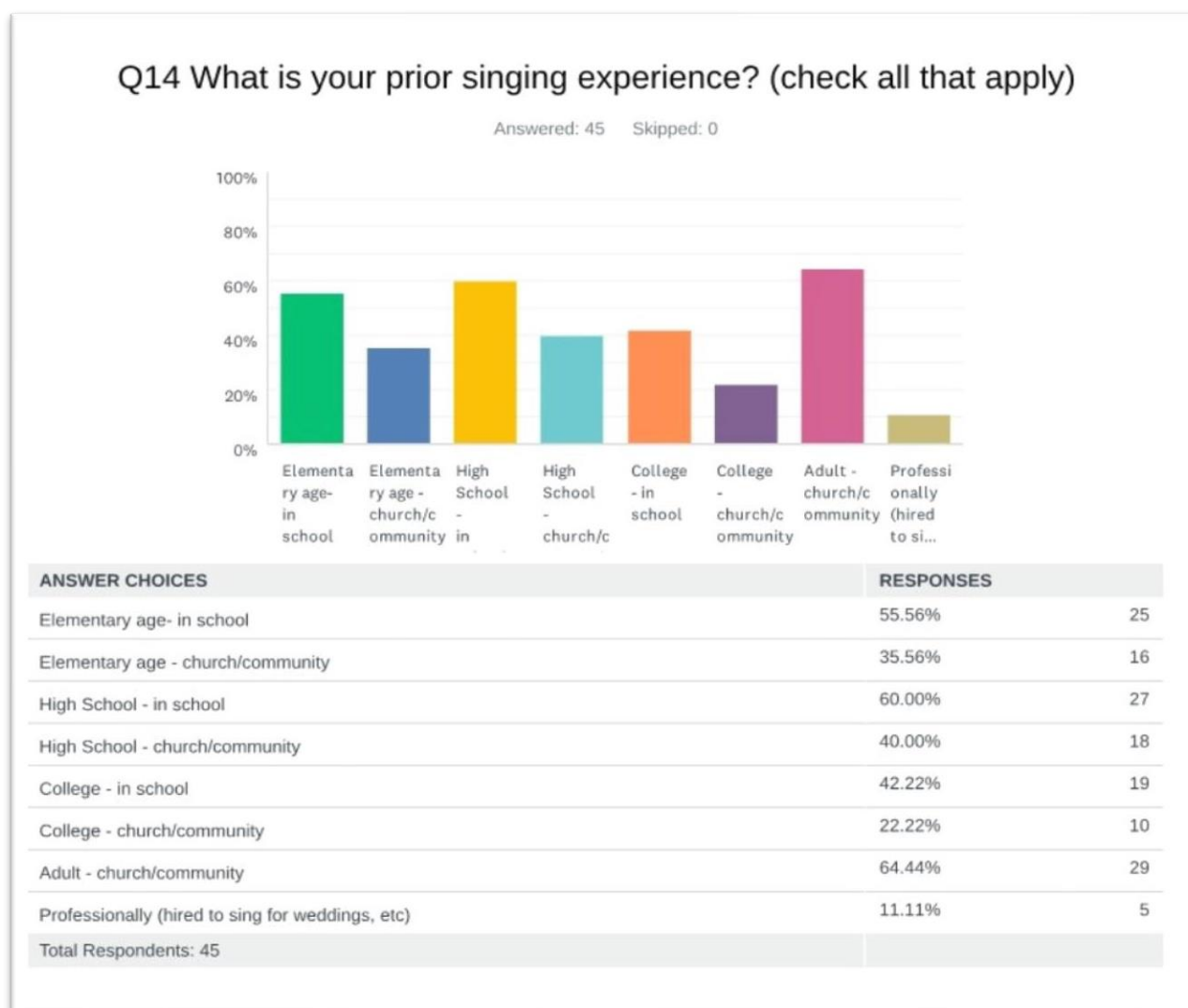


Figure 4 Prior Singing Experience

Themes Extracted from Semi-Structured Interviews

This section is organized into thematic categories based on the primary and secondary research questions. Each theme contains sub-themes generated from the responses of the participants during the semi-structured interview and the collected journal responses. The grouping process began with multiple readings of the responses from 15 individual semi-structured interviews and 45 journal responses, which came from 23 individuals (11 of whom can be directly attributed to participants who were interviewed). Each response was then color-coded and grouped by theme.¹⁴² Seven themes emerged from the interviews and journal responses which provide insight into an individual's motivation to attend rehearsals, to join and remain in a community choir.

Themes one through six were grouped as they applied to the original research questions. Theme seven, which emerged during the interview process but did not directly apply to the primary research questions, focused on factors that may impede participation in a community choir.

Theme 1: Social opportunity (interpersonal) as a motivating factor for attendance.

