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## ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, WHY DO ADULTS SING? THE IMPACT OF THE HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCE by THOMAS R. FITZSTEPHENS, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Doctor of Philosophy, in the College of Education & Human Development, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chairperson, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty.

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Thomas R. FitzStephens

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WHY DO ADULTS SING? THE IMPACT OF THE HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

by

**THOMAS R. FITZSTEPHENS**

Under the Direction of Patrick K. Freer

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify the potential relationship between high school choral experiences and adult amateur musicians' current motivations to continue making music. The study methodology included the selection of two ensembles ( $N = 81$ ), the Community Choral Guild ( $n = 23$ ), an adult community chorus, and Choral Ensemble ( $n = 58$ ), a university chorus class. All members of both ensembles were invited to provide information via questionnaire about their backgrounds and their recollections of their high school chorus programs. Six participants were selected for individual interviews ( $n = 6$ ). The two rounds of semi-structured individual interviews were narrative in nature and examined the lifelong motivations of participants to make music in choruses. The interview participants and I co-constructed narrative portraits of their musical life stories (Bignold & Su, 2013; Curry & Walker, 2002). The portrait data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019) to extract themes which were in turn examined through theoretical framework lenses of attribution theory and achievement goal theory.

Findings suggested three potential connections between high school chorus and adult amateurs' motivations to continue making music in ensembles: in high school chorus, participants received instruction that developed their appreciation of music's aesthetic beauty, inspired their desire for personal growth and achievement, and promoted positive social experiences which contributed to their motivations to seek similar experiences in adult choruses. The six interview participants all resided in a major Southeastern city in the United States and were diverse in self-identified age (19–60+), race (three White/Caucasian, three Black/African American), gender (three male, three female), high school communities (suburban, urban, rural),



high school population size (200–3000+), high school experiences, and high school singing motivators. Although their narrative portraits were unique, they each shared, to varying degrees, positive and engaging high school experiences related to the three themes that inspired them to lifelong music learning.

Data indicated experiences beyond-the-classroom, such as trips, competitions, and local performances, were impactful for all participants and deserving of further research. Implications for choral teachers to encourage lifelong learning include maximizing students' opportunities to experience aesthetic beauty, personal growth and achievement, and positive social experiences in chorus class. Additionally, choral teachers can increase their students' likelihood of becoming lifelong learners by teaching students the concepts and skills to make music independently, expanding musical ambitions beyond the classroom.

INDEX WORDS: Lifelong learning, motivation, music education, amateurism, high school, adult musician, aesthetics,

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by

Thomas R. FitzStephens

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the

Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Teaching and Learning

in

School of Music/Middle Secondary Education

in

the College of Education & Human Development

Georgia State University

Atlanta, GA  
2022

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## **DEDICATION**

This effort is dedicated to my wife, Jamie Link FitzStephens, who has been patient and supportive through the entire Doctor of Philosophy process. Her strength in the face of so many medical challenges inspires me to be strong and live for my dreams. I also would like to dedicate this work to my uncle, Bob Cervanak, who always encouraged me to challenge myself in music and academics. His kindness and support during my childhood power me still.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

According to Elpus and Abril (2019), 13% of the 2013 high school graduating class enrolled in at least one chorus class during high school. As people age, however, fewer decide to participate in group singing (Elpus & Abril, 2011; McPherson & Hendricks, 2010; McPherson & O'Neill, 2010). If music for all ages is a universal music education goal (National Association for Music Education, 2021), researchers can learn from those who discontinue participating in ensembles and those who continue participation. Adults who persist in making music in ensembles are worthy of study to understand their motivations for continued involvement. Perhaps studying their lifelong musical stories can shed light on types of pedagogies, curricula, classroom motivational environments, and relationships that can inspire and enable high school students to grow into lifelong music makers.

Music performance, especially with ensembles, has improved my life and meaningfully contributed to the person I am today. In times of anxiety, depression, and stress, music has been an art form with which I could have a reflective, healthful dialogue to heal. Learning difficult music has always given me a sense of accomplishment and pride. Rehearsing with ensembles brings me a sense of belonging, camaraderie, and the kinship of being part of a gift of beauty bigger than anything one person could create. Gracious comments from audience members have shown that music performances bring joy, healing, pride, and wonder to audiences and performers alike. The beauty of the sounds I have heard and been a part of creating, and the texts married to those sounds have elicited within me awe and growth.

In Plato's allegory of the cave (2019), prisoners are chained to the wall of a cave and can only see shadows of the world's activities dancing on the walls. The people believe in the reality presented to them and know no better life. The philosopher exits the cave, explores, and finds the

actual world endlessly more interesting and beautiful than the false shadow reality presented to the cave dwellers. He chooses to return to the cave to share the good news with his brethren. I feel like I was living in the cave for many years, and music showed me a way out of it. Thanks to my musical experiences, I have truly become a more empathetic, knowledgeable, socially aware, and reflective person. Since my growth began, I have tried to share my excitement with young people, hoping they can get as much out of music as I have. As of this writing, in mid-2022, I am involved in my sixteenth year of high school music teaching. I chose my profession because I believed it was meaningful and important. Music changed my life for the better, mostly thanks to a series of influential and effective music teachers. I see my labors as a gift to my community, the nation, and the world.

Time has enabled me to see many former students become adults. Social media have helped cultivate long-term friendships. The occasional messages, phone calls, coffee meetings, and dinners have revealed that most of them discontinued music making after high school. Aside from listening to music in their cars and attending occasional concerts, few make music in their homes and very few perform music in groups, a trend I find disappointing. In the past, my classes were always very focused on performing skills. I included little listening, composing, discussion, and other ways of experiencing music. My classes were widely loved, so why did my students stop singing after high school? More disturbingly, I learned it is a trend across the nation (VanWeelden & Walters, 2004).

### **Statement of the Issue**

Education that results in no long-term use has little value, or as education philosopher Jerome Bruner (1960) wrote: “The first objective of an act of learning is that it should serve us in the future.” For many years, leaders in American music education have lauded goals of music participation after formal education (Choate, 1967; Madsen, 2000; Music Educators National

Conference, 1937). In the third point of the 1967 Tanglewood Declaration, authors called for music education to extend from preschool through adulthood (Choate, 1967). Housewright Declaration authors (2000) demonstrated MENC's increased focus on music for all ages, urging those in the profession to think beyond high school: "meaningful musical activity should be experienced throughout one's life toward the goal of continuing involvement" (p. 219). The very first point within the declaration was: "All persons, regardless of age, cultural heritage ability, venue, or financial circumstance deserve to participate fully in the best music experiences possible" (Madsen, 2000, p. 219) The importance of lifespan musical experiences was placed at the very beginning of the declaration.

NAfME publications continue to advocate for all people, not just children, to learn music. The current NAfME Constitution articulates the goal of lifelong music participation twice in the Purpose section: "to conduct programs and activities to build a vital musical culture and an enlightened musical public for the benefit and the general welfare of all persons..." and "to promote the involvement of persons of all ages in learning music" (National Association for Music Education, 2020, p. 1). Additionally, the current vision statement posted in NAfME's strategic plan includes a reference to all ages: "Leading the world in music education, empowering generations to create, perform, and respond to music" (National Association for Music Education, 2017, p. 1) NAfME's current mission statement (National Association for Music Education, n.d.) and preamble state:

Preamble: Music allows us to celebrate and preserve our cultural heritages, and also to explore the realms of expression, imagination, and creation resulting in new knowledge. Therefore, every individual should be guaranteed the opportunity to learn music and to share in musical experiences.

Mission: The mission of the National Association for Music Education is to advance music education by promoting the understanding and making of music by all. (p. 1)

Despite these philosophical goals, music education in practice appears less than focused on providing for lifelong participation (Arasi, 2006; Holmquist, 1995). Instead of drawing the participation circle wide in later years of schooling, music education “serves the entire population only at the elementary level and moves toward more selective participation in the large-group performing ensembles through middle and high school” (Arasi, 2006, p. 4). Music education in secondary schools is structured more exclusively than inclusively, which limits its instructors’ ambitions to a small segment of the population (Bartel, 2004; Reimer, 2003) and reiterates the myth that music is only for those with the most God-given talent. Zenker (2004), Reimer (2003), and Kratus (2007, 2019) argue that our current model not only limits students’ opportunities in high schools but limits adults’ likelihood of pursuing a lifetime of music.

It appears school music attrition issues continue into adulthood. According to a 2004 study, less than 10% of adults who participated in music making during high school continued to sing or play an instrument in their adult lives (Vanweelden & Walters, 2004). The sample was small ( $n = 60$ ), but diverse (several different career fields and ages were included), but it is unlikely adults within or without the music education profession would be surprised by the results. If, indeed, music for life is a goal for music educators, it seems to be one we are not widely reaching.

The news is not all bad, however. People still make music in choirs all over the nation every day. Many adults sing far into old age. According to a large survey, the percentage of Americans singing today has increased by about 3% over the last decade, from 14% to 17% (Grunwald Associates LLC & Chorus America, 2019). About 54 million Americans sing today

and one in six adults sing in a chorus (Grunwald Associates LLC & Chorus America, 2019). It is likely that something during their school years inspired these adults to make music for many years. Why do some people extend what they learn it into adulthood and others do not?

### **Rationale for the Study**

According to Nazareth, lifelong music education is “music learning that occurs as a result of deliberate effort and conscious long-term involvement on the part of the individual” (1999, p. 17). Most school music teachers, and The National Association for Music Education, wish to create as many lifelong music learners as possible. Should we aim for amateur musicianship or professional musicianship? According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic, there were only approximately 187,600 professional musicians in the United States, or about 0.001% of the civilian labor force (U.S. Department of Labor, 2020). Knowing that very few graduates will become professional musicians, it follows that music educators are usually preparing students to become amateur adult musicians. Therefore, to learn more about successfully teaching for lifelong music making, it is important to study amateur adult musicians. In this study I will focus on adult amateur musicians. I will go into more detail into what it means to be an amateur in my literature review.

As I detail in Chapter Two’s literature review, many researchers have studied the motivations of adults to make music in ensembles. Few researchers have studied relationships between adult music making and those adults’ school music programs. Additionally, several researchers have focused on auditioned ensembles, which can contain musicians with similar backgrounds to professionals. However, few studies connect characteristics of secondary school chorus classes to lifelong music participation. Through learning about the lives and motivations of amateur choral musicians and their high school backgrounds, I have found some

commonalities between their stories. Perhaps those common threads can help current and future teachers, and teacher educators, inspire lifelong music makers.

My study was needed because most researchers have focused on motivations of school students or motivations of adults. I wish to expand our understanding of teaching for lifelong learning by connecting those two concepts, asking adults about current motivations for participation, and how those were or were not developed during high school. Also, most studies related to this topic have included survey data, where mine will include narrative data. Through learning about the lives and motivations of amateur choral musicians and their high school backgrounds, I hope to help current and future teachers, and teacher educators, inspire lifelong music makers.

### **Epistemology and Theoretical Framework**

I conducted this study with a constructivist epistemological stance, which fits my research aims well. In constructivism, all knowledge is constructed, not innate or passively absorbed. Learners do not make meaning in each situation independently, but rather build on their own previous experiences (Phillips, 1995), and can reflect on how they make meaning of things over time. I interviewed adults about their perceptions of their learning related to their choral experiences. Vygotsky argued that social relationships play a central role in meaning making (Vygotsky, 1978). Choruses are also social organizations, and relationships between choristers and with conductors are crucial to learning. In my study I investigated relationships between peers, community members, and teachers to aid in the development of full narrative portraits of participants' musical lives.

While the transmission of meaning within the world is social, constructivism also focuses on how individual's minds learn and make meaning (Wadsworth, 1996). I focused individuals' personal learning, motivations for learning, and reflections on their learning. Constructivism



“suggests that each one’s way of making sense of the world is as valid and worthy of respect as any other, thereby tending to scotch any hint of a critical spirit” (Crotty, 1998, p. 58). I sought to honor that epistemological position throughout the study by respecting participants’ experiences and their interpretations of their experiences as their unique way of learning and making meaning.

Attribution theory and achievement goal theory equipped me with a motivational framework upon which I built and interpreted the study. Weiner’s (1974) attribution theory is built upon the assumption that an individual’s perception of a task and the performance of the task are largely determined by their beliefs about the causes of success or failure. According to the theory, people will attribute their success or failure to categories of reasons which will influence their motivation to partake in the activity in the future. The theory consists of four major causal categories for attribution of success or failure on any achievement related task – ability, task difficulty, effort, and luck. Each of these can be categorized by an individual as either internal, meaning originating from within an individual, or external, meaning originating from outside sources. They can also be categorized as stable, meaning unchangeable and constant, or unstable, meaning influenceable by an individual. Generally, ability is categorized as internal/stable, effort is internal/unstable, task difficulty is external/stable, and luck is external/unstable.

If a person perceives they have failed at a task and believes the reason was their strategy, they are attributing the failure to internal and unstable reasons (their effort), which can be changed to perhaps find future success. If a person perceives their failure as an unchangeable aspect of their identity, they have selected an internal stable attribution, ability. When people believe they cannot improve, they are discouraged from trying again.

People often view musical talent as something one is blessed with or not, which sadly discourages participation for many people. This would be called a stable internal attribution – ability – one that does not change. Many music teachers reject this idea, believing that music performance is for everyone, not just the most talented. “Enjoyment that can be derived from the process of learning should not be overlooked in favor of perfect performances by the talented few. Educationally this is as true for children in schools as it is for adults in the community” (Richards & Durrant, 2003, p. 87). Can attributions be influenced by other people, such as teachers? Do they shift over time? How are they related to pedagogy and lifelong learning? If music educators wish to involve as many as possible in music, teaching with attribution theory in mind could help retention through school and into adult life. In this study, I hope I have further developed our understanding of adults’ motivations to sing in choruses related to Weiner’s theory.

In Nicolls’s (1984) achievement goal theory, learner motivation is categorized as either mastery (task/learning) or performance (ego/ability) oriented (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Tan & Sin, 2020). According to Anguiano’s (2006) conception, there are two types of mastery-oriented learners and two types of performance-oriented learners, but people mix and match them depending on tasks and instructors. Mastery-approach goals are focused on self-improvement, improving skills, task mastery, etc. (“I want to do as well as I possibly can on this task”). Mastery-avoidance goals are focused on avoiding embarrassment (“I do not want anybody to see me fail at this”). Performance-approach goals center on competition with others and public accolades (“I want to succeed at this publicly and do better than others”). Performance-avoidance goals emphasize avoiding losing in competition or doing worse than others (“I just do not want to be last or the worst at this”). Learners can simultaneously utilize multiple orientations, and

they generally mimic the orientations of their teachers (Anguiano, 2006). In this study, I hope I have further developed our understanding of adults' motivations to sing in choruses related to Nicholls's achievement goal theory.

I chose the two theories because both have been shown to impact intrinsic motivation, which increases the likelihood of retention of music participation (Lowe & Coy, 2006), and thus lifelong learning. The two theories have similar approaches to motivation and can be best understood from first-hand accounts of learners. Both theories account for the impact of the learner's perspective, instructor's actions, and the classroom's motivational climate on the learner's likelihood to engage in the activity again. Thus, I believed them both to be excellent theories to aid our understanding of the lifelong impact of music education.

I elected two theories rather than one to collect and assess the data from two perspectives. I included attribution theory to better understand habits of learning that contribute to lifelong learning from the perspective of the learners, in this case, adult amateur musicians. By asking them to look back on their lives and consider their learning attributions related to music, I hoped to better understand the learning attributions that contribute to music students becoming lifelong learners. As for achievement goal theory, I strove to investigate how participants could remember the ways their teachers structured and contextualized lessons and how those decisions may have contributed to participants' motivations for lifelong learning.

This study owed much to the work of Arasi (2006), who examined adult reflections on a high school choral music program related to lifelong influence. Arasi's dissertation study was a case study of a particular high school program, while this study was focused on singers in adult choruses with diverse backgrounds. In this study I also tried to find similarities in participants' choral backgrounds related to how they learned and what inspired and enabled them to become

lifelong music makers. Arasi's focus was mostly on the characteristics of the teacher. My participants had different high school teachers, so the focus was on participants' reflections on their learning. The implications relate to teachers' pedagogy, curriculum, and classroom social interactions.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to identify the potential relationship between high school choral experiences and adult amateur musicians' motivations to continue making music. In this study, I focused on the reflections of former high school chorus students on their music classroom experiences. My personal experiences directing high school and middle school choral programs for fifteen years, a review of the literature, and my studies during coursework led me to consider the following questions underpinning my research. The primary research question was as follows:

How do adult amateur musicians perceive the relationship between high school choral experiences and their current motivation to continue making music?

The subsidiary questions were as follows:

1. What motivates adult amateur musicians to continue making music in ensembles?
2. To what extent do adult amateur musicians perceive the influences of teacher's curricular and pedagogical decisions related to lifelong music making, and if so, what do they think of them?
3. How do adult amateur musicians perceive the influence of their learning attributions and classroom social interactions on their lifelong music making?
4. What are characteristics of high school choral programs that are successful at inspiring and enabling lifelong musicians?

**Subjectivity Statement**

I am a 40-year-old high school music teacher with fifteen years of full-time high school and middle school teaching experience. I am a cis-gender, heterosexual, White, married, middle class man living in a suburb of Atlanta. I was raised by married parents in a comfortable middle-class home in a quiet neighborhood with good schools. Although interested in music I did not sing in a choir until I was in college. I participated in my high school's theatre program, played guitar and sang in a garage band, achieved a 3.95 grade point average, then attended the University of Michigan in search of a possible career. After a freshman year spent as a prospective political science major, I found myself drawn passionately toward music. I joined as many music classes as I could, auditioned for the School of Music, and after a few tries I was admitted. I was far behind my world-class colleagues and struggled to keep up, working hard every night on my music and my studies, I grew more and more determined to succeed. I fell in love with the choral art, graduated, and began my career teaching high school.

When I was a twelve-year veteran teacher, I found myself feeling a lack of professional growth. I no longer felt that I was improving as a teacher, so I decided to challenge myself with a doctoral program in music education. Reading a lot of published research literature led me to question the long-term impact of music education on each student. According to the literature, attrition during school was a problem, as many students discontinued school music as soon as it was optional, but after students graduated, attrition was even higher. I had always believed in music's lifelong benefits and had felt them myself. I became very interested in understanding more about how teachers can inspire students to become lifelong music makers. When deciding what to study for my dissertation, I was drawn to the topic of teaching for lifelong music learning. I started a great journey which has made me a better teacher and a strong advocate for teaching for lifelong learning.

I am both emic and etic. As an emic veteran teacher, I have many life experiences as a leader in the classroom that influence my viewpoint. I have always believed music should be a lifelong activity and have taught with that goal in mind since 2004. I have grown, however, as a teacher who more fully embraces popular music, student enjoyment, student leadership, and social interactions such as team building. I believe my emic stance enabled me to understand the participants on a deep level and led me to ask interesting questions based on my experiences and theirs.

I am etic in that I strove to understand participants' narrative stories in their terms and honor their different life experiences. In reporting results, I aimed to place participants' voices over my own and use their words whenever possible. I am also etic in that I was never in my high school chorus; I am not experiencing school music as a student and have not sung in a university chorus for eleven years. I did, however, sing in a community chorus for eight years that performed on a professional level. Many of the singers were adult amateur musicians, and several of the singers were music educators. I have not sung in that ensemble for four years.

### **Definitions of Terms**

Lifelong Learning:	A process of individual learning and development through the entire lifespan, both in school out outside the school walls.
Music Making:	Performance either in front of others or alone, of original music, music composed by others, or improvised music.
Carryover:	The retention and use of specific skills, knowledge, and attitudes that have been acquired earlier in life.
Amateur:	One who participates in an activity purely for personal enjoyment rather than as a professional career (Kratus, 2019).

A hobbyist who makes music regularly but is not professionally required to attain and maintain a level of competency (Reimer, 2003).

Chorus/Choir: Although some make a distinction between the terms, many do not, and participants did not, so in this study they are interchangeable.

Aesthetics: The underlying qualities and beauty of music and musical sounds, the way hearing music makes people feel, and the appreciation of the beauty and feelings associated with music and the process of making it.

Lifelong learning became an internationally recognized important issue in the 1970's when the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) started to focus on it. UNESCO changed the name of its Institute for Education to the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (Steffens, 2015). Academic voices grew louder, calling for organizational endorsements of lifelong learning (Steffens, 2015). In 1996, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) presented a report called Lifelong Learning for All (OECD, 1996). In the report, the organization defined lifelong learning as

a process of individual learning and development across the lifespan, from cradle to grave... It is an inclusive concept that refers not only to education in formal settings, such as schools, universities and adult education institutions, but also to 'life-wide' learning in informal settings, at home, at work and in the wider community (Tuijnman & Bostrom, 2002, p. 101)

This definition will serve my study well, and addresses learning as more than just education. Learning takes place in both formal settings, such as high school choral classes, and informal settings, such as community choirs.

While people interact with music in myriad ways, many believe that music is most influential and beneficial when subjects engage in the process of music making through performance (Elliott, 1995). The positive impacts of music performance on the aging brain (Bugos & Kochar, 2017; Bugos, Perlstein, McCrae, Brophy, & Bedenbaugh, 2007; Guo, Ohsawa, Suzuki, & Sekiyama, 2018), wellness (Clift, Skingley, Coulton, & Rodriguez, 2012; Hillman, 2002; Koga & Tims, 2001), and quality of life (Cohen et al., 2006; Johnson, Louhivuori, & Siljander, 2017) are well documented. While I recognize the benefits of listening to music, writing about music, discussing music, and analyzing music, in this study I will define music making as performance of music on instruments and with the voice. Music making may include performance of original music, music composed by others, or improvised music. Music making may be in the home or in a group, in a formal performance or just for enjoyment. In this study I focused on lifelong learning through music making.

Another word of significance related to this study is the word carryover. Carryover will be defined as the retention and use of specific skills, knowledge, and attitudes that have been acquired earlier in life. For there to be carryover, there must be some barrier defining the two zones through which the skills and knowledge are transferred. In this case the carryover barrier in question is was graduation from formal secondary schooling to adult life. A central purpose of this study was to examine carryover of music education into adulthood.

## **2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**



Research related to lifelong music learning is multifaceted, so I have organized this literature review around several closely related areas of research. First, I review previous literature on the possible benefits of lifelong music making and the value of lifelong music making. Then I review previous research on the topic most closely related to my study, the motivation of adults to participate in music ensembles. Unfortunately, there is little research similar to my study regarding connections between the motivations of adults to continue singing and their high school experiences. I, of course, wish to expand the research literature on the lifelong impact of high school experiences, so the next section reviews the school music attrition problem and its traditionally proposed causes. Although this study is focused on reasons for retention, reasons for attrition are also relevant. I then explore previous music education research related to my theoretical framework of attribution theory and achievement goal theory. Music educators have applied theories to singers' motivations, and I must present their salient results before my own.

### **Benefits of Lifelong Music Making**

The benefits of adult music making are vast and documented in participants' sense of physical and mental wellness, reported quality of life, cognition, and social engagement. A 2019 Grunwald Associates LLC and Chorus America study, supported by the American Choral Directors Association, the NAMM Foundation, the Katherine B. Andersen Fund of the Saint Paul Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts, revealed evidence of many benefits of lifetime participation in choral singing. The 2019 Chorus Impact Study, as it is called, found that "adults who sing in choruses report significant personal benefits, including feeling less lonely and more connected to others," and "older singers report both a better quality of life and better overall health than the general public" (Grunwald Associates LLC & Chorus America, 2019, p. 3). The study was compared to a similar 2008 study and used data from thousands of

online surveys of singers and non-singers. There was a large disparity between the number of adult singers (5,736), and the number of general population adults (506) who completed the survey (Grunwald Associates LLC & Chorus America, 2019). The researchers did their best, utilizing weighting, to create representative samples out of the full samples as related to socioeconomic status and race and ethnicity, but due to the survey being online, the samples are younger and better educated than the wider populations the samples are intended to represent. The study also showed that “choral singers are remarkably strong contributors to their communities” (Grunwald Associates LLC & Chorus America, 2019, p. 3).

The link between instrumental music practice and enhanced executive function has been demonstrated in several studies through classic cognitive tests (Bugos & Kochar, 2017; Bugos, Perlstein, McCrae, Brophy, & Bedenbaugh, 2007; Guo, Ohsawa, Suzuki, and Sekiyama, 2018; Rauscher & Zupan, 2000; Seinfeld, Figueroa, Ortiz-Gil, & Sanchez-Vives, 2013). Bugos, Perlstein, McCrae, Brophy, and Bedenbaugh (2007) examined working memory and executive function in older adults in a randomized controlled trial (RCT) with individualized piano instruction. The standard cognitive tests showed the six months of weekly 30-minute lessons enhanced cognitive processes such as attention, concentration, and planning. Three months later, however, the gains were not maintained.

The main variable in the Hanna-Pladdy & MacKay (2011) aging adult instrumental music participation quasi-experimental study was musical instrument playing experience. There is no clear definition for the terms aging adults or older adults. Most studies place that age range at 60 to 80 years old, with some variance. Variables were well-controlled, including age, gender distribution, and education. The three participant groups were different in musical experience (none, 19 years, and 10 years or more), and the participants with at least ten years of experience

scored significantly higher than the non-musicians on all tests except verbal memory, suggesting a possible strong correlation between amount of playing and cognitive performance.

Interestingly, the cognitive gains were present no matter when the training happened in the participants' lives, recently or long ago. Following up on that experiment, Hanna-Pladdy & Gajewski (2012), suspecting the 2011 study may have simply revealed cognitive gains in people who were generally more active, not just more musically active, attempted to control for general activity level. In the 2012 study, musicians with ten years of experience or more again scored higher on neuropsychological tests of phonemic fluency, verbal working memory, verbal immediate recall, visuospatial judgement, and motor dexterity.

### ***Physical and Mental Wellness***

Besides cognitive gains, there have been many studies that have demonstrated a correlation between music practice and subjects' increased sense of physical and mental wellness. The Koga & Tims (2001) study focused on mental health and was the only study found to use biomarkers, including human growth hormone. The multiyear study focused on an existing music program in Florida where aging adults took organ lessons. The mental health inventories and psychological assessment questionnaires showed decreased levels of anxiety and depression, and the blood tests showed a 90% increase in human growth hormone, indicative of higher energy levels.

There are also several studies on self-reported mental and physical health related to singing in groups. The Cohen et al. (2006) study placed 90 of the 166 participants in a year-long choral program while the other 76 continued normal activities. After one year, the singing group showed positive results on self-reports including decreases in number of doctor visits, number of falls, and use of over-the-counter medications, and increases on overall health rating and number

of activities performed. One year later, the gains persisted, although less dramatically. The study, however, lacked randomization and did not have an active control. A similar study (Hillman, 2002) examined, through a survey instrument, choir members' thoughts and feelings related to physical health, emotional well-being, social life, self-confidence, understanding of singing, quality of life, and attendance at cultural events before and after joining a Scottish singing group. The 100 older adults showed increases in emotional well-being, quality of life, understanding of singing, and self-confidence.

The Clift, Skingley, Coulton, and Rodriguez (2012) RCT study included 265 participants assigned to either a choir performance or, once again, their usual activities. After twelve weeks, choir participants showed significant decreases on a depression/anxiety scale and increases on a quality-of-life scale. The changes persisted after six months, but this study did not have an active control group.

The Johnson et al. (2017) study aimed to compare the quality of life of older adult choir singers with a matched sample of older adults from the general population in Finland. The researchers attempted to control for sociodemographic qualities, satisfaction with health, and level of engagement in hobbies by using case-control methods to match a sample of 109 older adult singers with a sample of 307 older adults from the general population (Johnson et al., 2017). Controlling for sociodemographic variables, the singers reported significantly higher ratings on physical quality of life, but not psychological quality of life (Johnson et al., 2017). When considering engagement in hobbies, the singers "reported significantly higher overall quality of life and satisfaction with health when compared to either controls who were either actively engaged in hobbies or not active in hobbies" (Johnson et al., 2007, p. 1). Interestingly, a more recent study (Lonsdale & Day, 2021) comparing the psychological benefits of choral

singing to five other activities found that “any leisure activity that offers opportunity for improvement, mastery of a new skill, or a sense of accomplishment might have a positive effect on our psychological well-being” (p. 1179). The other five activities were solo singing, band/orchestra participation, team sport participation, solo instrumental practice, and solo sport participation.

Research on music participation using EEG measurements is common, including the Moreno et al. (2011) study linking music training to enhanced verbal intelligence and executive function. The authors’ data supported their hypotheses that a 20-day computer music training program would induce functional plasticity reflected in the N2/P3 complex, which are thought to be involved in inhibitory processing. A remarkable 90% of the participants showed improvement on verbal intelligence tests, which was “positively correlated with changes in functional brain plasticity during an executive-function task” (Moreno et al., 2011, p. 1425). The Moreno et al. study, however, included preschool children as participants and used a go/no-go task to measure executive function, a child-appropriate test comparable to the Stroop Test.

Bugos has led several studies related to music participation’s effects on executive functioning. Although it did not use an EEG, the Bugos et al. (2007) study utilized the Trail Making Test and Digit Symbol measures to evaluate cognitive gains in executive function following an individualized piano instruction program. The experimental group ( $n = 16$ ) of musically inexperienced adults (ages 60–85) showed significantly improved performance on those cognitive measures compared to the control group ( $n = 15$ ) which was an inactive control group (Bugos et al., 2007). Bugos’s 2019 study of aging adults (60–80 years old) demonstrated cognitive gains from music participation as well. Participants who participated in a piano or drum instruction program displayed significant enhancements in bimanual synchronization and

visual scanning/working memory abilities, when compared to an active control music listening instruction group. Additionally, piano instruction training “significantly improved motor synchronization skills as compared to percussion instruction or music listening” (Bugos et al., 2019, p. 1). This was also not an EEG study, but rather used standard cognitive functioning and intelligence tests to measure cognitive change.

The evidence for the benefits of lifelong music making is strong, therefore this researcher believes teaching lifelong music making should be a priority for every music instructor. To better teach for the long term, the next section examines studies seeking to learn the reasons adults decide to continue making music in ensembles.

### **Motivation of Adults to Participate in Music Ensembles**

Many studies have examined the motivation of adults to participate in music ensembles. A review of the research findings points to the following most common motivations for adult participation in music ensembles: personal skill development and enjoyment of playing one’s instrument or singing, aesthetic musical experiences, and social engagement and sense of belonging. Other major factors include habit (have always done it), purpose, wellness, release of tension, challenge, physical health, appreciation of the director, spirituality, intensified emotions, positive school music experiences, and education. Dabback, Coffman, and Rohwer’s (2018) analysis of 64 articles, book chapters, and dissertations related to the New Horizons International Music Association adult community music program came to similar findings. They found “people join New Horizons programmes seeking musical engagement and skill development, social engagement, learning and personal development, and as a response to life and role changes” (Dabback et al., 2018, p. 152).

Narrowing the search results for this portion of the literature review proved difficult. I culled the body of research to those most directly related to my focus of study (motivation for

lifelong music making), and when possible, those that attempted to connect adult music making with school music education. Several researchers have devoted much of their professional lives to studying adult music practices, so I deemed their work worthy of inclusion. The names of Coffman, Rohwer, Dabback, Bowles, and Bugos were consistently cited by researchers.

I thought it was also important to include a variety of explanations and approaches to the issue. Most of the studies utilized survey questionnaires and/or interviews, but some utilized other techniques and perspectives. For instance, Lamont (2011) was one of few authors who focused on musical identity formed over many years of life. Lamont combined ten years of data gathering with a study to create a very full picture of salient findings. I included Silvey's (2001) study because of its unique post-positive perspective which rejected the idea that large surveys could say something about a large population that includes infinitely diverse human stories. I included a study by Kruse (2009), who engaged in a deep ethnographic dive into the topic.

To acquire a diversity of perspectives, I included a mix of quantitative and qualitative studies, and some mixed methods studies. The studies lacking in significance due to copious limitations were removed. Lastly, although studies of adult music participation stretch back to the 1960's, I thought it was important to go back no further than 1990. Since the 1960's, technology has changed drastically, and American and European musical habits have changed so much that a comparison could ring hollow.

Most studies of adult music participation include surveys asking respondents what they perceived to be the benefits of their ensemble participation. Researchers often asked respondents for their reason for joining ensembles, their musical backgrounds, and why they continued in their ensembles. Whether qualitative or quantitative, the data were almost exclusively limited to first-person perceptions. No studies reviewed took medical information (blood samples, heart

rate, etc.), and no ensembles forced members to participate. Perceptions of benefit and motivation, along with some rehearsal observation, were central to data collection. The samples were demographically representative of the ensembles, but not of larger populations. The participants were overwhelmingly White, financially secure, middle- to old-age, and more highly educated than the public. Participating in the research studies often meant participants had to make commitments outside of rehearsal time including following links to surveys, participating in interviews, taking online music assessments, staying after rehearsals, and more. Although they represented a wide range of musical backgrounds, from little to extensive musical training, it may very well be true that the people who elected to participate in the studies represented higher levels of motivation than the ensembles at-large.

### ***Personal Musical Growth***

The most common themes in the literature motivating adults to participate in music ensembles were their desire for personal musical growth, instrumental/vocal skill development, and the aesthetic enjoyment of that process. Jutras's (2011) quantitative study of 62 New Horizons bands in the United States and Canada achieved an impressive 92% questionnaire response rate. Of course, that response rate refers to the 57 ensembles that returned the survey, not the percentage of ensemble members who successfully participated. The 43 questions included two aspects not seen in other studies. In an attempt to eliminate any assumption, the questions applied generally to all ensemble members, the questions clarified the listed benefits of participation as being directly applicable to the respondent, as in, "is this benefit of band participation for you personally?" (Jutras, 2011, p. 68). After each question, if the respondent answered in the affirmative, they were asked to rate the benefit on a 1–10 scale. Band members' top four reasons were play/fun, accomplishment, technique, and challenge. The intensity of the



top four participation benefits were ranked top to bottom as skill, social/cultural, personal, and health. An unfortunate pattern among the studies was the lack of clarity around the terms “fun” and “enjoyment.” The language in many of the surveys, including Jutras’s survey, did not ask the respondents to clarify exactly what was fun about participation. Reasons to claim to be having fun are as diverse as the members themselves, and can be related to aesthetics of the music performed, enjoyment of playing an instrument or singing, social engagement, physical exertion, director personality, etc.

The Bowles et al. (2014) study of musically active college nonmusic majors revealed that most respondents would not participate in music if they had not joined their college music ensemble. Evidently, the commitment to an ensemble motivated students to participate in music making. Bowles’s team developed a questionnaire for college choir, string, band, and marching band ensembles having 50% nonmusic majors. The questionnaire aimed to explore characteristics of students’ musical involvement, influences of their high school and college music directors, and other influences on their musical engagement during high school and college. Participation in the web-based survey was encouraged by the researchers, who assured respondents they would donate 10 minutes of personal time to an educational community music endeavor for each survey completed. Of the respondents, 82% said they enrolled in their ensemble because they felt it was “important to do so” (Bowles et al., 2014, p. 5), and 69% said they continued participating because they enjoyed performing in the ensemble. Participants appeared to believe participating in the band is good for them, but is that because it builds community, is good for their minds, is good for their emotions? Why did they think it was important? Several respondents noted the positive influences of their high school teachers and the importance of enjoying their high school musical experience.

They only qualifying orchestra-focused study I found was Shanksy's (2010) pilot study of adult motivations in community orchestra participation. Shanksy's orchestral musicians perceived benefits of performance skill building. The strongest motivators found were "love of playing one's instrument, desire for musical challenge, inspiration for practice and commitment to the organization" (Shanksy, 2010, p. 1). In addition to participant rehearsal observation as a flutist in the ensemble, the researcher conducted seven interviews. Three interviewees were professional musicians and four were amateur players, five worked and two were retired. The motivations for being in the ensemble were strikingly uniform.

### ***Enjoyment of Aesthetics of Ensemble Music Performance***

The enjoyment of the aesthetics of ensemble music performance, was a commonly cited motivator. Silvey's (2001) study found the main reasons people sing in community choirs to be the opportunity for beautiful aesthetic experiences, their desire for challenge, intensified emotions, and the performance of major choral works (Silvey, 2001). Silvey observed two rehearsals and included three ensemble members in two in-depth interviews (one interview included a married couple), and one interview with the director. Rather than do a large survey study, Silvey elected a post-positivist case study methodology, believing reality is constructed and interpreted differently by different individuals. He commented on the futile attempt to extrapolate large themes from samples of people, citing infinitely unique stories of individuals.

Ayling and Johnston's 2005 study of 39 high school seniors' decisions whether or not to sing in college choruses was a study of carryover. Thirteen of the 39 students, all of whom were very active in their high school programs, continued in college choruses. The researchers argued that had more participants understood the smaller time commitment the college choruses demanded, or been reached out to directly by college conductors, more participants would have

sung. The main reason cited for continuing was that they “just like to sing” (Ayling & Johnston, 2005, p. 34), what one might call a combination of aesthetic and personal growth responses.

Redman and Bugos’s (2019) questionnaires were distributed among four auditioned community choirs whose members had diverse musical training. The average age of the 135 participants was 60 and they averaged about 30 years of choral singing experience. The motivational factors for participation ranked in importance were the power of aesthetic experiences, spiritual motivation (although the choirs had no religious affiliations), emotional motivation, and a distant last place was educational motivation. When asked for a reason they might quit, the respondents said if the music lacked aesthetic beauty. The researchers noted the importance of repertoire selection to motivate ensemble members.

Selph and Bugos (2014) also studied adult auditioned community choirs. A sample of convenience led the researchers to three Florida ensembles. The mixed methods study included a survey on demographics, musical background, participation level, and musical preference. The qualitative interviews were with focus groups and one-on-one with directors. Investigators also observed three rehearsals, and their surveys had open-ended questions at the end. The 76 participants included 56 females and 19 males, ages 51–60. The most notable motivator for enrollment and retention in the ensembles was the power of the aesthetic experience. Noting that this study and the previous Redman and Bugos study were focused on auditioned ensembles, perhaps there is a link between music performance skill and aesthetic motivation. Comparatively, the Hillman (2002) study of very inexperienced choristers in Scotland, saw social engagement a primary motivator, not aesthetics.

### ***Social Engagement***

Social engagement proved to be a major motivational factor in almost all reviewed studies. Coffman and Adamek (1999) found, in their study of the contributions of wind band participation to senior adults' perceived quality of life, that the band members believed music making and socialization to be extremely important. They believed them to be "essential to their quality of life, rating them as high as family relationships and good health" (Coffman & Adamek, 1999, p. 27).