Theme 2: Commitment/Obligation to the chorus (interpersonal) and to self
(intrapersonal) Sub-theme: Spiritual/Emotional response (intrapersonal)
during rehearsal

Theme 3: Increased mental focus and/or energy (intrapersonal)

Theme 4: Reduction in perceived stress (intrapersonal)

Theme 5: Location, Connecting as a Community

¹⁴² Linda D. Bloomberg and Marie Volpe, *Completing Your Qualitative Dissertation: A Roadmap from Beginning to End* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2008): 110, doi: 10.4135/9781452226613.

Theme 6: Director; Focus on Teaching/Learning

Theme 7: Impediments to participation in a music ensemble

The prevalence of individual words used to identify reasons to attend rehearsal on a regular basis is represented in word art (figure 5). Visualization of word frequency is represented by increased font size.¹⁴³



Figure 5 "What I Get Out of Rehearsal"

¹⁴³ Tag Crowd, www.TagCrowd.com, accessed November, 2019.

Following is a discussion of the findings with details from interviews and journal responses that support each finding. Each theme is grouped as it applies to a primary research question.

Q1: What factor(s) motivate working adults in a fast-paced metropolitan community to participate in a volunteer amateur chorus?

Theme 1: Social Opportunity (interpersonal) as a Motivation for Attendance

The opportunity or need for socialization before, during, and after rehearsal produced mixed responses. Five of the 15 interviewed participants (33%) and seven of the 23 individuals who contributed through journal responses (65%) stated socializing with fellow choir members as a positive motivation to attendance; while six of the 15 interviews (40%) revealed that socializing was not an important factor. Those who cite socialization as an attendance motivator, they indicate that opportunity to be in community with others was a key motivator when they began chorus while in school. Participation in musical projects began in elementary school for one of the research participants because a teacher encouraged him to get involved. He shared that taking part in musical experiences through high school really helped him more effectively interact with peers. This community chorus continues to provide an important routine in his week. He said, “I look forward to singing, meeting new people. It’s really my only social outlet.” For many of these singers, the positive feelings from school ensembles are remembered and seem to draw them back to the choral opportunity, even if years later.

I look forward to seeing the people. There is a sense of community even if we don’t socialize, per-say.

I am an extrovert – singing is ‘manna to my soul.’

Some responses indicated an anticipation of the positive feeling participants expected to experience when attending rehearsal. When asked what they look forward to about rehearsal, the following responses highlighted the positive social aspect:

Seeing friends, singing together, (it's) a moment of calm but energizing focus.

Knowing that singing and being with choir friends would improve my mood.

It's so much fun seeing my fellow singers after concert and (I'm) excited with them to start anew.

Choir members are often thought of as gregarious extroverts who desire time to socialize.

However, responses by 6 of the 15 interview participants (40%) indicated that the social aspect is not a motivator for rehearsal attendance.

I'm an introvert. I am running out the door at the end, so I don't socialize. I talk mostly to people near me. Time to socialize is not my priority.

I look forward to singing, connecting a bit with my colleagues that sit around me, not really here to visit, kinda talked out.

I'm not attracted to the social aspect. I come for the music, for learning; being part of the creation.

I'm not really a social person. I may get a chance to talk to people before or after, but I usually stay wherever I am during break. It's enough socializing for me.

I'm here to work on the music. I don't want to visit...until it's the right time.

I'm not focused on a social outlet. Not much of a stand-around and chat kind of person. Rehearsal is 'structured social interaction.'

Theme 2: Commitment/Obligation to the Chorus (interpersonal) and to Self (intrapersonal)

Interview and journal questions sought to understand the motivating factors of attending rehearsal even when participants may prefer to stay at home after a long day of work or

other responsibilities. Though this ensemble does have a rehearsal attendance policy, only 1 participant mentioned this requirement as a motivating factor in attendance. Five of the 15 interview participants (33%) and 14 of the 23 individuals who contributed journal responses (61%) specifically mentioned commitment to the group (an interpersonal element) as a significant motivating factor of rehearsal attendance.

(I feel) an obligation to the group, sense of loyalty. I came to rehearsal because it's what we do— and its concert week.

I work at my part because I want to be part of the music, not part of the noise.

I attend rehearsals because of my commitment to the chorus, (and to) learn the music.

I'm there to learn – I go home and practice. It's my responsibility. Obligation I have to the group. I feel dedicated to the (voice section), to be prepared. It's the commitment to the group.

I never miss a rehearsal unless I'm physically unable-which is extremely rare. I promised to attend whenever possible.

A true commitment to the choral group. Choral music is my true love. The benefits of singing at rehearsal is to see new/old pieces come together to make beautiful music. I like learning new pieces and the challenges they present.

While commitment to the group may be the initial motivator for many singers, participants responses indicate there are other perceived benefits involved.

First, it's concert week, so I can't miss. Also, I just love the music we're singing. I know from experience that singing music I love in a group I love singing with will life my spirits and energize me.

Participating in VCS is a pleasurable obligation. Keeping the commitment to attend practice is easier because it is enjoyable. And it turns out to have the side benefit of being good for our emotional health, and probably our physical health, as well.

For a few respondents, the commitment was also to their own personal singing or artistic growth (an intrapersonal element).

(Rehearsal is) my commitment to something I want to do, and I cannot make this kind of music by myself. (This participant also referenced the book The Artists Way by author Julie Cameron.)

No question I'm committed to continue to sing.

(I am) motivated to come because panicked about concert in 4 days! I rarely miss a rehearsal.

Because it's early in the concert cycle I have moments of feeling overwhelmed but also moments of 'getting it' and sounding good – which is rewarding.

Being able to take something that is raw at the start...to sounding like it should. Choir is like team spirit.

Subtheme: Spiritual/Emotional response (intrapersonal) during rehearsal

A spiritual or emotional element of rehearsal participation was not directly investigated through the interview or journal questions. However, spiritual and/or emotional reactions experienced by participants during rehearsal came through as a motivating factor in three of the 15 interviews (20%).

Because (rehearsal is) a spiritual high and I like to be in harmony with other people.

Singing together in a chorus produces something unique. It is 'synergy' – what comes together is so much more than any individual can produce on their own. I'm happiest when I can lose my voice in the group.

Music is food for the soul and lifts up my feelings when they are somewhat down.

Dan Forrest pieces transported me; transported spiritually with the vibration. Transcendence of the individual through sound.

Being filled with wonderful music makes me happy.

I sing to give my heart wings; to give voice to all the emotions (you) hold inside.

Q2: What benefits, if any, do adults in this metropolitan suburb derive from participation in a volunteer community choir?

Theme 3: Increased Mental Focus and/or Energy (intrapersonal)

12 out of 38 total individual participants (32%) reported an increase in mental focus during rehearsal which allowed them to block out other thoughts.

I can't be singing and doing anything else – it occupies thought process, no space for worry and thoughts.

Rehearsal allows me to block out/forget everything else. No room for other thoughts or outside concerns during rehearsal.

Rehearsal is a physical and mental activity that opens up another side of life - that of a more complete person.

(Rehearsal) is something I enjoy, and it allows focus on something you enjoy without distractions. I like the quick pace.

(Rehearsal) engaged my brain completely – where no errant thoughts could come in. If something is worrying me, it was blocked out. It is a respite to get recharged mentally. The world contracts to be very focused. Fast thoughts. Vacation from my other thoughts.

Rehearsal gives me time to focus on something beautiful. Forget about outside world.

The 'monkey brain' (chattering) is silenced during rehearsal for the most part. I'm very focused.

Emotional and intellectual equivalent of working out. Creative outlet, very different from work in your job. Totally concentrated on the rehearsal notes, words, breathing, tone. Other thoughts blocked out. Constant paying attention and trying to improve.

My mind is able to shut out other responsibilities during rehearsal, and it helps me in being my full, creative self.

Even though I always look forward to rehearsal, my feelings are often just 'neutral'. However, today I was elated to be getting out of the house – glad to shut the mess behind and 'get away from it all.'

One participant (0.3% of total responses) shared that s/he had more energy at the beginning of rehearsal than at the end. This experience is unlike most responses. The participant suggested it may be due to the challenge of having to focus for sustained time and in one position (sitting or standing, not walking around). During the interview, this participant shared that s/he copes with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and that s/he tends to think about a bunch of other things even during rehearsal.

Theme 4: Reduction in Perceived Stress During Rehearsal (intrapersonal)

Most respondents (91%) reported a reduction in stress by the end of rehearsal as compared to their perceived stress level at arrival. Some participants expressed this as an improvement in their general mood or energy level.

Before rehearsal tonight I was tired, but (I'm) anticipating rehearsal and lifting of spirits when singing.

I was tired from a full day, but by the time I got to rehearsal my usual level of energy was back. It was probably a combination of a good meal, anticipatory adrenaline, and feeding off the energy of the group.

Making music, creating something, with like-minded people is very enjoyable. No matter what the stressors of the week might be, attending weekly rehearsals is uplifting and mood enhancing.

Rehearsals always lift my spirit. Sometimes following a stressful day. Rehearsal leaves me feeling better and energized.

What stress?? I never feel stressed at rehearsals. What I feel is an opening up to joy, and a welcome escape from the world's troubles. Tonight was no different, and it is such fun to be singing again after a hiatus. After rehearsal, I felt a lift in my spirits.