Rohwer's unique (2013) study queried spouses of adult New Horizons band members. Generally, the commitment to the band was seen as a benefit to the marriages of the participants, and to the lives of both spouses. Forty-two band member spouses took part (all from only one band) in the study and had been married an average of 41 years. An email invitation to participate was sent to band members who were asked to forward the email on to their spouses. The response rate was 65%. The questionnaire included short answer and open-ended questions.

Lamont (2011) and Dabback (2008) focused on identity formation, both socially and individually, through music participation. Lamont received 530 survey responses from amateur adult musicians ages 21–83 from around the globe, but also included analysis of ten years of gathered data in their study. Other methodology details were unfortunately left to the reader's imagination. Lamont contended that musical identity is formed over the lifespan in stages and through identity crisis transitions in life. Each person experiences these in different ways and is thrown into choices depending upon their circumstances. Many people, Lamont contended, do not consider themselves musicians because of bad experiences with peers or teachers, or because of a societal expectation of musically perfect performance. The most motivating factors for music participation Lamont found were related to improvements in social life. Dabback's (2008) qualitative study of the Rochester New Horizons Band members found that identity was an

ensemble participation motivator, especially for more aged members. Not only did members develop enriched musical identities as band members, but they also adopted roles as valuable contributors to a larger musical ensemble with the hopes of passing traditions on to later generations.

Holmquist's (1995) dissertation focused on 244 community choir members' school experiences through surveys and found that love of the personality of the teacher did not instill long-lasting participation, but rather a learned commitment to music performance motivated their carryover behaviors from high school.

Faulkner's (1957) study found that those adults who did not participate in music had never experienced emotional or intellectual reactions to music. Tipps (1992) study investigated adult community choir members' educational characteristics and their levels of music participation during school. Tipps found that most singers had been involved in high school music programs and revealed the importance of sight-reading skills to continued participation. Tipps asserted continued participation was linked to perceived skills and discontinued participation was linked to perceived lack of skills.

This study owes much to the work of Arasi (2006), who examined adult reflections on a high school choral music program related to lifelong influence. Arasi's dissertation study was a case study of a particular high school program, whereas this study seeks to understand singers in adult choruses from different high school choral programs and find similarities in those backgrounds related to how those students learned and what inspired and enabled them to become lifelong music makers. Arasi's focus was mostly on the characteristics of the teacher. My participants had different teachers, so the focus was on how participants reflected on their learning.

The motivators for adult music ensemble participation are varied, but the above-mentioned trends are fairly consistent. Generally, researchers have attempted via interviews and mixed methods surveys to gather data on motivation by asking members how they perceive benefits of membership, and why they continue to enroll year after year. Fewer researchers have utilized ethnography, case study, narrative methods, life history methods, spouse interviews, document analysis, and rehearsal observation to learn about ensemble members' motivations.

### **School Music and Attrition**

Music education has an attrition problem. Across the United States, and in large numbers, students are choosing to discontinue music classes as soon as they are optional (Elpus & Abril, 2019; Elpus, 2014; Elpus & Abril, 2011; McPherson & Hendricks, 2010; McPherson & O'Neill, 2010). The problem continues into adulthood, with less than 10% of American adults singing or playing instruments (VanWeelden & Walters, 2004). Many music educators, and the National Association for Music Education, share a goal of making music education a lifetime endeavor (National Association for Music Education 1968, 1999, 2014) but it appears that many school music programs are failing to prepare or inspire students to include music in their adult lives (Kratus 2019, VanWeelden & Walters, 2004).

Some music educators are examining reasons why this is happening and encouraging the profession to adapt to ensure music education's place in secondary schools and American adult life. Traditionally proposed attrition causes include college admittance pressures, standardized testing, content, including repertoire choices and instrument choices, a lack of creativity in the curriculum, teacher-centered classrooms, and the band/chorus/orchestra large ensemble music program model that has been in place since the early to mid 1900's (Elpus & Abril, 2019, Elpus, 2014; Green, 2006, 2008; Kratus, 2007, 2016; McPherson & Hendricks, 2010; Tipps, 2003; Williams, 2011).

The attrition problem in music education has been heavily studied and it would be impossible to cover all relevant literature in this review. This portion of the literature review will focus on the most significant contributions to peer-reviewed music education research literature related to the topic since 2000, the last two decades, with only brief deviations from that sample. Students in the United States are generally dropping out of music classes after middle school or in the middle of high school once they have fulfilled their fine arts requirements. According to a 2011 nationwide study, 21% of high school seniors (class of 2004) were enrolled in music ensembles, compared to 30.9% in 1982 (Abril & Elpus, 2011). A 2019 update to the study showed that 24% of the 2013 graduating class had participated in at least one music ensemble class (Elpus & Abril, 2019). This may seem like progress, however the issue in the 2011 study concerned seniors currently taking a music class during their senior year, and the 2019 study identified whether they had taken a single music ensemble class in high school. Many students cease enrollment in music classes between 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade, so the two percentages are not clear evidence of increased enrollment.

Since 2000, many schools have cut music programs or music time due to their cost and perceived lack of relevance to the importance of testing (Elpus, 2014; Elpus & Abril, 2019; Major, 2013; Miksza, 2013). In California, music education attrition is a critical problem. According to a Music for All Foundation study of California's public schools, student music class enrollment and the quantity of music teachers in California dropped severely from 1999 to 2004. In the same time frame that music student enrollment population dropped by 50% and the number of music teachers declined by 26.7%, overall public-school student population increased by 5.8% (Music for All Foundation, 2004). The study also found that schools across the state had decreased their allotted time for arts classes in general and cut general music courses severely.

In 2008, Abril and Gault received responses to a Likert scale survey from 541 public and private secondary school principals across the United States. Although principals seemed to value music education, and 98% of the schools surveyed offered some music course taught by a music specialist, only 34% of those schools required a music class of all students (Abril & Gault, 2008). Mostly the middle school principals responded that their schools require a music class, while many of the high school principals responded that they do not require any music at all. The researchers also believe the percentage of schools that require music could be lower because principals surveyed who do not offer music classes in their schools would have been less interested in responding to a music survey (Abril & Gault, 2008).

### **Traditionally Proposed Causes of Attrition**

College admittance pressures and standardized testing have been demonized by many who see music education's attrition issue as a problem of policy and circumstance rather than curriculum and pedagogy (Elpus, 2014; Menken, 2006; Mertler, 2010). Many feel that college admission has become far more competitive than in the past. The desire to accumulate AP credits, early college credits, and impressive academic high school resumes may be pulling students away from music class offerings, especially in high socioeconomic status (SES) areas (Abril & Gault, 2008; Elpus, 2014). Even some primary schools have decreased music and physical education time to increase reading and math time in an effort to increase standardized test scores and hopefully funding (Music for All Foundation, 2004, Elpus, 2014). According to Abril & Gault's survey (2008), principals believe curricular factors are contributing to pushing music education to the margins. Principals saw No Child Left Behind, scheduling, budget concerns, and standardized tests as having the most negative effect on music education.

Those who blame education policies bring a strong argument, however there is also a body of research showing that students in higher socioeconomic classes, who often face the most



pressure related to standardized testing and college preparation, also exhibit the highest participation rates and access to music education courses (Elpus & Abril, 2019). Elpus and Abril argued that there is “a body of research that provides a strong case for the predictive value of SES in a students’ access to and retention in a school music program” (2019, p. 324). Lack of funds may be a roadblock for many but is a factor that has yet to be tested empirically on a national level (Elpus & Abril, 2019). The conflicting results thus confound themselves. It appears administrators, and indeed their positions as mouthpieces in their communities may influence the larger population’s opinion, may believe college admittance pressures and standardized tests are causing attrition in music education, but the research is certainly mixed and does not fully support that conclusion.

### **The Content Problem: Classical Music Exclusivity**

The content of music education classes may be a major player in attrition. High school music programs focus mainly on classical music, which may be causing their perceived value to plummet. A recent survey revealed that “music interest inside of school was ranked significantly lower than for any other subject, while music interest outside of school was ranked second highest for any subject in grades 6 and 7–9, and highest of all subjects in grades 10–12” (McPherson & Hendricks, 2010, p. 201). As everyone knows, teenagers have musical interests outside the canons of Bach, Mozart, Brahms, and Beethoven. The styles of music played outside of school are primarily non-classical and the styles of music students play in school are primarily classical (Kratus, 2007). The narrow scope of repertoire and lack of popularity of classical music in general may be leaving students out. Classical music is a tiny and decreasing size of music instrument and recording sales (Kratus, 2007, Green, 2002), and may be failing to seem relevant to students currently in school (Kratus, 2019; Lamont & Maton, 2010). According to a 2009 study, classical music participation rates “declined between 1982 and 2008, from 12.9% to

9.3%” (League of American Orchestras, 2009, p. 4). The study also found that classical music audiences “declined by 13%, or 3.3 million people, between 2002 and 2008,” and “paid attendance declined by 8% between 2002 and 2007” (League of American Orchestras, 2009, p. 4). The study projected a drop of another 14%, or 2.7 million people, by 2018 (League of American Orchestras, 2009).

In a 2010 survey, students in the United States reported lower competence beliefs and values for music and art than for all other subjects (McPherson & Hendricks, 2010). Interest in music inside school ranked lower than all other subjects while music outside school ranked second highest (McPherson & Hendricks, 2010). This drastic disparity shows that the music chosen, or the manner in which it is taught may be a large part of the problem. Classical music demands a lot of performers and listeners, and many feel intimidated by it for cultural and musical reasons, which may be leaving some out of school music (Lamont & Maton, 2010). Lamont and Maton (2010) attempted to explain the position of cultural music in society, school, and SES using ideas from sociologists Pierre Bourdieu and Basil Bernstein. Bernstein pointed to the concept of school’s place to prepare students for work and life. Many families see school as utilitarian, simply useful to prepare young people for the careers of adult life, and they reject the practical relevance of some humanities and arts. In today’s economy, versatility and flexibility are highly valued. Some would argue the status of a subject, such as music, with few perceived employment options, must be questionable. Students’ choices of subjects in late secondary school may reflect their desire for subjects that more directly prepare them for employment, and they are leaving music out (Lamont & Maton, 2010).

Bourdieu saw culture as social capital with the power to exert social domination of one group over another (Bourdieu, 1984). He also contended that parents are always trying to ensure

their children receive the right education by experiencing the dominant culture's ways of learning, working, and making art (Bourdieu, 1984). This may no longer extend to high-art music as it did before popular culture revolutions since the 1950's (Lamont and Maton, 2010). The music curriculum may no longer be culturally relevant to people. Because the monetary and fame successes of non-classical musicians in the adult world far out-pace those of classical musicians, it is possible that classical music has lost some of its status symbol power. In a recent poll, only 10% of students (aged 8–14 years) reported listening to classical or jazz music (Lamont, Hargreaves, Marshall, & Tarrant, 2003), and of the top 100 radio markets in the U.S., more than one third have no classical music station at all (Kosman, 2002). Success in classical music may no longer be emblematic of success in life and work, causing it to lose the interest of many students and families (Elpus & Abril, 2011; Lamont & Maton, 2010).

McPherson and Hendricks (2010) studied differences in student motivation using expectancy-value motivational theory. The authors compared the survey results looking for possible impacts of gender, socio-economic status (SES), school music participation, and school year on motivation to study music, and three other subjects (math, science, and mother tongue), in schools. All groups of students saw music as increasingly difficult, progressively less important, and useful, and students felt less capable in school music as school years increased from 6<sup>th</sup> grade through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Student beliefs in their own competence dropped significantly as they advance in school. McPherson and Hendricks found that “students in the USA reported lower competence beliefs and values for music and art than for all other subjects” (McPherson & Hendricks, 2010, p. 206). In general, students are motivated to do things they are good at, so music's decrease in popularity as a chosen elective over time, especially in late secondary school, may be due to the way music is taught and assessed. These competency belief and

attrition problems may be directly related to the content mostly being taught in class – Western Classical performance skills (Kratus, 2019). Students may not be seeing themselves as successful members of large classical music ensembles, but that does not mean they cannot be good musicians. If the curriculum is not serving students, perhaps it is driving them away, causing attrition.

On the other hand, the repertoire, the content, or the *what* being taught may be immaterial compared to *who* is teaching it and *how* they engage students. Most people have seen high school students of the modern age enthusiastically rehearse and perform choruses by Mozart or Victoria, plays by Shakespeare, marches by Sousa, or string quartets by Shostakovich. If a teacher is truly passionate about their craft, they can ignite curiosity in students for just about any subject matter. The *how* of pedagogy is the next subject, with the understanding that most music can be taught in ways that engage most students.

### **Pedagogy: Agency, Student-Centered and Teacher-Centered Classrooms**

What about *how* teachers are teaching music in schools? What causes of attrition may lie there? Although the landscape of education in general is becoming less teacher-centered and more collaborative and constructivist, secondary music classes still hold to the large ensemble model of music education, which could be leading to attrition. Kratus argues that “music education practices have drifted too far from other contemporary education practices” (2007, p. 46). Most music teachers still exhibit an “autocratic model of teaching that has no parallel in any other school subject” (Kratus, 2007, p. 46). In the California study, music education’s decline in popularity topped all other subjects, including all other fine arts classes. Dance, drama, and visual art classes which usually contain more choreography, student agency over material, and student creation, saw increases in student enrollment over the same period (Music for All Foundation, 2004).

In 2022, students are being prepared for a world full of entrepreneurship, small start-up companies, and professional lives with multiple careers. Robots and codes are replacing jobs once done by people. Gone or limited are the days of making a middle class living by working low-skill jobs in factories. People have almost infinite information at their fingertips on their smart watches, tablets, cell phones, and laptops. Technology is zooming ahead to give people personalized experiences in their smart speakers, shopping websites, cars, grocery store coupons, and more. If music education continues to be taught autocratically (Kratus, 2007), as it often is, it may go the way of the dinosaur.

There has been an increase in diverse secondary music class offerings around the United States. In the last few decades, many high schools in the U.S. have added guitar classes, musical theater classes, keyboard labs for music composition, and specialized ensembles like mariachi bands. Perhaps students hunger for a music experience that is more student-centered, wherein they have agency and choice. Informal learning practices can increase student agency and interests in a subject (King & Pringle, 2018). “As more music teachers in the U.S. begin adopting progressive forms of music education like informal music learning, music teacher educators need to reflect on their voices” (Kastner, 2018, p. 2). If high school ensemble teachers want to motivate students, they may need to learn from what is inspiring students to take those non-traditional music classes. Music ensembles can include creative activities like these non-traditional offerings, and perhaps improve retention, with some effort from teachers.

Informal music learning is a strategy that can reach students in a modern way, and perhaps improve student retention. Rather than systematic lessons building toward competencies, informal classroom activities are based on student curiosities and everyone in the room learning from each other, like a community music program. Informal music learning can include

opportunities for students to select their own or create their own music, peer-lead learning activities, aural copying and rote teaching, a non-sequential learning process, and an integration of roles as performers, listeners, improvisers, and composers (Kastner, 2018). The informal learning process can help move classrooms away from the current teacher-centered model to one where teachers function as facilitators of more creative activities selected through surveys of student curiosities (Green, 2002, 2006, 2008). A recent study of student perceptions of Green's Musical Futures informal music learning initiative found that the program "enhanced student interest and confidence and increased their musical skills" (Hallam et al., 2018, p. 213) and the students were pleased they had more control over their learning.

Music teachers can also learn from the community music school model. Community music schools have teaching professionals and amateurs who work with aspiring musicians as mentors and co-performers. Students come to the school to fulfill existing curiosities, often related to popular music. Educators can do the same by getting to know their students' musical preferences and "make this inquiry a starting point of the musical curriculum" (Reyes, 2016, p. 27). If students are interested in creating music in various styles, teachers should adapt to authentically teach those styles in the way they are created and performed (Green, 2002, 2006, 2008; Reyes, 2016). Many students are interested in popular music, which is not created or performed as most music in secondary music ensembles is rehearsed. Students are still participating in music outside of school at high levels (Lamont et al., 2003), but they are mostly focused on popular music created with guitars, drums, keyboards, computer software.

Incorporating informal music learning in classrooms, especially when rehearsing popular music, may be helpful, but a structured, conceptual epistemology must be at the core of any curriculum put into action through pedagogy. As McPhail argues, fully embracing informal

education can leave out “powerful conceptual knowledge” that gives students the “potential to participate fully as capable musicians” (McPhail, 2018, p. 176):

There is a danger that in placing the knower rather than the knowledge at the center of our educational endeavors, we have reduced access to something extremely important: the dimensions of knowledge that hold the power for students to move beyond their experiences, to imagine, and conceptualize a different world. (McPhail, 2018, p. 176)

Additionally, a recent study found mixed reviews for informal music learning. In the study, musicians who learned informally “bemoaned the lack of more formal music education” (Hess, 2020, 441). Many of the participants, and ultimately the researcher, advocated for a mix of formal and informal learning in music classes (Hess, 2020).

### **Teacher Training**

Many undergraduate music education majors are not being well-trained in teaching creativity, popular music, or independence-building skills (Hennessy, 2000; Langley, 2018; Menken, 2006; Odena & Welch, 2009). In the United States, Britain, and Australia, collegiate teacher preparation programs are generally very focused on Western Classical Music and tend to minimize instruction in improvisation and composition (Allsup & Benedict, 2008; Odena & Welch, 2009; Regelski, 2006). Many in-service teachers have never composed and cannot improvise but spent most of their college years perfecting performance technique and reading skills on their principal instruments (Langley, 2018). One way to address teachers’ understandings of creativity is to implement more opportunities for creativity in teacher preparation programs.

Langley’s 2018 study showed that undergraduate music education majors were excited about creativity in the classroom but receive little training on how to teach it. When those

teachers entered the workforce, they still valued creativity but did not incorporate it in their teaching. Some teachers considered elements of problem-solving skills and initiative as synonymous to creativity. They passed along these disjunct understandings of creativity to their students who believed the convergent thinking rehearsal activities to be creative when in most cases they are not (Langley, 2018). Teacher participants claimed that their undergraduate professors were very influential over these definitions (Langley, 2018). A concerted effort on the part of university professors to help pre-service teachers fully understand creativity would provide an opportunity for change. Teacher education professors might take the lead in providing effective, applicable approaches to engaging in creative activity for pre-service teachers.

Many teachers feel unprepared to teach improvisation and composition, often because they lack the diverse musical background to confidently produce or even reproduce varied styles of music (Odena & Welch, 2009). Undergraduate music majors are products of the existing K–12 music curriculum, so it is only natural that they lack substantial training in musical creativity and diverse musical backgrounds. Music teachers feel generally less able to implement the creativity-related music standards than their training indicates (Byo, 1999). Most secondary music classrooms do not currently include many creative activities, but surveys show teachers are open to the idea, as are students, so if teacher training includes more creativity training, so will music classrooms (Langley, 2018).

Shifting or diversifying the focus of the current collegiate conservatory-model may be difficult and take a long time. Kastner's 2018 case study of a first-year teacher with a popular music background revealed a teacher who seemed to feel guilty for embracing informal teaching methods and popular music. The subject "used the metaphor of a bruise to describe how she believed some in her undergraduate studies would judge her interest in popular music and



creative musicianship, but as she became a music teacher she had agency to incorporate the informal learning she valued” (Kastner, 2018, p. 1).

Hennessy’s 2000 study surveyed primary school teacher’s confidence in teaching music. Primary school teachers are often expected to teach a multitude of subjects and have more confidence in some subjects and less in others. With background knowledge of their own, surely viewing music as for specialists only, primary school teachers with less music experience would be justifiably intimidated. The study showed that teaching primary school teacher’s a different approach could yield more teacher confidence (Hennessy, 2000). By focusing on pupils as *knowers* (in terms of self-expression rather than natural talent) and less on the *knowledge* or *elite coding* (Lamont & Maton, 2010) of musical activities, primary school teachers were less intimidated to teach music. Rather than struggling to get music perfectly performed, the teachers felt more comfortable letting the students express themselves musically. If teachers focused more on *knower coding*, perhaps students would be more likely to continue in music.

### **New Ideas to Solve the Attrition Problem**

In recent years, issues related to independent amateur musicianship been heavily researched and written about. Although they may not have used the word “amateur,” many music education researchers have studied the characteristics and appear to agree they are not commonly taught in America’s secondary schools. Indeed, an October 12, 2019, Google Scholar 1990-2019 search for the words “independent,” or “amateur,” or “popular,” or “lifelong” just in the articles of NAFME publications *Music Educators Journal*, *Journal of Research in Music Education*, *UPDATE: Applications of Research in Music Education*, *General Music Today*, and *Journal of Music Teacher Education* yielded almost 2,500 results. Because of such numbers, this section of the literature review will be focused on research articles most closely related to the

characteristics of amateur music making, as delineated by Kratus's 2019 article, "A Return to Amateurism in Music Education."

Kratus argued that the future of music education may lie in its past, before competition and professionalism replaced amateurism as goals in music classrooms. In Kratus's 2019 article, he defined a musical amateur as "one who engages in music purely for the love of doing so" (p. 32). He defined a music professional as one who "must meet the musical standards required by employers and audiences" (Kratus, 2019, p. 32). As stated above, very few adults become professional musicians (U.S. Department of Labor, 2012–13), and according to a recent study, only about ten percent of those students who participated in school music continue to sing or play instruments as adults (VanWeelden & Waters, 2004). Music teachers are thus left with a choice of which part of the spectrum (between professional and amateur) for which to strive for their students, and, if one holds lifelong music participation as the ultimate goal, the choice is clear that teachers must move close to the amateur side of the spectrum.

The characteristics of independent amateur music making are not the focus of most high school music ensemble classes. Characteristics of amateur music participation include: (1) creativity, (2) success being defined by the participant, (3) expressions of independent desires and ideas, (4) music usually being made in small groups or by individuals (Kratus, 2019). The characteristics of the professional (or semi-professional) classical musician include: (1) they commonly perform previously composed music (2) they get paid to perform, (3) their success is defined by audiences, evaluators, consumers, (4) their bands, choruses, and orchestras tend to be quite large (Kratus, 2019). Examining high school music classes reveals that most of them are training students to be future professionals, not amateurs (Reimer, 2003). Students in school ensembles receive no payment but are held to "extrinsic standards established by curricula and

teachers following musical scores rather than their own independent musical desires” (Kratus, 2019, p. 32). Other extrinsic sources of motivation include grades, numerical ratings, competitions and evaluations, which demonstrate that success is defined by others, as in the professional world.

### **Creativity and Musically Independent Amateurs**

A logical piece of the puzzle is the curriculum – *what* is being taught. Music education may be leaving students out because of its curricular focus on elite quality performance expertise over creativity and expressiveness. A possible cause of attrition in secondary music education could be the lack of creative activities in classrooms (Kratus, 2007, 2016; Langley, 2018). Musical amateurs regularly include creative activities in their adult music participation, but few high school classrooms put creative decisions in the hands of students (Kratus, 2019).

Although a supposedly valued part of the previous two iterations of the United States’ national music standards, most secondary music ensemble classes continue to include few creative activities such as improvisation and composition. A 2018 mixed methods study investigated the perceptions of students and teachers regarding creativity in choral classes and found that creative activities were mostly absent (Langley, 2018). Langley (2018) found that so much emphasis is placed on convergent thinking, that little class time is left to devote to creativity. Creativity makes use of divergent thinking, which involves choosing the solutions to problems which have multiple answers, while convergent thinking is problem solving that leads to one correct answer. Divergent and critical thinking are now considered staples of good educational practice, but most secondary music ensembles are just rehearsing until they find the one correct instructor-chosen answer to a composition created by a far-away or deceased composer.

Most music teachers lack the ability to effectively teach all the national standards, and subsequently habitually leave some out of their lesson plans (Byo, 1999). The most neglected (of the 1994 standards) are improvising, composing, understanding music in relation to other subjects, and understanding music in relation to history/culture (Byo, 1999). The first two are, not coincidentally, the most creativity-oriented of the standards. A 2008 study of the focus of published studies in music education saw a disparity like the one Byo found. The same standards (#3, #4, #8, and #9) were the least studied (Kruse, Oare, & Norman, et al., 2008). The research team's work suggested that "in order to more fully understand these neglected domains, more inquiry be undertaken which focuses on these particular standards" (Kruse et al., 2008, p. 59). When composing, students naturally incorporate divergent thinking, convergent thinking, and improvisation into their creative processes, and literature has pointed to the possibility that it is advantageous to apply the potential of both improvising and composing to enhance the social dimension of music learning (Chi & Chen, 2012; Koops, Hankins, Scalise, & Schatt, 2014). Composition and improvisation could be included in high school music classes in the form of pencil and paper compositions, computer-assisted composition projects, guitar classes, ukulele classes, ipad applications, improvisation games, and more. High school music teachers and professors may present the opportunities for students to explore creative skills in a nurturing social environment (Odena & Welch, 2009).

Composing activities using computers could be incorporated into music lessons. Music classes could perform student compositions in class mini concerts (Gifford & Johnson, 2015) or at evening concerts. Mellor (2008) studied computer-based composition in secondary school students, ages 13–15 years. The students used a program called *Dance eJay* to create original compositions. They found the students were excited and ready to create, despite their different

backgrounds and prior experience of formal music training. The students followed a vertical strategy of composition, meaning they composed by completing one section before moving on to the next (Mellor, 2008). Defining “creativity” in terms of divergent thinking skills and problem-solving skills, students were definitely found to be “creating” (Mellor, 2008, p. 451).

Another study of undergraduate students from three different musical backgrounds (both jazz and classical, pop, and classical), attempted to map students’ composing strategies when engaging in computer-assisted composition. Music technology was used as a refining tool, recording tool, improvising tool, and an experimental tool (Chi & Chen, 2012). “Music technology can open up new horizons of musicality if it fulfils its potential of giving people direct access to creative decision-making with sounds, storage, and the instant retrieval of sounds, along with devices to alter and refine previous decisions. This enables genuine compositional creativity” (Chi & Chen, 2012, p. 159).

The Lakewood Project is an interesting high school rock orchestra program that incorporates student composition, arrangement, improvisation, informal learning, formal learning, and student creative decision-making into weekly rehearsals. The Lakewood Project encourages student composition and arrangement and utilizes many original works of students in their performances, which are student-led with no adult conductor. When learning a new song, students are often broken into groups to work on their parts and try to improve the existing composition through improvisation, practice, and student-led dialogue. The music for The Lakewood Project is mostly chosen by students, giving them opportunity to explore their individual musical desires with their peers in an ensemble (Koops et al., 2014).

The Koops, Hankins, Scalise, and Schatt (2014) mixed methods study of The Lakewood Project reveals one to ten years after graduation, alumni of the program are much more musically

active than most people their age. 21% of survey respondents indicated they continue to perform professionally, and 50% of the respondents indicated performing non-professionally (Koops et al., 2014). 15% indicated formally educating others in music while 8% indicated educating others in music in an informal setting (Koops et al., 2014). 10% indicated composing non-professionally, and only 13% indicated that they no longer participate in music (Koops et al., 2014). Numbers like that are hard to ignore, but still the study and the program itself have some weaknesses that reduce its relevance to the music education of the population at-large. Like any survey and voluntary interviews, those who decide to participate are often the ones who feel most passionately about a topic. The survey was disseminated through a Facebook group, and although the alumni who responded had glowing reviews of the group, those who opted out of the survey (and subsequent interviews) may have very different opinions of the group. The Lakewood Project is an audition-only, after-school program for students who also take private lessons. The group also has a lot of adult help, including two music directors, a production manager, a sound technician, assistant sound technician, and a lighting designer (Koops et al., 2014). These circumstances are extremely difficult to re-create in most schools, the authors readily admit, so one must be careful to keep realistic circumstances in mind when interpreting the results.

### **Repertoire, Autonomy, and Musically Independent Amateurs**

In school, repertoire is usually chosen by the teacher, often from approved lists rather than for the students in a particular population, and decidedly more classical/folk/jazz-oriented than students' music outside of school (Kratus, 2019). A recent study (Vasil, 2019) of teachers who began including popular music and implementing informal music learning practices in their music classes found they did so because students felt “insecure in their musical abilities and disconnected from the content and pedagogy used in music classes” (p. 298). Amateur musicians

play whatever music they wish to play. As adults, few music ensemble graduates will continue to make classical music. Schools appear to be preparing students for classical conservatory-style college programs rather than for independent amateur music.

In New Zealand, teachers have a considerable amount of curricular autonomy, and many choose to include popular music in their classes (McPhail, 2013). A balance, McPhail claims, is difficult to strike between honoring students' musical interests and teaching the skills considered fundamental to the discipline of music. In a qualitative evaluation of three case studies of secondary music teachers, McPhail found that "teachers generally attempt to find a balance between affirming student interests and pre-existing skills and knowledge, which is often focused on popular music, and bringing students into contact with the collectively-developed conceptual and historical knowledge of the discipline" (McPhail, 2013, p. 9). McPhail also pointed out that his research reveals a deeper struggle between two forms of knowledge, informal and disciplinary, and the role each play in cultural transformation in schools.

In a 2016 study, West and Cremata examined an informal collegiate music ensemble. The group had a mix of traditional and non-traditional school instruments and chose their repertoire democratically. The genres they chose were rock and other contemporary genres, suggested by members of the ensemble whose instruments ranged from violin to ipad. Giving the students input regarding what repertoire they would perform affirmed students' musical tastes. One of the often-cited reasons for student dislike of school music is the repertoire, and the students in the West & Cremata study enjoyed being able to directly express themselves in ways they wanted to through repertoire they chose (West & Cremata, 2016).

Green argued that the classical/pop split can be bridged, and many genres could be included in the curriculum if informal teaching practices were to give students authentic

opportunities to experience diverse styles of music free of the delineations that come with them as school music (Green, 2006). She argued that “informal music practices within music education could offer pupils a level of autonomy from their teachers, that would increase their capacity to carry on their learning independently. Thus, this would encourage further participation in both formal and informal music-making beyond the school” (Green, 2006, p. 115). Perhaps it is not either/or but this and that. Informal music participation is irrespective of repertoire, can be used to teach any style, and is especially relevant to music learning styles that happen outside of schools. Informal music learning is fitting for small-group learning, can give students more autonomy, and can easily include creative activities.

In Allsup’s study of mutual learning in instrumental music education, he found that when students composed their own music the result was a fun, self-directed, collaborative, student-centered, personally meaningful, and self-reflective classroom environment (Allsup, 2003). After the participants split into two groups for their composition project, they chose jazz and popular music styles and although they attempted it, “group members and researcher saw classical music as unproductive for group composing or community-making” (Allsup, 2003, p. 24). The students learned from each other, not just the teacher, and there was an emphasis on interpersonal relationships and an expectation that ensemble members would take care of each other. The study, however, included almost no description of methods of data analysis, and little of data collection. The researcher was a participant in the study and recorded many conversations but did not reveal to the reader how the qualitative data was analyzed, which leaves any reader unclear as to the validity of the author’s conclusions.

Again, turning to The Lakewood Project can be informative. In addition to combining instruments usually found in rock music settings with classical orchestral instruments, The



Lakewood Project rehearsals themselves display a mix of informal and formal learning, which expands the rehearsal experiences for those accustomed to formal learning (usually classical instrument players), and those accustomed to informal learning (usually rock musicians) (Koops et al., 2014). The student-led interactions of the students from diverse musical backgrounds, and musical dialogues and compromises rendered, graduates said, are some of their most valuable experiences (Koops et al., 2014). Graduates who went on to be musicians, and those who did not, agreed that an important benefit in the program was the student-led negotiations regarding music genres, styles, and how they related to the repertoire they worked on. The benefits were both musical (expanding the musical experiences of the young people), and extra-musical (developing all students' abilities to problem-solve, negotiate, and work in a team).

### **Standard Large Ensembles**

Most high schools remain wedded to the band/chorus/orchestra large ensemble model, and use traditional school instruments, which were popular in the late 18th and early 20th centuries, rather than choosing to accommodate to students' instrument interests which include guitars, keyboards, and computer music software (Kratus, 2007, 2019, Williams, 2011). Guitars, keyboards, ipads, ukuleles, and the like, are "instruments that allow for a lifetime of musical performance and creativity and enable a performer to play alone or with others and to sing while playing" (Kratus, 2007, p. 45). The repertoire choices and ensemble structures of most American high schools insist that students play instruments that do not lend themselves to independent music participation after high school. Few adults participate in wind bands, so most of those instruments sit in the closet once school is over. That is unless a player lives close enough to and wishes to commit weekly hours to a wind band, when there exists about one wind band for every 129,000 people in the United States (Kratus, 2019).

The instruments currently used also make it difficult for students to enter high school music classes as beginners (Williams, 2011). A high school student interested in music would be rightly intimidated to join band as a sophomore with zero experience on band instruments. Not only are the instruments culturally foreign to most students, but they are difficult to learn quickly enough to play the standard ensemble repertoire in high school ensembles. Allsup wrote that fear of change and fear of loss of tradition stand in the way of band teachers embracing other instruments, and thus the 90% of the school population not in band class (Allsup & Benedict, 2008). He stated: “we are afraid to open the bandroom doors to more than what tradition tells us band should be” (Allsup & Benedict, 2008, p. 166). Embracing more instruments would make band difficult to manage, in many teachers’ estimations, which breaks with tradition and prompts teachers to rethink the relevance and transferability of the traditions that initially inspired them to go into the field (Allsup & Benedict, 2008).

Could bands accept students’ interests and adapt their repertoire and curriculum to accommodate the instruments students bring in? Through interviews with popular musicians, Green found that sustained music making often starts with curiosity about an instrument: “all the interviewees had started off by playing instruments they liked, often because they had heard them being played in ways they found inspiring, or had heard them playing music they found inspiring” (Green, 2002, p. 106). It is a tall order to ask music teachers to adapt to whatever interests students may have, especially considering their training often includes one or two methods classes in each instrument family.

Pendergrast and Robinson’s (2020) study of 827 middle and high school students’ preferences for learning conditions supports the contention that large ensembles are part of the problem with music education. The researchers queried 369 school music students, 254 students

who participate in music outside of school, and 204 nonparticipants about their preferences for teacher role, group size, repertoire in the music classroom, and their interest level for six different secondary music courses. Findings showed that “out-of-school music participants and nonparticipants had a stronger preference for small group learning and repertoire choices” (p. 264). The top four secondary music classes were piano/guitar, music composition with technology, popular music groups, and music history/theory class. The Pendergrast and Robinson study is yet another piece of evidence that many students are left out of secondary music programs.

The instruments and repertoire most high school ensembles use involve large group performance, when small group and solo music making is how independent amateur musicians usually make music (Kratus, 2019). Allsup’s 2003 ethnography of two small groups of students tasked with creating new music demonstrated how making music in small groups can be a community-building and personally meaningful activity in which students learn from each other and an instructor (Allsup, 2003). In Allsup’s influential book, *Remixing the Classroom: Toward an Open Philosophy of Music Education*, Allsup advocates for a laboratory classroom environment over the highly structured band/orchestra/chorus class. In an open laboratory, exploration takes place, new advancements can be made, new ideas forged, and new sounds found. The current ensemble model holds fast to 18th-century instruments as well as singing and playing techniques, and, he claimed is “highly structured, intricately coded, and standardized in such a way that effectively excludes novice input or learning through discovery” (Allsup, 2016, p. 67). Exploration, curiosity, and learning, he argued, take place more effectively in a laboratory, while large ensemble classes discourage exploration to keep order and prepare for

concerts and competitions. “Such control over the classroom is important in the large-ensemble model, although not necessarily conducive to the best student learning” (Williams, 2011, p. 53).

### **Competition and Extrinsic Motivation**

Kratus (2019) contended that currently our music education system is preparing students for large group competitions rather than individual enjoyment and self-motivation, leading to discontinuation of participation after graduation. In this environment, success of a music program is “determined by trophies and the ratings of judges rather than the satisfaction students take in their own musicianship and their desire to continue musical engagement on their own” (Kratus, 2019, p. 33).

Regelski argued that technical “skill drills” and class regimens that subject every student to the same repetitive drills can push students away and are unethical because they fail to consider the differences amongst students and their diverse interests (Regelski, 2012, p. 17). Drilling for technical skill “risks ‘turning off’ students who sought to study music in the expectation of acquiring the needed skills from the music itself” (Regelski, 2012, p. 17). Practice, he argued, should be a meaningful and rewarding pursuit to improve skills students have “personally discovered (p. 39) to be relevant to their success and pleasures” (p. 39).

Large ensembles, much like professional orchestras, tend to put all creative and musical decisions in the hands of the conductor. “In this design, students are most often reduced to technicians, simply carrying out the creative wishes of their music director” (Williams, 2011, p. 53). Are teachers creating beautiful sounding ensembles but just proving their own musicianship instead of that of students? Students are more motivated when they have input on decisions and feel autonomy and independence (Allsup, 2003; Kratus 2007; Regelski, 2006, 2012; Green 2002, 2006). Green’s idea of informal music takes that concept very far, advocating for bringing informal learning styles of popular musicians and community music schools into the classroom.

Green has long championed repertoire, curriculum, and pedagogy changes in music education. In her landmark 2002 book, *How Popular Musicians Learn: A Way Ahead for Music Education*, she demonstrated how an informally taught popular music learning curriculum can inspire students to make music. She stated that “One of the motivations behind this book was to contribute to calls for increased amateur participation in music-making, not only be children and school-aged young people, but carrying over into adult life” (p. 55). Her point was not only to add popular music to the curriculum, but to learn the way popular musicians learn (the informal learning process) to build their musical independence (Green, 2006).

Allsup wrote that a good mix of informal and formal learning can help operationalize popular music in the classroom but critiqued going as far as Green in her book *Music, Informal Learning, and the School* (2008), which he claimed advocated for the “disappearance of the teacher” (Allsup, 2008, p. 1). West and Cremata’s study focused on how the hospitality of a music participation context influences the meanings members constructed upon participating. When music teachers are open to student ideas and music interests, they create a hospitable learning environment, but when the teacher is not open to change an inhospitable environment is created (West & Cremata, 2016). West and Cremata encouraged blending informal and formal music learning in school: “They might harmoniously coexist, borrowing from each other depending on the contexts” (West & Cremata, 2016, p. 82).

### **Attribution Theory and Music Education**

My endeavors to find studies that have used attribution theory as a lens for examining adult participation in music ensembles generated few results. There have been many studies focused on children and adolescents. Asmus, in the 1980’s and 1990’s, pioneered the field with several studies utilizing Weiner’s attribution theory to study motivation in music.