For the most part, whatever the mood walking in, spirits are always elevated by the end of rehearsal.

Very tired today but I expect to be better once the singing starts.

Even when I feel like I'm to(o) busy to go to rehearsal or too tired, I come away feeling energized and glad I've gone!

It's often tempting, after a challenging day, to skip rehearsal and get an early night but I always finish rehearsal feeling more energized than I did before it and glad that I attended.

(Rehearsal is) an energy boost like working out. Physical and mental work-out.

Even when I feel like I'm to(o) busy to go to rehearsal or too tired, I come away feeling energized and glad I've gone!

I was tired from a full day, but by the time I got to rehearsal my usual level of energy was back. It was probably a combination of a good meal, anticipatory adrenaline, and feeding off the energy of the group.

It usually builds up my energy. Come to practice tired almost every time but feel rejuvenated at end.

The following reports tell the story through comments from five individual participants' journal responses. The journal prompts addressed the perception of stress, mood, or energy before, during, and then after rehearsal. The transformation of energy and stress through the course of one rehearsal is evident.

Participant 1:

Before: perceived stress level 7 (commute, missed my turn, added time)

Arrive: Stress level 10 Glad to have choir tonight.

During (vocal) warm-up: feel release of stress

During: happy, glad to be here, belong, good energy, low stress

After: good – though tired as today started earlier than usual

End: stress level 2

Participant 2:

Before: 25 minutes commute to rehearsal, rain, mildly stressful

During: stress went down with the singing

After: I went home on a 'high.' Maybe it has to do with more deep breathing, maybe because I like the music and the hope that comes with the Christmas season – or both. Doesn't really matter why.

Participant 3:

Before: busy/stressed – full day of work at home, kids’ homework took more effort than expected! Had to get babysitter, lots of balls to juggle at home. Hard to shake off the day, good to immerse self in the rehearsal.

During: Feeling more energized.

After: Tired after long day but positive – feel like I accomplished something.

Participant 4:

Before: tired, woozy, exhausted, anxious

During: slow increase in energy and reduced stress, enjoyment, sense of accomplishment after learning something new.

After: still tired, but more content and less stressed. I like singing and know it makes me feel better.

Participant 5:

Before: Came straight to rehearsal from work, 10-15 min commute.

Minor stress associated with heavy traffic and not wanting to arrive late. Poor weather usually exacerbates the already heavy traffic en-route. Not in a great mood. Frustrating day, both personally and professionally.

During: Sometimes I feel slightly stressed during rehearsal. Usually when I’m struggling to grasp a piece or part of it, but for the most part my energy improves and my stress levels drop, as they did tonight.

After: I felt good after rehearsal. My stress level was down, and my energy was up!

During the interviews, participants were asked in what way, if any, their sleep pattern is different after rehearsal. The responses were overwhelmingly similar. 11 out of 15 (73%) commented that they had a surge of energy or adrenaline after rehearsal and that it took additional time to get to sleep. They were surprised to learn that this was a common situation for other singers, too.

I’m re-energized after rehearsal. Harder to fall asleep after rehearsal.

Harder time going to sleep – a bit wired. Takes longer to calm down. I have more energy after rehearsal, feel ‘wired.’

Leave feeling calmer. Good kind of tired. Need a little downtime, mild adrenaline buzz to come down from.

Tired. Long day. High notes. Nice to have (the) drive home to come down off the adrenaline before going to bed.

Increase in energy while singing and a nice 'buzz' when I get home, to fall asleep quickly.

After rehearsal I am pumped up. Harder to go to sleep, need to wind down. Usually leave rehearsal with more energy than I bring to it.

Q3: What element(s) of this community choir (Vienna Choral Society) influence membership retention?

Theme 5: Location, Connecting as a Community

Six of the 15 interview participants (40%) cited the location of VCS rehearsal as a positive factor to their regular participation. 3 of the 15 (20%) noted that they first became aware of VCS because of an advertisement banner that hung across the main road that goes through Vienna. This ensemble is situated in a dense, metropolitan area that is an outer suburb of Washington, D.C. A desire for a 'sense of community' was expressed as being fulfilled in VCS by 8 of the 15 participants interviewed (53%). This desire for being a part of something was expressed in many ways, including the following comments:

VCS has a mix of people; (which is a) uniqueness of where we live. We don't know one another, yet we work together.

The people in VCS are welcoming, not music snobs! Interesting collection of people/DIVERSE.

Relationship and exposure to people from such diverse backgrounds. CEOS to students. All that diversity of thought, but we have a common purpose – the Arts bring people together: 'pulling together in the same direction.'

Keeps me tied to my community – I never worked here, so to get to know my community was to join this choral group.

Wanted something local, to meet local people.

Knew no one in the choir; first impression: These are the happiest people I've ever seen!

Opportunity for intergenerational collaboration was revealed as an important element for members of VCS. Interview participants responses to the role of performance indicated that a sense of accomplishment is a key factor among this goal-driven community.

I love when we have student group perform with us – seeing what the kids can do. Purpose of performance: share something with the community. Like preparing dinner for someone else.

A multi-generational community choir that accepts all levels of musicianship is a wonderful benefit of living in this community. The voice is the most economical of instruments. Many people have given up their old instruments or have lost the skills sufficient to play in a local group. Yet, most people can pick up singing again, and fully participate in making music.

Before rehearsal, I am anticipating our progress and level of improvement. During rehearsal I feel good and am eager to get better and better. I get better (at singing) by being with others.

Love when we have student group perform with us – seeing what the kids can do.

I like the feeling of accomplishment. Exciting when it goes the way it's supposed to. For me, performance is the apogee and fulfills a desire to share the music.

(Performance) leads us to a shared goal, but I would do it just for practice.

Feeling good about the concert – felt huge success with the fantastic youth choir and orchestra sharing the program with us; excited to hear from (Artistic Director and Executive Director) about concert and next concert plans.

Purpose of performance is to share something with the community. (It's) like preparing dinner for someone else.

Still on 'high' from Saturday night (concert) and excited for next one.

Feels good when it's coming together. (It's) tangible. (We) produce something.

Raises the spirit of the community. It's lovely to watch the audience and sometimes they look stunned. (The performance) plants some 'upliftment' in the community.

Might NOT be addressing the Vienna Community (because concerts are not held here).

Need a deadline to do your best. Recordings don't always show what we have done, it is the *inner* feeling. In our community, (VCS offers) a vast range of music to those who can get all the 'classical' they want.

Share what we are learning and doing. My family comes to every concert. The performances are entertaining and sometimes uplifting - probably touching somebody in the audience.

Super fun to sing together, but desire to share with audience. The enjoyment of music is great for audience. Themes of concerts are good. (previous director) – said, "Every concert is a unique experience because never the same combination of people in the room. Audience brings its own energies."

Role of audience: we aren't there to entertain solely, they have to be open to the experience.

What would be the point of rehearsing? I'm goal oriented. For the audience: enjoy what we have to offer.

Theme 6: Director's Impact; Focus on Teaching/Learning

There were no survey, journal, or interview questions about the impact a choir director has on membership and retention in a chorus. However, the positive and negative impacts of a director emerged as a key theme both in access to joining an ensemble and motivation to continue with an ensemble. 7 of the 15 interview participants (47%) and 4 of the 23 journal participants (17%) specifically expressed an appreciation of the director's focus on teaching/learning.

The following comments were taken directly from journal responses:

I love the VCS approach to community singing, which encourages each singer to participate as musically as they can. I wish every music group I have participated in had this same approach, as I believe everyone should have and can have the ability to make music with others.

(The director's) efficient pace and style helped me concentrate on learning the music - instead of thinking about the World Series game going on!

Rehearsals are structured well. Conductor – so wonderful, sincere. (This is) amplified by his work with children. (I) desire to make (director) happy by meeting his standard of excellence.

(The director) has made us a much more accomplished musical choir. The theatrics of the previous director are missed by some. I stayed because education of choir by this director.

There is a good teaching, learning approach that (director) uses.

I feel proud to say I'm a member of a choir, and a good one at that. Energized when I learn. Fulfills needs for a senior single person, meaning socialization, gratification. Cross-generational connection.

I like (that) the director is encouraging – no scolding (my son had experienced that in other choir experiences). He (the director) expands capabilities. Focus is on what we did well.

Fun singing with this group and with (director), who is really inspiring.

While I still don't read music, I've learned so much through singing with VCS that I pick up the music very quickly.

No penalty for failing here. Do what you can. Always someone better, someone worse. Work on your own skills.

Love the VCS director – he can give feedback in a way that motivates, but doesn't cause people to leave grumbling, or not come back. I do get frustrated when the quality is often full of mistakes, and the director doesn't stop us.

Diversity of music. Keeps me in music. Find myself growing as a singer.

Ambiance of this choir – vibe – that music is worthwhile and an investment. I wanted to see how (director) teaches adults who don't read music. I have a professional desire to learn. My impressions of director: not mean, notpretentious.

(I'm) drawn to VCS being a teaching choir – made me feel good to know I would learn.

My other choir is a better choir-I had to audition for it. The music is more challenging. (That choir) does lift my spirits sometimes, but not like VCS. It's interesting that my response to the two groups has been different. Still trying to figure that out.

For an amateur choir, where you don't have to try out, (the) director is most important.

Rehearsal with (our director) is like getting a private voice lesson.