Weiner's (1974) theory is built upon the assumption that an individual's perception of a task and the performance of the task are largely determined by their beliefs about the causes of success or failure. According to the theory, people will attribute their success or failure to categories of reasons which will influence their motivation to partake in the activity in the future. The theory consists of four major causal categories for attribution of success or failure on any achievement related task – ability, task difficulty, effort, and luck. Each of these can be categorized by an individual as either internal, meaning originating from within an individual, or external, meaning originating from outside sources. They can also be categorized as stable, meaning unchangeable and constant, or unstable, meaning influenceable by an individual. Generally, ability is categorized as internal/stable, effort is internal/unstable, task difficulty is external/stable, and luck is external/unstable.

If a person perceives they have failed at a task and believes the reason was their strategy, they are attributing the failure to internal and unstable reasons (their effort), which can be changed to perhaps find future success. If a person perceives their failure as an unchangeable aspect of their identity, they have selected an internal stable attribution, ability. When people believe they cannot improve, they are discouraged from trying again.

People often view musical ability as something one either is blessed with or not, which sadly discourages participation for many people. This would be called a stable internal attribution – ability – that does not change. Many music teachers reject this idea, believing that music performance is for everyone, not just those with the strongest performance skills. In fact, Legette's (2012) study of in-service teachers, using Asmus's Music Attribution Orientation Scale, revealed that teachers attribute effort and ability as the leading causes of student success or failure. Legette's (1998) survey study of 1,114 public school students utilized the Asmus

Music Attribution Orientation Scale as well. The students collectively “placed more importance on ability and effort as causal attributions.” (Legette, 1998, p. 102). Participants ranged in age from elementary through high school, and as students aged, they were significantly more likely to attribute success and failure to effort and ability (Legette, 1998). Legette claimed that ability attributions can be a double-edged sword, causing some to expect to fail in the future and possibly give up while motivating others toward more success.

Asmus was a trail blazer, using attribution theory to study motivations of music students. In 1986, Asmus conducted a study with 589 music students, grades four through 12, at eight different public schools. Asmus found that music students attributed much of their success and failure to internal-unstable causes. These kinds of attributions “encourage student persistence until a task has been successfully achieved” (Asmus, 1986, p. 268). Unfortunately, music students, especially older ones, tended to attribute slightly more of their results to internal-stable causes such as ability, which many believe does not change over time. Asmus’s study, as well, saw a hardening of student attributions over time. As student grade levels rose, the number of internal-stable (ability) attributions increased and the effort-related internal-unstable attributions decreased. Both Asmus and Legette found significant differences between schools, and they both believed their findings reflected more on the school and community environment than the teachers.

Richards and Durrant wrote: “Enjoyment that can be derived from the process of learning should not be overlooked in favour of perfect performances by the talented few. Educationally this is as true for children in schools as it is for adults in the community” (2003, p. 87). Can attributions be influenced by other people, such as teachers? Do they shift over time? How are

they related to achievement? If music educators wish to involve as many as possible in music, teaching with attribution theory in mind could help retention through school and into adult life. Asmus's (1986) study of music education and music therapy college students elicited findings related to motivation. A sample of 143 undergraduate and graduate music education and/or music therapy majors filled out surveys. The hypothesis was that the way persons perceive their own causes of success and failure can influence their perceptions of the same in others. Educators and therapists certainly need to know how to motivate others daily. The results indicated that the participants generally attributed the causes of their own success/failure to external and stable causes such as task difficulty. The same participants attributed the causes of the success/failure for others as internal and unstable causes such as effort. The result may seem to be human nature – people wish to protect their self-image and avoid embarrassment so they reject the possibility they could be responsible for their failure – “it was unfair!” It was, however, encouraging that the future teachers and therapists believed that others could improve through effort. If they didn't believe others could improve, teaching wouldn't make sense

Asmus and Harrison (1990) surveyed 187 nonmusic majors in college music appreciation courses. To understand relationships between musical aptitude and motivation, the researchers also subjected the participants to musical aptitude measurements. The study did not support a strong correlation between musical aptitude, sex, or academic level and motivation. The strongest motivator for involvement in music was affect for music, or the ability to feel the emotion of the music (some might call aesthetic enjoyment). Adult music ensemble participants often cited their enjoyment of the music itself as a major driving force for participation. The authors charged the music education community to capitalize on this idea and emphasize the affective aspects of music participation. “As the course progresses, instructors would need to



systematically reinforce effort-related causes for musical achievement to encourage continued striving by the students as the course material increases in difficulty” (Asmus & Harrison, 1990, p. 266).

Redman’s (2016) dissertation study using a survey and musical aptitude test did not mention attribution theory directly, but bears mention here. Redman’s hypothesis that there would be a stronger relationship of spiritual, emotional, and aesthetic motivation factors and less pronounced motivations for education and social factors to sing in adult, auditioned community choirs was confirmed. Aesthetic motivation was the primary motivator for singers to join the choir, and a lack of aesthetic beauty and truth was the most cited possible reason members would discontinue their participation. Members largely expressed a desire for challenge and agreed that some level of vocal stress is beneficial to singing. The singers were motivated to improve for aesthetic experiences believing the better they sang, the better chance they would have an aesthetic experience (Redman, 2006). The singers self-selected into four groups, dabblers, talented amateurs, semi-professionals, and professionals. The aesthetic motivator was the top reason all groups continued participating in the ensemble.

Richards and Durrant’s (2003) case study of the Can’t Sing Choir in London operationalized teaching for internal, unstable attributions. The adult singers chose to participate in an adult education course for non-singers, and in their initial questionnaire pinned their negative self-images related to singing on parents, music teachers, and even friends. They joined the ensemble with the intent to have pleasurable aesthetic experiences and to build their self-confidence. The primary fear inhibiting their singing was embarrassment, but most of them bravely pressed on to finish the course.

The director of the ensemble was a master teacher who carefully designed lessons with achievable and progressively challenging tasks causing 100% of the singers to believe they had significantly improved their singing by the end of the course. The director was encouraging but not patronizing and cultivated a belief in the singers that singing is a developmental process in which perceived failure is temporary. Singers increased their belief that they could change their voices with effort, an unstable and internal attribution. The authors argue that the experience did much to change the causal attributions of its members, allowing the members to move the causes of their failures to more external factors, like a previous teacher who may have made unhelpful negative judgements or supplied too difficult or unreasonable tasks.

This shift towards external attribution raises self-esteem and encourages a sense of pride in the achievement. Perception of controllability alters with the discovery that repeated practice does in fact improve performance, thereby removing the ‘shame’ associated with internal uncontrollable causes. Finally, creating a new history of success breeds an expectation of success and therefore a genuine sense of confidence. (Richards & Durrant, 2003, p. 86)

There are connections to the studies of music and attribution theory and Kratus’s concept of “amateurism.” Teaching for amateurism is teaching students to make music for the love of the art. The studies above, and those in question one, repeatedly reveal that people are motivated to participate in music because of their love of the experience. The words used by researchers, “affect,” “ability to feel the emotion in music,” “aesthetic experience,” and “enjoyment of the process,” all strike at similar ideas. Amateur music making encourages people to find their affective experiences in music by composing, songwriting, performing, and listening to music in styles that are personally relevant and moving to them as individuals.

Richards and Durant's (2003) study most directly reveals that teaching music for the love of the process of making music can be extremely rewarding. The participants were not seeking external rewards of grades, scores, medals, or competition victories. They were making music as amateurs, who put in effort, and even struggle, believing they can improve their skills and loving the process. Once the participants in Richards and Durrant's study were convinced they could make progress through effort they took ownership of their results, guided by a teacher who knew how to assess their ability level and raise it, they committed to loving the process.

Amateurism can help move success attributions toward more internal and unstable causes, which can encourage future participation. The focus in amateurism is on the individual's desires for music making. If taught by a sensitive teacher, in a sequential and patient manner, with attention on the individual's skills, the likelihood of blaming failures on stable, immutable causes such as ability could decrease. In ensembles it is more difficult, though not impossible, to prevent some people from being overwhelmed. Many students cannot keep up with their peers, so they blame stable attributions such as ability and never return to music. Often the difficulty of the task, as set up by the teacher, is at fault.

Professionals need not be the only people benefiting from participation. I am an amateur tennis player and play often for the love of the activity. While I desire to win my matches, I feel no shame that I could never return a serve from Roger Federer. I understand that my performance on the court is directly related to my effort in practice. For many, sports are a great way to blow off steam, but music comes with a pressure of perfection. I gain a lot of pleasure and health from an activity at which I will never excel. Can we move music education in that direction? For many, academics bring some pressure, but not nearly the pressure of performing in front of people, where a slight mistake could be humiliating in real time. Amateurs are not

concerned with being the best but are concerned with bettering themselves. Constantly comparing oneself to others drains activities of joy, which the studies above relay as a positive force for participation.

Too often, our music classes focus on the perfect performance of repertoire, comparison to other performers, perfection, and achievement. A constant hunt for professionalism, and an abandonment of amateurism, leaves most people in the dust, never to benefit from music making again. Can people's habits of attributions be changed, at least while they are in music class? It appears, with a patient teacher free from pressures of performance and comparison to others, it can be done.

### **Achievement Goal Theory and Music Education**

It is important to me that my study aims to help classroom teachers. I sincerely hope something comes from this study that can aid teachers who wish to teach for lifelong learning and inspire those who have yet to make lifelong learning a goal to consider doing so. With that in mind, I would like to examine another theory that can work in tandem with attribution theory and more specifically address teacher classroom choices. Much of this portion of the literature review is thanks to an exhaustive literature review focused on achievement goal theory in music education research by Tan and Sin (2020).

A motivational framework similar to attribution theory is achievement goal theory. In achievement goal theory, learner motivation is categorized as either mastery (task/learning) or performance (ego/ability) oriented (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Nicholls, 1984, 1989; Tan & Sin, 2020). According to this theory, there are two types of mastery-oriented learners and two types of performance-oriented learners, but people mix and match them depending on tasks and instructors. Mastery-approach goals are focused on self-improvement, improving skills, task mastery, etc. ("I want to do as well as I possibly can on this task"). Mastery-avoidance goals are

focused on avoiding embarrassment (“I do not want anybody to see me fail at this”).

Performance-approach goals center on competition with others and public accolades (“I want to succeed at this publicly and do better than others”). Performance-avoidance goals emphasize avoiding losing in competition or doing worse than others (“I just do not want to be last or the worst at this”). Learners can simultaneously utilize multiple orientations, and they generally mimic the orientations of their teachers (Anguiano, 2006).

Of all the people in the room, the teacher has the strongest impact on the classroom environment. Using achievement goal theory, several researchers have examined the motivational climates of music classrooms. Sandene’s (1997) dissertation study of 672 middle school instrumentalists found that mastery-oriented motivational climates were more likely to cause students to attribute success to their own work and performance-oriented climates may cause students to believe they will succeed whether or not they try hard. Anguiano’s (2006) study not only revealed that students mimic the perceived motivational climates created by their teachers, but also highlighted the perils of performance-avoidance goals, which Anguiano found to be negatively associated with student achievement. Lacaille, Whipple, & Koestner (2005) found that performance goal orientation in ensemble music class was counterproductive because music performers are already prone performance anxiety.

Research on verbal praise for effort versus verbal praise for talent showed that praise for effort was much more likely to lead students to elect mastery goal approaches (Droe, 2013). Droe (2013) recommended teachers give verbal praise for effort over talent (and over no praise at all) to develop mastery goal orientations which may in turn lead to persistence and enjoyment in student musicians. Mastery-oriented climates have even been found to foster stronger group cohesion and musician enjoyment than performance-oriented climates (Matthews & Kitsantas,

2007). Following the 2007 study, Matthews and Kitsantas (2013) randomly assigned college instrumentalists to rehearsal environments based on either mastery- or performance-oriented teaching styles. To ensure validity, the researchers wrote scripts for the conductors based on theoretical distinctions laid out in previous literature (Ames & Archer, 1988). Ames and Archer's study of academically gifted middle school nonmusic students indicated that "students who perceived an emphasis on mastery goals in the classroom reported using more effective strategies, preferred challenging tasks, had a more positive attitude toward the class, and had a stronger belief that success follows from one's effort" (Ames & Archer, 1988 ,p. 260). Matthews and Kitsantas's study came to a similar conclusion in music classes: "results indicated that participants in the mastery goal orientation condition reported higher levels of collective and self-efficacy beliefs and attributed the success or failure of the ensemble most frequently to the conductor's use of rehearsal strategies" (p. 630).

### **Summary**

In this literature review I first examined the values of lifelong music making. I then pointed out that there is an attrition problem in United States high school music programs that continues into adulthood. There are many traditionally proposed possible causes, which were reviewed, including: college admittance pressures, standardized testing, repertoire choices, instrument choices, a lack of creativity in the curriculum, teacher-centered classrooms, and the band/chorus/orchestra large ensemble music program model. I examined studies related to adult motivations to make music, a body of research to which I hope to add my work.

Issues related to independent musical amateurism were then explored, including tensions between teaching for independent amateur musicianship versus teaching for professionalism, repertoire choices, student autonomy, standard band/chorus/orchestra instrumentation, competition, and extrinsic motivation. I then explored the theoretical frameworks of attribution

theory and achievement goal theory as possible ways to explain music class motivations. The gap in the literature appears to be research on the sustainability of music learning after graduation. The purpose of this study was to identify the potential relationship between high school choral experiences and adult amateur musicians' current motivations to continue making music. Many studies have examined motivations of school music students in relation to these theories, but no studies have examined adult musician's perceptions of their high school chorus rooms motivational climates and their perceptions of their own motivational attributions.

### **3 METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this study was to identify the potential relationship between high school choral experiences and adult amateur musicians' current motivations to continue making music. A secondary purpose of this study was to identify the characteristics of music programs that graduate adults who continue to sing. Due to the inability to conduct a longitudinal study, I had to ask adults to think back on their past experiences with music and motivation. The theoretical framework including attribution theory and achievement goal theory and the research questions required me to gather data from adult amateur musicians who were involved in their high school choral programs, and as adults continue to take part in ensemble music making.

The overall study methodology included a selection of two ensembles with younger and older members to examine motivations at different ages and in two groups. Through a questionnaire I administered to the entirety of both ensembles I acquired details of participants' backgrounds, some of their recollections of their high schools and their high school chorus programs, and information needed to purposively select a portion of the participants for individual interviews. Through two rounds of semi-structured interviews, I gathered the

information needed to co-write with participants their musical narrative portraits. Those portraits allowed me to examine participants' lifelong motivations to make music in choruses. The participants and I co-constructed narrative portraits of their musical life stories informed by the work of Bignold and Su (2013), and Curry and Walker (2002). Data analysis for this study included reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019) of the cumulative narrative portraits through which I extracted themes. I examined those themes to identify the meaningful concepts and commonalities across the data, which I reported as findings.

My chosen research methodology reflects my strengths as a researcher and teacher and aligns well epistemologically with constructivism. Through my practical experiences researching for qualitative research classes, I found I was successful at interviewing. I am a relatable person who puts people at ease to share their thoughts, and I am a good listener. I find people's lives and choices fascinating, so their narratives never lose my interest. This study was no different, and I felt like I built meaningful connections with each participant. Epistemologically speaking, narrative inquiry aligns with constructivism in that they both refer to individuals' personal ways of making meaning and understanding the world. In individual interviews I posed questions to each participant to better understand their personal ways of understanding and learning music, and their understandings of their musical life stories based on their life experiences.

### **Assumptions**

An assumption I made was that the narrative interview is a valid form of data collection. Within the interviews, I assumed the people could consciously express the salient moments of their experiences and summarize them coherently (Creswell, 1998). I assumed that participant memories were clear enough, despite the passage of time, to reveal meaningful experiences from the past. I assumed that participants' high school chorus experiences were important enough to have some sort of impact on their adult lives. I tried to maximize my likelihood of finding



participants who felt their high school chorus was impactful by choosing those who indicated in their questionnaires that they thoroughly enjoyed high school chorus.

I also assumed that participants were honest during interviews. The benefits of lying in this situation would be, of course, dubious. I asked participants to speak about topics upon which they may have never reflected, including their chorus teacher's classroom activities, pedagogy, and curriculum. I kept in mind the participants' limited knowledge in those fields and tried to keep esoteric verbiage to a minimum.

### **Narrative Inquiry**

According to Riessman (2008), narrative data is case-based, and always tells the stories of individuals, identity groups, nations, communities, organizations, etc. Each case is unique and rich with information. These extended accounts are treated not as fragments of pieced-together information, but as units themselves. Narrative data is generalizable in a different way from statistical approaches in quantitative research. Narrative data is generalizable to theoretical propositions which are meaningfully transferable (Riessman, 2008). Mishler (1986, 1995) argued that making conceptual inferences about social processes is equally valid compared to quantitative research and has a long history in anthropology and sociology.

Bruner (1990) argued that narrative knowledge is more than mere emotional expression and is a legitimate form of reasoned knowing. He contended that human action is the outcome of the interaction of a person's previous learning and experiences, the present situation, and a person's proposed goals and purposes (Bruner, 1990). The connections people make between past, present, and future are meaningful. People think of their lives in plotted stories. Because people understand their lives in that way, it makes perfect sense for researchers to understand people's lives in the same way. Narrative inquiry also aligned with my constructivist

epistemological position for this study which refers to people making meaning of the world through their cumulative experiences within it.

I chose to use narrative inquiry because my research questions related to participants' musical life stories as seen from their perspectives. To learn about how participants felt about their past musical experiences and motivations I conducted semi-structured interviews and obtained long form, rich, narrative data from each participant. Informed by attribution theory and achievement goal theory, the questions focused on motivations and self-reflections of learning. Narrative inquiry is a process in which the researcher takes part as well. The researcher becomes part of the story, as a character who enters a story, and impacts the participant's telling of the narrative. The researcher and participant together weave the participant's narrative story, each contributing their input. My input was relevant, I hope, as I am a high school music teacher myself, and my high school music classes changed the direction of my life.

### **Participants and Delimitations**

I used purposeful sampling to select two ensembles for this study. All ensembles and individuals were given pseudonyms in public documents related to this study. Because I am a full-time teacher in a city in the Southeastern United States, I delimited my chorus selection to those in my metropolitan area. One of my goals was to be able to provide high school teachers with more in-depth knowledge of the lifelong motivations of choral singers, thus I delimited my chorus selections to ensembles that resembled typical high school choruses. Typical high school choruses are mixed (not just one sex or gender), perform a wide variety of research, are voluntary, perform sacred and secular music, and are not associated with one church or religion.

The conductor of Community Choral Guild (CCG) allowed me access to the ensemble, as did the instructor of a university's Choral Ensemble (CE), a chorus class at a large university in the southeastern United States. The two ensembles were different in several ways, but both

consisted primarily of adult amateur musicians. Some CCG singers were also music teachers, and some CE singers were music majors. CE was a campus chorus class open to students, staff, and local community members, but its membership mostly included undergraduate students. CCG was a voluntary community chorus with a much higher average age than CE. CCG required an audition to join, but CE accepted all who registered for the class. I chose an ensemble of mostly recent high school graduates (CE) and an ensemble of mostly people over 40 years of age (CCG) to provide opportunities for comparisons of differing age group's motivations. CCG had about 30 members and CE had about 70 members, although several were absent from rehearsal on the day I visited.

Several qualities of CCG facilitated my ability to answer my research questions. The singers were amateur musicians who paid to be in the group and received no compensation for their singing. Before attending a rehearsal, I spoke to the conductor about my study, and he assured me the singers would most likely be interested in participating. After attending some of one rehearsal, it was clear the singers were enthusiastic amateurs, not professionals. They were very kind and interested in helping. They took much longer to fill out the questionnaire and generally gave longer responses to the free response questions than the CE students. The ensemble met weekly on Mondays 7:30 – 9:30pm.

Several qualities of the university CE also aided me in answering research questions. The singers were almost all amateur musicians, except for a few music majors. The ensemble was mostly undergraduate students with a few community members in the group. I anticipated the average age of CE to be much lower than that of CCG, which turned out to be correct (detailed in the procedures section). Students could receive a single credit for singing in CE, and according to the questionnaires and word of mouth, several of the students in the chorus joined primarily to

get credit and satisfy a degree requirement. The class met Mondays and Wednesdays from 3 p.m. to 4:20 p.m.

When considering which choruses to choose, I had to consider several factors. Many adults take part in their worship location choruses or participate in LGBTQIA-focused groups partly, or mainly, due to religious reasons or motivations to be in groups with people they believe will make them feel welcome. I decided to avoid these groups because schoolteachers are not commonly able to focus on appealing to motivations related to religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, etc., and my hope is that the findings of this study can prove helpful to teachers in classrooms. Also, many community choruses are led by church choir directors who fill the ranks of the groups with many of the same people who originally joined their church's choir. The church directors double dip to recruit members, which could mean the singers originally joined due to religious motivations. Although Dr. Kerry Walters, director of the CCG, works at a church, he is new to the Community Choral Guild position and CCG rehearses at a different church. CE is of course affiliated with a large university in the southeastern United States and is not associated with a church or religion.

Both groups I selected were mixed, SATB ensembles. Groups centered around a single gender expression, such as Atlanta Women's Chorus or Atlanta Gay Men's Chorus, are wonderful, but ensemble members' motivations may be closely linked to those sex or gender identities, so I excluded them from the sample. Many school chorus teachers cannot populate ensembles by sex or gender and must work primarily with mixed groups, so I considered only mixed groups. There are also many choral groups formed around specific styles of music, such as barbershop or gospel music. I decided to exclude those groups because most high school chorus teachers must teach a curriculum with a wide variety of repertoire, not just one style.

According to videos and past concert programs I found online, CCG and CE performed repertoire styles like many high school groups but on a more advanced level. The repertoire they performed is predominantly but not exclusively from the Western Classical Music tradition, in several languages, and included other styles such as jazz, popular music, gospel, African American spirituals, and some non-Western Classical Music from India, Africa, South America.

Some ensembles in Atlanta perform on a professional level, such as Atlanta Master Chorale (AMC). While the ensemble members' stories would be interesting, they are not emblematic of the average high school choral graduate. Most of AMC's members studied music in college as a major or minor, and many of the ensemble's members are semi-professional or professional musicians. Members of CCG were predominantly amateurs, hobbyists who were serious about their craft, but not professional-level artists. CE was what some call the *y'all come* chorus at a large university. Although a voice placement was required, all singers were welcome, and the ensemble can swell to over 100 singers. Most high school graduates become either music listeners or amateur musicians, and very few become professional musicians (Kratus, 2006, 2019; Reimer, 2003; U.S. Department of Labor, 2020). Rather than studying professionals or semi-professionals, I chose to study hobbyists to learn what inspires them to continue participation, which could help high school teachers find effective ways to reach larger groups of people.

My selection of CCG did have disadvantages as well. Because CCG consisted of mostly White people middle-aged and older, I feared I was overrepresenting White adults who sing in choruses. The CE membership helped balance the racial make-up of the sample with a more racially diverse and much younger population. Because both groups sang mostly Western Classical Music, my study omitted the voices of ensembles that focus on other styles of music.

There are many people with whom Western Classical Music does not resonate, and high school chorus teachers must also reach them. I initially thought there would be an underrepresentation of people in their twenties, thirties, and forties, but both ensembles included several people in that age range. I left the study of groups focused on other genres and specific genres of music to another time. I also, of course, omitted the overwhelming majority of Americans who do not sing in choruses but do consider themselves musically active. Adults sing at karaoke, open mics, church, and many other venues, but do not have the interest or time to dedicate to a chorus. The many people who do not sing in choruses are deserving of future study, whether or not they took part in their high school choruses. I plan to work with amateur singers who are not in choruses in future studies.

In the procedures section below, I detailed my questionnaire respondent characteristics and purposeful sampling process. From the initial questionnaire responses, I used purposeful sampling to select persons for interviews with knowledge of the specific phenomena in question (Creswell, 2012), high school chorus and lifelong music making. Therefore, the interview participants were adult amateur choristers who also had memories of their high school chorus program. After ensuring the participants had memories of their high school choral programs, I needed to ensure they had positive experiences in those programs. Because my aim was to identify the potential relationship between high school chorus and the motivations for lifelong singing, I only selected participants who were positively motivated by their high school choruses. A study of people who sing as adults but endured negative high school experiences will have to wait.

To better understand the impact of geography, I looked for participants from rural, suburban, and urban schools. To better understand the impact of race, I searched for participants

of multiple racial backgrounds. I also endeavored to evaluate whether and how the participants' ages impacted their motivations, which led me to seek participants from wide age ranges. My selection of CCG and CE as two ensembles with different average ages aided this, but I also had to keep in mind that both groups have younger and older singers. Based on the questionnaire results, I planned to select interview participants who had a variety of motivators for participation in high school and adult choruses. I hoped to learn each of their individual stories to understand more about how their personal interests led them to participate in chorus as adults.

The participants graduated from high schools of varying sizes, and they represented diversity in geography, race, age, and motivations for singing in choruses. All six interview participants sang in their high school choruses throughout high school, although that was not a prerequisite. Many respondents wrote that they did not remember much about their high school chorus. I selected participants with clear and positive memories of high school as indicated by their open-ended questionnaire responses. Due to time and rich data generated by the methodological position of this study the sample size for interviews was six participants. I did not attempt to generalize findings to all high school chorus programs, community choruses, collegiate choruses, conductors, high school chorus teachers or students. Classroom environments, students, schools, communities, and teachers are infinitely diverse, and must be understood as such.

### **Instruments**

I created and used a preliminary questionnaire (Appendix A) with questions about singers' backgrounds. The questionnaire screened for singers who match the purposeful sampling criteria. The questionnaire included closed- and open-ended questions for the purpose of clarity, gauging participant interest, and for the opportunity for the expansion of ideas (Creswell, 2012). After demographic questions, the questionnaire included a Likert-style survey

with questions about what participants found motivating in their high school choral programs. The Likert-style questions were based on my literature review, which found the three most common motivators for adults to sing in choirs to be personal skill development and enjoyment of playing one's instrument or singing, aesthetic musical experiences, and social engagement and sense of belonging. The 20 Likert-style questions were targeted to those three motivators. My aim was to analyze the respondents' motivators and select interview participants with a variety of motivators.

If they were not in their high school's choral program, the questionnaire instructed them to answer about any other ensemble with which they previously sang and make note of it on a designated line. The open-ended questions were about participants' high schools and their high school chorus experiences. Next were questions about their high school choral classrooms related to pedagogy, motivation, achievement, and curriculum. Finally, there was a section inquiring about participants' motivations to continue singing. I added several questions at the behest of my prospectus committee, who rightfully pointed out that, when given the opportunity, I may as well gather as much information as would be reasonable. Although the questionnaire gathered a lot of information, even from those who were not in their high school choruses, in this study I only reported the results that were directly related to my purposeful sampling process. The analysis of the other information may prove useful in my future research.

After phase one was complete, I examined the questionnaire results to narrow the down the group to six participants for interviews. I calculated mean scores for each Likert-style survey question, setting strongly disagree as one (1) and strongly agree as five (5). I decided to call this score the *enthusiasm factor*. To increase internal consistency and catch any respondents who absent mindedly filled out the questionnaire, I included several questions that were negatively



worded counterparts of the other questions. For those questions, I flipped the scores to the opposite values, to ensure one overall mean for each respondent's questionnaire. I checked the questionnaire's reliability by performing an internal consistency calculation using Cronbach's coefficient alpha. The Cronbach's alpha scores were 0.80 for CCG, and 0.96 for CE, which displayed the questionnaire had good internal consistency (Gliem & Gliem, 2003). I kept the questionnaire results for those who indicated they were not in high school chorus, but I did not consider them for interviews. Their data will be of use in my future research.

The questions in the Likert-style survey were related to different motivators, based on the commonly cited motivators for choral singing found in my literature review: personal skill development and enjoyment of playing one's instrument or singing, aesthetic musical experiences, and social engagement and sense of belonging. I selected phase two participants who displayed clear memories of their high school chorus programs in the open-ended questions, and whose Likert-style surveys had high mean scores for positive high school experiences. I chose participants for interviews who valued different aspects of their high school chorus experiences, detailed later in this chapter. I contacted participants via the email addresses they supplied in the questionnaires. All participants responded and completed all phases of the study.

For phase two, I interviewed the selected participants in two rounds of semi-structured, individual interviews using the semi-structured, individual interview guide (Appendix B) I created to keep my interviews on topic. The interview guide I created was informed by attribution and achievement goal theories. As participants led me through their musical life stories, I asked questions about motivations and attributions. I asked whether their teachers invested energy and focus, mastery- or performance- goals. I asked them why they did what they did, and to what they attributed both the success of their ensembles and their personal successes,

effort, luck, ability, or task difficulty. At their request, I met five of the six participants over Zoom and one participant in person. In the first interviews, we focused on high school and high school chorus. After the interviews, I watched the recorded footage, transcribed the interviews, and jotted down ideas for possible themes in my field notes. I also made note of topics I felt needed more attention in the second interview. I scheduled the second interviews one to three weeks after the first interviews to allow time to reflect, analyze, and prepare.

In the second round of interviews, we focused on participants' life after high school and their adult musical activities. Afterwards, I transcribed those interviews, took notes, and moved on to writing narrative portraits. The narrative portraits took weeks to complete and were difficult to write. I emailed the participants first drafts and asked them to read them. I asked them to contribute to the portraits and point out what I may have left out, to ensure the finished product was as fair, accurate, and collaborative as possible. The participants all responded to my emails, however only one participant made significant contributions to the narrative portrait. In general, the participants corrected small details that we missed. They all expressed satisfaction with the finished products.

## **Procedures**

The study had two phases, moving from the full ensembles to two rounds of individual interviews.

### ***Phase One***

In phase one, I visited the ensembles to administer the preliminary questionnaire and informed consent document (Appendix C). In the informed consent document, I also asked whether they would be willing to take part in further interviews. Both conductors stopped rehearsal early and gave me the floor for about 20 minutes of rehearsal time. I introduced myself, described the study, and administered the paper questionnaires and consent forms. I explained

that participation was completely voluntary. I also explained that everyone was free to discontinue study participation at any time or not participate at all. In both ensembles, everyone participated in phase one, although several respondents in CE left most of the questionnaire blank.

I had considered restricting participation to just those who took part in their high school choruses but decided against it. My advisor and I decided it could be useful to ask participants about their previous choral music experiences, no matter the venue. The data may not directly apply to my current topic but could prove useful in the future. That was a good decision because both ensembles had several members who never sang in high school choruses, had only participated in church or community groups, or had never been in a chorus at all. In CE ( $n = 58$ ), 16 of the 58 respondents did not take chorus in high school, and in CCG ( $n = 23$ ), nine of the 23 respondents did not take chorus in high school. Interestingly, 10 CE singers were in a chorus for the very first time. Several people raised their hands asking what to write if they had never been in their high school chorus. I asked them to write the type of the chorus they had sung in on a designated line near the Likert-style questions. I asked the singers who were in their very first chorus to answer the questions about the current chorus they were in.

Immediately following the completion of the questionnaires, I entered the questionnaire results into an Excel spreadsheet on a password-protected, dedicated external hard drive under lock and key and destroyed the papers in a shredder. On that same hard drive, I created a key to link participants' identities with their pseudonyms and study data. When the study is completed, I will permanently delete all information that could be used to identify participants.

I calculated the Cronbach's coefficient alpha for each ensemble's questionnaire results and found the questionnaire to be reliable. I examined the questionnaire results to narrow down

the group to four to eight participants for interviewing. I decided on six interview participants, three from each ensemble. I selected participants with some of the highest mean scores on the questionnaire, I called the enthusiasm factor. I also strove for diversity in age, race, sex, motivations, and geographical background, detailed later in this chapter. Finding a satisfactory amount of diversity, I contacted the participants via the email addresses they write in the questionnaires.

### **Questionnaire Results**

Of the respondents who completed the questionnaire ( $N = 81$ ), all were adults ranging in age from 18 to 83 with an average age of 35. The average age of CE ( $n = 58$ ) was 24, and the ages ranged from 18 to 78. The average age of CCG was 62, and the ages ranged from 37 to 83. CE ( $n = 58$ ) included 32 respondents who had been in their high school choruses, 7 respondents who had never been in any chorus before, and 19 respondents who did not participate in high school chorus but did have prior choral experience (middle school, elementary school, college, home school, or church). CCG ( $n = 23$ ) included 14 respondents who had been in their high school chorus and 9 who did not participate in high school chorus but did have prior choral experience, and zero respondents who were in their first chorus ever.

Because I was looking for interview participants who had been in high school chorus, I also calculated the questionnaire means (enthusiasm factors) only for those who affirmed that they had participated in their high school choruses (see Table 1). The other respondents had answered questions about other ensembles, which would not tell me about the overall enthusiasm for high school choral programs. The mean score for the 29 CE respondents who were in high school chorus and answered all the Likert-style questions (3 respondents did not fill out that portion of the questionnaire) was 4.14. The standard deviation of the averages was 0.96, which showed that most respondents had high regard for their high school programs. In CCG, the mean score for

those respondents who were in high school chorus was 4.51. The standard deviation of the averages was 0.64, which showed the CCG members had even higher regard for high school experiences. Cronbach's alpha scores were also quite high, showing the questionnaire had high reliability.

**Table 1**

***Ensemble Questionnaire Statistics, Including Only Those Who Took High School Chorus***

Ensemble	Took HS chorus <i>n</i>	<i>M</i> age	Questionnaire <i>M</i> (Enthusiasm factor)	<i>SD</i> of questionnaire <i>M</i>	Cronbach's $\alpha$
Choral Ensemble	29	24	4.14	0.96	0.94
Community Choral Guild	14	60	4.51	0.64	0.86
Total/Overall	43	36	4.26	0.89	0.94

*Note.* The questionnaire was scored 1 to 5 where 1 represented the lowest motivation and 5 the highest motivation, the *enthusiasm factor*.

In Table 2, I detailed more information about the respondents who had taken high school chorus. I categorized the Likert-style questionnaire results into three groups, which, based on my literature review were likely to be the most likely motivators for participation in adult choirs. I calculated the Cronbach's alpha for each group of questions for each ensemble, and in total.

**Table 2**

***Motivators by Ensemble, Including Only Those Who Took High School Chorus***

Ensemble	Aesthetic musical experiences-related questions	Personal skill development and enjoyment of singing-related questions	Social engagement and sense of belonging-related questions
CE ( <i>n</i> = 29)			
<i>M</i>	4.17	4.18	3.98
<i>SD</i>	0.94	0.96	1.02
Cronbach's $\alpha$	0.90	0.88	0.81

CCG ( $n = 14$ )			
<i>M</i>	4.60	4.41	4.43
<i>SD</i>	0.52	0.68	0.71
Cronbach's $\alpha$	0.66	0.67	0.54
Total ( $N = 43$ )			
<i>M</i>	4.31	4.25	4.12
<i>SD</i>	0.85	0.89	0.96
Cronbach's $\alpha$	0.89	0.85	0.79

I worked to narrow down my respondents to four to eight people for interviews. My first selection criteria were positive and clear memories of high school chorus, for which I ranked the participants in order from most to least positive and clear. I also selected for a diversity of age, which came easily due to the mean ages of the two ensembles. I selected for a diversity of gender. Males in CE were outnumbered 46% to 54% and 30% to 70% in CCG. It was important to me that my sample feature racial diversity. Both the ensembles in my study were predominantly White, which made me concerned that the sample would not be very representative of American choral populations or Atlanta populations. Because I left self-identified race as an open-ended question, I received many different responses. There were very few respondents who identified Hispanic or Latino, and 23% of respondents either responded “other” or left the self-identified race question blank. 65% of the respondents in CCG answered that they were White or Caucasian, and 26% answered N/A, human, other, or left the question blank. However, most people would likely look at the ensemble and assess the ensemble as more than 65% White. I also tried to find respondents who attended rural, suburban, and urban high schools of varying sizes. Rural schools were the least represented and suburban schools were the most represented. I organized responses on school population sizes into three groups, with the middle range of 500 – 2,000 as the most common response (41%).

**Table 3**

### *Characteristics of Questionnaire Respondents*

Characteristic	All respondents (%)	Choral Ensemble (%)	Community Choral Guild (%)
Self-identified gender			
Female	58	46	70
Male	41	54	30
Non	1	2	0
Self-identified race			
White/Caucasian	43	34	65
Black/African American	21	26	9
Human, Other, no response	23	22	26
Hispanic/Caucasian, Asian-American, South Asian, API, Indian, Mixed, Southeast Asian, Hispanic, or Latino	>1each	>3 each	0
High school community			
Suburban	47	45	52
Urban	22	22	22
Rural	10	10	9
Other/answers unclear	9	7	13
No response	12	16	4
Characteristic	All respondents (%)	Choral Ensemble (%)	Community Choral Guild (%)
High School Population Size			
<500	24	19	39
500-2,000	41	36	52
>2,000	15	21	0
Other/unclear	6	5	9
No response	14	19	0

### **Interview Sample**

I was pleased to find a rather diverse sample of singers who were enthusiastic about their high school choral experiences, especially considering many of the questionnaire respondents indicated they were not willing (45 out of 81) to participate in interviews. As the Table 4

describes, my interview sample featured diversity in age (19 to 62), race (two White, three Black/African American), gender (three females, three males), and geographical background (one rural, one urban, and four suburban). Schools ranged in size from 200 students to over 3,000 with one private school. Steve attended a private Baptist school with a small student body of 200.

**Table 4**

*Characteristics of Interview Participants*

Name (Ensemble)	Age	Gen der	Self-reported race or ethnicity	School community	Approx. school size	Questionnaire <i>M</i> (Enthusiasm factor)
Adrian (CE)	19	M	White	Suburban	3,000+	4.5
Katherine (CCG)	51	F	-	Urban	1,400	4.2
Mila (CE)	20	F	Black	Suburban	1,500	4.6
Phyllis (CCG)	62	F	African American	Suburban	1,000	5
Rita (CE)	60+	F	African American	Rural	400–500	4.95
Steve (CCG)	45	M	Caucasian	Suburban	200	4.35

I knew, based on the questionnaires, that I found two suitable candidates who identified as Black or African American (Rita and Phyllis). I also found two candidates who identified as White or Caucasian (Adrian and Steve), and two who left that part of the questionnaire blank (Mila and Katherine). Later Mila said she usually identifies as Black but uses the terms Black and African American interchangeably. Although Katherine never claimed a race, most people would categorize her as White/Caucasian based on her appearance. Although my sample only featured two races, I was satisfied that several perspectives would be represented.