Theme 7: Impediments to participation in a music ensemble

Impediment 1: Work/Family responsibilities

The setting of this research study is in a condense metropolitan suburb of Washington, D.C. Traffic and commuting can take a significant portion of the evening. This can result in an increased level of perceived stress as noted by these participant responses:

Commute – quick turnaround after coming home from work. Cook a quick dinner, drive to rehearsal, hoping not to run into too much traffic, barely make it on time - it's a stressful commute.

It's a little stressful getting rehearsals. I worry about traffic, rainy weather, accidents that may delay my commute.

The school system in this Northern Virginia community is one of the largest and most prestigious in the country, boasting a 91% high school graduation rate,¹⁴⁴ with 92% of graduates indicating intention to pursue postsecondary education.¹⁴⁵ Advanced academic courses are

¹⁴⁴ Jennifer Ortiz, "91% of Fairfax County high school students graduated on time in 2019," October 9, 2019, <https://wtop.com/fairfax-county/2019/10/91-of-fairfax-county-high-schools-graduated-on-time-in-2019>, accessed March 21, 2020.

¹⁴⁵ FCPS Postsecondary Profile 2018-19, <https://www.fcps.edu/about-fcps/performance-and-accountability/fcps-postsecondary-profile>, accessed March 21, 2020.

offered in all high schools and are open to all students who seek academic rigor.¹⁴⁶ Parents in this metropolitan suburb place a high priority on getting their kids to all kinds of sports and music lessons after school. Some parents consider their own participation in a community chorus a luxury, as demonstrated in these remarks:

It's my art date for me.

(This) really is the only activity for me. It's the only thing for ME. My thing. I feel good enough at it that it's reasonable to have this for myself.

Great time to have some autonomy. Ride to rehearsal with husband is great, singing in choir together feels like a date night.

Kids homework took more effort than expected! Had to get babysitter, lots of balls to juggle at home.

With a busy work schedule, long commute (over an hour each way), and family responsibilities, one participant describes her appreciation that membership in VCS “allows for ‘life’ – (it’s) flexible, (you) can miss a concert and be forgiven.” Many participants shared that work and/or family responsibilities made joining a community music ensemble impractical during their younger adult years, as shared in these statements:

After college, I did not sing until I joined VCS, so from 1976-2013. It is life- enriching, soul-satisfying to be making music again.

I hadn't thought of being in a choir during work/family responsibilities.

After my kids could get themselves to TKD – wanted to get back into music. I had an injury that didn't allow me to play the instrument I did in college. I didn't even know if I could sing but decided to try something for myself for a change.

My job right out of college required lots of traveling. It wasn't conducive to being in a chorus, and I didn't know of any groups.

Music played no role in college or during work years until my son was 16.

¹⁴⁶ FCPS Postsecondary Profile 2018-19.

Every stage of life has its mission. Single working mom – no time possible to do something. Only looking back, can I see that music was important in young years and now later. I don't know whether I would have enjoyed it during work/mom years because I didn't have the time to practice.

Impediment 2: Audition requirements, Director impact

The joining process and the director of the group both can have negative impacts and create impediments to participation in a community music ensemble. Conversations with interview participants revealed the long-lasting impact of previous negative audition processes. These experiences still negatively affect their confidence in singing and therefore impede their willingness to audition for community ensembles. Concerns were shared through the following comments:

During High School my family moved. I had to sight-read in front of the other (choir) students to get into the advanced group.

I drove under banner for years, took about 10 years to eventually join (find the time). Did not want stress of an audition.

I sang in choir all the way from elementary school through college. I was disappointed when I didn't make the choir at my grad school. What drew me to joining VCS was that membership does not require an audition.

I went to a concert and was so impressed with the music and musicianship. Saw it was non-audition, so I emailed the director. "I don't read music, but I love music, could I try out?" Before this, I had always assumed choir was full of music majors.

Once I stopped traveling for work so much, a friend invited me to a VCS concert. I thought – these guys are really good – and it was cool that it was a non-audition group.

I knew 2 people in 2 other choirs, but because VCS was non-auditioned – I joined because it was the only way I felt I could (participate in a choir).

The director has an impact on the ensemble, either positively or negatively. This element was not a part of the research investigation but came through in many journal responses and participant

interviews. These comments indicate ways the director can negatively impact growth and retention of members in a community ensemble:

My friend didn't join VCS because didn't like the director at that time – because the director did not seem to care about the quality/readiness of the group. I left a barbershop chorus because director would stress out and scream at the ensemble during competitions.

I'm not sure why I stayed in during the earlier years. There were many concerts where I felt like we weren't ready. One of the previous directors was not so good at teaching aspect. Now, the tone of the group (positivity) has improved.

A previous director cursed during rehearsals – turned people off and they gave up coming to rehearsal.