I wanted to avoid homogenous responses to questions regarding motivation. I did not want to interview six interview participants similar mindsets, all motivated by the same factors. I therefore also attempted to ensure a diversity of motivators, while acknowledging that my



knowledge was limited to their short answers on questionnaires. The questionnaires signaled that the participants were most prominently motivated by a range of factors, including competition (Rita, Phyllis), aesthetic experiences (Katherine, Phyllis), relationships (Steve, Adrian, Phyllis), and skill development (Rita, Mila). I detailed some of the most telling answers in Table 5, including three of my interview participants' responses to questions about high school and adult choral singing. Table 6 includes the enthusiasm factor scores for each interview participant, divided into the three motivational factors from my literature review. Although Katherine's and Steve's overall enthusiasm factor scores were lower than the average in CCG, they remembered much of their high school programs, Katherine offered an urban perspective and Steve seemed very motivated by relationships, which diversified my interview sample.

**Table 5**

*Some Motivation-Related Responses of Interview Participants*

Name (Ensemble)	What did you enjoy most about your HS chorus program?	Why do you continue to sing in chorus?	What do you enjoy most about your current chorus?
Adrian (CE)	Being a member of a community	It is a requirement for my major. Otherwise, I would have stopped after high school. That being said, I'm glad I'm here!	I like being around the same people consistently & having a stress-free class.
Katherine (CCG)	The music	I love to sing	Singing w/ my kid
Mila (CE)			It keeps me musically sharp.

	we were a show choir as well as a traditional choir. So, my favorite part was performing in our annual spring concerts	I don't ever want to lose my skills. Singing and just music in general are one of those things that you lose if you don't use	
Name (Ensemble)	What did you enjoy most about your HS chorus program?	Why do you continue to sing in chorus?	What do you enjoy most about your current chorus?
Phyllis (CCG)	The musicals, holiday and competition	It's in my DNA	Everything! Music is life!
Rita (CE)	The competition and the beautiful sounds we made. The relationships and friendships	I want to keep learning and to keep my voice in a good quality for performance	I love Choral Ensemble It helps me keep my voice with good quality, gives me ideas of how to sing properly, and confidence to keep singing. I continue to learn new things and reinforce others.
Steve (CCG)	The experiences, friends + travel.	Appreciation of the education given	Fellowship with others with a common interest

**Table 6*****Motivation-Related Means of Interview Participants***

Name	Aesthetic musical experiences-related questions <i>M</i>	Personal skill development and enjoyment of singing-related Questions M	Social engagement and sense of belonging-related questions <i>M</i>
Adrian (CE)	4.6	4.25	5.0
Katherine (CCG)	4.4	4.0	4.0
Mila (CE)	5.0	4.88	4.4
Phyllis (CCG)	5.0	5.0	5.0
Rita (CE)	5.0	5.0	4.8
Steve (CCG)	4.4	4.0	4.6

The participants I chose were closer to professional than had anticipated. One participant was a music technology major in college (Adrian), and two participants had semi-professional music careers (Phyllis and Rita). One recorded an album of original songs and even made a few music videos for YouTube (Rita). The other was a paid church music minister with a long career of many paid gigs (Phyllis). However, thankfully none of the participants were full-time musicians; all had day jobs (or were students) separate from their musical endeavors. I felt that the amateurs involved in my study fit Regelski and Kratus's (2019) definition of people who enjoy a hobby even when it requires "strenuous effort" (Regelski, 2006, p. 31). From the beginning, interview participants knew they would receive no benefit more than a stroll down memory lane, but all of them participated to the end of the process.

### ***Phase Two***

I interviewed the selected participants in two rounds of semi-structured, individual interviews. I confirmed with participants that they understood informed consent document (Appendix C) they signed during phase one. I used my interview guide (Appendix B) to ensure I remained focused on answering the research questions for the study. In the first interview I focused on the participants' high school music experiences, and in the second I focused on their post-high school music experiences in alignment with Riessman (2008), who recommended conducting multiple interviews with each person given time to reflect between. Immediately following each interview and whenever I worked on the project, I made field notes of my thoughts and observations. I wrote down possible themes and ideas for further questions.

After each interview I was able to download the Zoom recordings and upload the information to Otter software. Because there were no technical difficulties, I immediately deleted the videos from my phone. Immediately following the interviews, I uploaded the files to a

password-protected, dedicated external hard drive under lock and key and deleted them permanently from my laptop. My phone and laptop are also password protected. The only interview with technical difficulties was the second interview with Katherine. Katherine was the only participant who wished to meet in person rather than over Zoom. At the second interview, my laptop's battery died during the interview. Luckily, everything was recorded on my phone, and I was able to upload the file to Otter when I got home. I deleted the incomplete file from my laptop.

I transcribed the interviews with the help of the Otter application. To ensure the transcriptions were correct, I watched the video recordings and edited the transcriptions, noting laughter, long pauses, and any other meaningful utterances or facial expressions. Sometimes Mila answered with facial expressions rather than words. I had to stop the videos many times and rewind them to write verbatim accounts. I noted laughter and other relevant utterances using parentheses. I saved the interview transcriptions to my external hard drive and deleted them from my laptop. I listened to and read the interviews several times, considering possible themes, connections, further questions, and characteristics of each participant's story. Based on my observations of the interview footage of the first round of interviews, I added questions to my list for the second round of interviews, specific to each participant's story. I scheduled one to three weeks between the interviews to allow time to reflect, analyze, and prepare. Most interviews were between one and two weeks apart. Mila's second interview had to be postponed about three weeks after her first interview because of her final exam schedule.

In the second round of interviews, I asked some follow-up questions to probe for details I noticed were missing in the first round of interviews. In the second interviews, we talked about college, post-college life (when applicable), and the choruses in which the participants currently

sing. I reflected on those transcripts as well, took notes, and then moved on to writing narrative portraits.

### **Interview Procedures**

Riessman (2008) recommended power sharing, which is following the participant down whatever path they wish to go. Sometimes the participants followed unexpected tangents. Rather than strictly turning the conversation back to the scripted questions, I tried to be attentive, empathetic, and asked more questions about the topics participants are interested in talking about. One interview went places I did not anticipate. Phyllis and I talked a lot about race and power, and I followed her wherever she wanted to go with it. It was her story and I tried to help her tell it and related it back to high school chorus when possible. I was disappointed at how people had treated her throughout her life, based on her race. As Riessman (2008) said to do, I began interpreting the data during the interviews, and even thought about how I might take ideas back to my classroom.

Reissman (2008) argued that narratives do not exist as data alone but must be interpreted. The interpreting researcher will always bring their experiences to the interpretive lens as well, so although the findings may be generalizable, the interpretive meaning gleaned from the data will always be, to some degree, unique. The interpretive act is what makes the research important, therefore the author must reveal some details about him/her/their-self to earn the trust of the reader. When I visited the ensembles, I told them I was a high school chorus teacher, doctoral candidate, and singer. In interviews I answered all questions addressed to me. The interviews felt natural, purposeful, and conversational. I told each participant about myself when appropriate and shared some information about my life with them. With Rita, I told her I was sad that few of my students sang in choruses after high school. Mila and I both went to a fine arts magnet program in our high schools, so we talked about what our experiences were like. Steve invited

me to come to his church's Christmas concert. In the 1970's Phyllis attended the school at which I now teach, so we talked about the school and the community at length. I gave her a Zoom tour of my chorus room, which was part of a building project to which she donated. Adrian and I talked a lot about empathy and how music can make us better people. I complemented him on his wisdom which was far beyond his 19 years of age.

Riessman also recommended generating detailed interviewee accounts rather than brief answers. I allowed participants to speak as much as they pleased, and mainly spoke up to ask clarifying questions or to egg them further down their road of narration. I gave participants time for silence after each answer to allow them time to think of anything else they might want to mention. Sometimes I let the silence persist, and sometimes I asked if participants could say anything more on topics. Rita had some short answers and I probed her with several further questions.

Riessman recommended co-constructing the narrative with the participants, so I contributed my ideas along the way. I helped the participants walk through their stories and encouraged them to reflect on reasons they felt specific ways about music, people in their lives, their musical skills, and their learning styles. Like other narrative researchers (King & Pringle, 2018), I saw participants as co-researchers, writing and considering their stories with me. Compared to my qualitative research classes, I was more talkative. I confirmed understanding and attention with frequent affirmative utterances. The interviews I conducted in person felt the most natural. I was able to read Katherine's body language and facial expressions better than those of the video conference participants. At the end of each of the interviews I felt closer to Katherine and felt like I had made a friend. In person I asked more follow up questions and felt

more comfortable brainstorming ideas. When meeting virtually, there is always the issue of latency, so I felt less comfortable speaking up.

The responsibility of the researcher is to develop or discover a plot that displays the links among the data elements as parts of unfolding development culminating in some kind of conclusion (Polkinghorne, 1995). I looked at the transcripts to understand them individually, as musical life stories meaningfully moving between events through time. I then attempted to make links among the data, my interpretive meanings of the participants' stories. I listened to and read the transcripts several times to understand the events in the participants' lives related to their unique musical motivations. With the participants, I put each together as its own unique narrative, with my voice helping give context to their words from the interviews. To ensure the participants' voices were in the foreground, I used many interview quotations.

### **Narrative Portrait Writing Process**

Writing the narrative portraits proved extremely difficult. I felt terrible as I started writing because each time I wrote something I felt I was failing to capture the completeness of a participant. I felt I had gotten to know each of them well. They had vulnerably shared important parts of their lives with me. Some of them told me intimate things about their families, their feelings, death, pain, and suffering. I did not want to misrepresent anybody. I did not want to put them in a box or reduce them to a statistic with a conclusion. I wanted to tell their stories with integrity and kindness and felt I could not simplify their lives to a few pages of pixelated paper. I desperately wanted to avoid labeling them in any ways they would not want. I tried my best to put myself in their shoes and think about how each word I wrote would make me feel if someone wrote it about me.

I felt very shy to write but started writing anyway. I typed and deleted my work many times. I decided the best I could do was to stay laser-focused on issues related to their musical

lives. I realized I did not have to tell their life stories, just their musical stories. I wrote, tailoring the narrative portrait to the musical story of each of them, knowing that if I got something wrong, they would correct me in their revisions. I tried to remain as true as possible without overstepping and making assumptions about them from my perspective. I learned from the process by writing something, then reading it, then writing again until I felt that I had been fair, honest, and only wrote what I knew to be true.

To write the portraits I listened to the interviews while reading the transcripts. To keep the study's purpose and research questions in mind I typed them in a sticky note file right next to the transcripts. As I listened and read, I looked back and forth, searching for relevant interview text related to the questions. After reflecting on my conversations with the participants and my field notes, I had a good idea of the experiences, people, and concepts that were most meaningful to them. I read the transcripts and noted when comments were meaningfully related to participants' musical stories and the research questions. I took quotes and copied and pasted them into another file. I wanted to keep large blocks of participant text intact, so I kept sentences and paragraphs and threw out little. I titled each quote with a few words or sentences to describe the moment or concept within.

After accumulating large document files full of quotes and my own short descriptions, I went through that material again, this time limiting information to only the most relevant. Some of the interviews veered onto tangents and hurdled across timelines. The quotes and descriptions were not chronological. I wanted the information in the narrative portraits to be as chronological as possible, so I put them in order the best I could. I then tried to weave the quotes together into a story by filling in the gaps between with my summative words.



After I completed the first draft of the portraits, I emailed the participants to ask them to contribute their ideas. I told them I wanted to tell their stories with integrity and accuracy, and to portray them as they saw themselves. I asked them to be honest with me and let me know if I needed to change anything. All participants responded, although only one appeared to spend significant time editing the portrait. Rita responded with many grammatical notes and some fact corrections. I gladly made the changes and emailed her back. We sent three revisions back and forth before reaching the final version.

The other five participants wrote me back but changed little of what I wrote. Three of them asked me to make some very small changes. All participants approved the final drafts of the portraits. Phyllis and Steve said I did a good job and did not want to change anything. Phyllis wrote to me:

Blessings to you Mr. FitzStephens!

I believe that you have captured my experiences and I thank you so very much. May the Lord bless you and give you the desires of your heart as pursue your dreams and aspirations. Congratulations in advance. (Phyllis, personal communication, February 28, 2022)

### **Analysis Procedures**

I created narrative musical life stories with participants using many of the participants' own words that were intended to be good faith representations of their thoughts and especially their motivations to participate in choruses. I ensured validity by allowing the participants to check the transcripts, co-write the narratives with me, and approve the final narratives to ensure portrayals were fair and correct.

I analyzed the narrative portraits using reflexive thematic analysis, which I describe in detail in Chapter Five, a method demarcated by Braun & Clarke (2006) and clarified in their

2019 article. “Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). To use thematic analysis correctly, Braun and Clarke argued that researchers must make their epistemological and other assumptions explicit. The epistemology I chose guided me through my analysis of the data and informed the way I theorized meaning. Locating my thematic analysis in constructivist epistemology, I identified themes within the narrative portraits that were personally meaningful to the participants and reflected their understandings based on their life experiences. With research questions always in mind, I identified, analyzed, and reported the patterns of meaning within the data. As a co-creator of the narrative portraits, I noted that I bring myself and my background to the data and the data analysis.

### **Crystallization**

“Crystallization provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial, understanding of the topic. Paradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know” (Richardson, 2000, p. 934). The analysis of my data sources (questionnaires, field notes, interviews, codebook, and narrative portraits) contributed many perspectives toward crystallization. I wrote up analysis and included evidence – in the writing – of research being treated as a deliberative process, one that involves decisions related not just to design and method, but ontology, epistemology and methodology, and rationales for these, individually and collectively. Knowingness demonstrates engagement with research as a thought-out adventure, rather than simple ‘recipe following’ activity. (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p. 591)

I detailed the findings in an organized chapter following the narrative portraits. I examined themes not only within each participant’s story, but themes across all participants as

well. Finally, I considered themes related to the participant's ensembles, ages, backgrounds, and any other meaningful and relevant data acquired through the study. In my implications section, I related my conclusions back to the high school classroom and provided some ideas teachers wishing to motivate students toward lifelong music making

### **Boundaries**

I must acknowledge several boundaries of my study. I cannot use this study to create a one-size-fits-all curriculum for high school chorus or generalize participants' motivations to all choral singers. Although I am satisfied that I strove for depth rather than breadth, my sample size and characteristics delimited the scope of my study. My ( $n = 6$ ) interview design was never intended to be generalizable but not all research has to be. I examined the musical life stories of six adults who, after enjoying their high school chorus experience, continued singing in adult choruses. The ages of the singers were 19, 20, 45, 51, 60, and 60+. None of the participants were aged 21–44, or over 70. All participants were either Black/African American or White/Caucasian, with no other races or ethnicities represented.

Additionally, the singers I selected all sing in choruses. Not only do they sing in choruses, but they sing in choruses that perform similar repertoire to that of most high school choruses. I did not attempt to study singers who were in high school chorus and continued to sing as adults in non-choral venues. There are surely millions of people who sing at home, play guitar, sing karaoke, write songs, and make music in myriad ways. I also did not study singers who abstained from high school choral experience but joined choruses as adults. These are both populations worthy of study and from whom more can be learned about promoting lifelong learning. Even within the choral music genre there are many other venues where adults can sing, church choirs, gospel choirs, barber shop groups, etc., all of which could yield different results.

At least five of the six interview participants appear to have participated in well-funded and successful high school chorus programs. For example, as I detail in Chapter Four, five of their programs took trips, five attended competitions, and two had multiple teachers in the room. All the participants expressed admiration and appreciation for the sounds their choruses made and the opportunities their choral programs provided. Many American students do not have access to successful, well-funded programs, or to such traditional choral environments. This study focused on adults who were successful in traditional high school choral environments which contributed to their inspiration to sing in adult ensembles. This study did not investigate the impacts of high school programs on students who were not successful in those environments or who did not have access to those kinds of environments. Adults who did not feel successful or interested in their high school music programs are worthy of study. Although I did not study people who vacated school chorus programs, perhaps my study can aid educators by further developing our collective understanding of how to effectively reach more students in chorus classes.

Because we do not have access to another person's unmediated experience (Riessman, 2008), narrative analysis is by nature imperfect. I cannot enter their experience and live as them. When oral data is transformed into written for interview transcripts and for interpretation the experience is not fully captured. We are only seeing the shadows on the wall of the cave and must know that before going too far with our conclusions. To minimize this problem, and to avoid colonizing the data with my own voice (McCormack, 2000a), I included many of the participants' own words in the presentation of findings in Chapter Four.

#### **4 Narrative Portraits**

### **Adrian's Narrative Portrait**

Adrian attended a middle to upper class suburban high school with an active choral program. He entered the program as an unsure, moderately interested freshman singer and exited the program as an enthusiastic leader amongst his peers. He took his first high school chorus class because he had sung in his middle school chorus, and he needed a fine arts credit. At first, he had moderate interest in high school choral singing. Adrian's parents encouraged his involvement in music and always came to his performances to show their support:

I did choir in middle school and then went on to continue for my fine arts credit choir in high school, but I always like to sing after a certain point. And so it was something that I enjoyed doing. Despite I think it being the easy, fine art class that everyone just kind of went into because they needed the credits. And a lot of people dropped out, but I continued and ended up doing like the higher classes that were available (Recorded interview, December 2, 2021, Lines 58 – 62)

Adrian started enjoying chorus when he was in 10<sup>th</sup> grade when he started making friends with his fellow singers. In the auditioned chorus, Adrian felt much more a part of a community of like-minded students interested in making high quality music.

So you kind of go along with the the popular opinion when your 14, 15 and you kind of get swept up in like the you know "music's not for me. I just don't take it seriously," or whatever. But I think when I started making friends at the concerts, I started to enjoy it a lot more. And it became kind of like a community for me or I, you know, became a part of that community, which was really, really influential on my eventual choice to become a music major and you know, doing three choirs my senior year because I never would have imagined doing that my, my freshman year, that's for sure. (Recorded interview, December 2, 2021, Lines 87-93)

In addition to that, there was another emphasis placed on like, teamwork, like, she would talk a lot about how we're a family, even when it was the non audition choir with a lot of people who didn't care. It was still a family. And it was like, which I definitely felt. I felt like chorus was my community. When I went to that room, it was kind of like, you know, this was, this was my class where I get to relax and like not worry about, like, all the assignments that I didn't do the night before. I would get to go in and be like, Okay, now I'm with my friends, and I just sing, it's good. (Recorded interview, December 2, 2021, Lines 424-429)

Adrian started making music outside of class as well, with friends from chorus class. He and a friend started writing and recording songs using computer software, guitars, and their voices. After high school, Adrian released an album of original songs. The wide array of music he listened to and performed in chorus ignited his curiosity, prompting him seek out more diverse styles of music outside of class. He even used a music reading practice example as inspiration for a song he wrote.

And I kind of, you know, as I was learning how to produce just by producing, started experimenting a lot and like doing different stuff with my sound and so whoever I was listening to at the time, I would draw from them and I was into all different types of music I was listening to classical pieces that I would find through choir, I was listening. And you know, just from going to, to classical concerts. (Recorded interview, December 2, 2021, Lines 255-259)

Over the four years of high school, Adrian's chorus teacher grew into more and more of a mentor. In his 10<sup>th</sup> grade year, Adrian spoke individually to the chorus teacher to acquire a

recommendation for AP Music Theory class. Adrian's teacher took notice of his extra interest in music and Adrian's involvement in music increased.

And so I ended up taking AP Music Theory, my junior year of high school, and it increased my interest in choir and what we were doing by a tremendous amount, because now I went from being a kid who made music and, you know, people kind of knew as like a SoundCloud rapper, to someone who was a huge theory nerd, and knew more than everybody else in this non audition choir. (laughter) And got really excited about it. So I think my relationship with her grew from there. (Recorded interview, December 2, 2021, Lines 206-211)

Adrian's chorus teacher encouraged his musical endeavors inside and outside of school. She played his original songs for class and gave him private feedback when he sent her his recordings. He felt seen, and because he respected her exceptional musical skills, he respected her opinions on his music. Adrian also found the choral program's accompanist supportive and inspiring. He even wrote his favorite song while taking a vocal lesson at her house.

It is just really awesome how she encouraged my music, exploration, and, you know, bolstered my love for classical music and different genres. So, I think we had a, we had a stronger relationship towards the end of high school and she is the reason why I went on to, you know, do music in the capacity that I'm doing now. (Recorded interview, December 2, 2021, Lines 213-220)

Adrian's chorus teacher played a lot of music for her classes. She put effort into teaching the students how to appreciate quality performances and compositions. She engaged her chorus classes in discussions about the music they were performing. She taught her classes about the backgrounds of the composers, and the historical and cultural contexts of the pieces they were

performing and listening to. She helped students build personal connections to the music they were preparing for performance. Adrian loved many of the pieces the teacher chose, and still knows his parts.

And we would sometimes listen to pieces that she wanted us to check out from other choirs. And sometimes she would like talk about, I think she would always kind of talk about whatever piece we were going to learn before we started because she always wanted us to have a background or connect to the music that was a big thing with her as she wanted us to have a connection to what we're singing, which is a huge, huge influence on the way I make music today, (Recorded interview, December 2, 2021, Lines 229-233)

Adrian's chorus years always ended with a pops concert, in which the choruses performed choral arrangements of popular music, which added style diversity repertoire of the choral curriculum. His chorus teacher wanted students to perform music they found personally meaningful, especially at the pops concert. If students wanted to do a piece that had not yet been arranged for chorus, the chorus teacher would commission piece of music to be written for them. Most schools are not able to afford such activities, which Adrian now realizes and appreciates as exceptional.

Today, Adrian strives to empathetically understand the performers and composers of music. He loves songs from cultures different from his own and looks to always perform works by other people honestly and reverently. He is very interested in the languages of the world. His chorus teacher chose repertoire from many languages and cultures and educated the students about the backgrounds of the works. He strives to make his performances expressive and sincere.



When he performs songs he wrote in the past, he looks to emulate the emotional place he inhabited when he wrote them.

But when I'm trying to, like, emulate a past version of myself, or you know, if I'm writing a song, that's like a story, that's not real. I try to act and like, get into that emotion. So I definitely, like a lot of that comes from from choir of like getting into the piece. And like, feeling what, because that was my first experience. Like, I've, I've done acting in the past, but never like musical theater, only regular theater. And so, you know, that was something that I first learned in choir was like, your face should look a certain way when you're performing. Like you should be, you know, reflecting what you're singing and not just like, you know, singing about something really sad and like have a smile on your face or singing about something really happy and being deadpan. (Recorded interview, December 16, 2021, Lines 482-490)

Adrian sees value in writing and performing music. Through music performance and composition, he has found a way to express himself that fits his communication style and provides him with emotional support.

Um, it's, it's like therapy. I don't know, exactly when I got into writing as much as I do now. But like poetry, I, at a certain point, I started to think, in prose, I started to think in poetry and like, a lot of my thoughts were song lyrics. So I started to write all that down. And it's like, whatever I'm feeling at the time, there's a lot of things that you can't express through words, which is, you know, part of the experience of being human learning how to communicate. But putting that to music has made it a lot easier for me to get thoughts out. And, you know, express my emotion. It's also made me feel a lot more seen. (Recorded interview, December 16, 2021, Lines 380-389)

Adrian enjoyed rehearsing during chorus class, especially with the advanced chorus. The students in the advanced chorus, which required an audition, were more dedicated and engaged with the choral art form. They were given responsibilities to lead other students and took a lot of pride in their performances both at competition and at concerts. He very much enjoyed the more complex pieces of repertoire and shaping every detail of their performances for upcoming concerts.

His chorus teacher did a great job engaging and inspiring students without pressuring them. Students sometimes led warm-ups and the chorus director tried to involve people without forcing them to do so. She found ways to get everybody involved in ways that suited them. Adrian is not the type of person to grab the spotlight. He doesn't like to perform solos in front of the class, and often gets anxious before performances. He appreciates that his choir director rarely called on individuals for solos. He also appreciated that his choir director understood he has a rather fragile voice that can be easily lost. On his rougher days she let him sing less or abstain from singing. He appreciated the respect and trust she put in him to be honest about that. He also really enjoyed daily warm-ups, which he believed helped him improve his vocal technique and make his voice stronger.

Like many dedicated and curious music students, Adrian was sometimes frustrated with how often his teacher had to stop rehearsal for disrespectful behavior, especially with the younger students.

I didn't enjoy having to stop as frequently as we did. Sometimes I wish that our choir director would kind of just continue going despite people talking. Because it made our choir, so stop and start. And I don't fault her for that, I should say, because people were really disrespectful. But at the same time, you know, I kind of preferred like, when you

got the audition choir, like if people were talking it was, it wasn't really like, you know, stop the whole choir, because it's like, you know, they're probably talking about something that's going on, and it's probably not a disruptive sort of situation. (Recorded interview, December 2, 2021, Lines 363-368)

Adrian's chorus teacher placed a lot of emphasis on their annual competition, where the chorus was graded on many aspects of performing and sight-reading. The process of preparing every detail of their performances impacted Adrian's outlook on performance and recording. The attention to detail appealed to his meticulous nature and he enjoyed it.

They would put a heavy emphasis on like getting everything right and kind of um tweaking, like, minutiae to try to get everything to sound as good as possible, which I loved. Like it made me a bit of a picky musician, I guess. I think it really played into my like obsessive nature of like, you know, when I'm recording, I need to make sure everything is well crafted and tuned. (Recorded interview, December 2, 2021, Lines 470-473)

Adrian's chorus teacher encouraged her students to think of singing as a lifelong endeavor. She frequently talked about connecting to music on a personal level through listening, performing, and discussions with others. Adrian saw many of the things he worked on in high school classes as not relating to life after schooling, but his chorus teacher made her curricular connections to life after high school explicit. Students were encouraged to connect to and appreciate music to enable them to become better people and to enjoy their life on deeper levels.

But for choir, it was kind of like, you know, maybe you will need to sight sing again, depending on what you're going into, but it's gonna be so helpful to learn how to connect with music, and to learn how to, you know, be present, and focus in mindful of what

you're listening to, and what you're taking in a what you're putting out. And I think a huge emphasis was placed on, like, appreciating the music in and out of class. Like, whether it was the music that we were learning or just music in general, because sometimes the director would just play, like, songs that had nothing to do with what we were singing or other choirs. Like, she would just play a song. She's like, I like the song, y'all. Y'all should listen to this. It's like cool. Like, I dig that. (Recorded interview, December 2, 2021, Lines 414-42)

Adrian believes anybody can learn how to sing and cites his own progress as proof that daily effort pays off. He considers himself to be a much better singer than he used to be. He strongly believes musical skills are not inborn but earned through practice.

Adrian is now a 19-year-old music technology major at a large university in a major southeastern American city. His primary instrument is his voice, and he sings in the University Chorus. He participates in the group because it is a degree requirement, but also because he loves singing in a chorus. COVID forced his first year of college chorus into the virtual world, so his first concert was in the fall of 2021. He still cares about his ensemble putting their best work in front of audiences.

Like I get really nervous for whatever reasons. So... I didn't used to and then at some point I started getting nervous for them and even if I wasn't nervous, like I think it's just a lot of emotion and a lot of like, it's a big thing because you know, you work for so long and it's the culmination of our all your hard work. (Recorded interview, December 16, 2021, Lines 643-646)

A kind and benevolent female conductor leads the University Singers. She begins each rehearsal asking for good news from students. "It's a good, good, like team building sort of

environment (Recorded interview, December 16, 2021, Line 584). The ensemble does not require an audition, so the singers come from all sorts of musical backgrounds. Some struggle to match pitch and others have been singing for many years. The music choices are similar to traditional high school choral music repertoire.

For me, personally, it's on the easy side. For the choir I'd say. I would say it's it's right.

It's right. I don't think there was a ton of trouble when... Yeah, I really don't think it was too difficult or too easy for the choir itself. (Recorded interview, December 16, 2021, Lines 740-742)

Adrian's high school chorus experience is having a direct impact on his daily life. His interest in music was engaged and fed by his high school chorus teacher and he continues to expand his involvement during college.

Um, if I was not in choir in high school, I would not be a music major today. I can say that definitively. Because the connections that I made in choir in high school, spurred my music career. And the connection I made with my director, spurred my interest in continuing music, education, my music education. So I really think you know, oh, also my pianist for... the connection I made with my pianist who played for our choir. She ended up being my vocal coach who trained me for my university audition. And is the reason I got in to college. So that's another, you know, every single connection, every single step that got me from high school to being a music major in college, just about every single one was taken in high school choir. So I can say that very strongly and very proudly. (Recorded interview, December 16, 2021, Lines 694-708)

### **Katherine's Narrative Portrait**

Katherine grew up in a university city in New York where she attended public schools populated mostly by children of employees associated with the university. She lived close to the

university's campus, where her father was a professor. Her mother was a professional opera singer and voice teacher, but the family generally saw her musical activity as a hobby.

So as much as my mom was a professional ... musician, it always came across to us as kids that my dad treated it like it was her hobby. So for my dad, and he's like, 'Oh, I don't really care,' and he loved her music. Don't get me wrong. He loves her voice. He loved her, her music, but he never treated it like it was her career. (Recorded interview, December 18, 2021, Lines 156-159)

As a child she took piano lessons and participated in performances with the local symphony orchestra's children's chorus. When she was in junior high school, she took part in her school's drama program. In high school she chose to join the choir program instead and felt much more in her element. The music, which she loved, motivated her more than anything.

I loved making the music. I joined the high school choir, mostly for the music. I found that when I was in drama, I enjoyed drama, but I didn't get that sensation, that same sensation of the music when you have the... it just does wasn't the same for me.

(Recorded interview, November 28, 2021, Lines 39 – 41)

Katherine did not join chorus for the social relationships. As an adult looking back on her childhood, Katherine believes her parents isolated her and sheltered her from the kinds of experiences many of her peers had, which created social distance between her and her peers. For example, popular music was not played in her family's home. "Yeah. But I grew up in a very socially awkward household. Right? So being a social person was not something that I was ever taught. I had to figure it out on my own" (Recorded interview, November 28, 2021, Lines 881-882). When in her high school chorus, Katherine did not feel comfortable connecting with her peers and mostly kept to herself. Part of the reason she discontinued her involvement in drama

activities was the pressure she felt to be social with her classmates. The music, however, moved her to perform with them.

I was a very socially awkward human being as a teenager...the social aspects of choir never quite sank in for me... -it really, really was the music that motivated me the whole time. (Recorded interview, November 28, 2021, Lines 42 – 43)

Katherine's parents, especially her mother, were supportive of her involvement in music and attended her performances. Her father placed heavier importance of academic performance and did not seem to think of music as a viable career path. Katherine saw her father's line of work as a future profession, not her mother's.

Because she was never, it was never treated like that was her career. Even though she had a master's degree. Even though I was there when she was getting her master's degree. The idea ... of that being her career and her profession, was never. You know, my dad was a biology... professor, that was a profession. It was really weird. And I think that had more of an influence on me than anything else. (Recorded interview, December 18, 2021, Lines 979-990)

My dad was more about academics. Making sure we were straight A students and he was a professor (laughs) in microbiology, -fungal physiology, and mycology... Academics was much more important to him. (Recorded interview, November 28, 2021, Lines 303-305)

Now that her parents are retired, her father listens to her mother's recordings all the time. He seems to love her voice.

And I think my dad regrets not supporting my mom more. I think he realizes what he deprived her of. He'll never admit. But the fact that he listens to her constantly, you know, tells me that it's in his mind that she should have gone... she should have gone

much farther than she did. And it was because of the lack of support he gave her. Because - in order for you to really expand, you know, I mean, you can compare her voice to those of the mezzo-sopranos at the Met. And they're comparable... she had the most incredible voice. It was rich and luscious and you needed [that] for Brahms, right? (Recorded interview, December 18, 2021, Lines 1026-1031)

Katherine's high school choral program was by many standards, unique. Her choir director was also the band director, which is common, but she believes he was equally invested in both ensembles and their music. He was a professional jazz pianist who, in his 40's was at the height of his performing career. He often played gigs in the area and was somewhat famous in the city's live music scene. By Katherine's account, he was an incredible jazz musician, and his professionalism and high standards inspired his students to follow suit. In rehearsal, he led by example for his choir students and the students of his very successful and popular band program.

Yeah, typical rehearsal. So we would all gather. He usually when we were walking in would be playing something. He'd be practicing his own music for his own performances, professional performances, so we would walk into some great jazz piano and (laughs) yeah, you know, so he would set the mood that way. Right? Kind of by example. He set it by example. So, um, you know, he was serious about practicing so we were serious about practicing. We saw him serious about his own music, so we were serious about music. I mean, I think that's really how it... worked. So, we had our warm-ups and our sight singing, you know, practice, always. And then we have, you know, our practicing of the pieces that we were going to perform, right? But I think that tone was always set by him because he was always practicing his own pieces for his own performances. (Recorded interview, November 28, 2021, Lines 543-551)



Because her choir director was very passionate about jazz music, almost the entirety of his repertoire choices was jazz. Unlike many high school choral programs, Katherine's included a substantial component of improvisation. Students learned to scat sing in jazz vocalist style, a skill often overlooked in high school choral programs.

Katherine loved the harmonies and repertoire in her choir program. Because her teacher was such a great jazz musician, she had the opportunity to sing pieces most high school choirs never attempt. She enjoyed the challenge of singing jazz. Katherine went on to major in biology in college but continues to make music as a hobby. She was very inspired by her high school chorus experience and even briefly dreamed about becoming a jazz singer.

And then you know, I had this dream of being you know, this jazz vocalist (laughs) and all these crazy things. And you know, they were dreams. They were never, you know, I was never good enough to go that in that direction. But it was inspiring. The music was always inspiring. So that was what drove me more than anything else. (Recorded interview, November 28, 2021, Lines 51-54)

She was motivated to perform and successfully auditioned for the select ensemble, Kaleidoscope. She was happy to have two choirs in her school day, all the choirs her school offered. The select ensemble is where her teacher challenged students to sing solos as well. "We were always expected to have solo and do solo pieces in Kaleidoscope" (Recorded interview, November 28, 2021, Line 654). "That's when he became really serious about our performance. Your senior year is when you became, when he was, he cracked hard on his senior students. Because if you were still involved in Kaleidoscope he expected you to continue your music on after..." (Recorded interview, November 28, 2021, Lines 688-692).

Katherine did not develop much of a personal relationship with her choir teacher. She respected him and liked him very much in his professional capacity. He was very good at communicating with high school students. He tended to develop stronger bonds with the students who showed strong interest in pursuing music after high school.

I don't I don't know if I had a real personal relationship with him. He, he formed really strong relationships with those who were obviously going to pursue, pursue music after high school, but I loved him. He was great. I mean, he was, he knew how to work with high school students. (Recorded interview, November 28, 2021, Lines 478-481)

Although her teacher's expectations were high, grading was based more on dedication than skillful performance. Dedication was a character trait for which she believes many adults and teachers in her childhood advocated.

Most of it was participation. Your, your attitude. Not so much your ability. But people who were not serious about the music kind of filtered themselves out, because jazz is not an easy music to learn. And so it was, you didn't end up having nonmusical students involved. It just didn't happen... So it was mostly based on dedication. And how serious you took the time. (Recorded interview, November 28, 2021, Lines 633-636)

When asked about reasons for success and failure on tasks in her musical endeavors, Katherine cites dedication. It continues to be a large part of her life outside of music as well. "And I think that yeah, that has always been a huge part of my life. Am I dedicated enough?" (Recorded interview, November 28, 2021, Lines 1118-1119)."

KATHERINE

Well, my dad preached dedication to academics. And so dedication was always part of our was always part of the mentality. So it was kind of like if you don't if you're not dedicated enough to something, you're going to fail.

TOM

Right.

KATHERINE

And so if you fail, it must be because you're not dedicated enough. Right? (Recorded interview, November 28, 2021, Lines 1102-1110)

Although Katherine's high school choir teacher was focused on high achievement and quality performances, they did not attend any kinds of competitions. Her teacher did, however, help the students secure gigs outside of school. Her teacher's professionalism and unique repertoire choices inspired her love of singing and helped the program impact her for the rest of her life.

I think that one of the biggest impacts I had I got from being involved in high school choir with the director, the director that I had, considering he was a professional jazz musician, incredible jazz musician, was that (long pause)... the love of singing, nontraditional, quote unquote, nontraditional choral pieces that push the envelope that bring in different kinds of music that you don't normally necessarily hear in you know, the classical choirs. (Recorded interview, November 28, 2021, Lines 1043-1047)

Katherine left high school a year early to attend college, where she sang in her first classical style choir. It was different and much closer to the kind of music her mom was involved in. She enjoyed it as well. After that year, however, she transferred to a large university at which music ensemble participation was only for music majors. She was a biology major, so she went

several years without participating in music performance. She did, however, always stay consistently connected to music.

But it's, I realize when I when you make me think about it, and I look back, I never stopped my connection with music. I just stopped singing because I didn't have a, a venue. You know what I mean? So, I've always been a music person. You know? I can't drive around in the car without music playing. (Recorded interview, December 18, 2021, Lines 180-183)

After she graduated, she moved to Los Angeles and was motivated to take voice lessons. “I took some serious voice classes with a professional voice teacher who worked with serious singers” (Recorded interview, December 18, 2021, Lines 203-204). The lessons were very expensive, however, so she did not take them for long. At one point her instructor had his students sing in a recital. It was a memorable experience for Katherine.

I was the second one to perform. And our instructor, like he put, I think he felt he put his best two, I didn't realize this at the beginning, but I think he felt he put his best two students first. So that anything else that happened after that he was hoping everybody would be too drunk to worry about (laughs). It's LA! And after I sang he's like, ‘Isn't that amazing. It's almost like professional musicians up here.’ And I was like, that's the first time anybody had ever made a comment like that to me about my singing. (Recorded interview, December 18, 2021, Lines 931-938)

Katherine was stunned by her instructor's comment and said that moment was the first time she felt like she was really good at singing. I asked her whether that experience might have inspired her to consider pursuing a career in music. She said if she would have had the money to continue lessons, she may have considered it.

I was in my ... It was after... I was mid 20s. So I must have been like 25. And I think if I had been in a more stable situation, I probably would have taken that and run with it.

Because I was so surprised to hear something like that. Coming out of somebody's mouth about me singing. Right? (Recorded interview, December 18, 2021, Lines 954-956)

Katherine does believe she is a good singer. Her confidence grows as she sings.