I decided to go back to church – I wanted to sing. I told the church choir director that I wanted to join, but she said, 'our choir loft is full'.

I didn't try out for college choir because of what my 6th grade chorus teacher said to me when I didn't get accepted into chorus.

Chapter V: Discussion

Throughout American history, making music in collaboration with others has strengthened, developed, and connected people across generations. Results of this research study underscore the positive impact community music ensembles can have on a civil society. Several participants identified intergenerational collaboration as a perceived benefit of community music ensembles. The Vienna Choral Society currently has a range of members from ages 18 to over 65. Additionally, the concert programs are a collaborative effort which feature student choirs from local public schools. When community music ensembles collaborate with the school music curriculum, a positive impact occurs for both groups. In 2012, British music educator and researcher Brydie-Leigh Bartleet explained, "... such collaborations can provide school music programmes with a wide range of learning experiences outside those offered in the formal curriculum."¹⁴⁷ Bartleet added, "these exchanges can result in a pooling of resources, an enriching musical experience for the participants, and a significant community-building exercise for all involved."¹⁴⁸

The findings of this study support the attitude and social activism of early 20th century educator Peter Dykema, who believed in the social values of music. Dykema used his skills as organizer, teacher, author, and administrator to build a sense of community throughout the nation.¹⁴⁹ Increasing opportunities for collaboration, such as joining voices in a community

¹⁴⁷ Brydie-Leigh Bartleet, "Building vibrant school-community music collaborations: Three case studies from Australia," *British Journal of Music Education* 29, no. 1 (2012): 59. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0265051711000350>.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ 150 Henry Edward Eisenkramer, "Peter William Dykema: His Life and Contribution to Music Education," Order No. 6401472, Columbia University (1963): 2, In PROQUESTMS ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global: The Arts, 41.

chorus, can serve to bring a sense of unity and purpose to the divisive political climate in our nation. Dykema uses his journalistic platform to remind music teachers of the fundamental uses of music beyond mere entertainment: 1. Music is a socializing agent. 2. Music extends the world to other places and times. 3. Music influencing positive character traits.¹⁵⁰ The results of this study can validate the importance of participation in ensemble music throughout life, regardless of a person's intended career path.

Early aims of this study included investigating the political diversity within this community choir and what way, if any, those differences affected collaboration. Though differences were inferred in the interview process, participants did not clearly express them in the conversation. The survey data, journal responses, and interview process revealed the continued high level of perceived stress related to work elements and non-work elements. Participants shared that prior ensemble experiences in elementary school and high school provided a significant foundation for participation in music throughout life. Interview participants often reflected on early music experiences and the positive elements of which resulted in looking for that kind of opportunity when their leisure time eventually allowed.

Future research could explore the possibility of Organizational Choirs formed at convenient locations and times for those who work long or odd hours or whose job requires frequent travel. One of the interview participants shared about a unique choral opportunity experienced while working at the Brookings Institute where they had a choir that met at lunch. This participant looked forward to the singing group as the colleagues got to know each other better. Through this lunch-time music ensemble, the participants had opportunities to interact with colleagues from different departments and this increased collaboration across the business

¹⁵⁰ Dykema, "The Music Teacher and Public Service," 9.

environment. The choir was voluntarily started by a division leader within the organization and open to any who wished to join. During the interview, this participant shared that though they had work friends before this choir started, they were surprised to find this additional connection between them through music.

At the time of this writing, the world is battling the COVID-19 pandemic. This community, like many across the planet, are practicing ‘social distancing’ to preserve and protect the health of their own communities. The pandemic has brought a sudden end to choir rehearsals and performances for the Vienna Choral Society this season. Two participants of the research study shared their reflections in the following email responses:

I miss the rehearsals because I like being in this crowd of people who enjoy singing. I'm alone most of the day and look forward to company in the evening. Also, I like the messages the songs provide--they give me a boost. And, BTW, it opens my lungs to sing out. And don't we all need all the lung strength we can get!

We are thankful that (VCS) was smart enough to end the rehearsals and protect the population. We miss the choir and have enjoyed singing at home with the family. My husband plays the piano and our kids join in with us. We have a former band called "The Wildcards" and they are getting back together to do an online concert.

Social media is presently filled with individual celebrities performing in their own homes. Though recording artists would normally fill venues, they seem to also need to feel the joy that the act of singing provides to them personally. By performing in their own living room, they experience what fills them with purpose, and bring joy to those who support them. Even though socially distant, technology has enabled amazing collaborative choral music experiences.

In summary, this research demonstrates participation in a community choral ensemble has both intrapersonal and interpersonal benefit to its members. This qualitative study revealed that opportunity for socialization and the building of relationships between members is a benefit

but is not a key motivating factor. For most, spending leisure time in an activity that is mentally challenging and has a focused goal is of high importance to this community. This may be due to the high level of education of this group, to the types of professions members of this group hold or held, or to the desire to make the best use of limited leisure time.