I gain confidence as I sing. I forget sometimes when there's space between times singing that I'm actually a decent, like I can actually learn parts and hold my parts, and you know, sing in tune, and people say I have a decent voice which is hard to know, because you always hear yourself differently than how other people hear. And so I would say, I'm not at my mom's caliber. I might have been able to be had I took it seriously when I was young and pursued it and had the ability to pursue it and all of that. But I think I inherited some of some of her talent at least. But I would say I have to work, I have to work harder (Recorded interview, December 18, 2021, Lines 872-878)

In her late 20's Katherine joined a Unitarian Universalist congregation and commenced singing regularly again. She has been singing ever since. Her faith is very important to her, as is her participation in Unitarian Universalist congregations and their music. She moved to Atlanta during the COVID-19 pandemic and looks forward to participating in a Unitarian Universalist congregation again soon. For her, music participation is a spiritual matter. The connection between her musical spiritual experiences and her experiences with her UU congregations is a big part of her life. "So it's become. It's a spiritual matter for me, I think. The music is. The singing. It's what kept me going back to church over and over again. The music" (Recorded interview, December 18, 2021, Lines 79-80).

Since moving to Atlanta, Katherine has joined a community chorus, the Community Choral Guild. At the time of the interview, she had sung in the chorus for about six months. In that time, she was able to perform in one concert. Due to COVID-19, their rehearsals preparing for their fall concert were shorter than normal, and singers had to spread out. The added hurdles made concert preparation more stressful which was most clear in the behavior of their conductor, who seemed to be worried they might not put a quality performance together. In the end, however, Katherine said the ensemble performed very well at the concert, which prompted some audience members to join the group.

And I think it surprised everybody, in the choir at least I don't know about the audience but it surprised everybody how well it actually went, you know? (Tom Laughs) Including Kerry (laughs). He was so relieved at the end. It was pretty obvious (laughs). You know, but that shows how much of a professional he is also. He doesn't want to just put out, you know, slapdash, throw together something, which gives me hope that long term involvement in the field will. (???) (Recorded interview, December 18, 2021, Lines 597-601)

The rehearsal process was difficult, due to the safety measures, but Katherine's concert experience was excellent. Katherine believes that the extra distance between singers during rehearsals made hearing much more difficult, but when they stood closer for the concert, the wonderful experience of making choral music happened for her again. When she is a part of moments like that, Katherine feels good at singing.

I think we did the best ever, we had sung in any of the pieces, at the concert, because all of a sudden we could hear each other, right? And everyone was like, 'Ah,' and that there were parts. And I think you could see it in the Kerry's face. There were parts where that

tuning fork, that, that clear bell, you know, it was just everything just lined right up, and everybody was in tune and everybody and the, you know, the volume, the balance was there, and the vowels were there. And, you know, and everybody felt it. You know, you could just tell. Even the audience felt that you could just tell. And that is that it's almost like, you know...

TOM

Eureka.

KATHERINE

Yeah, it's eureka. It's a spiritual moment. It is it's a spiritual moment. You know, I don't think you need to believe in any kind of, you know, anthropomorphic deity to have that sense that, you know, something other is happening, right? Something other. And that's the... knowing that I can reach those moments, with the group tells me that man, I'm not so bad. (Recorded interview, December 18, 2021, Lines 898-912)

For several years, Katherine, her husband, and children lived in Sarasota County, Florida, which boasts a high-quality community chorus called The Venice Chorale. When her parents moved a ten-minute drive away from their home, her mother suggested they join the choir together. Katherine needed little convincing and very much enjoyed singing next to her mother in the alto section of the choir for several years. She enjoyed the repertoire choices their director made. He likes “pushing the envelope” (Line 1078) with concert music choices and was planning to program Todd’s *Mass in Blue* before the pandemic, a challenging jazz-influenced masterwork. She also continued singing at their Unitarian Universalist Congregation.

You know she, she and I are really good friends. We have our mom and daughter situation. You know, there's always that weird, weird, you know, tension. But when it

comes to music, we're really good friends. And we love singing together. And we both sing the same part – Alto 1. And so yeah, who's gonna turn? I'm not gonna turn down the chance to sing. So I waited to join the Venice Chorale because my kids were still really young and I didn't think I could handle it. (Recorded interview, December 18, 2021, Lines 784-789)

Katherine's formative experiences with music have inspired her to share those kinds of opportunities with younger people, especially her children. She donated a piano to a public arts high school so that many students could benefit from it without a cost. Her arthritis prevents her from playing it.

I'm like, 'Yeah, I have it given to an institution where the students don't have to pay to have access to the music.' You know what I mean? That's how important it is. I realized, right? Share the love. So that's what I did. Because there's just no way, I can't play it anymore. (Recorded interview, December 18, 2021, Lines 245-251)

Katherine wants to pass on to her children all the joy and beauty she has received from her music participation. She wants to enable her children to explore art forms they love and to give them opportunities to benefit from the social aspects of artistic endeavors as well. One of her children sings in Community Choral Guild, much like how she and her mother sang together in The Venice Chorale. Drama has been a great opportunity for her children to be artistic with their peers as well. They seem to be enjoying their participation.

It's a very social, drama and chorus, are very social activities. Absolutely. It's one of the reasons why Alex was so drawn to it is because it's very social. My kid. And and they're finding drama has been their way here, because we just moved here in last July from



Florida. And drama for my two oldest has been the way to, for them to find friends.

(Recorded interview, December 18, 2021, Lines 900-903)

I was like, 'You know, be involved in things that you know, you love to do, and you'll find people that you can connect with.' I mean, that's, you know, so that was one thing that I've tried to do that is stress the social, because I think that that is an essential part of being a kid (laughs). And learning how to how to manage the social aspects of, of, you know, being part of humanity. (laughs) My dad didn't have the same idea. (Recorded interview, December 18, 2021, Lines 909-913)

And my youngest seems to now be more attached to it. Now that she's in middle school choir and ... she loves her choir teacher. I worry a little bit about what happens when she goes to high school. But we'll see what happens. She's got three years. (Recorded interview, December 18, 2021, Lines 266-268)

The Venice Chorale had a free high school choral program with a stipend of \$100 per month for students to get private voice lessons. The youth choir rehearsed at the same time as the adult choir, which made participation convenient. Many youth choruses in the Atlanta area are expensive and few of the community choruses have both adult and youth programs.

Venice Chorale had a youth choir, ... and a high school apprentice program, and so they were determined to bring young students in. And and they, the whole idea was to make it affordable. Right? So it wasn't this like \$100 a month. The youth choir - 25 bucks for the whole season. (Recorded interview, December 18, 2021, Lines 494-496)

And I was really, really looking forward to Alex being old enough to be in the High School apprentice part. Because my kids were in the youth choir with the Venice Chorale. And she was really, really excited. That's, that's another reason they my kids got old enough to become part of

the youth part. Then I felt okay, that means I can actually be part of the adult choir. (Recorded interview, December 18, 2021, Lines 823-826)

Katherine seems to believe it is important to offer musical opportunities to young people at affordable prices. She also thinks it is important for young people to interact with professional musicians, as she did in her high school choir program.

Yeah, I think it's important. I think that's why I liked the Venice Chorale's idea of bringing in the younger generation, because there were a lot of professional musicians in the in the chorale, including the director and, you know. (Recorded interview, December 18, 2021, Lines 1179-1185)

Yes, it was a major bridge builder, using something that everybody who was involved loved, which was the music, the choral music. But it did it did introduce these kids to professional musicians. And I thought that's really, really important. I think, you know, even if the children even if the students never pursued music, you know, as a career, showing that it can be done is important, you know, so, yeah. (Recorded interview, December 18, 2021, Lines 1200-120)

Katherine has no plans to stop singing, and will likely be singing in two ensembles soon, the Community Choral Guild, and her Unitarian Universalist Congregation. Her spiritual experiences with music make her come back again and again. She enjoys working at it and earning the experiences beautiful music performances can provide.

I have to work have to work at it. But you know, I can definitely hear when I'm not in tune. (laughs) And (long pause) I don't know. You being, I would say professional musician, when everything hits, right. It's like a tuning fork. Right? Right? And it's almost like this, like, a clear bell ringing. Right? And I think anybody who takes music

seriously, always searches for that. Right? That, just that. You know, whether they're playing an instrument in an orchestra, or they're singing in a choir or whatever. Singing in a band. So I think that that's what keeps me going. Is being able to reach that point.

(Recorded interview, December 18, 2021, Lines 884-890)

### **Mila's Narrative Portrait**

When Mila was in the eighth grade, the high school a cappella groups came and sang for her middle school. She found the performance very inspiring, and it motivated her to join the fine arts program at the high school. "And I was just enamored, and I was like, I have to audition for this program. I have to be in this program," (Recorded Interview, November 23, 2021, Lines 118 – 119).

Mila attended a high school with a fine arts magnet program in an outer suburb of a large city. The school was only four years old when she attended (2015 – 2020), evidence of the major growth in the area's population, which increased by more than 50% between 2001 and 2010, according to [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov). "I think my class and a couple of classes before me kind of built the program" (Recorded Interview, November 23, 2021, Line 44). Mila remembers the school being "predominantly Black" (Recorded Interview, November 23, 2021, Line 720), with only a few non-Black students in the chorus program.

Mila participated in the performing arts throughout her high school career. The students and faculty put together many high quality and high budget performances. Expectations were very high, and students were extremely busy working long hours to prepare for performances.

Yeah, so that was a really cool experience. It was quite like, going to school there was quite like High School Musical. We had flash mobs. We were a show choir, so we sang traditional music and we also had the spring show at the end of the year that was like an

actual concert. So we would sing and dance, and learn choreography, and sing and dance.

And that was so much fun. (Recorded Interview, November 23, 2021, Lines 53 – 56)

Their choral director, who is very active in the show choir world, actually had their performance dresses designed specifically for the students.

...it's a long black dress and there's a red sparkly sash, and it's pretty basic. It's like a halter top dress and we all wear the same dress. For this spring show the end of the year though, we had, it was a costume change every number. (Recorded Interview, November 23, 2021, Lines 70 – 73)

In addition to the show choir activities, the school put on musicals each year. Every student in the chorus division of the fine arts program was required to take chorus, group voice class, vocal lessons, piano class, and music theory class. Additional private teaching was available after school for a fee. Mila also took drama, musical theater, and theater tech classes. Rehearsals were long and intense, and Mila sometimes became frustrated when her peers would take many repetitions to learn things.

And then as it got closer to time, like in November, we started we would start to have rehearsals after school, I think maybe like twice or three times a week from 4 to 7pm. We'd have three-hour rehearsals, and we would just sing and sing and sing and sing. So we had a little bit of break, we had like a, like a kind of snack break. Not so much dinner, but like snack. And then we go back and sing and sing and sing and sing until we're done. And I mean, I... I enjoyed the process, but like it would start to get frustrating because he would give us the same notes over and over and over again. And people aren't people aren't shaping up and I'm like, 'shape up people!' (Recorded Interview, November 23, 2021, Lines 330 – 336)

He said that our shows would cost like \$20,000 to \$30,000. Like we would have a lighting technician come in, lights we had the proscenium arch set up and decorated. We had fog machines. (Recorded Interview, November 23, 2021, Lines 354 – 356)

Students were not pulled from class and graded individually, however, students were tasked with performing solos at end-of-the-year recitals. Otherwise, students were graded on participation and attendance. Students were also forced to audition for all state honors chorus.

Um, so grades mostly came from performances. Like if you showed up at the performance and you did the performance, you got your grade. That's how we graded it wasn't too hard. (Recorded Interview, November 23, 2021, Lines 555 – 556)

We got graded on all state our scores from All state. And then we got graded on our recitals at the end of the year as well. That we had to sing a solo at. So yeah, those and then all the shows that we did. (Recorded Interview, November 23, 2021, Lines 569 – 570)

Mila's chorus participated in a lot of competitions. She enjoyed traveling and singing in such a good chorus. They always won the competitions, and the students took great pride in their performance quality. Her school also hosted a cappella group competitions, which their ensemble always won.

We traveled to sing. We traveled to New Orleans one year and to Tennessee Pigeon Forge another year, and we would do festivals and competitions. We'd sing in them while we traveled. And I think we always won everything in our division. Like we never lost in our division. I don't think there's ever a time we ever lost anything. I'm so serious.

(Recorded Interview, November 23, 2021, Lines 231 – 235)

They also went to performance evaluation every year at the highest level and earned superiors. The chorus practice using the numbers sight reading system. Her teacher stressed the importance of achieving at all evaluations and competitions. Students also expressed the desire to achieve as a group.

Um, I know my teacher did. I think all of us collectively did want to perform well as a group, because we were so used to performing well as a group. And, you know, it's fun to win. And so I think that like, sense of like, we all want to win kind of made the competition like more. I don't want to say real, but like, it just made us work that much harder, because we all wanted, and then we all wanted to, like, make our teacher proud in a way. (Recorded Interview, November 23, 2021, Lines 617 – 621)

Her chorus teacher did express to students his desire for them to continue singing after high school. Because it was a fine arts magnet program, many of the students planned to make a living in the arts. For those who were going another direction, he still pushed them to continue their musical involvement after school.

Um, yes. Um, so, he always told us like, his goal is for us to continue singing even after we graduate, like in any form or fashion. I think he wanted a lot of us to, like, go on and try to do this professionally. (Recorded Interview, November 23, 2021, Lines 597 – 599)

And some of us like, kind of are on that track. But um, yeah, he just he said, like, no matter what, like, if you're just in church, choir, if you join another chorus, or if you're doing musical theatre, or if you're singing professionally, I just want you to go out and continue singing for the rest of your life. So that was, I think, his goal for us. (Recorded Interview, November 23, 2021, Lines 605 – 608)

Her family did not push her involvement, but they supported her in whatever she wanted to do. There were a lot of expenses related to program involvement, and her family always paid them. There were annual dues, fees for dresses, and expensive trips as well. Mila's family supported her even though they were not particularly musical.

We went to New Orleans and I wanted to go so bad. And we were singing in New Orleans. And I think my grandma actually paid for that. Like my family like, even though like, maybe they didn't understand it or anything. Like I really wanted to do it. And I knew that I wanted to do it, so they supported me. (Recorded Interview, November 23, 2021, Lines 228 – 231)

Mila's participation in the performing arts has inspired her younger sister, who loves to sing and has a beautiful voice.

And I think me having that experience in high school and like her coming to all my shows and seeing me heavily impacted her and her musical journey and her just loving to seeing and wanting to sing wanting to take vocal lessons. She hasn't started yet. But she has expressed that she wants to take vocal lessons. (Recorded Interview, November 23, 2021, Lines 204 – 207)

Mila may have made a friend for a lifetime because of their involvement in high school chorus.

But one is like one of my closest friends. Like I still talk to her to this day. We talk every week even though she goes to Howard now in Washington, like, we were joined at the hip in high school. She's a grade younger than me, like we were joined at the hip. We both sang soprano two. And we both went to Tennessee together. We did the musicals together, we did a lot of things together. We just did everything together. And then I graduated. And it was kind of sad. We didn't get to hang out as much anymore. And then

she moved to DC. And we still talk all the time. I still have a couple other people that I keep in touch with from then but not so many. I was a little like, kind of a bit of an outsider in chorus, but yeah. (Recorded Interview, November 23, 2021, Lines 263 – 269)

Every year her chorus would have in-class parties and students would bring really good food. Their chorus teacher would make his signature sausage bread. Although there were plenty of conflicts, at the end of the day they all were working toward the same goals. They all wanted the performances to be as amazing as possible. They were a team and somewhat like a family.

I enjoyed like, there was a huge sense of togetherness. I know every year, we would have our annual Thanksgiving and Christmas party and everybody would cook and we do Secret Santa and exchange gifts. We got each other pretty good gifts. They were quite thoughtful. I can't remember any of mine, though. I didn't get like the great gifts.

(Recorded Interview, November 23, 2021, Lines 410 – 413)

However, Mila often felt like an outsider. She felt many students in the chorus were very competitive and arrogant.

Very competitive. It was very competitive. But like there was also like they were like favorites. So there are certain people that had arrogance and an attitude that I guess was just built in so. (Recorded Interview, November 23, 2021, Lines 288 – 289)

Very disagreeable people. And then some of them had that like diva mentality for like, for what we're in high school why are you? (both laugh) We're not doing anything for real, like calm down. (Recorded Interview, November 23, 2021, Lines 295 – 296)

And, um, there was always that like, it was kind of like a fraternity/sorority type situation. Like, there would be like beef. But like, at the end of the day, like there's like this togetherness, and like somebody has my back. So there was that. What I didn't like...



it was toxic, it was so toxic. Like there was that but like it was just very toxic. Like people did not know how to treat other people for real. That's why I only came out with like, two, two, maybe three like close friends from there (Recorded Interview, November 23, 2021, Lines 428 – 433)

Mila believes many of the toxic problems originated with their chorus teacher and the program director, who both valued performing skills over good behavior. It seemed like they wanted to put together the best possible performances on stage no matter what happened to the students' feelings.

He set the tone. And like he would keep giving privileges to people who were not acting right. Like, there was no real discipline. It was just reward because they could sing well. So like the fact that they could sing well overlooked all the whatever they were doing. (Recorded Interview, November 23, 2021, Lines 452 – 454)

Mila started out as a timid freshman but after an audition during her eleventh-grade year she caught her teacher's attention. She took more of the spotlight from then on.

Um a little bit. Okay, so when like the my first two years, I was quite timid. Everybody else they had like a huge personality. And I'm, I mean, I can turn turn it on and off. Like, I think I'm more of an agreeable person, I'm gonna kind of go with the flow type of person. Like if I need to turn it on, I will turn it on, but I'm just like, I like to chill. (laughs) They're just really out there. And that's what my teacher likes. (Recorded Interview, November 23, 2021, Lines 303 – 307)

...until I auditioned for Chicago, my junior year. And my teacher said that he had never heard me sing like that ever in his life. (laughs) And I think that opened up a little bit of some doors for me, but like I, he just wasn't looking. (laughs) I think he was just paying attention to everyone else, because I feel like I was singing like the same the entire time. But yeah, he just wasn't

paying attention to me. So yeah, that kind of brought me into the foreground a little bit, my junior year. (Recorded Interview, November 23, 2021, Lines 307 – 312)

The chorus teacher believed preparation was key to success. He consistently told the students to work hard to achieve. Mila was a hard worker and graduated salutatorian at her school.

Okay, so the succeeding I mean, it was always preparation like our teacher drilled into us, like, if you're prepared, like, you're not going to be nervous, like, preparation quells nerves like preparation get you ready. Like, if you just prepare, you'll be fine. (Recorded Interview, November 23, 2021, Lines 639 – 641)

Hard work beats talent when talent doesn't work hard. Like that's one of my favorite sayings ever. Like, it's so true... (Recorded Interview, November 23, 2021, Lines 535 – 536)

She graduated in 2020 and is now a sophomore in college. After high school, Mila chose to go to college and major in film. Film has creativity, music, acting, dance, and all the arts Mila loves. Film is also a more practical career field than music.

Yeah, it's like film is like the common love I love all art and film is like, oh, so along with like musicals. It's like a conglomeration of everything but I think film more so you have you have a little bit more creativity in what you can do, and like outside the box with film, and it's a conglomeration of everything. So that's why I chose to do film when I got here and then to like, there's more money in film. And like more because music getting try to get into musicals and musical theater, that's hard and like a lot of people don't go and see musical theater anymore, so. (Recorded Interview, November 23, 2021, Lines 171 – 176)

She did not sing in a chorus her freshman year because it was going to be online. She thought online chorus sounded like a waste of time. She joined University Chorus this year to keep her singing and music reading skills strong. The group, which is the only non-audition group at the university, is not nearly as challenging and engaging as her high school chorus program. The ensemble features many different levels of singers, including beginners. After all her work in high school, she feels bored and unstimulated. She wishes she could have challenged herself more in a more advanced group. She did audition for other groups, but University Chorus was the only group that fit in her class schedule. Mila misses being challenged the way she was in her high school chorus. She also feels that many of the students are not as dedicated as her high school colleagues were.

Um, well, I've only just done... this is my first time like actually singing getting back into choir since high school. It's, it's a lot different. I think a lot of the people there are there because like it's a requirement for their classes. So it's not, it's not the same. And then not everybody's at the same level either. It's, but I mean, I was actually pleasantly surprised because they sounded better than I thought they would. So that was nice. (Recorded Interview, December 8, 2021, Lines 159 – 163)

I need someone to throw a shoe at me when I mess up. When I tell you at my high school... I never got a shoe thrown at me. But he would throw his shoes. Yeah, he was a little crazy. (Recorded Interview, December 8, 2021, Lines 661 – 662)

And see, I'm used to singing hard music. We always used to sing Class A LGPE. And he'd always make us do these difficult songs. We were singing Whitacre my freshman year of high school. Sleep. That was that was the first song I remember singing Sleep by Whitacre. I love that song. (Recorded Interview, December 8, 2021, Lines 570 – 572)

Her current choral director in the university Choral Ensemble is very different from her high school teacher. She is more gentle, kind, and positive.

She has a really vibrant, positive bubbly personality. So I think that helps. She's a very agreeable person. She's really nice, like you said. She likes to make a lot of corny jokes. (laughs) I don't know. I think she's just like a nice person. So like when somebody is nice to you want to accommodate them. So I think that's what helps. You know some people are like assholes so that they're never gonna do right. But I think she's nice. She makes me want to, you know, sing. (Recorded Interview, December 8, 2021, Lines 762 – 766)

Oh, she has a lovely voice. Her voice is so lovely. It's very beautiful. She gets up there. I think she's a soprano. (Recorded Interview, December 8, 2021, Lines 772 – 773)

On the other hand, Mila wishes she would push the chorus more. If she was a little tougher, “maybe the choir would sound better (Recorded Interview, December 8, 2021, Line 679)

Mila does find it interesting that the chorus is so diverse and includes people from countries all over the world. However, she does not have relationships with the other singers the way she did in her high school chorus.

There's not really any room for getting to meet people. And I think everybody in there's like a different major. So that's the only times our paths crossed. So I didn't really know anybody there. (Recorded Interview, December 8, 2021, Lines 730 – 732)

At the end of her first semester in the ensemble, they put on a concert. It did not excite her. It seems many of the things that excited her about singing in an ensemble are missing for her in the current ensemble, especially the standards of excellence.

It was, it went well. Like we sang our. I think we had like three or I don't know, maybe four or five pieces that we sang. It was.... I thought it was so boring. I was so bored the entire time. (Recorded Interview, December 8, 2021, Lines 539 – 540)

She says there are lots of boys in the chorus, but they sound bad, or they cannot be heard at all. She said with disappointment, “The grad students are usually only ones I can hear singing” (Recorded Interview, December 8, 2021, Lines 858 – 859).

She will not be continuing in the group next semester but plans to take private voice lessons. She wants to work on her voice specifically. She looks forward to working with a teacher she found online.

She said she specializes in people finding their own voice. And I still feel like, you know, in my like, six, seven years of singing, I still haven't found my voice yet. And so that's what I need. (Recorded Interview, December 8, 2021, Lines 228 – 230)

She may join her church choir in the future. Her nondenominational church has a very good choir. Like many ensembles, however, COVID-19 decimated their numbers. She says it is not the same, but she hopes it will get going again.

She hopes to employ the vocal techniques she used in high school more often. Her high school program did develop her appreciation for different types of music and stoked her drive to achieve. Performing made her more brave and willing to put herself out there and take risks.

Well, I don't sing anywhere else but like all the technique and everything has stayed with me just like singing in the car singing in the shower. I have a nice appreciation for like arias. Most people don't like to listen to those, but I like them and opera music as well. Classical music, just all types of music through that I found an appreciation for. (Recorded Interview, December 8, 2021, Lines 467 – 470)

I think it did make me more driven, more eager to achieve and to push myself and to put myself in uncomfortable situations so that I can grow. So yeah. I think that's it. (Recorded Interview, December 8, 2021, Lines 968 – 969)

She thinks she is a good singer and is interested in improving and learning more about music in the future.

Um, yes, like, technically, yes. Like as a technical singer, like I know how to sing. And I know that I do a good job at it. Like I said, I'm still trying to find my voice though. I don't think it's anything unique. I think I sound best in choirs. But it's something I want to work on. Because I want to do more like solo singing. Like, I also have this little dream like singing on cruise ships. I feel like that would be so fun. It's like, go work on a cruise.

That'd be so fun. Just singing on a cruise. (Recorded Interview, December 8, 2021, Lines 902 – 906)

### **Phyllis's Narrative Portrait**

Phyllis is 62 years old and grew up in suburban Atlanta. She went to school in a majority White district and was one of about a dozen Black students in her high school. Her family lives in the area due to their long history of involvement working for wealthy families and companies in the area.

They have been here for... I'm the fifth generation, I'm the fifth generation. So we've been on the original tract of land. So some of the other family names we knew because we were some of the worker bees that worked for Mr. Coca Cola, that worked for the city of Decatur, the Sam's family, that worked for families at Emory. So a lot of the employers, we were already there working. Our parents and our grandparents were working at these places... after Reconstruction was done. (Recorded interview, November 21, 2021, Lines 212 – 217)

Her family is full of musicians, especially singers, going back generations. She grew up with family members who were in the music business and many of them were also amateur or professional church musicians.

I'm from a singing family. My aunts and uncles had a gospel spiritual could quartet call the Hannah Spiritual Quartet. So my grandmother was teaching them to be performers even in the 40's. (Recorded interview, November 21, 2021, Lines 334 – 336)

Joining high school chorus was automatic for her. She sang all the time, played piano, made music in her church, and performed throughout her younger years. Singing is something she feels like she has to do. "Oh, yeah. Yeah, I think that was like DNA, musical DNA. I'm trying to think if there was anyone that could not sing in our family" (Recorded interview, November 21, 2021, Lines 364 – 365).

In 1968, after the U.S. Supreme Court ordered states to hasten school integration efforts, Phyllis started attending a mostly White elementary school. She successfully auditioned to sing the national anthem for an event, a bold move for a young Black girl, and a controversial choice for a teacher to make. Several years later, when Phyllis was a successful and confident high school singer, she auditioned to sing the national anthem at another event. The high school band teacher chose someone else, and many of Phyllis's friends suspected he did so because of her skin color.

When Phyllis got to high school, she met an atmosphere of bullying. All younger students were targets for bullying, especially anyone who was different. Luckily, she had several cousins and other family members who attended the high school who could defend her and help her navigate the environment. The school was almost entirely White, except for the 10 – 15 Black students, who were mostly related to her. Although Phyllis was the only Black girl in her high

school chorus, it was one of the few places she felt safe because she already knew many of the other students.

Chorus was always fun... finding your place within it. When you're in eighth grade, you know, you're Subby, you're told, you know? You're pushed around by all the other upperclassmen. So it was trying to find your tribe or someone like you, or someone quirky, like you, that was going to speak volumes for how you survived. At that time, high school was eighth grade, to 12th grade, and not ninth. They didn't have any middle schools. (Recorded interview, November 21, 2021, Lines 175 – 179)

She made new friends and kept the friends she had made growing up.

Yeah, you'd learn the new ones. And then the ones that you already had gone from first grade to seventh grade, you know, that was a safe harbor for you to be in. So you were hoping that they're singing the same part, so that you get to sit next to them, or if you know, that they're not assigned seats and stuff. And you know, then, you know, even at 8<sup>th</sup> grade, you know, somebody is gonna say, you have cooties or something like that, and that don't want to sit, you know, next to you. The good thing about my coming up is that the law changed. Before 1968 I was at a school that was only populated by people of the same race as I am. And when the law changed in 1968, they sent a bus driver out to pick us up. (Recorded interview, November 21, 2021, Lines 203 – 210)

One of her favorite parts of high school chorus was the friendships. She enjoyed working on teams with others and taking trips with them to competitions. She loved singing so much that she hated for class to end.

Um, what did I enjoy? Always the friends, camaraderie. I loved the trips. I loved... I just... it was fun from the beginning to end. You hate it, what you hate when it was over



you know? Then you have to go to biology, right? (Recorded interview, November 21, 2021, 795 – 798)

Cause the friendships I've had with people that I used to sing around campfire with, Girl Scouts, were the same friends that I had in high school. So then we, now we're singing about boys though. (Recorded interview, November 21, 2021, Lines 595 – 597)

Her chorus teacher arranged for many performances for small groups of students outside the school day. Phyllis was often selected for the performances because she was a reliable and strong singer. The students sang at fancy events and at each other's churches.

Alright, so let's see, our little group was like two tenors, two bass, two altos and two sopranos. And so you could fit that into two cars. We did dinner parties because we were working for the DeKalb County... DeKalb Arts Council... So we worked for them and represented our school to go to rich people's homes. And then we after we done you know... get something to eat and go back home. You know, drop everybody back home. (Recorded interview, November 21, 2021, Lines 1003 – 1008)

I think so. Because we would sing at each other's churches as well. So those doors were open for us to go and sing at Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist, and Episcopalian churches. (Recorded interview, November 21, 2021, Lines 1029 – 1030)

Phyllis and some other students also participated in Solo & Ensemble competitions and DeKalb Young Artists competitions. Phyllis liked to sing solos and she and her colleagues were quite successful, bringing lots of trophies and medals back to her high school. Phyllis probably would have participated in more performances, such as some state-wide events, but her skin color made some travel impossible.

When I could. I didn't, I had a transportation issue. So mostly Diane and Ken, she had the all-star five that could always go and the parents could do. So that if it were an issue and you had to stay overnight, with me being Black, I just couldn't always go to those things. If it was something that the location of it was close by then I could be entered into it. She also, our teacher also made us audition for DeKalb Young Artists of DeKalb County. And I was one of the Young Artists for DeKalb County singing at... rich folks' houses. (Recorded interview, November 21, 2021, Lines 638 – 644)

Phyllis's high school chorus teacher always encouraged her to compete and helped her get ready for her solos and small group performances. "When I was competing for the state and in competition, just for that, she made sure that I was prepared" (Recorded interview, November 21, 2021, Lines 610 – 611). Her teacher programmed classical style concerts but also ended every school year with a variety show performance that included solos, choreography, and musical theatre numbers. She did not shy away from putting Phyllis on stage singing roles many would consider controversial for a Black girl to perform in the 1970's. She sang songs from *The Wiz*, *West Side Story*, and more. Phyllis fondly remembers those performances, called Show Times, and her many featured performances.

Her chorus teacher was a White woman with a long German name. She was very strict, professional, talented, and worked the students hard. From the sound of it, she managed a very successful chorus program which led to incredible and rare opportunities for high school students. They performed with a famous conductor and sang with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra. "She was she was very tough. She was, she didn't like, you know she... she had her times she'd be fun with us. And she had times that she was you know very German" (Recorded interview, November 21, 2021, Lines 666 – 667).

She was an excellent musician and recruited the best pianists that you could find that played for the choir we did with Robert Shaw. We did the *Chichester Psalms* in the 70's when it was just coming out. Our school's choir was chosen to go and learn this with Mr. Shaw. (Recorded interview, November 21, 2021, Lines 668 – 671)

Phyllis's teacher also gave her opportunities to lead ensembles. She served as a sort of assistant conductor for an ensemble during her junior and senior years.

... because I was a helper bee like my mom and dad, like I was telling you about them helping other communities and other rich people, I was always going to be a helper to make it easier for the teacher. So whatever she needed done, I could do that... she taught me how to conduct. In my junior and senior year the younger people that were coming in, she would let me come and direct. (Recorded interview, November 21, 2021, Lines 819 – 823)

Her high school chorus program was very special to her and contributed to her lifelong musical involvement. Her involvement in her high school chorus gave her opportunities to experience some very special moments in her life. Years later, she contributed to the fundraiser for a new fine art building at her high school, which previously did not have one.

Oh, well, I mean, I, I guess I'm kind of kind of... It broadened what I was already experiencing. And it opened up some other doors to sing with audiences like oh, my gosh, I mean, who you can't compare singing some of Leonard Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms* and you got Robert Shaw conducting you. I mean, it takes you places that you go, 'How'd I get here? Look where I am, and look who's around here and.' I mean, you know, from the high school part since you were talking about it. Even from the beginning part of me singing the patriotic song was taking me taking our school out of that at my

elementary school right down the street from my high school, taking me to sit behind people that are sitting there in the audience. It was very fascinating, and an honor to be asked to do that. And it opens these doors for you. You know, even if they don't say, well they say thank you in applause. Applause is thank you. (Recorded interview, November 29, 2021, Lines 507 – 515)

During and after high school, her mother always gave her encouragement. She encouraged her to sing and stressed academics heavily. Phyllis studied hard and achieved a very high GPA, which caused colleges to compete for her.

... when the bidding war began, my dad said, 'Well, we'll just see who's gonna pay the most. Who wants you really.'... Our academic scores were so high, mine and my brothers, that we have the Georgia incentive scholarship where you can go to any school in the state of Georgia, free of charge. And thanks be to strong moms and dads that, homework is first, extra work is first, and let it open up the doors for you. (Recorded interview, November 29, 2021, Lines 235 – 241)

She decided to go to Stetson University in DeLand, Florida, to study vocal performance. Stetson's population was less than 1% Black students at the time. Her mother encouraged her to sing all styles of music. In college she had the opportunity to perform leading roles in operas, further expanding her repertoire of music. When she played a "merry wife" in an opera, she was part of a performance seen as controversial because a Black woman was married to a White man. Some people had not seen a Black girl sing some of the music she performed.

In the way you know, and they would want me to sing some Michael Jackson and I could do that for them. I would sing the "ABC" song or "I'll be There," you know, but I'd also sing something that they didn't think I could sing. Oh man, what was (Sings some of

Bach's "Bist du bei mir") So when I was singing the Mozart or Bach they were like, 'How do you know this song?' My mother was just very adamant and determined to make sure that that I knew all types of genre of music not you know, everything.

(Recorded interview, November 21, 2021, Lines 598 – 604)

Her parents were a guiding force for her as she grew up, and helped her navigate the complicated racial relations in the United States. Phyllis was good at making friends, but also encountered plenty of discrimination and racism along the way.

It goes along with the same sort of things that happened to people of color. We still got crosses burned out here. We still had profane things done. But we still persevered in spite of it. My mother was always saying to us that 'you just show them who you are.' And, and so that they won't... perhaps they won't see color. And it happens in some circles that people are able to see you as just a person, of course in other circles of it and at my high school there's always going to be those that will only see your color. So but the thing that gets you in the door is your ability to, to excel. And that's what I did to take advantage of those opportunities that were available for me... (Recorded interview, November 21, 2021, Lines 218 – 225)

When Phyllis went to Stetson University, she came face to face with some of the racism and White supremacy still thriving in Florida. Legal segregation was ending there, and the remnants such as signs separating "Colored" and "White" people were still visible. At the end of her first semester, she attended a Christmas parade and was shocked to see the Ku Klux Klan marching in the parade.

'Okay, now what do I do?' And I and my mother said, 'Scholar yourself, you must be yourself to the glory of God. You were created by God. Everything in you to succeed has

been given to you by your Creator. And whatever you do with what your teachers and others that teach you, is what you do with it opens the doors for you.' That's what my mother and father would tell us over and over again. And she was right. (Recorded interview, November 21, 2021, Lines 248 – 252)

She decided to stay at Stetson and graduated a few years later. Her singing skills, her personality, and her family's training and advice helped her navigate both White and Black realms. She could move between the two worlds well, which enabled her to do many amazing things in her life. She secured jobs singing and playing piano in both Black and White churches.

I ended up singing for an Episcopal Church that paid me serious money, just to sing to services. And then I would go to an AME Church, which is an African Methodist Episcopal Church. And I would go there now, those Episcopalians they probably thought what they were giving me was chicken feed. But it was a lot of money back in those days. So for two services, I'd get paid these hundreds of dollars, just to sing these two services, make the rehearsals, and then I'd ride my bicycle over to the AME church that couldn't afford sometimes to pay me anything at all, but maybe give me a dinner, to also do that. Now, I've always been in that sort of a role to be in both doors, and I don't know why God allowed that for me, and I'm grateful for it. I know that it's to learn something, and it's also to help others learn. (Recorded interview, November 21, 2021, Lines 252 – 261)

... at least in my neck of the woods, my grandparents and my great grandparents knew that those relationships that they had with people who had influence was going to serve us, you know, because you can't change your skin color, or your ethnicity. But what you can do is to behave yourself in such a way that you are, if you're not, well it's going to be

one or the other, or both, or in between. You're going to be respected or you're going to be tolerated. But even in toleration, you're still allowed to be present, but you have to be careful of the things you do and to make sure that you're home alive. I'm sorry to say that even in this time now, I have to say that. (unclear) because I thought for sure. I thought for sure we get there. But anyway, it is what it is... (Recorded interview, November 21, 2021, Lines 414 – 426)

Phyllis has a strong Christian faith and sincerely tries to look for the good in people. She derives a lot of strength from her faith. She tries to be good to other people and help them see everyone's humanity. She values diversity and believes God wanted the world that way. She relates diversity to nature, likening our human population to a beautiful garden full of infinite types of flowers, "But I mean, but he has a variety of like, of everything. And the only reason that the other parts came to choke out what God made is because of the evil one..." (Recorded interview, November 21, 2021, Lines 1067 – 1071). She has trouble understanding why people are sometimes so horrible to each other, and why they cannot see the beauty in each other.

And... I don't understand it. And I pray I pray for all people. I pray for the ones that love everyone. And I pray for the ones that don't. I don't have any, I don't harbor any hatred. I just you know, the same space that they want to live in and be around the next day is the same thing I want for myself and my children and my grandchildren, you know? So I pray for our world I pray for our world because the Creator did not give us the things that we've done and oh how we grieve his heart. Hopefully we will. (Recorded interview, November 21, 2021, Lines 1083 – 1088)

After completing her Bachelor of Music degree, Phyllis attended Georgia State University, working toward a Master of Music degree and a teaching certification. She decided

not to take out student loans and instead worked several jobs while going to graduate school. Phyllis was constantly working. She almost became a school music teacher, but she ran out of money and had to stop her graduate work. She chose to make her position with the Internal Revenue Service her full-time employment, mainly due to the benefit package.

While working, she continued her active performing career, considered going into music and entertainment professionally, and secured an agent with HBO. The lifestyle, however, was not amenable to her, “His crowd, or the people that he was with would do things that I just couldn't do” (Recorded interview, November 29, 2021, Line 235). Many men, some famous, put her in positions that made her uncomfortable, “...but I mean, anybody if, if they put their hand on you, and, and it's someone of authority it's, you know, you know the difference when you're a woman” (Recorded interview, November 21, 2021, Lines 246 – 247). She never compromised her principals to get work, “But I could never take the bait. I would never take the bait” (Recorded interview, November 21, 2021, Line 263).

Although she has worked for the IRS for 35 years, Phyllis has never stopped singing. She has kept very busy with amateur and professional performing and music teaching. Among her many musical activities, here are some: She performed central roles in large concert fundraisers for local churches, accompanied church choirs on piano, directed an after school high school choir, performed with the Atlanta Bach Choir, performed with the Emory Meridian Chorale, performed as a voice actor, has served as music minister for several churches, performed with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Chorus, has performed many solos at local churches, performed for several Georgia governors and Jimmy Carter, performed as part of the National Black Arts Festival, performed in music videos, composed songs, performed as a recording artist, performed in many nursing homes, and has performed with several community choruses.



Phyllis married a man who was very controlling. He forced her to discontinue many of her musical activities, including singing with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Chorus. He appears to have been jealous of her accomplishments. He claimed it was unsafe for her to be downtown at night, rehearsing with the ensemble. In 2001 she filed for divorce and started making more music again, reclaiming her identity. She joined the Community Choral Guild.

And, and I tried my best even we wrote songs together, he started a ministry. I even have those songs. I've got to get those published too. The songs that we did together and, and separately. I did a, in between that, which he was very upset, (Recorded interview, November 21, 2021, Lines 359 – 361)

But I had to find myself again. I was losing me. And like you had said, 'How does choir influence?' It is it's a lifeblood for those of us who sang. Can you imagine a world without music and someone not singing? Oh, that's, that's a dreadful! (Recorded interview, November 21, 2021, Lines 705 – 707)

She is now the minister of music in her home AME church, "...after my divorce came back to my home church, and I'm there now. I'm sure that they're probably looking at somebody to replace me because I am 62. I'd love to stay though." (Recorded interview, November 21, 2021, Lines 855 – 856). Phyllis never wants to stop singing again, "You always keep singing because it gladdens our heart even if you have to sing a sad song" (Recorded interview, November 29, 2021, Line 295). Phyllis has been with the Community Choral Guild more than 20 years and loves every minute of rehearsal. She is still learning.

... it's always wonderful... and I guess if you, if people flatly just see it as a rehearsal, why would you do that? (TOM laughs). You have a chance to, there is so much that, that that is part of music. I mean, even when you hear the accompanist. Even when you're looking

at the notes, and or the language. And you want to know what does this one, what does this mean here? You're in class all over again. So it's the ultimate going back to high school music, or wherever you were doing choir, even if it was, you had a we're blessed to have choirs like we did from first grade and middle school and high school. You know, we were always singing. And I mean, or even just jamming to whatever was on the radio. You know? We did. And it was fun. It was fun to do. We did concerts. I think I told you this part where we will pull out the drum set. And we'd have our own we'd have our own Chastain. (Recorded interview, November 29, 2021, Lines 562 – 570)

Music is very important to Phyllis. She has a beautiful dramatic soprano voice and can sing soprano all the way down to tenor. She sang quite a bit during our interviews, “It's just, it's breath to you. I mean, it revives us.” (Recorded interview, November 29, 2021, Line 444).

Well. You know, songs get you through an awful lot. Songs carry you through the awkward times of life, your joyful times of life. Stressful times of life. Times when you're at war with yourself. Music helps you to sort it out many times. Music can pull you out of the out of your worst of times, and also be there celebratory in your best of times. Or when you don't know what to feel at all. It's a constant friend. It's a constant love in your life, as well. You know, if you're not receiving it. It just gives you so much.

(Recorded interview, November 29, 2021, Lines 485 – 489)

Recently she had the honor of singing at an event on the Emory University campus. Some of Phyllis's family members who preceded her worked for some of the powerful people on campus. Because of the color of their skin, they were not allowed to come in through the front doors or be seen in parts of the building. Phyllis walked right through the front doors of the building, went to the room for the event, and performed. Times have changed.

In these days, but not as a child, no way, I don't think they would. I don't think they'd allow that. I think when we used to drop people off at Emory, when in my age of the 60's, and the 70's, one had to be very careful. And there was just certain places you could go and some certain places you couldn't go. For Emory, what they used to do for my parents that worked there, and the musical thing that I saw was going to Glenn Memorial for the Christmas concerts. And when the laws changed, and you were able to go, you know, I'm sure that there was still a certain place that you sit when you're when you are brown. That's just the way it was. So and even though laws may have changed, mindsets, sometimes do not. So you have to in any anything, even for yourself, you have to read that room. Doesn't matter... like that part of it is like I don't know what that's called...

(Recorded interview, November 21, 2021, Lines 386 - 395)

Phyllis is an admirable woman who has overcome many obstacles in her life. One of the reasons for her strength and fortitude is her ability to appreciate what God has given her. Music has helped her cope with pain and suffering. Another quality she carries with her to adapt is to constantly see life as a classroom. She looks for learning experiences.

Yeah, it is. Because just simply to be. The gift of to be, I don't know whether people realize what a gift that is. Because we did not form ourselves. And there's so much to learn. And this world, every moment that you are alive, you are learning you are. It's a classroom. And what do you want your world to be? You know, and I guess for mine, I just, I with open arms, receive all the gifts and graces and beauty that the Lord will allow me to experience. That's what I want. And I want us to be able to, to live in harmony in that same way, that when we see the birds and we hear them and we see a little inchworm

making his way. You know, all of it is just, it's a gift and not to be squandered.

(Recorded interview, November 21, 2021, Lines 1298 – 1305)

### **Rita's Narrative Portrait**

Rita grew up in rural Alabama, near Alabama A & M, in a town that was not on most maps. She attended a high school with an entirely Black population. There were many teachers in her neighborhood and folks associated with Alabama A & M. The town was in an agricultural area, so many people were farmers.

Rita's mother passed away when Rita was 12 years old, but before she did, she instilled in her children a dedication to church that Rita carries to this day. She grew up singing in church with her siblings and was the seventh of 13 children. The siblings formed a singing group that traveled to local churches performing. After her mother died, she was mostly raised by her elder siblings and her aunts and uncles, and she also took on a lot of responsibilities caring for her younger siblings. "Yeah, you know, at 12 years old, my childhood, kind of ended, because at that point, I had to start, help taking care of my younger brothers and sisters" (Recorded interview, November 28, 2021, Lines 354 – 355).

When Rita entered high school, she took chorus class. She cannot exactly remember signing up, and said she felt like it was required. Perhaps a teacher signed her up for it because word got around that she had a very strong and beautiful voice. She was happy to be in her high school chorus. "But I grew up singing. So it was just a part of me that I've always, you know, loved to sing. So when, being in a choir, it just kind of came naturally for me to do that" (Recorded interview, November 28, 2021, Lines 222 – 223).

Her high school had one chorus class, consisting of 9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grade students. There were about 50 students singing in the chorus at the time. By Rita's account the two music teachers (a conductor and an accompanist), were excellent musicians who worked the students hard and

were very strict. The accompanist was also an operatic singer who could sing all the parts and taught the students their harmonies using the piano and his voice. He also taught other classes in the school that were not music.

Yes, we had the piano teacher, and then we had the person that was teaching us the music. So they worked hand in hand. And both of them were very, very qualified, very experienced in the music that they were teaching. So those were the two, I still remember their names. Lettie Boyd and Mr. Charles Lee. Mr. Charles Lee was the pianist. And Leddy Boyd was the music director and taught us the voice and interpretation of the song and the dynamics and so forth. (Recorded interview, November 28, 2021, Lines 116 – 120)

Although Rita says the teachers did not create very personal relationships with the students, she thinks the students looked up to them. She respected their professionalism and believed she and the other students wanted to please their teachers with their progress. She was always very impressed with her teachers and the choral experience they created.

I think you do really have to like the directors though. And I did like my directors, because of what they brought to the table. For example, Mr. Lee's voice quality; He could sing all voice parts, from Soprano to Bass. And then the director, I liked to see the way she directed the choir. It's just, I don't know, it was just the overall experience. (Recorded interview, December 5, 2021, Lines 552 – 555)

Rita's chorus teachers stressed the importance of success at music competitions. She believes the students were nervous before festival performances because they wanted to please the teachers. They wanted to win the competitions, and display all we had learned, which was a lot to remember. She felt the pressure and also the achievement associated with the

competitions. The competitions also provided the group with an opportunity to travel and sing as well.

So yeah, we participated in music festivals. And we actually won, I think two years in a row. And it was just a great experience. You know, traveling and then I think we had to travel to Tennessee or somewhere for that music festival. (Recorded interview, November 28, 2021, Lines 133 – 135)

There was a lot of pressure on us, because there were a lot of things they taught us that we had to execute going into these festivals. You know, we had to have breathing techniques down pat, we had to have our diction, the articulation, all of that perfected. All those things they taught us in class, we had to perform that. So we were well prepared for it. But you know, executing it is a different thing. So evidently, we did it very well to win first place. They were very serious about winning, I mean, very serious. (Recorded interview, November 28, 2021, Lines 596 – 601)

(Recorded interview, November 28, 2021, Lines 596 – 601)

Rita's teachers were quite serious and strict with their students' musicality and their behavior. "When you came into the choir, you weren't really concerned about relationships, because those teachers were serious about our music. (Recorded interview, November 28, 2021, Lines 380 – 281). The relationships with other choir members were certainly secondary to the music. Rita was more motivated by the music the group created than by any relationships related to the experience. Rita was awed by the sound the teachers got out of the choir.

Although the music teachers had very high standards for ensemble performance, they did not grade students individually on their performance skills. Students did not have to sing by themselves for grades. Dedication to the ensemble, behavior, and cooperation seemed central.

You knew you would get an “A” or a good grade in choir by coming to rehearsals on time because, they were very strict about being on time. Also, learning your parts, listening during rehearsals, and just following directions. I think all of those just helped you to get a good grade in choir. (Recorded interview, November 28, 2021, Lines 559 – 561)

Rita’s chorus teachers did not explicitly express to students that they should use skills learned in chorus after school. However, all teachers in the school impressed upon the students that the decisions they made in school would follow them the rest of their lives.

This will follow you the rest of your life, this is something that was taught from our principal and all of our teachers. It was stressed over and over ‘these are things that are going to follow you the rest of your life. So you’ve got to do it right, or you need to do your best.’ We were instructed these things on a daily basis. (Recorded interview, November 28, 2021, Lines 577 – 580).

In Rita’s high school chorus class, students learned mostly by rote. The pianist would play or sing the parts and the students would learn them. To Rita’s best recollection, the teachers did not use a music reading system. However, now that she is an adult in a chorus associated with a university, she is learning reading skills, for which she is thankful.

There were a few people in the choir that could read music. I remember one young lady who played the piano. She could read music. But no, I didn't learn to read music back then. Matter of fact, I've learned to read more now that I'm in university Choral Ensemble than anywhere. And that's why I really appreciate it. (Recorded interview, November 28, 2021, Lines 447 – 450)

Rita loved the music her high school chorus teachers chose. The repertoire mostly consisted of Spirituals and hymns. She loved the harmonies and learning vocal techniques. Her biggest motivator seemed to be her love of the music itself. Many of the songs have stayed a part of her life ever since then. Her time in high school chorus was one of the best experiences of her life.

Well, I enjoyed just singing the repertoire of songs that were chosen by the directors. The highlight of the performance was hearing the different voices in the choir, how we harmonized and how we executed what we'd been taught in terms of enunciation, the vocal expressions, and the overall vocal quality of the choir. (Recorded interview, November 28, 2021, Lines 518 – 522).

I tell you, that was one of the best experiences I've had in my life. The teachers were so dedicated and serious about the music that we sang. And also serious about how we sang it. They didn't want you to make a mistake at all, from the diction on down to the quality of your voice, the breathing techniques and so forth. And the songs, the repertoire that they chose for us to sing. I think I mentioned earlier in the survey, one of the songs that we sang, it sticks with me to this day, "Create in Me a Clean Heart, O God." I tell you, I love that song. And it has stuck with me all throughout my life. So it was very important to me. (Recorded interview, November 28, 2021, Lines 104 – 110)

Rita has suffered a lot of loss and music has helped her endure her grief, find joy, and be closer to God. In addition to losing her mother early in life, her son, who was a police officer, died unexpectedly. Music has been a balm to her wounds and has helped her get through tough times.



Right. Yeah, just being able to express some of the grief and hurt through song has helped me a lot. (Recorded interview, November 28, 2021, Lines 175 – 176)

You have sad parts in your life, but then you look at how the Lord has brought you through and you're still making it and still have joy in your life. One of the songs from my album is from Nehemiah 8:10, “The joy of the Lord is the strength of my life.” It has helped me a lot being able to convey this kind of message through songs. has helped me a lot. (Recorded interview, November 28, 2021, Lines 178-18)

Also a lot of hymns helped me. I love hymns. Like “A Mighty Fortress is Our God.” I love that one. (Recorded interview, November 28, 2021, Lines 188 –189)

Oh, yeah. I tell you singing helps me so much. When I'm feeling down, a song will come to my mind that just helps me to refocus and get back on track. I'm a spiritual person, so singing is just a part of my life. There's so much meaning in some songs that can relate to your spirit that helps you to stay grounded. So it's just a great part of my life. I will tell you, if I didn't sing, I don't know what I would do. This may be true for a lot of people, I mean, it's very important.(Recorded interview, November 28, 2021, Lines 540 – 546)

She was also seriously injured in a car accident. During her recovery she had to spend a lot of time in bed and “the Lord gave” (Recorded interview, December 5, 2021, Line 81) her some songs. The songs she was inspired to write helped her deal with grief and pain and led her to seriously think about a career in music. In 2002 music also led her to her future husband. She searched for an experienced person to produce her album of original songs. The man she found helped her write all the instrumental parts, they produced an album, and there are several recordings on YouTube. After the album was finished in 2007, they began dating and eventually got married. Now her husband is a music graduate student, working on a degree in composition.

He took university's Choral Ensemble class during his graduate school program and encouraged her to take it. Now she has been in the group for three years. She also recently took a music theory class.

In university Choral Ensemble, she enjoys the variety of music. The ensemble performs repertoire in many languages and from several different musical traditions. She likes all the people and the relaxed atmosphere. Their conductor always begins rehearsal by asking what exciting things are happening in the singers' lives. She likes hearing what other people are doing in the group, including playing different instruments, performing outside the choir, other activities, making music, and more. The ensemble is very diverse, which she enjoys. The diversity in age, background, race, ethnicity, and vocal skills creates a unique and beautiful sound.

So we have a variety of people in that choir: students, attorneys, I mean, professional people like myself. People from all walks of life. But the quality that comes that comes out of that group is really amazing. So I really like it and I have to commend the conductor for that. (Recorded interview, December 5, 2021, Lines 340 – 343)

She enjoys learning the solfege music reading system and other music reading techniques, and she finds the conductor's voice to be incredibly beautiful. She does not enjoy singing on neutral syllables because she would rather sing on the text of the pieces, a common feeling amongst singers. She likes the conductor's repertoire choices. She finds the pieces in foreign languages the most challenging, but also interesting. The music is not too hard or too easy, but right on point, she believes. She finds the conductor to be a good motivator.

So I don't know, it's just her demeanor. She's, not dogmatic or anything like that. I think its the conductor, and how they relate to us, is what I think really motivates us to even

come to class. And the things she does to try to make us get involved in the group.

Allowing people to tell her and the class what's happening in their lives. I like that part of it. (Recorded interview, December 5, 2021, Lines 501 – 506)

Rita still regularly uses the skills she learned in her high school choir. She uses her vocal skills when she sings in church, university Choral Ensemble, and at home.

The training from high school chorus, being disciplined in learning the parts, the correct enunciation of vowel phrases, and the quality of my voice flowed over into my adult singing life. However, you must continue to perfect your skills even more. So, yeah, I think that did help a lot. (Recorded interview, December 5, 2021, Lines 215 – 219)

She directs hymns at her church and wants to take a conducting class. As a cantor she has lead singing in many church services. She is still not sure she wants to be a full director, but seems to be somewhat interested in the idea.

I'm going to take a conducting class. But, um, I don't know, I'm kind of shy. I don't know if I could do it. I don't know. (both laugh) I'm a shy person. I mean, I think it would be a great experience. (Recorded interview, December 5, 2021, Lines 573 – 575)

Rita does believe she is a good singer but tries not to compare herself to others. She tries to glorify God with her performances and bring beauty and joy to people through quality performances.

But in terms of performance, what I try not to do is to compare my performance with other people. Because I feel like what God gave me is my talent. And I take it and I try to do the best that I can, to present it to the best of my ability. If I didn't feel like I was pretty good singer, I probably would not perform. But I think I'm pretty good. (Recorded interview, December 5, 2021, Lines 641 – 644)

When asked how she handles successes and failures, Rita said she is very critical of herself, but tries not to be too hard on herself. She is still taking classes and looking for opportunities to learn and grow.

So if I, succeed, and personally, I'm the type of person, I'm very hard on myself. So I could practice on a song and sing it and feel like I did pretty well. But I'm always going to see a point where I could have done better. I could have done this better or that better. I could have held that note longer or I could have pronounced this word, enunciated it better or rounded my tone. I am so critical that when I perform, I rarely ever listen to my performances. I critique myself as I perform. Not sure if that's good or bad. So, I have to get to the point where I don't judge myself so harshly.

Rita still practices at home regularly. She plays her part at the piano and sings. She insists that practicing is important, and she tries very hard to improve her performances and do the very best she can.

Oh, yeah, definitely. Have to. Definitely. I don't have anyone else to really practice with. So yeah. Matter of fact, I have a performance this week coming up at a revival at our church. So yeah, I definitely have to practice. Practice makes better. Yeah, I won't say perfect. (both laugh)

She is very driven to succeed. She holds herself to very high standards, is presently pursuing a Music Management Degree at University and is undecided on her career path in the music industry.

TOM

That's really cool. And for singers like you, you seem to be interested in reaching that bar. I guess maybe because you want to challenge yourself or you really wanted to give

something beautiful to the audiences. What do you think? Why do you think you're interested in reaching that bar?

RITA

Um, well, one reason is because whatever I do, I want to do my best. And when I do sing, you're right, I do want to bring an experience to people that I feel like they can, they would enjoy, and that they would receive a blessing from it. They will want to hear me perform again, you know? So definitely, I think that's what I'm thinking when I sing. And of course, when I present myself before people, I want to make sure that I give my best, whatever I can do. So, like I said, I do my best. I practice, pray, and let God do the rest. (both laugh) (Recorded interview, December 5, 2021, Lines 684 – 695)

Perhaps some of her drive and expectations of excellence came from her choir teachers all those years ago. One wonders how her life would have been different without that high school experience. Without high school choir, she said she would still be singing, but it would not be the same. “But I probably still would have been in choirs and so forth. I just don't know if I would be as maybe disciplined as I am.” (Recorded interview, November 28, 2021, Lines 659 – 660)

### **Steve's Narrative Portrait**

Steve attended a small private school in suburban Denver associated with a Baptist church. He and his older brother went to the church and affiliated school and his parents attended the church as well. Steve, who is now in his 40's, says some of his peers still actively participate in the same church and school. When he was promoted to high school, his mother decided to home school him for his general education classes, but he continued attending school for sports and some classes, including basketball, football, physical education, choir, orchestra, and band. He also played violin in the Denver Young Artists Orchestra.

Steve was very musically active as a child, as were many of his peers. Many of the students who sang in his school choir sang in the church choir there as well. Steve said his school was known for their fine arts program. Music was a part of the daily life for people at his church and school from a very young age through adulthood. Joining the high school choir was never much of a question for him. Music was always part of his day.

The funny thing is it was more something that we had done ever since elementary school. So I mean, even from the time when I got into kindergarten, first grade, and things like that, I mean, they had elementary school choirs and elementary... In teaching, first, second, third grade, there was a lot of music that went into the actual teaching of mathematics, other things and stuff like that. (Recorded interview, December 2, 2021, Lines 158 – 161)

Music was just kind of a part of everyday life, if you will, with regards to school, as well as even just church and things like that, and your involvement in both. And so it was just something that was always there. And, and, you know, it wasn't that the parents pushed it on us or anything else like that. (Recorded interview, December 2, 2021, Lines 162 – 165)

Steve's choir teacher was a charismatic man who was very dedicated to the church and to the school. He didn't just work during school hours but took students on mission trips and to competitions. Steve believes his choir teacher helped him find an appreciation for the beauty of music, and for the performance of music.

So his involvement within our lives you know, continue even to this day and and we all have a lot of respect for individuals like that, that will just engage in that... fine appreciation for music. And I think that was part of it too was just the appreciation for

what music truly can be and is. (Recorded interview, December 2, 2021, Lines 210 – 213)

Steve remembers learning breathing techniques in class, music reading skills using solfege and numbers, and scale exercises to explore singers' vocal ranges. He said his teacher worked on teaching the students diction and vocal projection skills as well. Steve enjoyed the repertoire his school and church choirs sang as well.

Steve remembers students were graded individually on their singing and memorization. Although the choir teacher pulled students out of class to hear them individually, he does not think it was punitive or intimidating. It was a good opportunity for the choir teacher to work with individuals on their skills.

And there was coaching and instruction that went along with that. But yes, you were also somewhat graded. And it wasn't necessarily graded on how well you actually sang; some people sing better than others. I mean, there's nothing against that, but just on how well you were actually excelling within you know that. I guess you could say that there was a showing of you are trying to you know, better yourself in whatever it is that you're performing or doing. (Recorded interview, December 2, 2021, Lines 350 – 354)

Ron wanted to know, he wanted to have a personal relationship with each of his students I think as well, but also to coach and give instruction but then yes, also encouraged on, on how to better yourself in your singing abilities or what needed, you know, you could get one on one instruction and coaching I think a little bit. (Recorded interview, December 2, 2021, Lines 362 – 365)

Steve's choir teacher, who also led the church choir as well as the school's band, led an auditioned honors choir. The honors choir traveled for performance tours and even sang at a

Chicago Bulls game when Jordan and Pippin were on the team. Steve was motivated to audition for the group and successfully auditioned into the choir. He enjoyed the traveling, performing, and the more challenging music. The honors choir was one of Steve's favorite parts of his high school music program.

Steve's high school choir and honors choir performed at many off-campus locations and events, including the state capitol, sporting venues, nursing homes, churches, tours, and an annual competition called CACS (Colorado Association of Christian Schools). "Traveling, as I said, was a big part of it for some of us, you know. Getting able to, being able to go and travel to some of the other states and locations and things like that" (Recorded interview, December 2, 2021, Lines 277 – 278). Preparing for and executing these performances were Steve's favorite part of school choir.

I think the exciting part was working your way up to being able to go on the honors choir tours, or like I said, CACS competition. Those are some of the things that were pushed, you know, and you wanted to perform and do things well, in those competition, things like that. Or like I said, going to the, to the Capitol, we also, parades that you might be involved in, things like that. Those things were always enjoyable. (Recorded interview, December 2, 2021, Lines 378 – 382)

The annual Colorado Association of Christian Schools included competitions in many areas, including choral performance, poetry, speech, and band performance. It was a large event to which many schools from around the state traveled each year. Steve enjoyed the camaraderie, friendly competition, collaboration, and the opportunities for growth and connections. He would see the same students at those competitions at church youth events. He did not feel a lot of



pressure associated with the performances to which he gives credit to the adults in his life who encouraged bettering oneself through hard work, not through defeating others.

And that was one of the highlights of the year was going to those competitions. You got to know some of the students from some of the other schools as well. We actually did a combined music festival that weekend as well, where were you at perform with the students from the other schools, both in honors as well as other choirs (Recorded interview, December 2, 2021, Lines 284 – 287)

I think it can be. I, I know that there's a lot of pressure put on a lot of individuals and things like that. But the pressure, I think with regards to that was, in our competitions, winning isn't everything, you know? You go, you, you perform, you do the best that you can. And that's all that is required of you, you know? Whether you place first, second, fifth, 20th, it doesn't really matter. And, you know...again, it's, it's we're all kind of here to kind of do the same things. There was encouragement... (Recorded interview, December 2, 2021, Lines 423 – 427)

A common thread amongst adults in Steve's community was their effort to encourage young people. Steve was encouraged to take part in musical activities inside the school as well as outside the school. He was encouraged to use his gifts to give people beauty and blessings. Many people saw music as a lifetime activity, right for children and adults.

And then I think music was definitely encouraged. I think that was another thing with it. And I think that was a wonderful thing, that was music was encouraged period. And whether it be your teachers or the things and yes, your parents and stuff like that were or, you know, encouraged in doing music not necessarily just within your local church, and

your local school, but also within the community. (Recorded interview, December 2, 2021, Lines 297 – 300)

Encourage your students to go and do things, you know, that here's a gift that you have, and you know, use it in, you know, in whatever way you can. Whether it be within your church, whether it be within your community, things like that, go and actually use your music elsewhere. (Recorded interview, December 2, 2021, Lines 306 – 308)

There were adult musicians associated with the church who taught private music lessons. Any person attending the church or school could easily find a music teacher. In fact, his mother taught private voice there. The strong music program served as a kind of outreach and attracted people to the church and gave them an opportunity to be included in the church community. One event often led to invitations to more events and services.

Steve's church mission trips highlighted the music program through student and adult live performances. The church he attends now also does this. Sharing Christianity with others and encouraging people to join the church's community of love and support is a central purpose of most Baptist congregations. Steve has always tried to invite people in, to share commonalities with others, and to make music with others. Steve continues to meet people and commune with others through musical activities.

...and we even did a missions trip with the school kids and we all went to Canada. And but there was a ton of us from the choir, there was a number of us that were in music ministry that played instruments and things like that. So when we would go on these different trips, in those senses, we would perform and do music. (Recorded interview, December 2, 2021, Lines 144 – 147)

And, you know, so, um, the music was just an avenue, I think of just we looked upon it more so as just a not necessarily even a spiritual gift, but in certain ways, you know, this is something that, honestly, yes, God has provided us with, and things like that, that we can use in minister and other areas and just be a blessing (Recorded interview, December 2, 2021, Lines 194 – 197)

Since high school, Steve has consistently made music without a significant stoppage. He still uses the breathing techniques, diction skills, and understanding and appreciation of music he learned in his school choirs. Although he has moved, he has stayed involved in churches, church music ensembles, and other secular music ensembles. He has played violin in orchestras, played percussion in bands, and even helped teach drumline at some Colorado high schools. Playing in an orchestra with his brother, however, was a major highlight for him.

Well, since high school, one of my fonder experiences is actually with my brother. As we got a little bit older, he had gotten himself involved in an orchestra group, and I actually got called with him, they needed some assistance in a couple areas and they knew I had the musical expertise to do so. And so he kind of invited me along. (Recorded interview, December 11, 2021, Lines 51 – 54)

He continues inviting people to performances and to church activities. For Steve, music making continues to be central to connecting people and spreading the word of the church. When his friends perform, he attends, supports them, and appreciates the music. When his friends' children perform, he does the same. He continues to appreciate music, making a long series of connections to others as he ages.

I've continued in singing within my church. Every church that I've been a part of, and I've been going to church since I was young, and then if there were other avenues or other

things, you know, that is more of my interconnections with people saying, 'Hey, you know, there's this men's group that I'm singing with,' or 'Hey, you know, we're wanting to do this for something else,' that I've just been able to continue, and just have other connections and being able to perform and do some type of music and, and singing. And, you know, I just myself, even seem to look for certain opportunities, if I see them.

(Recorded interview, December 11, 2021, Lines 214 – 219)

And really enjoyed my experiences there as well, got to do a lot of traveling. And being able to, you know, go on trips and things like that, serving by ministering in music.

(Recorded interview, December 11, 2021, Lines 59 – 60)

Steve has worked in many security capacities and is now a federal officer with the TSA Surge Capacity division. His love and appreciation for music led him to look for jobs around music. He worked ticketing and security for some large venues, and they often gave him complimentary tickets. He enjoyed and appreciated the diversity of the many acts and musicals that came through Red Rocks and the Denver Performing Arts Complex. Steve thinks music education is important, and students should learn that there are many people involved in each performance who are not in the spotlight.

I encourage young people, you know, it's one of the things that young people need to also think about. If they enjoy music, or if you do have some type of music appreciation, you know, there are areas to get involved with in music, where you're not necessarily just performing. You know, you can be behind the scenes, you can be in those areas where, you know, you can be on a sound crew or you know you can be in an area of security, or you're you can be someone to help with the setup and sets and things like that. And, you know, be rewarded for doing certain things and have a nice job or something like that as

well going into stuff, but at the same time appreciate and be around, you know some of that music and some of that culture. (Recorded interview, December 11, 2021, Lines 186 – 193)

Steve is involved in his church's mission trips, and with music groups with young people. He believes singing groups are a great way to bring people into the church, and to help pass his appreciation of music on to the next generation.

That's another area where I'm still involved as well as kind of working with young people and things like that. Being able to sing with them in our children's ministries and things like that with church stuff. You know, we do singing groups with the young people and the kids. (Recorded interview, December 11, 2021, Lines 79 – 81)

Somewhat recently, Steve moved to Atlanta and joined a church. After singing with his church for a while, an individual in the church choir recommended he try out for Community Choral Guild. Thus, the theme of music connecting people came forward again in his life. He has now been in the guild for two years. His first year he earned a lead role in a guild performance of *Oedipus Tex*. He can sing bass or tenor and is often forced to sing tenor because ensembles are often short on tenors.

He enjoys singing in Community Choral Guild. He believes the director does a good job of communicating with singers and checking with them for clarity, so the rehearsal process feels collaborative and respectful. Although the guild is not a religious organization in any way, Steve sees several benefits to his continued participation. He sees it as an area of ministry, he experiences many styles of music, and he improves his vocal skills.

The funny thing with that is, is it's still an area of ministry. Music being that connection, I can go and I can sing with these individuals and I don't necessarily even have to indicate

to them what I do. You know that I know that... You know that I go to church and this and that, but you know, things come up in conversations and stuff, or, 'Hey, I do sing with my church and hey, you know, we got a performance.' (Recorded interview, December 11, 2021, Lines 376 – 380)

What you learn at church, I'll just be honest, is very limited. It is continuing doing a lot of worship music, you're doing a lot of just church music, if you will. And you know, and whatever style that your church might do. (Recorded interview, December 11, 2021, Lines 385 – 387)

Community Choral Guild helps in the way of still helping in bettering certain areas of being able to be vocally better in my own church ministry, and also in other ways, and encouraging of music styles and, and singing and teaching. And, you know, a lot of things that we do there is even a little bit more difficult than some of the stuff that you might do in church. (Recorded interview, December 11, 2021, Lines 389 – 392)

The conductor of the guild sometimes pushes the envelope with modern repertoire and music from distant parts of the world. Steve likes most of the music, but some of it can be difficult or require a lot of rehearsal. Some of the styles are not his cup of tea, but overall he likes the repertoire the ensemble sings. Steve enjoys encountering many styles of music and no matter the style, he enjoys learning the backgrounds works of art.

What is the song is about? I enjoy those things, period, in any type of music. Why did this person write the song? And what does the song represent? And what is the meaning behind the song? That can be both in Christian music as well as secular. (Recorded interview, December 11, 2021, Lines 434 – 437)

Steve believes the singers in the group are motivated when they walk in the door, so the conductor does not have to stir them very much.

And we are there because of what we enjoy, and the love of music. And we want to perform to the best of our ability. And we don't want to disappoint. We don't want to disappoint ourselves first and foremost, but we also don't want to disappoint Kerry as our director and as our instructor. We already have an appreciation for him.... (Recorded interview, December 11, 2021, Lines 457 – 460)

He sees his conductor motivating the singers with professionalism, words of praise, and facial expressions that signify that the singers got something right.

He motivates by his actions. I think we are encouraged and we are pleased with ourselves when we see that he is pleased in what we are doing and that we did something properly or, you know, like this whole new thing. (Recorded interview, December 11, 2021, Lines 461 – 463)

Steve does believe he is good at singing, but he continually strives to improve. He has a humble spirit and looks to learn from everybody he meets.

I do think I'm good at singing. But I think there's always somebody, there's always room for various improvement. We're always continually learning. There's nobody in this world that has it all. All down, that's like, you might have your PhD, or this or that. But, you know, somebody can come along and share something with you, that is something you've never heard before. Or show you something or teach you something... we're continually learning. You never stop learning. (Recorded interview, December 11, 2021, Lines 489 – 493)

He is motivated to improve through practice not to achieve perfection, but to give the beautiful gift of music to other people.

And I will say that boldly that I am striving for, it's not striving for perfection, but is striving to give something, give reverence or glory to something as well. And doing so within my musical ability trying to strive for more of a perfection to do that. And, you know, that's even some of the reasons why I do certain things. (Recorded interview, December 11, 2021, Lines 513 – 516)

He has been asked to sing solos before and although those make him nervous, he has been encouraged and supported by others.

Even a couple individuals saying, 'Hey, thanks for having the courage to do that. I would love to do something like that. But I don't have the courage to get up there in front of an audience and do what you did.' And just coming to the realization that, you know, yes, this is something that I enjoy. But at the same time, you don't have to be entirely perfect, I think sometimes it's stressed too much upon us and things like that, and in various things you know? That we are not perfect people. But we are striving for certain areas in things and stuff like that, but it's okay to make mistakes now and again. (Recorded interview, December 11, 2021, Lines 540 – 551)

One of the main reasons Steve continues to participate in choral ensembles is the connections they enable him to make with other people. Steve believes music has the power to bring people together for positive reasons. Music has the power to change people's lives for the better.

With that, you know, this is a way and a means of me being able to communicate to others. And it's something that also that I enjoy. You know? Music is just the way to



connect with other individuals, but also in some area where I can share and give this gift to others, if you will, because I think music is something that you can give. It's even shown now, then you know, there's even a commercial out that you see right now that you know, as a gift for Christmas, or for this matter, even for birthdays now, or even for your anniversary, or whatever else it might be, where you can write down certain things. And you can send it off to these individuals that will help to write you a song that you can present that to your loved one or this that or whatever else. Music just has a nice connection like that. That's why we love music. (Recorded interview, December 11, 2021, Lines 551 – 559)

Steve enjoys how music can build bridges between people who are from different backgrounds, and how it can connect cultures with a common thread.

And doing that with other individuals. You know, and I think that's just kind of the biggest thing to take from it is just, you know, the spectrum of the beauty that can be created, with individuals from various realms getting together. That's the one thing again, even with the beauty of the choral guild, one of the things like you said, the choral guild is designed and made up with people from all sorts of different areas of life, you know? Like I am there with another one person from my church. There's other people from various other churches that literally grew up around that type of music. But then there's other individuals that just came from other backgrounds and diversities, things like that. But we are all coming together in a collective to present and do something within that group. And the beauty behind that. And that's just enjoyable. That's one of the things that I can't do within church, we're all the same. We're all coming for that same kind of thing and stuff like that. (Recorded interview, December 11, 2021, Lines 608 – 619)

A few years ago, Steve's church took a mission trip to Brazil. The trip was a very exciting opportunity for him to travel and experience Brazilian culture. Understanding and appreciating other cultures through their music is important to Steve.

And when we went to Brazil, on our missions trip and stuff like that, you know. Sure, we were singing in English, and we learned a couple songs and other languages and stuff like that. But music is kind of a worldwide thing. And it's interesting to get to learn and know about music from other locations and cultures. And I think that should be encouraged also, not necessarily just, not necessarily just the different types of music. Yes, you have your jazz got your pop, you have your classical, you have your soft rock, you have your rock. Yeah, I understand that. But the different cultures, and what music is, and appreciation of some of those other cultures, and the types of music that they do and things like that. Yeah, I think that was just kind of a big part of it. (Recorded interview, December 2, 2021, Lines 319 – 326)

...you know, a couple of things that we might have done in high school that, you know, we even take into our adult lives and stuff was just fun ways to just spending time in fellowship even as you get older with other individuals and things like that as well. (Recorded interview, December 11, 2021, Lines 232 – 235)

## 5 RESULTS

### Analysis

Using the six-step method outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019), I systematically analyzed Chapter Four's narrative portraits for evidence related to my research questions. Most importantly, I searched for evidence of a potential relationship between high school choral music experiences and adult musicians' current motivations to continue making music. I analyzed with

my theoretical framework in mind, looking for participants' attributions (ability, effort, task difficulty, luck), and looking for their teachers' and their own learning motivations (performance-approach, performance-avoidance, mastery-approach, mastery avoidance). In the next section I will detail my analysis process.

A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). Furthermore, the “keyness” of a theme is not necessarily dependent on quantifiable measures – but rather on whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). For my analysis I took an inductive approach, which means the themes identified are strongly linked to the data themselves (Patton, 1990), as such, this form of thematic analysis bears some similarity to grounded theory. In this approach, if the data have been collected specifically for the research (via interview or focus group), the themes identified may bear little relation to the specific questions that were asked of the participants. They would also not be driven by the researcher's theoretical interest in the area or topic. Inductive analysis is therefore a process of coding the data without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame, or the researcher's analytic preconceptions. In this sense, this form of thematic analysis is data-driven (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 83).

For phase one, I completed Braun and Clarke's (2006) “familiarizing yourself with the data” (p. 87) step by reading and re-reading the narrative portraits. I wrote down initial ideas for possible themes, questions I had, and anything meaningful that I noticed. I made special note of the topics that came up often in each portrait. For example, Katherine's love of music, singing, and her enjoyment of the jazz repertoire her high school teacher chose were centerpieces of her story. Steve regularly returned to the issue of connecting to people through music rehearsal and

performance. He expressed desire to connect to people by singing in person, as well as to composers across cultures by learning about the meanings and backgrounds of their music.

In phase two, I generated initial codes. To keep my data organized, I uploaded the portrait documents into NVivo software. Once the documents were in NVivo, I read through them and coded every word into what NVivo called “nodes.” NVivo collated my codes in an organized fashion. I went through all the data, one document at a time, coding all the text. I placed many paragraphs and sentences under multiple codes. For instance, all participants mentioned activities beyond-the-classroom, such as competitions, trips, and special performances. I created a code for all of them, but they all fell into other codes as well, such as spirituality/church, peer relationships, and competition. All of the participants talked about their high school chorus teacher’s influence. Some of them were inspired by the personal encouragement their teachers gave them, others were simply impressed by their teachers’ professionalism and musical talent. I created several codes related to characteristics of high school teachers and their programs.