Appendix A

Demographic Survey Questions

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/singer-demo>

1. What is your age?
 - ☐ Under 18
 - ☐ 18-24
 - ☐ 25-34
 - ☐ 35-44
 - ☐ 44-54
 - ☐ 55-64
 - ☐ 65+
2. Are you currently participating in a community chorus?
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
3. What is your gender?
 - ☐ Male
 - ☐ Female
4. What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have achieved?
 - ☐ Less than high school
 - ☐ High school or equivalent (GED)
 - ☐ Some college but no degree
 - ☐ Associate degree
 - ☐ Bachelor degree
 - ☐ Graduate degree
5. Which of the following categories best describes your employment status?
 - ☐ Employed, full time
 - ☐ Employed, part time
 - ☐ Not employed, looking for work
 - ☐ Not employed, not looking for work
 - ☐ Retired
 - ☐ Disabled, not able to work
6. How long is your average commute to work?
 - ☐ 0-20 minutes
 - ☐ 21-40 minutes
 - ☐ 41-60 minutes
 - ☐ 60+ minutes
7. How long is your average commute home from work?
 - ☐ 0-20 minutes
 - ☐ 21-40 minutes
 - ☐ 41-60 minutes
 - ☐ 60+ minutes

8. In a typical week, how often do you feel stressed about work?
- ☐ Always
 - ☐ Most of the time
 - ☐ About half of the time
 - ☐ Once in awhile
 - ☐ Never
9. Are you a parent or caretaker of children?
- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
10. Are you a care-giver for spouse or parent/relative?
- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
11. In a typical week, how often do you feel stressed about non-work related things?
- ☐ Always
 - ☐ Most of the time
 - ☐ About half of the time
 - ☐ Once in awhile
 - ☐ Never
12. What is your prior singing experience? (Check all that apply)
- ☐ Elementary/Middle School – in school
 - ☐ Elementary/Middle School – church/community
 - ☐ High School – in school
 - ☐ High School – church/community
 - ☐ College – in school
 - ☐ College – church/community
 - ☐ Adult – church/community
 - ☐ Professionally (gigs, weddings, etc)

Appendix B

Moments of Music: A Qualitative Case Study in a Metropolitan Community

Chorus Semi-Structured Interview Questions

*These questions will guide the interview, with follow-up “tell me more about that” to expand and gain additional insights into the perceived motivations and perceived benefits of participation in community chorus.

1. What was your music background prior to joining the Vienna Choral Society?
2. When did you join/how long have you been a member of VCS?
3. Why did you choose VCS? What elements of VCS have kept you as a member?
4. Did you know anyone else/have a connection to the chorus before you joined?

5. Describe your employment / other daily responsibilities
6. Do you have children or parents/family members for whom you provide care?
7. How long is your (range of typical) daily commute to work?
8. Is it different on rehearsal days?
9. When you think about going to work, what concerns do you have/what do you look forward to?

10. When you think about going to rehearsal, what concerns do you have/what do you look forward to?
11. Describe how you feel/your mood when you arrive at rehearsal.
12. Describe how you feel/your mood during rehearsal
13. Describe how you feel/your mood after rehearsal
14. What benefit(s) do you think you get from attending rehearsal (beyond learning the music)?

15. How much time for leisure activities do you feel you have each week/month?
16. What (if any) other activities do you do in your leisure time?
17. Why do you think you choose to spend 3+ hours of leisure time each week participating in a community chorus?

Appendix C

Journal Prompt #1 (pre-rehearsal)

Did you come straight from work to rehearsal?

Describe your commute to rehearsal (number of minutes, perceived stress level, weather concerns?).

Describe your mood/feelings before choir rehearsal today. What motivated you to attend rehearsal?

Please share any other reflections on your experiences regarding rehearsal today and your perception of the benefits or challenges of attending.

Journal Prompt #2

Describe your mood/feelings before choir rehearsal. What motivated you to attend rehearsal?

Describe your mood/feelings/energy/stress levels during tonight's rehearsal. Describe your mood/feelings/energy/stress levels after tonight's rehearsal.

Please share any other reflections on your experiences regarding rehearsal today and your perception of the benefits or challenges of attending.

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IRB Approval/Waiver

September 19, 2019

Katherine Iooss

IRB Exemption 3913.091919: Moments of Music: A Qualitative Case Study in a Metropolitan Community Chorus

Dear Katherine Iooss,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101(b)(2), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:101(b):

(2) Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if . . . the following criteria is met:

(ii) Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation;

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued exemption status.

You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu. Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research

Research Ethics Office

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