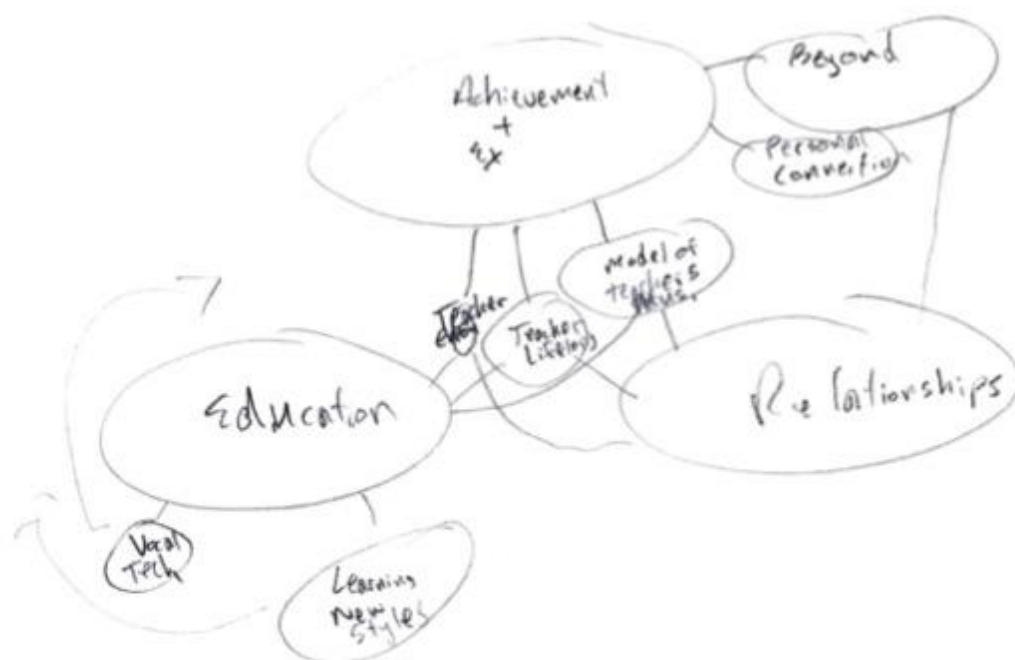
In phase three I searched for themes. I followed Braun and Clarke’s (2006) advice to “start thinking about the relationships between codes, between themes, and between different levels of themes” (p. 89). I read all the codes and the data excerpts collated within them. I consolidated many of the codes together when it became clear that they were part of larger themes. For example, the theme of personal growth and achievement was the result of several sub-codes related to education, competition, self-esteem, meeting challenges, mastery of skills, and teacher influences. Some participants, Rita and Mila especially, were very inspired by their high school chorus’s success at competitions and the work they put in to reach those heights. Rita and Adrian believed their experiences preparing for competitions made them more detail oriented, driven to succeed, and gave them the specific content understanding to help them

become better singers they later utilized as adults. At first, I thought the participants were simply interested in winning, but upon further reflection I realized they were motivated to strive for new levels of mastery thanks to participation in competitions. Therefore, I included competition as a sub-theme of personal growth and achievement.

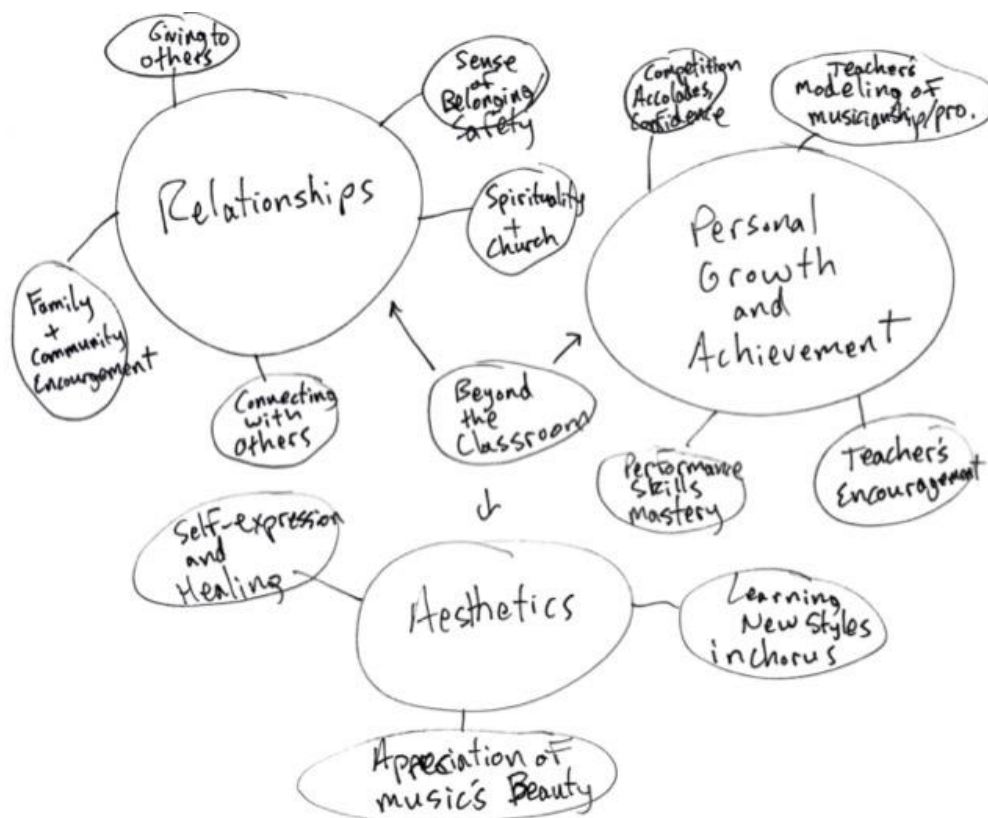
I used my long list of themes and created a thematic map. I looked to see whether themes were related, how they were related, and how I might combine them under overarching themes. I kept a miscellaneous theme for codes I still could not place. Many of the themes I found related to participants' motivations to connect to others, to be part of a team, to give to others, and to feel a sense of belonging. For Adrian, Steve, Phyllis, and Mila, the relationships they made in chorus were very strong motivators. I grouped those as sub-themes under relationships. I included my progressive thematic maps in Figures A, B, and C.

## **Figure A**

*Thematic Map Version 1***Figure B**

*Thematic Map Version 2***Figure C**

### Thematic Map Version 3



In phase four I refined my themes. I reviewed the collated excerpts under each theme and considered whether they appeared to form coherent patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I had to move some of the excerpts into other themes and created new theme titles that better reflected new groupings of excerpts. The key progress I made in phase four was that I ensured my themes and sub-themes were consistent across the entire data set. Under each theme, I compared the excerpts from each portrait to the excerpts from all the portraits. I created a new thematic map with a hierarchical grouping of sub-themes under themes. The new grouping was much more consolidated than the previous grouping, which enabled me to describe the three main themes as aesthetic experiences, personal growth and achievement, and positive social experiences. I kept a theme of negatives separate from the other themes so that I could revisit it.



I also kept the theme of beyond-the-classroom because I believed that it was an important commonality amongst all participants. The excerpts within the beyond-the-classroom theme were double coded into other themes, which forced me to consider eliminating it. I decided, however, that there was something important about the beyond-the-classroom experiences every participant seemed to enjoy. Each of their high school teachers provided solo and/or group opportunities for their students to perform at competitions, take trips, and learn from different teachers. Steve's beyond-the-classroom experiences were valuable to him because they enabled him to connect with other Baptist churchgoers across the state. Mila's beyond-the-classroom experiences were important to her because she reveled in achieving victory in competitions. Adrian seemed thankful for his beyond-the-classroom experiences because they focused classroom activities on the mastery of performance skills. Phyllis enjoyed achieving at competitions as well, but she also mentioned that first and foremost she enjoyed the camaraderie around them. Although I could have inserted the beyond-the-classroom theme under the other three main themes, I thought it deserving of special attention in this study.

In phase five I further defined and named the themes within the narrative portraits. I worked to write clear definitions of each theme to codify their significance to myself and the reader. I found the clearest words to describe all the excerpts within each sub-theme. For each theme and sub-theme, I wrote a few sentences to define the scope and content and to identify the essence of what each theme was about (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Table 7 includes my sentences defining each theme.

**Table 7**

***Definitions of Themes and Sub-Themes***

Theme topic	Sub-Theme topic	Theme
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1. Aesthetic experiences		In high school chorus, participants developed their appreciation of music's beauty, their ability and curiosity to learn various styles of music, and their ability to express themselves and heal through choral singing and believed these aesthetic experiences motivated them to seek similar experiences in adult choruses.
	Appreciation of music's beauty	In high school chorus, participants developed their appreciation of the beauty of their choirs' repertoire, that of the human voice, and that of harmony. They were also interested in understanding the poetry, the backgrounds of the composers, historical contexts, symbolism and interpretations. They enjoyed shaping performances to make them more beautiful and felt a sense of pleasure from partaking in the experience of singing in a chorus, all of which motivated them to seek similar experiences in adult choruses.
	Learning new styles of music in chorus	In high school chorus, participants learned styles of music they did not encounter on a daily basis. They enjoyed how their teachers chose a diversity of repertoire, enabling them to learn music from around the world and use music as a window into other cultures all of which motivated them to seek similar experiences in adult choruses.
	Self-expression and healing	In high school chorus, participants believed chorus made them feel happier. They felt more seen and healed by singing in groups. They saw singing as a way to express their feelings to cope with suffering and to celebrate joy, which they wished to continue in adult choruses.
2. Personal growth and achievement		In high school chorus, participants received performance-approach instruction in elements of performance skills mastery they proudly displayed in competitions, developed confidence in their vocal skills, received encouragement from their teachers, and learned from teachers who modeled excellent musicianship and professionalism. These experiences contributed to participants' lifelong dispositions toward personal musical growth and achievement in vocal music which led them to continue singing in adult choruses.
Theme topic	Sub-theme topic	Theme

	Performance skills mastery	In high school chorus, participants learned how to improve their singing and music interpretation skills. Their chorus classes contributed to their effort-attributed, mastery-oriented lifelong learning habits in music reading, diction, vowels, range, tone, improvisation, style, pitch, rhythm, dancing, and ensemble listening.
	Teacher encouragement	In high school chorus, participants appreciated teachers' supportive and positive attitudes, collaborative nature, kindness, and patience. They developed confidence in their abilities partially thanks to their teachers' encouragement, individual attention, solo selections, and praise, which motivated them to continue singing in adult choruses.
	Teacher modeling of musicianship and professionalism	In high school chorus, participants were impressed by their teachers' high quality music performance and evaluation skills. They respected their professionalism, high expectations, discipline, good communication, conducting, singing, piano skills. They attempted to emulate the examples their teachers modeled for them, which contributed to their lifelong mastery-approach learning motivations
3. Positive Social Experiences		In high school chorus, participants connected with others, received family and community encouragement, gave musical gifts to others, partook in spiritual- and church-related experiences, felt a sense of belonging and safety, and believed these positive social experiences motivated them to seek similar experiences in adult choruses.
	Connecting with others	In high school chorus, participants were motivated by the connections they made with other people. Not only did they enjoy singing with others, but also the feeling of connection to the composers and cultures from which the music came. They were excited and thankful for the people music participation enabled them to meet which motivated them to meet more people and have similar experiences in adult choruses.
	Giving to others	In high school chorus, participants enjoyed giving the gift of the beauty of music to audiences. They wanted to perform music in a way that was compelling to their audiences. Consequently, as adults were also inspired to pass on to others, especially younger people, the joy music had brought to their lives through adult chorus performances.
Theme topic	Sub-theme topic	Theme

Sense of belonging and safety	In high school chorus, some participants were in groups in which they felt safe and accepted. They enjoyed the feeling of dedication to a team, especially with like-minded people who were passionate about the quality of the chorus's sound. They derived a sense of confidence in their identity from singing as individuals and parts of ensembles which motivated them to seek similar experiences in adult choruses
Spirituality and church	Four of the participants described singing as a spiritual experience. They also believed singing in church to be an important part of their expressions of their faiths. They believed singing to be a part of their lifelong devotion to a higher power.
Beyond-the-classroom	In high school chorus, all participants were motivated by musical activities outside the classroom. Activities included competitions, trips, festivals, lessons, instrumental music playing, songwriting, composing, recording, performances at places like nursing homes, musicals, church music, and mission trip performances. Beyond the classroom performances contributed to their motivation to perform in similar ways as adults.

In the seventh phase I produced the report, which is the rest of this chapter. I made my best effort to provide a “concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive and interesting account of the story the data tell” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 93). My analysis of the narrative portraits in relation to my research questions led me to conclude three main themes across the data set: 1) aesthetic experiences, 2) personal growth and achievement, and 3) positive social experiences. All six of the narrative portraits included considerable evidence of the three main themes, relating high school choral experiences to adult amateur musicians’ motivations to continue making music. Those three motivators were primary reasons participants enjoyed their high school choral experiences and why they continued to sing as adults. I will also detail the sub-themes in the following pages.

**Findings**

I found three connections between high school chorus and adult amateur's motivation to continue making music in ensembles: aesthetic experiences, personal growth and achievement, and positive social experiences. Those three topics came up regularly as themes that significantly motivated participants to sing. They experienced those three in their high school programs and looked for them again in their adult choral ensembles. The beyond-the-classroom topic had components of the three other themes and was an important commonality between all portraits. It is notable that the ensembles participants sang in as adults rarely performed outside of rehearsals and concerts, so it may not be a strong motivator for adult amateur musicians but functioned as a strong motivator for the participants when they were in high school. Only Steve's church choirs regularly took trips with adults.

**Table 8**

### *Summary of Findings*

Research question	Finding 1	Finding 2	Finding 3
How do adult amateur musicians perceive the relationship between high school choral experiences and their current motivation to continue making music?	In high school chorus, participants developed their appreciation of music's beauty, their ability and curiosity to learn various styles of music, and their ability to express themselves and heal through choral singing and believed these aesthetic experiences motivated them to seek similar experiences in adult choruses.	In high school chorus, participants received instruction in elements of performance skills mastery they proudly displayed in competitions, developed confidence in their vocal skills, received encouragement from their teachers, and learned from teachers who modeled excellent musicianship and professionalism. These experiences contributed to participants' lifelong dispositions toward personal musical growth and achievement in vocal music which led them to continue singing in adult choruses.	In high school chorus, participants connected with others, received family and community encouragement, gave musical gifts to others, partook in spiritual- and church-related experiences, felt a sense of belonging and safety, and believed these positive social experiences motivated them to seek similar experiences in adult choruses.
Why do adult amateur musicians continue making music in ensembles?	According to this study's findings, adult amateur musicians sing in ensembles seeking quality aesthetic experiences, positive social experiences, and opportunities for personal musical growth and achievement.		

Research question	Finding 1	Finding 2	Finding 3
To what extent do adult amateur musicians perceive the influences of teacher's curricular and pedagogical decisions related to lifelong music making, and if so, what do they think of them?	Only three of the participants perceived their teachers' curricular and pedagogical decisions, and only did so because their teachers explicitly stated so.	All six believed lifelong music making to be important and beneficial and the three whose teachers explicitly advocated for lifelong music making appreciated the effort.	
What are characteristics of high school choral programs that are successful at inspiring and enabling lifelong musicians?	According to this study's findings, high school programs that provide students with quality aesthetic experiences inspire lifelong musicianship.	High school programs that provide opportunities for personal growth and achievement through competitions and clear performance goals inspire lifelong musicianship.	High school programs with positive social experiences are successful at inspiring and enabling lifelong musicians.
How do adult amateur musicians perceive the influence of their learning attributions on their lifelong music making?	Findings suggest adult amateur musicians believed their internal-unstable effort-related attributions contributed to their desire to continue improving their skills. Their tendencies, impacted by their music teachers, to connect their effort with the products of their work motivated them to continue improving.	Findings suggest participants' teachers promoted a mix of mastery and performance goals. Those appear to have influenced participants' motivations to continue in music. The teacher who promoted performance-approach and -avoidance goals appears to have been less successful at promoting lifelong musicianship.	

### **Theme 1: Aesthetic Experiences**

In high school chorus, participants developed their appreciation of music's beauty, their ability and curiosity to learn various styles of music, and their ability to express themselves and heal through choral singing and believed these aesthetic experiences motivated them to seek similar experiences in adult choruses.

Music education philosophers have struggled to define musical aesthetics and their value in the curriculum (Alperson, 1991; Elliott, 1995; Langer, 1966; Meyer, 1956; Regelski, 2011; Reimer, 1989, 2003). Simply put, Langer, Reimer, and other supporters of music education as aesthetic education have long held that music's value is in the understanding of the forms, meaning, and evocative feelings of music itself (Meyer, 1956; Reimer, 1970, 1989). Elliott, Regelski, and other praxialists have promoted the idea that music's value lies in its active practice, especially in groups, and have decried aesthetics philosophies as vapid and ethnocentric (Alperson, 1991; Elliott, 1995; Regelski, 2011). This study is not the proper venue to re-litigate the schism between praxialism and aesthetics-based approaches to music education. Indeed, I did not ask participants to wax philosophical on the differences between the views and take a position. My usage of the term *aesthetic experiences* is an effort to acknowledge that the participants in this study were motivated by the beauty of the music itself and all its elements, but crucially also by their means of experiencing the music in particular settings, usually in choirs. Rather than a "this or that" approach, I am saying "yes, and" to elements of Reimer and Elliott, as some have before, (Freer, 2020; Jorgensen, 1997), as I believe my participants unknowingly did.

For the purposes of this study, I will define aesthetic experiences related to what the participants enjoyed and appreciated about their musical involvement: the underlying qualities and beauty of music and musical sounds, the way hearing music makes people feel, and the



appreciation of the beauty and feelings associated with music and the process of making it. In interviews, Katherine, Rita, and Phyllis mentioned their love for the music first and foremost. Phyllis loved music so much that talking about her musical history prompted her to break into song several times during interviews. All participants spoke of learning how to appreciate music during their high school choral classes, and their hopes to continue doing so. Music appreciation was a profound connection between participants' high school and adult musical lives. I further categorized aesthetic experiences into three sub-themes: a) appreciation of music's beauty, b) learning new styles in chorus, and c) self-expression and healing.

***Sub-Theme A: Appreciation of Music's Beauty***

In high school chorus, participants developed their appreciation of the beauty of their choirs' repertoire, that of the human voice, and that of harmony. They were also interested in understanding the poetry, the backgrounds of the composers, historical contexts, symbolism and interpretations. They enjoyed shaping performances to make them more beautiful and felt a sense of pleasure from partaking in the experience of singing in a chorus, all of which motivated them to seek similar experiences in adult choruses. Each narrative portrait included evidence that participants were motivated to sing in high school and as adults due to their appreciation of music's beauty.

Adrian's teacher played many pieces of music for class and led classroom discussions about the elements of music. She taught them how to listen actively and how to understand many of the artists' compositional decisions and cultural significance. He said she placed an emphasis on appreciating music outside of class as well. He said she "encouraged my music, exploration, and, you know, bolstered my love for classical music and different genres" (Adrian portrait, p.

92). He also mentioned that rehearsing with fine attention to detail carried over into his adult music making. His involvement in choral music heavily influenced his songwriting.

They would put a heavy emphasis on like getting everything right and kind of um tweaking, like, minutiae to try to get everything to sound as good as possible, which I loved. Like it made me a bit of a picky musician, I guess. I think it really played into my like obsessive nature of like, you know, when I'm recording, I need to make sure everything is well crafted and tuned. (Adrian portrait, p. 96)

Katherine's primary motivator was the beauty of the music. She did not make friends in high school chorus because she was "socially awkward," and she said, "I loved making the music. I joined the high school choir mostly for the music" (Katherine portrait, p. 99). Katherine developed an appreciation for jazz music, a style she did not hear in her home, that she carried over into adulthood. Katherine is thankful she learned how to sing creatively using scat singing in her high school jazz chorus. Additionally, her appreciation of the beauty of choral music was the primary motivational factor that has kept her singing into her 50's. Phyllis described and sang many songs from her high school and college days. She now loves the sounds of choral rehearsal in CCG. She expressed appreciation for music as a gift of beauty in a troubled world. She was motivated to continue making music partly due to her appreciation of music's magic and beauty.

Phyllis, Rita, and Steve sang actively in their church as children, but credited their high school chorus involvement for deepening their love and appreciation for the beauty and power of music. Rita's strongest motivator to sing in choirs seemed to be the music itself:

...I enjoyed just singing the repertoire of songs that were chosen by the directors. The highlight of the performance was hearing the different voices in the choir, how we

harmonized and how we executed what we'd been taught in terms of enunciation, the vocal expressions, and the overall vocal quality of the choir. (Rita narrative, p. 144)

She also mentioned her favorite parts of her current chorus, CE, are the repertoire the director chooses and the quality of sound the ensemble produces, "...the quality that comes that comes out of that group is really amazing" (Rita portrait, p. 143). Steve believed his high school teacher taught him a "fine appreciation for music" (Steve portrait, p. 148). He brought his appreciation into his adult life where he now values and appreciates music from many cultures and styles, which prompted him to join CCG, which performs music different from that he encounters in his church choir. Steve worked in security services for many years and sought out musical opportunities like working at music venues so he could hear the many performances from many genres. Steve continues to ask questions about music and the backgrounds and origins of the pieces of music he hears and sings

***Sub-Theme B: Learning New Styles in Chorus***

In high school chorus, participants learned styles of music they had not previously encountered. They enjoyed how their teachers chose a diversity of repertoire, enabling them to learn music from around the world and use music as a window into other cultures all of which motivated them to seek similar experiences in adult choruses. Adrian wrote music during high school, and continued to do so in college, inspired by his exploration of music styles in chorus.

Adrian

"started experimenting a lot and like doing different stuff with my sound and so whoever I was listening to at the time, I would draw from them, and I was into all different types of music I was listening to classical pieces that I would find through choir" (Adrian portrait, p. 91).

His chorus teacher chose repertoire from many styles, genres, languages, and cultures, which ignited Adrian's curiosity to explore music outside of class. As an adult Adrian strives to empathetically understand the performers and composers of music. He loves songs from cultures different from his own and looks to always perform works by other people honestly and reverently. Adrian enjoys the diversity in repertoire in CE, which performed in several languages during the fall concert. He is motivated to continue making music in ensembles partly due to his desire to further his experiences with different genres of music.

Katherine's high school teacher focused exclusively on jazz music, which was a departure from the exclusively classical repertoire she heard in her home. She fell in love with the genre and still likes jazz music. Most high school programs do not have a professional jazz pianist as their director, and Katherine was thankful that he exposed her to a lot of music too esoteric and challenging for most high school chorus directors to know or attempt. She was inspired by a

...love of singing, nontraditional, quote unquote, nontraditional choral pieces that push the envelope that bring in different kinds of music that you don't normally necessarily hear in you know, the classical choirs (Katherine portrait, p. 104)

As an adult she enjoys learning different styles of music and has performed in church and more traditional choirs. Her previous community chorus director chose unconventional music, which she loved. She was very disappointed that COVID-19 shut down her chorus just prior to their performance of *Mass in Blue*, a classical/jazz hybrid piece.

Mila's high school chorus sang classical music, a cappella popular music, and show choir music. She also had the opportunity to sing musical theatre and operatic solos. She joined a chorus in college and was disappointed in the repertoire. In the future, she plans to join her

church gospel choir and to learn more operatic arias in private voice lessons. Phyllis's high school program included classical choral music and an end-of-the-year musical revue with popular and musical theatre music. She was forever inspired by her school choir's performance of *Chichester Psalms*, led by famous conductor Robert Shaw. Her high school experiences contributed to her decision to major in vocal performance in college, where she secured lead roles in operas. She was proud to be an African American woman who could perform in many styles, as her mother recommended,

Some people had not seen a Black girl sing some of the music she performed. In the way you know, and they would want me to sing some Michael Jackson and I could do that for them. I would sing the "ABC" song or "I'll be There," you know, but I'd also sing something that they didn't think I could sing. Oh man, what was (Sings some of Bach's "Bist du bei mir") So when I was singing the Mozart or Bach they were like, 'How do you know this song?' (Phyllis portrait, p. 130)

Rita's high school chorus did not sing a wide variety of repertoire, but she enjoys singing a wide variety of repertoire in CE, she "likes the conductor's repertoire choices. She finds the pieces in foreign languages the most challenging, but also interesting. The music is not too hard or too easy, but right on point, she believes" (Rita portrait, p. 143). Rita feels music deeply and credits music's beauty with impacting her life positively.

### ***Sub-Theme C: Self-Expression and Healing***

In high school chorus, participants believed chorus made them feel happier. They felt more seen and healed by singing in groups. They saw singing as a way to express their feelings to cope with suffering and to celebrate joy, which they wished to continue in adult choruses. Rita and Phyllis both expressed that singing helped them through hard times in their lives. For Rita,

“just being able to express some of the grief and hurt through song has helped me a lot” (Rita portrait, p. 142). Rita still sings one of the songs she learned in high school chorus, “Create in Me a Clean Heart, O God,” that she built a personal connection with over her entire life. She said “I tell you, I love that song. And it has stuck with me all throughout my life. So it was very important to me” (Rita portrait, p. 141).

Phyllis could not imagine a life without singing because it has helped her so much emotionally in difficult times and joyful times.

Well. You know, songs get you through an awful lot. Songs carry you through the awkward times of life, your joyful times of life. Stressful times of life. Times when you're at war with yourself. Music helps you to sort it out many times. Music can pull you out of the out of your worst of times, and also be there celebratory in your best of times. Or when you don't know what to feel at all. It's a constant friend. It's a constant love in your life, as well. You know, if you're not receiving it. It just gives you so much. (Phyllis portrait, p. 135)

Adrian's teacher wanted students to make personal connections with the music they performed and achieved that through class discussions. For the annual pops concert, if students wanted to perform a song and they could not find an arrangement, she would commission arrangements for them. Adrian described his musical involvement as “therapy” (Adrian portrait, p. 94) and as a way for him to express his emotion and “feel a lot more seen” (Adrian portrait, p. 94). Adrian's teacher played some of his original music for class, which encouraged him to express himself more through music. Her feedback, which he respected due to her professionalism and musicianship, strengthened his belief in himself that music was something

he was good at. Music gave him a way to communicate that he could not find anywhere else. After high school he became a music technology major at a large university.

## **Theme 2: Personal Growth and Achievement**

In high school chorus, participants received performance-approach instruction in elements of performance skills mastery they proudly displayed in competitions, developed confidence in their vocal skills, received encouragement from their teachers, and learned from teachers who modeled excellent musicianship and professionalism. These experiences contributed to participants' lifelong dispositions toward personal musical growth and achievement in vocal music which led them to continue singing in adult choruses. All six participants believed they were good at singing, and all sang in high school choruses they considered very good. Five of the six participants mentioned that their high school choruses were very successful at competitions. As adults, none of the participants participate in competitions anymore, but all continue to sing in ensembles. The techniques of mastering performance skills they learned in high school contributed to their lifelong pursuits of skilled performance.

### ***Sub-Theme A: Competitions, Accolades, and Confidence***

In high school chorus, participants were motivated by competitions, evaluations, and public performances. They gained confidence from performing, especially from performing solos. They derived pleasure from being part of a successful ensemble that impressed others, which motivated them to participate in excellent ensembles as adults. Mila, Adrian, Phyllis, Rita, and Steve all said their high school choral ensembles went to competitions. They seemed proud of the work they did to prepare and the performances they executed. Their chorus teachers placed a lot of emphasis on the importance of the competitions, and some of them and their colleagues felt nervous and pressured to perform up to their teachers' expectations.

Adrian attended a school that regularly succeeds at evaluations and competitions. In preparing for competitions, the attention to detailed components of quality choral performance in which his chorus teacher and classmates engaged inspired him to become a “picky musician” (Adrian portrait, p. ). He now does his best to create quality performances that are well-crafted and well-executed. He gained confidence in his singing ability throughout high school, rose to become a student leader in the auditioned chorus, and took AP Music theory class. In his college chorus, Adrian still cares about the ensemble putting their best work in front of audiences, saying, “ I get really nervous for whatever reasons... like I think it's just a lot of emotion and a lot of like, it's a big thing because you know, you work for so long and it's the culmination of our all your hard work” (Adrian portrait, p. 97).

Mila participated in a high intensity high school arts magnet program at which she was inspired by the school’s success at competitions, and the teacher’s high standards for performance. She enjoyed working long hours, striving for success, and being challenged. Her chorus teacher always preached that preparation was the key to success. If they failed to work hard, he would throw shoes at people. She was proud of her school’s program, “And I think we always won everything in our division. Like we never lost in our division. I don't think there's ever a time we ever lost anything. I'm so serious” (Mila portrait, p. 114) Her teacher pushed students to perform well at competitions, and the students followed his example.

I think all of us collectively did want to perform well as a group, because we were so used to performing well as a group. And, you know, it's fun to win. And so I think that like, sense of like, we all want to win kind of made the competition like more. I don't want to say real, but like, it just made us work that much harder, because we all wanted, and then we all wanted to, like, make our teacher proud in a way. (Mila portrait, p. 115)



I think it did make me more driven, more eager to achieve and to push myself and to put myself in uncomfortable situations so that I can grow. So yeah. I think that's it. (Mila portrait, p. 115)

Phyllis frequently talked about how successful her high school chorus program was. They were selected for special performances and were very proud of their sound. She represented her school as a soloist at competitions and seemed proud to be selected to sing for special events. She wondered if any of the trophies and plaques they had earned were still in the halls of the school. The opportunities her teacher gave her undoubtedly helped her build the confidence to make her next step, which was to audition for university music schools. Phyllis went on to be a paid performer in many ensembles, and to briefly start a career in the music industry before minimizing it to make room for another day job. When she stopped singing in ensembles for several years due to a controlling husband, she felt like she was losing herself. When she rejoined a chorus and resumed challenging herself musically, she felt much better about her life.

Rita said that her ensemble traveling to competitions was a great experience. Her teachers were extremely serious and strict about the students expertly executing all the components of their performances. They were very successful, she said, winning two years in a row. She grew to become a performer who always wants to give her best and said her high school choral program contributed to her musical excellence. Without high school chorus, she believes she would still be singing, but believes she would not be as disciplined as she is about her music skills.

Steve expressed that his favorite part of high school chorus was the after-school honors chorus. The ensemble required an audition, and each year they took a trip to a statewide competition for Christian schools. His school was known for their fine arts program, and they put

a lot of work into their preparation and execution of performances for the competitions. Steve took a somewhat different tone than the others when speaking about competitions, however. He did not feel pressured to win, but rather just to do his best. He felt a great sense of camaraderie at the annual competition, which also featured a cooperative ensemble of students from different schools. He gave “credit to the adults in his life who encouraged bettering oneself through hard work, not through defeating others” (Steve portrait, p. 150)

Although Katherine’s teacher did not take the chorus to competitions, he did secure them many performances outside of school to display their talents. She successfully auditioned for the school’s select group, placing her in two chorus classes per day. In the top ensemble, the teacher “became really serious about our performance” (Katherine portrait, p. 102). After college, Katherine flirted with the idea of a career in music. She took some vocal lessons and gained confidence when her teacher said she sounded like a “professional” (Katherine portrait, p. 105) in front of a crowd at a recital. She says she is a good singer, and gains confidence as she sings.

### ***Sub-Theme B) Performance Skills Mastery***

In high school chorus, participants learned how to improve their singing and music interpretation skills. Their chorus classes contributed to their effort-attributed, mastery-oriented lifelong learning habits in music reading, diction, vowels, range, tone, improvisation, style, pitch, rhythm, dancing, and ensemble listening. Steve continually strives to improve his singing, knowing he will never be perfect. He joined CCG partly to maintain his vocal skills and learn different singing techniques from new teachers. He believes he can learn more, and mentioned how the breathing techniques, diction skills, and music appreciation he learned in high school chorus were foundational to the work he continued in adulthood. His was the only high school teacher amongst the participants who graded the students one-on-one, giving students notes on

their vocal skills. Like Adrian, Steve saw competition preparation as an avenue to the more important goal of mastering performance skills.

Adrian was inspired by the complexity of the repertoire in his high school chorus and noted several pieces that I know require high skill levels to perform. He valued his teacher's daily warm-ups, during which he worked on his vocal skills, something he continued into his adult life. Adrian cited his own progress as proof that daily effort pays off. "He considers himself to be a much better singer than he used to be. He strongly believes musical skills are not inborn but earned through practice" (Adrian portrait, p. 97).

Katherine's high school teacher helped her establish a desire to sing challenging jazz music. Katherine enjoyed the challenge of learning different harmonic palettes, which is one of the reasons she sings in CCG. She briefly dreamed of becoming a jazz singer and believed she may have had the ability but did not have the time and money to pursue it as a career. Mila's chorus teacher worked the students very hard, had very high expectations, and did not let them give up until they sounded excellent. Mila took that drive with her into her adult life. Mila's primary purpose for joining her college chorus was to "keep her singing and music reading skills strong" (Mila portrait, p. 119). She became frustrated that her college chorus, CE, did not challenge her, and many of the singers in the ensembles were far behind her in their vocal development. She feels she is a good singer but wants to find her solo voice. She plans to drop chorus and take private voice lessons to work on mastering her skills.

Although in her 60's, Phyllis still learns from every rehearsal, and sees the connection between her high school music classes and her current chorus:

Even when you're looking at the notes, and or the language. And you want to know what does this one, what does this mean here? You're in class all over again. So it's the ultimate going back to high school music. (Phyllis portrait, p. 135)

Rita consistently critiques her performances and tries to improve. She learned that discipline from her high school chorus experience. She learned a lot of vocal technique and performance skills from her teachers that she applied to her solo music and her performances with choruses. She continues to strive to learn, and although in her 60's has started a music management degree. She recently took a music theory class and plans to take a conducting class. She joined CE to improve her vocal skills and has been pleased with how much she improved her music reading skills, "I've learned to read more now that I'm in university chorus than anywhere. And that's why I really appreciate it" (Rita portrait, p. 140).

### ***Sub-Theme C: Teacher Encouragement***

In high school chorus, participants appreciated teachers' supportive and positive attitudes, collaborative nature, kindness, and patience. They developed confidence in their abilities partially thanks to their teachers' encouragement, individual attention, solo selections, and praise, which motivated them to continue singing in adult choruses. After Adrian took AP Music Theory class, his teacher took notice of his interest in music and their relationship grew. She encouraged his musical endeavors by giving him feedback on his original music, playing his music for class, and giving him a leadership role in the choral program.

His chorus teacher did a great job engaging and inspiring students without pressuring them. Students sometimes led warm-ups and the chorus director tried to involve people without forcing them to do so. She found ways to get everybody involved in ways that suited them. (Adrian portrait, p. 94)

Adrian's teacher explicitly encouraged students to participate in chorus and to appreciate music after high school and outside of high school. She encouraged students to "connect to and appreciate music to enable them to become better people and to enjoy their lives on deeper levels" (Adrian portrait, p. 96).

Katherine did not mention her high school teacher's encouragement but did mention that he accepted her into the advanced select ensemble. Later in life, a private voice teacher gave her encouragement that caused her to consider a career in music. Mila felt that she flew under her teacher's radar for the first two years of high school, then gained his attention when she auditioned for a musical. Her teacher explicitly encouraged students to engage in music throughout their lives, not just during high school. She believed his goal was "for us to continue singing even after we graduate, like in any form or fashion" (Mila portrait, p. 115). He stressed the importance of lifelong music making,

...no matter what, like, if you're just in church, choir, if you join another chorus, or if you're doing musical theatre, or if you're singing professionally, I just want you to go out and continue singing for the rest of your life. (Mila portrait, p. 115)

Mila appreciated that her college director is an agreeable, positive person, however, she does not plan to take the class next semester and said the chorus might sound better if the director were tougher on them. In such a large ensemble, it is all but certain she and the director do not interact on an individual basis. I did not ask, but it is doubtful that her director has given her individual encouragement.

Phyllis's high school teacher encouraged her to perform and compete and helped her prepare for her many performances. She did not encourage students to sing for the rest of their lives, but Phyllis appreciated how dedicated she was to giving her opportunities. Rita and her

classmates wanted to please their teachers with quality performances, especially at competitions. Students knew their standards were high, so they sought their teachers' satisfaction. While her chorus teachers did not express the importance of singing for a lifetime, the school's teachers consistently reinforced the impact their high school decisions would have on the rest of their lives. Rita sings in CE partly because the director is kind, relatable, and encourages them to get involved in the group, "Allowing people to tell her and the class what's happening in their lives. I like that part of it" (Rita portrait, p. 144).

Steve felt encouraged by his choral director, who wanted to create a personal relationship with each student, which, at a small private school, it was likely easier to do. His words of praise and pleased facial expression let the students know they had done things properly. Steve's acceptance into the honors chorus opened him to a future of music performance he may not have otherwise had. While Steve's teacher did not explicitly tell students that he was teaching them lifelong skills, Steve felt the church and school community encouraged lifelong engagement with music. In Steve's school and church community, people of all ages performed music, often in inter-generational ensembles. Growing up in that community likely impacted his view of music performance as a lifelong activity.

#### ***Sub-Theme D: Teacher Modeling of Musicianship and Professionalism***

In high school chorus, participants were impressed by their teachers' high quality music performance and evaluation skills. They respected their professionalism, high expectations, discipline, good communication, conducting, singing, and piano skills. They attempted to emulate the examples their teachers modeled for them, which contributed to their lifelong mastery-approach learning goals. All six participants expressed strong appreciation and admiration for their teachers' music skills and professionalism.

Adrian respected his teacher's music abilities, her patience, and her ability to rehearse an ensemble. He respected her music opinion highly enough that he was inspired, and his confidence was boosted when she complimented his original songs and played them for the class. Katherine's teacher was an incredible jazz musician who consistently performed in their university town. He played piano as students entered the classroom, rehearsing his own pieces for his band. He set the tone "...by example. So... he was serious about practicing so we were serious about practicing. We saw him serious about his own music, so we were serious about music" (Katherine portrait, p. 101). Katherine believes all young people should have the opportunity to interact with professional musicians the way she did. Her previous community chorus had a youth program that she really valued. She wanted her children to participate in the program which included lessons with professional musicians, "And I thought that's really, really important. I think, you know, even if the children even if the students never pursued music, you know, as a career, showing that it can be done is important" (Katherine portrait, p.111).

Mila's teacher was very explosive and dramatic, which created a toxic classroom environment. While she did not appreciate his volatility, she did appreciate how intensely he motivated the students to succeed, throwing shoes at students who were causing problems. Phyllis's chorus teacher was very "strict, professional, talented, and worked the students hard. From the sound of it, she managed a very successful chorus program" (Phyllis portrait, p.127). Rita was awed at the sounds her teachers could get out of the students and she believed the students strove to please them. One of her teachers served as the conductor and the other as the accompanist and they both were fine musicians:

And I did like my directors, because of what they brought to the table. For example, Mr. Lee's voice quality; He could sing all voice parts, from Soprano to Bass. And then the director, I liked to see the way she directed the choir. (Rita portrait, p. 138)

Steve appreciated his teacher's dedication to the art form and to the growth of the students. He not only worked regular hours at the school, but also led an after-school honors chorus, led the church's music program, and took trips with students and church members. Steve was impressed with his knowledge and dedication. As an adult, Steve saw the CCG director as a quality conductor who motivated the singers "with professionalism, words of praise, and facial expressions that signify that the singers got something right" (Steve portrait, p. 156).

### **Theme 3: Positive Social Experiences**

In high school chorus, participants connected with others, received family and community encouragement, gave musical gifts to others, partook in spiritual- and church-related experiences, felt a sense of belonging and safety, and believed these positive social experiences motivated them to seek similar experiences in adult choruses. Some participants made close personal relationships in chorus. Adrian met his college roommate in high school chorus, and Mila stays in constant contact with a friend who now lives far away. Participants enjoyed the close friends they made and also the larger social environment of a group of people all working together to create beauty in the world. Rita and Katherine did not make significant friendships in high school chorus, but for Phyllis, Adrian, Mila, and Steve, the relationships they made were central to their motivations to sing in high school and their adult lives. Later in life, Katherine was pleased to sing with her mother and her child in choruses. Her mother prompted her to join a community chorus, then Katherine prompted her child to join a chorus with her.

#### ***Sub-Theme A: Connecting with Others***



In high school chorus, participants were motivated by the connections they made with other people. Not only did they enjoy singing with others, but also the feeling of connection to the composers and cultures from which the music came. They were excited and thankful for the people music participation enabled them to meet which motivated them to meet more people and have similar experiences in adult choruses.

Adrian did not begin to feel excited about the chorus program until his sophomore year when he started making friends in chorus. He and a friend he met in chorus started writing songs outside of class and his acceptance into a more advanced ensemble connected him with likeminded students who were more engaged with the choral art form. After taking AP Music Theory class, he developed a mentor-mentee relationship with his chorus teacher that contributed to his decision to major in music technology in college. The connections he made in his choral program permanently changed the path of Adrian's life. Without the connections he made with his chorus teacher, his accompanist, and some of his peers, he would not have become a music technology major. In fact, "every single step that got me from high school to being a music major in college, just about every single one was taken in high school choir. So I can say that very strongly and very proudly" (Adrian portrait, p. 98).

Although Mila felt that many of the students in her chorus program were mean, she also made a very close friend. She made a friend on a chorus trip with whom she stays in touch even though she goes to college far away. She believes they built a lifelong bond through chorus. Mila plans to stop singing in CE, and she has made no friends in the ensemble. She said the singers have no time to get to know each other. Although Mila cited the lack of musical challenge and beauty of sound as reasons for leaving the ensemble, perhaps the lack of social connection was

also a contributing factor. If she had joined the ensemble with a friend or made a friend in the ensemble, the story could have been different.

Phyllis's favorite part of high school chorus was the camaraderie with her peers.

Um, what did I enjoy? Always the friends, camaraderie. I loved the trips. I loved... I

just... it was fun from the beginning to end. You hate it, what you hate when it was over you know? (Rita portrait, p. 125)

Although Rita's high school chorus classroom environment was very strict and serious, she values the connections she now makes with people in CE. The ensemble is very diverse, which she enjoys, and she appreciates getting to meet and sing with people from all walks of life. She enjoys how at the beginning of each rehearsal; her current conductor allows the singers to share information about their lives. Interestingly, her musical life story led her to her husband. She hired him to help her produce her album and eventually they fell in love and got married. His participation in CE led him to encourage her to join, which she later did.

Steve's primary motivator for continuing to take part in choruses is the connections he makes with others. In high school, Steve enjoyed the trips chorus took and getting to know singers at his school and at other schools and churches. As a child he went on mission trips with adults and students in inter-generational choruses, something that he continues now as an adult. Steve's faith is very important to him, and he sees his participation CCG, a secular community chorus, as an area of ministry as well. He looks for opportunities to meet new people and invite them to church events and concerts. One of his favorite experiences was a mission trip to Brazil where he got to learn about Brazilian music and culture and get to know people in his church choir and Brazilians they met there.

Steve and Adrian also concluded that music is a way to feel connected to people of other cultures, composers, and to bring people together. From his teacher, Adrian learned to try to “empathetically understand the performers and composers of music” (Adrian portrait, p.93). He likes the way performing other people’s music connects him to them and “looks to always perform works by other people honestly and reverently” (Adrian portrait, p. 93). Steve joined CCG due to the suggestion of a church friend of his, who also sings in the group, and values the experience of coming together with people from different backgrounds,

But then there's other individuals that just came from other backgrounds and diversities, things like that. But we are all coming together in a collective to present and do something within that group. And the beauty behind that. And that's just enjoyable. That's one of the things that I can't do within church, we're all the same. (Steve portrait, p. 158)

### ***Sub-Theme B: Family and Community Encouragement***

In their youth, participants received encouragement to sing from family, church members, and other people in their community. All participants received support and positive feedback on their singing or their decision to sing in choruses, which contributed to their confidence and performance-approach motivations for future performing. Steve, Phyllis, Rita, and Katherine came from musical families with singing in the home. Mila and Adrian did not, but their parents were very supportive, both financially and emotionally, of their childhood musical endeavors. Katherine and Steve both had mothers who were college-educated singers and taught voice lessons. Phyllis and Rita came from families with relatives very active in church music, and they sang with family for church events.

Adrian received positive feedback from a friend who listened to his music regularly. His parents supported him and attended all his concerts. He also received words of praise from peers

after his teacher played some of his original music for his class. Mila's music program had several expenses, including annual custom dresses and trips. Her family always paid for her to participate in the program and supported her involvement.

Phyllis had very supportive parents who encouraged her sing all styles of music. They guided her with their words of wisdom as she navigated often unwelcoming high school and college music settings, often as the only Black girl. She learned to stay true to her values, which helped her when, later in life, they were challenged. She learned from her family to develop relationships with those in power and found ways to be successful in White spaces and non-white spaces.

... at least in my neck of the woods, my grandparents and my great grandparents knew that those relationships that they had with people who had influence was going to serve us, you know, because you can't change your skin color, or your ethnicity. But what you can do is to behave yourself in such a way that you are, if you're not, well it's going to be one or the other, or both, or in between. You're going to be respected or you're going to be tolerated. But even in toleration, you're still allowed to be present, but you have to be careful of the things you do and to make sure that you're home alive. I'm sorry to say that even in this time now, I have to say that. (unclear) because I thought for sure. I thought for sure we get there. But anyway, it is what it is... (Phyllis portrait, p. 132 )

Rita's mother encouraged her musical commitments as a part of her church involvement. She and some of her siblings formed a singing group that performed in many churches. Her current husband, who is in graduate school studying music, has encouraged her music career. They recorded several songs together, performed in church together, and his encouragement led her to join CE.

Steve and Katherine both had mothers who taught voice and encouraged their involvement in school and church music. For Katherine, singing in choir with her mother brought her great joy. She joined a community chorus at her mother's suggestion, and they sat next to each other each week, singing the alto part in rehearsal. After a move, she joined a different community chorus and now sings next to her child. Her father did not discourage her childhood musical involvement, but strongly advocated for his children to succeed academically in school. He did not see music as a practical career path, which influenced Katherine to get a college degree in biology she never used in her work. She can no longer play piano due to arthritis but took piano lessons as a child. Steve's entire school and church community was supportive of music involvement for all ages. Adult musicians taught lessons at his church, adults bolstered the inter-generational choirs that went on mission trips, and people of all ages sang in church. For him, music served as an avenue to make connections with people in his community and farther communities.

***Sub-Theme C: Giving to Others***

In high school chorus, participants enjoyed giving the gift of the beauty of music to audiences. They wanted to perform music in a way that was compelling to their audiences. Consequently, as adults were also inspired to pass on to others, especially younger people, the joy music had brought to their lives through adult chorus performances. Katherine, Steve, and Phyllis all believed musical involvement has the power to make the world better, and actively promote musical opportunities for younger people. Rita did not mention that specifically but did mention how she saw music as a gift to her audience. She said, "when I do sing, you're right, I do want to bring an experience to people that I feel like they can, they would enjoy, and that they

would receive a blessing from it” (Rita portrait, p. 146). Mila and Adrian are only 20 and 19 years old, so perhaps they have a future that includes thinking of music as a gift.

Katherine’s impactful musical experiences have inspired her to encourage her three children to be involved in music. Although her high school music experience did not have a significant social component, she wants that for her children, saying, “It’s a very social, drama and chorus, are very social activities. Absolutely. It’s one of the reasons why Alex was so drawn to it is because it’s very social. My kid” (Katherine portrait, p. 109) She appreciated how her previous community chorus had a strong youth program and looked to have her children involved in it. She is disappointed that the local community youth choirs are very expensive but is happy her local school has a good choral program for her children. She donated a piano to a public school, even though several private institutions offered to pay her for it. She believed it was important to give the piano to an institution where “students don’t have to pay to have access to the music. You know what I mean? That’s how important it is. I realized, right? Share the love. So that’s what I did” (Katherine portrait, p. 109).

For Steve, music as a gift to others is part of his faith. He invites people to his performances and invites interested individuals to join his church or his church choirs, partly to minister to them.

... the music was just an avenue, I think of just we looked upon it more so as just a not necessarily even a spiritual gift, but in certain ways, you know, this is something that, honestly, yes, God has provided us with, and things like that, that we can use in minister and other areas and just be a blessing. (Steve portrait, p. 152)

Steve encourages young people to perform and to get involved in music in any way they can, even backstage like he sometimes has. He supports his friend’s children by attending their

performances. He sings in inter-generational church choirs now as an adult, an activity he has come to value:

That's another area where I'm still involved as well as kind of working with young people and things like that. Being able to sing with them in our children's ministries and things like that with church stuff. You know, we do singing groups with the young people and the kids. (Steve portrait, p. 154)

***Sub-Theme D: Sense of Belonging, Safety***

In high school chorus, some participants were in groups in which they felt safe and accepted. They enjoyed the feeling of dedication to a team, especially with like-minded people who were passionate about the quality of the chorus's sound. They derived a sense of confidence in their identity from singing as individuals and parts of ensembles which motivated them to seek similar experiences in adult choruses. When Adrian auditioned into the advanced ensemble in tenth grade, he started to enjoy chorus. A lot of that enjoyment came from making friends and singing with students who were more dedicated and engaged with the choral art form. He felt he fit in better than he did with the non-auditioned ensemble's students.

And it became kind of like a community for me or I, you know, became a part of that community, which was really, really influential on my eventual choice to become a music major and you know, doing three choirs my senior year because I never would have imagined doing that my, my freshman year, that's for sure. (Adrian portrait, p. 90)

Adrian's chorus teacher also put a strong emphasis on teamwork and mentioned that the chorus was a kind of family, and Adrian felt like it was his "community" (Adrian portrait, p. 90).

Additionally, for Adrian, music is his most comfortable method of communication. He feels like he can share his thoughts best through music, "putting that to music has made it a lot easier for

me to get thoughts out. And, you know, express my emotion. It's also made me feel a lot more seen" (Adrian portrait, p.).

Although Phyllis was the only Black girl in her high school chorus, it was one of the few places in her high school where she felt safe. She knew a lot of the other girls since they grew up together in Girl Scouts, singing around campfires, which provided a "safe harbor for you to be in" (Phyllis portrait, p.125). Phyllis loved the social aspects of high school chorus, being part of a team, traveling to competitions, and making new friends. After high school, she encountered painful racism in college, but just as in high school, she earned opportunities in venues where few Black people were seen. She made money singing in White and Black churches and was able to make friends with people of all backgrounds through music performance. After a controlling husband forced her to stop singing in choruses, she felt like she was losing her identity. She filed for divorce and joined CCG before it was finalized,

But I had to find myself again. I was losing me. And like you had said, 'How does choir influence?' It is it's a lifeblood for those of us who sang. Can you imagine a world without music and someone not singing? Oh, that's, that's a dreadful! (Phyllis portrait, p. 134)

Steve was very interested in meeting people through chorus, but also took a lot of joy from feeling like a part of a team. The competitions he took part in during high school, his close church choir communities where everyone knows everyone, and his mission trips all seemed to allow him to feel part of something larger than himself. His identity as a Christian is very important and participation in music allows him to connect that faith with the larger world. He pointed out a connection between his high school chorus and his motivations to continue singing, "a couple of things that we might have done in high school that, you know, we even take into our



adult lives and stuff was just fun ways to just spending time in fellowship” (Steve portrait, p. 159).

Although Katherine did not have a good social experience in her high school chorus, she does now feel dedicated to CCG. Preparing a concert during COVID-19 was difficult, but she expressed pride and satisfaction that they performed well and even inspired an audience member to join the group. She also wants her children to use chorus and drama as places where they can feel safe and connect to people with whom they can belong, “You know, be involved in things that you know, you love to do, and you'll find people that you can connect with” (Katherine portrait, p.)

For Mila, high school chorus was competitive and familial, even if it was a bit dysfunctional. Although there were conflicts, she believed all the singers had the same goals and shared a “sense of togetherness” (Mila portrait, p. 117). She was very dedicated to her high school chorus team and was disappointed that many of the students in CE take the class simply for the credit and do not exhibit dedication.

Rita did not mention that she valued high school chorus because of the sense of belonging and safety but did value her and her classmates’ commitment to the team. In CE she likes how the director asks to hear from members of the ensemble and she likes the diversity of the group, “... we have a variety of people in that choir: students, attorneys, I mean, professional people like myself. People from all walks of life” (Rita portrait, p. 143).

### ***Sub-theme E) Spirituality and Church***

Four of the participants described singing as a spiritual experience. They also believed singing in church to be an important part of their expressions of their faiths. They believed singing to be a part of their lifelong devotion to a higher power. Based on the participants’

descriptions of the intersection of spirituality and music in their lives, I believed it fit best under the positive social experiences theme. The participants explained singing in choirs as part of a relationship between themselves and a higher power, and with those in their church community. They also seemed to see singing as a way to better their internal relationships with themselves through reflective and comforting music.

Four of the participants described singing as a spiritual experience. They also believed singing in church to be an important part of the expression of their faiths. Rita, Phyllis, and Steve all sang in their churches as children, and continued to do so as adults. Katherine did not mention singing in church as a child but has done so as an adult. For Rita, singing in church was required. After her mother passed away, she and some of her 12 siblings formed a singing group which performed regularly at local churches. Rita's relationship with music and God helped her through tough times in her life. She loves hymns and derives strength from her relationship with God, mostly through music:

You have sad parts in your life, but then you look at how the Lord has brought you through and you're still making it and still have joy in your life. One of the songs from my album is from Nehemiah 8:10, "The Joy of the Lord is the Strength of my Life." It has helped me a lot being able to convey this kind of message through songs. has helped me a lot. (Rita portrait, p. 142)

Phyllis also grew up singing in church and continued singing in churches into adulthood. She worked as a paid and unpaid cantor, accompanist, and choir director. Her faith brought her through many of the difficult times of her life as well. Her parents taught her to see herself as one of God's creations, endowed with all the beauty God could give. Her relationship with singing brings her closer to harmony with the world and to harmony with God:

I guess for mine, I just, I with open arms, receive all the gifts and graces and beauty that the Lord will allow me to experience. That's what I want. And I want us to be able to, to live in harmony in that same way, that when we see the birds and we hear them and we see a little inchworm making his way. You know, all of it is just, it's a gift and not to be squandered. (Phyllis portrait, p. 137)

Steve's relationship with music was always closely related to church. As mentioned, Steve has sung in choirs on mission trips and regularly performs in church choirs. Church is a place where Steve sees friends and feels at home. Growing up in a school attached to a church, Steve and many of the students sang in church and school choirs. For Steve, music has always been a spiritual gift, "... something that, honestly, yes, God has provided us with, and things like that, that we can use in minister and other areas and just be a blessing" (Steve portrait, p. 191).

Katherine is a devout Unitarian Universalist, for whom music is a spiritual experience. She experiences spiritual moments when choral performances and chords come together perfectly. Her spiritual experiences with music inspire her to keep coming to church, rather than the other way around, "...it's a spiritual moment. You know, I don't think you need to believe in any kind of, you know, anthropomorphic deity to have that sense that, you know, something other is happening, right? Something other" (Katherine portrait, p.108). Adrian did not mention church, and Mila only mentioned it in passing. She said her church has a wonderful gospel choir that she would like to join someday, but COVID-19 cancelled it and it has not come back at full strength.

In the following sections I will address relationships between my sample's characteristics and my findings. My purposeful sampling criteria considered age, race, gender, ensemble (CE or CCG), high school size, high school surrounding community size.

### **Motivation and Sample Characteristics**

Zooming out to the questionnaire results of all those involved in phase one, the motivational means (enthusiasm factors) from the Likert-style questions were fairly equal across the ensembles (see Table 2). The standard deviations showed that most of the scores were quite close to the means, which were high, so most respondents had good high school experiences. Overall enthusiasm factor averages were related essentially to theme one (4.31), theme two (4.25), and theme three (4.12), and were all quite high. Respondents in CCG had higher scores in all three categories of questions, especially the relationships questions (CCG 4.43, CE 3.98). It is not known whether the older members of CCG truly had better high school social experiences, or whether the years of hindsight have given them more affectionate memories of their social experiences.

In Table 3, I detailed the backgrounds of the questionnaire respondents. As expected, the participants were predominantly White. I was a bit surprised how 23% of the respondents preferred not to share their race. The largest proportion of respondents came from suburban high school schools (47%), a number higher than anticipated. Of course, the terms *suburban*, *urban*, and *rural* are a bit subjective to most people, and I did not provide definitions in the questionnaire.

The open-ended questions revealed that many respondents did not have, or did not share, clear or detailed memories of their high school choral programs. One question stuck out as having more uniformity of answers than I anticipated. The question was “What did you enjoy most about your high school chorus program?” The overwhelming majority of the respondents mentioned friendships, community, or relationships. This was even true in CE, where relationships-related Likert-style questions only averaged 3.98.

I chose participants from a collegiate ensemble and from a community chorus to examine whether there were differences between motivations as reported by adult singers of differing ages. My sample did feature an age range of almost 50 years, from a 19-year-old man to a woman in her mid-60's (Rita would not divulge her exact age). I did not speak with participants about their motivational changes over time and did not directly address the issue with each of them. The participants, although aged 19, 20, 45, 51, 62, and 60+, shared similar motivations for their high school and adult music involvement. The only difference I found to be noteworthy was between younger and older participants related to personal growth and achievement. As mentioned, the older participants were less interested in singing for competitive reasons and more interested in singing for their education and skill mastery. They mentioned how they enjoyed competitions as teens, but when they became adults, they discontinued competitive singing. This aligns with previous research in achievement goal theory that teachers with mastery-oriented classroom environments are more successful at encouraging lifelong learning than those performance-oriented environments (Anguiano, 2006; Lacaille, Whipple, & Koestner 2005).

Four of the six participants were motivated by positive social experiences in high school, and as adults all six were motivated by positive choral social experiences. As mentioned, Rita's high school chorus environment was very strict, and Rita expressed that she was rather shy, so her high school chorus relationships were minimal. Similarly, Katherine expressed that she was a socially awkward youth, but as an adult she very much enjoyed singing in choruses with her mother and child. For some, it appears, positive social experiences played a larger role in their adult choral motivations, a finding supported by previous research (Hillman 2002; Silvey, 2001).

Spirituality is a component of motivation that may increase over time. Katherine expresses that she now sings in choir due to a spiritual dimension, though she did not recall spirituality as a factor in her high school singing. The spiritual experiences she reaches while singing drive her to go to church more often. Adrian and Mila, the youngest participants, did not mention singing as a spiritual experience. Mila did say she hopes to sing in her church's gospel choir but did not otherwise mention spirituality. Rita, Phyllis, and Steve spent lifetimes singing in their churches. Their religions are huge parts of their lives, and their musical life stories. Church choir involvement was not a central focus of this study, but its strong impact on lifelong singing has been documented by previous researchers (Clift et al., 2012; Rohwer, 2010).

I did not find any noteworthy differences between the motivations for continued participation related to gender or to the ensemble in which the participants sang. As mentioned, the main three themes were central to all participants' motivations. It was a bit surprising that relationships were not more of a motivational factor for those involved in the community chorus, CCE, than the collegiate chorus, CE. One would expect that those who join a community chorus would be considerably more interested in experiencing feelings of community (Clift et al., 2012; Coffman, 2008; Dabback, 2008; Hillman, 2002).

To account for geographic diversity, I included participants who attended high schools in rural, suburban, and urban areas. There were no significant differences in their motivations related to geographic backgrounds. All six participants attended schools with quality choral programs of varying sizes. The sizes of the choral programs and high schools did not seem to make a difference. I was only able to include one participant from a rural background and one from an urban background, making 66% of participants suburban. More research is needed on non-suburban choral singers, and especially rural singers.

## Race

At the outset, I regarded race as beyond the scope of this dissertation and did not probe participants about the topic. During data analysis, however, I became concerned that I may have missed important information due to the absence of questions about race. My concern that neither I nor my participants of color (other than Phyllis) had discussed how race might have influenced their musical life stories prompted me to email them a few questions. Only Phyllis's story placed race near the center of her musical life story. Katherine mentioned race a few times in relation to her desire for her children to grow up in a less conservative and White, more pluralistic, and diverse community, which prompted her family's recent move. I asked my participants of color, "Did race in any way influence your motivation to continue singing as an adult?" and "Do you think my race as an interviewer influence your answers at all?" (Personal communication, March 31, 2022). Mila and Rita both provided interesting answers. Mila believed race was a small part of the reason she left CE, saying:

Race played a slight factor with my decision to leave CE chorus. Coming from a predominantly black choir to a predominantly white one was very different. The sound was different, the energy was different, class was different, the jokes were different etc. I don't want to say one is better than the other, but I definitely prefer one over the other.

(Mila, personal communication, March 31, 2022)

Mila also responded that she did not think my race impacted the content of her answers, but perhaps the way she delivered her answers. She said, "I try to make it a point not to code-switch so much anymore, especially when I don't necessarily have to. But I may have censored myself talking to you without realizing" (Mila, personal communication, March 31, 2022). I do not know Mila well enough to determine whether she censored herself, but my impression was that she was very forthcoming and open to all questions I posed.

Rita wrote that she does not like the terms African American or Black and thinks of herself as an “American human being of color” (Rita, personal communication, March 31, 2022). Her response reminded me of one of the questionnaire respondents who answered the self-identified race question with “human.” Rita said my race never influenced her at all, and that she never thought about it. She said she views the world as a “melting pot” (Rita, personal communication, March 31, 2022) and that God created all people with ample beauty and diversity God envisioned. She said she has many people of my race in her family. She expressed a desire to embrace all styles of music, no matter the source culture, and said race has nothing to do with her continuing to sing.

Adrian and Katherine both attended, as they called them, “very diverse” schools. As I reflected on my data, I realized I had assumed Steve had grown up in a predominantly White school and community. I knew he graduated from a Baptist private school in Colorado, but I had never asked him. I sent him a message to ask for the racial make-up of his school. He told me his school was about 80% White and 20% non-White. As an adult, Steve seeks out opportunities to be in diverse surroundings where he can learn from people who are from different backgrounds than his.

Phyllis talked about race a lot and expressed disappointment that America has not come closer to its aspirations for peace and equality. Phyllis and her family encountered a lot of racism, but music seemed to be one of the places where she could excel and feel safe doing so. She believed she was the exception, not the rule, when it came to navigating White and Black spaces. Her ability to go anywhere and sing myriad styles with diverse people was not due to chance. I believe she worked hard to be accepted in spaces dominated by White people, some of whom likely sneered (or worse) at her presence. Her parents taught her to lean on Christian faith



whenever people made her feel unwelcome, and she would not let her singing be muted. Singing, I believe, was part of her asserting her right to be in beautiful spaces, to enjoy the blessings of her creator, especially music, and to share those gifts with others. Her race certainly made her musical life more difficult, but she refused to be deterred, and likely broke down barriers for future singers and served as an excellent role model for the younger people she encountered.

### **Pedagogy**

A subsidiary research question was: Do adult amateur musicians perceive the influences of teachers' curricular and pedagogical decisions related to lifelong music making, and if so, what do they think of them? Three of the participants did perceive their teachers' curricular and pedagogical decisions related to lifelong music making and three did not. Adrian, Mila, and Steve believed their high school chorus teachers made it explicitly clear through their words and actions that music should be a lifelong learning activity. Katherine, Rita, and Phyllis did not recall their teachers explicitly mentioning lifelong learning. To gain further information on this topic, one would likely have to contact the teachers and interview them.

Adrian, Mila, and Steve celebrated their high school chorus teachers' encouragement to make music for a lifetime. Adrian especially believed that his teacher did a good job relating music listening and performance to teens' lives, a skill he believed was important to enjoy life on "deeper levels" (Adrian portrait, p. 96). Adrian noticed that, at the annual pops concert, his teacher tried to find repertoire that was personally meaningful to the students to perform. Steve internalized his teacher's and his community's valuing of music as a part of daily church and school life for all ages. Mila, although she plans to stop singing in CE, plans to take voice lessons. When asked about her teacher's relationship with lifelong learning she said he regularly addressed it as the primary goal of the choral program. She hopes to work on her solo vocal skills and music reading in future private lessons and perhaps sing in her church's gospel choir.

Tipps (1992) found that teaching students music reading skills led to a higher likelihood of lifelong music learning. The only participant who did not learn how to read music in her high school chorus was Rita, who was excited to learn how to read music in CE. Katherine played piano as a child and found vocal music reading easy. Mila felt like she was a strong sight-reader and a primary motivator for her to sing as an adult was to keep her reading skills strong. Steve felt comfortable reading music for percussion, voice, and violin. I did not delve deeply into this topic but did note that all participants wished to improve their reading skills, a component of the personal growth and achievement theme, which was likely partly inspired by their high school chorus experience.

### **Beyond-the-classroom**

In high school chorus, all participants were motivated by musical activities outside the classroom. Activities included competitions, trips, festivals, lessons, instrumental music playing, songwriting, composing, recording, performances at places like nursing homes, musicals, church music, and mission trip performances. Beyond-the-classroom performances contributed to their motivation to perform in similar ways as adults. The beyond-the-classroom theme had components of the other three themes in different ratios for each participant. When asked about their high school experiences, all six participants mentioned how much they enjoyed trips. Five of the participants mentioned trips very early in the interviews, which may show their importance. Each participant seemed to have different reasons for enjoying their experiences beyond-the-classroom related to aesthetic experiences, positive social experiences, and personal growth and achievement.

Rita's high school chorus took an annual out-of-state trip to a competition. She enjoyed it and was proud they won twice. Her beyond-the-classroom experiences were inspiring due to personal growth and achievement. Rita also made music in her church throughout her childhood.

She valued her spirituality, relationships, and aesthetic experiences with her church music.

Mila's high school chorus took out-of-state competition trips as well, and she too was proud of their success. Mila became close to a friend partly thanks to a chorus trip, a friend she still considers very close. The personal growth and achievement component was memorable to her as well as the relationships she developed. She also participated in after-school musicals and the rehearsals went late into the night. She felt pride in her school's productions and appreciated the work and dedication that went into them (personal growth and achievement).

Phyllis performed in competitions, church, and special performances outside of her high school chorus. Her chorus teacher gave her extra time to help her prepare. She found personal growth and achievement through her extra-curricular solo and chorus performances. Her favorite part of her trips, however, was the camaraderie, revealing she was motivated by the positive social experiences of the beyond-the-classroom experiences. Steve's favorite part of high school chorus was the after-school honor chorus. He enjoyed the trips they took and the competitions they participated in because of the connections he made with others (positive social experiences) and the sense of pride (personal growth and achievement) he felt when they performed well. Steve also performed regularly with his church, where he felt a sense of belonging (positive social experiences) and enjoyed the music they performed (aesthetic experiences).

Adrian made a friend in chorus, and they started writing songs outside of class (positive social experiences). His teacher listened to his original works, gave him feedback, and played his music for the chorus class (personal growth and achievement). When he made his recordings, he gained a sense of self and felt better able to communicate (aesthetic experiences, positive social experiences). Katherine had fewer musical experiences beyond-the-classroom, but she did take piano lessons and performed for special events with her high school chorus after school.

In this chapter I detailed my method of analysis of the narrative portraits the participants and I created together. I then described the findings of the analysis through themes and sub-themes. In the next chapter I will examine the meaning of the findings, why they are important, connect them to previous research, and related them to my framework and research questions.

## **6 DISCUSSION**

In Chapter One I noted that for many years, music education's leaders have advocated for educators to teach with a goal of lifelong music participation (Choate, 1967; Madsen, 2000; Music Educators National Conference, 1937). Despite these philosophical goals, music education in practice appears less than focused on supporting lifelong participation (Arasi, 2006; Holmquist, 1995). Music education in secondary schools is structured more exclusively than inclusively, which limits its instructors' impact to a small segment of the population (Arasi, 2006; Bartel, 2004) and reiterates the myth that music performance is only for those with the most God-given talent. The attrition issues continue into adulthood, during which an even smaller percentage of the population takes part in choral ensembles (Van Weelden & Waters, 2004).

In my literature review, I affirmed the benefits of lifelong music participation and described the most traditionally proposed causes of attrition in music education. Many researchers have studied the motivations of adults to make music in ensembles or the motivation of school children to do so in school. However, few researchers have studied relationships between motivations for adult music making and those adults' school music experiences. Additionally, several researchers have focused on auditioned ensembles with musicians who have similar backgrounds to professionals, a very small segment of the population (U.S.

Department of Labor, 2020). To focus on a larger population, amateurs, I focused on singers in two ensembles that required beginner skill levels.

I used purposeful sampling via a questionnaire to find six interview participants. Although many studies on lifelong musicianship have utilized interviews, most have interviewed ensemble directors (Arasi, 2006; Selph & Bugos, 2014; Shanksy, 2010; Silvey, 2001) and used snowball sampling based on the testimonials of directors or singers to find more participants. Silvey's (2001) sampling method was the closest to mine in that he interviewed three ensemble members and a director, using narrative inquiry, to understand lifelong motivations to sing. However, the director recommended the three ensemble members, two of whom were married, and one served as the ensemble librarian. I chose my interview participants not based on recommendations but based on their self-identified characteristics and ideas. I believe my sample selection process was unique and although laborious, worth the effort.

I studied individuals' personal learning, motivations for learning, and reflections on their learning. Learners do not make meaning in each situation independently, but rather build on their own previous experiences (Phillips, 1995), and can reflect on how they make meaning of things over time. While constructivism theory posits that the transmission of meaning within the world is social, it also focuses on how individual's minds learn and make meaning (Wadsworth, 1996). Constructivism "suggests that each one's way of making sense of the world is as valid and worthy of respect as any other, thereby tending to scotch any hint of a critical spirit" (Crotty, 1998, p. 58). By collaborating with participants to write their narrative musical life stories I have kept the learner at the center of the issue in a constructivist manner. To make connections from the past to the present, I interviewed participants, asking them to recollect and reflect upon their musical life stories in long-form narratives. Together, we turned those stories into one narrative

portrait of each participant with a focus on meaningful elements of their life stories related to the research questions.

Constructivism informed my work on the portraits, in which I used their own words, collaborated with them, and analyzed their stories based on their perspectives of their learning and motivation over time. Using Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2019) methods, I analyzed the portraits for potential connections between high school choral experiences and adult amateur musicians' current motivations to continue making music. I viewed the portraits through my theoretical lenses of attribution theory and achievement goal theory and established my findings by crystallizing the following data sources: a) narrative portraits; b) participant interview videos and transcripts; c) field notes; d) codebook; and d) questionnaires.

I will now detail my conclusions related to my research questions and subsidiary research questions. My primary research question was: How do adult amateur musicians perceive the relationship between high school choral experiences and their current motivation to continue making music?

The subsidiary questions were as follows:

1. What motivates adult amateur musicians to continue making music in ensembles?
2. To what extent do adult amateur musicians perceive the influences of teacher's curricular and pedagogical decisions related to lifelong music making, and if so, what do they think of them?
3. How do adult amateur musicians perceive the influence of their learning attributions and classroom social interactions on their lifelong music making?
4. What are characteristics of high school choral programs that are successful at inspiring and enabling lifelong musicians?

My analysis suggests that for this study's participants, there is a relationship between high school choral experiences and adult amateur musicians' current motivations to continue making music. Findings indicate that positive experiences with aesthetic experiences, personal growth and achievement, and social experiences were the most impactful aspects of the participants' high school experiences and motivated them to continue making music as adults.

### **Boundaries**

I must acknowledge several boundaries of my study. I cannot use this study to create a one-size-fits-all curriculum for high school chorus or generalize participants' motivations to all choral singers. Although I am satisfied that I strove for depth rather than breadth, my sample size and characteristics determined the scope of my study. My ( $n = 6$ ) interview design was never intended to be generalizable but not all research has to be. I examined the musical life stories of six adults who, after enjoying their high school chorus experience, continued singing in adult choruses. The sample was not large, but the people were purposely selected because of their firsthand knowledge of the phenomenon in question. Their experiences may not represent the population of their city, state, or the nation at large. Indeed, none of the participants were aged 21–44, or over 70, and all participants were either Black/African American or White/Caucasian, with no other races represented.

My status as a White, middle-aged, middle-class male could have influenced the information my interview participants chose to share. Perhaps the answers Black participants gave would have been different if a non-White researcher had been asking the questions. It is possible participants, especially those of color, did not feel comfortable speaking about race with me. This could have had the impact of decreasing the perception of race as a factor in my results. It is also possible that participants did not feel comfortable speaking about gender issues with

me. It is important to note that the way the participant perceives the researcher can impact their unconscious and conscious decisions regarding what information to share, and how to share it.

My interview process, mostly over Zoom, had a more positive than negative impact. Due to COVID, I conducted 10 of my 12 interviews over Zoom. I felt that if the interviews had been in person, like my interviews with Katherine, participants would have shared more. However, as one of my committee members mentioned, Zoom may have also helped my study. Interviews were easy to schedule, at night, on weekend mornings, and enabled me to reach participants who may not have had access to transportation. The ease of meeting and the elimination of travel may have first enabled participants to initially agree to interviews, then encouraged them to persist in the study to the end. Also, participants were able to meet me in the privacy of their own home, which may have encouraged them to feel more comfortable and open up more.

I should have asked more questions tailored to achievement goal theory and attribution theory which may have reaped more data directly related to my theoretical framework. I gave brief explanations of the theories which may have confused participants. I could have side-stepped explaining the theories to them and conceived ways to ask them without explicitly walking them through the theories. This could have opened them up to more reflection and could have reaped more information directly related to the theories. Had I asked, I may have been able to learn more about what motivators they and their current and former directors focused on. Participants did answer my questions thoughtfully, but I did not probe to find out how they attributed their successes or failures in other areas of their lives. Perhaps narrative interviews are not the best venue to study attribution theory and achievement goal theory. A researcher may be better positioned to study them via surveys or rehearsal observations, noting the language used by the conductor. Also, the theories were difficult to study retrospectively. Participants mostly



understood the theories related to their current lives but did not clearly recall their high school motivations. However, the six interview participants were very open with their thoughts and answered all questions. Together we created the six narrative portraits I presented in Chapter Four.

My methodology of narrative inquiry led me to write narrative portraits, which I then used as data for my thematic analysis process. One might wonder why I did not code and analyze the interview transcripts instead. While it is possible that I may have missed some information in the process of converting the interviews into narrative portraits, I believe it was the best course of action. I took my time, as I detailed in Chapter Three, reading the transcripts, watching the interviews, and then writing the portraits. I believe they are more concise, summative, and reflective of the salient aspects of the participants' musical life stories than the interviews alone. The narrative portraits were also collaborative efforts between me and the participants. The process of emailing the drafts back and forth afforded a dimension of member checking that added to the trustworthiness of the study.

A causal relationship between high school choral experiences and adult participation cannot be directly proven. Each of the six interview participants passionately love music and singing. It is possible that they would be musically active adults no matter what their high school chorus experience had been like. It is possible that appreciation or enjoyment of choral singing is not something that a teacher can impart upon a student. It is possible that teaching a student to enjoy chorus is akin to teaching someone who dislikes the taste of broccoli to like it.

My study was needed because most researchers have focused on motivations of school students or adults. I wished to expand our understanding of teaching for lifelong learning by connecting those two stages of life, asking adults about current motivations for participation, and

how those were or were not developed during high school. Also, most studies related to this topic have included survey data, where mine will include narrative data. Learning the musical life stories and motivations of adult amateur choral musicians and their high school backgrounds gave me a long view of a topic that necessitates such a view. The narratives in this study, I believe, are emblematic of many musical life stories around the nation. I believe my analysis of the narratives can provide meaningful ideas for teachers interested in promoting lifelong learning. Acknowledging the boundaries of this study, I now present my interpretation of the findings.

### **Inductive Analysis**

I did take note that the three themes of my findings were very similar to those I found in my literature review. My process of analysis was inductive, however. During my narrative analysis I utilized Nvivo coding and considered my themes very carefully. I followed Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2019) method and became somewhat frustrated that my three themes were turning out to be similar to those found in previous literature. I hoped to find something new and exciting. I made several thematic maps and re-grouped the Nvivo "nodes" (as the program named them) several times, throwing out several revisions that regrouped the sections of narrative portrait text. My somewhat surprising finding was related to beyond-the-classroom, but the three main themes were similar to those found in previous literature. I also believe the sub-themes in my study carry more in-depth information than that provided by the broader main themes themselves. The three main themes, I believe, continue to come up in research because they are important and common motivators for choral participation.

### **Discussion of Theme Topic 1: Aesthetic Experiences**

The importance of aesthetic experiences to adult musicians has been well-documented in previous research (Asmus & Harrison, 1990; Ayling & Johnston, 2005; Faulkner, 1957; Redman,

2016; Redman & Bugos, 2019; Selph & Bugos, 2014; Silvey, 2001). My data analysis indicates that participants' high school aesthetic musical experiences contributed to current motivations to continue making music. In this study, the definition of aesthetics is: The underlying qualities and beauty of music and musical sounds, the way hearing music makes people feel, and the appreciation of the beauty and feelings associated with music and the process of making it. Of those who took high school, aesthetics-related questionnaire items received the highest mean ratings from CCG members (4.60) chorus and second highest (by only 0.01) from CE members (4.17).

All the interview participants enjoyed the sounds their high school choruses made. They appreciated the repertoire their high school ensembles learned and sought out similar interactions with beauty in their adulthood choirs. Participants' high school teachers helped singers develop an appreciation for the beauty of choral music that carried over into adult life. One wonders how their lives may have been different if their high school teachers had chosen different repertoire or if the choruses had failed to achieve a level of beauty the participants found pleasing.

All the interview participants enjoyed learning a variety of styles of music in chorus. Katherine's high school chorus only learned jazz, but she enjoyed the diversity of repertoire in her adult choruses. Rita's chorus sang mostly African American Spirituals, but she enjoyed the varied repertoire of her adult chorus. The other four participants seem to have learned traditional Western Classical Music repertoire in high school, but crucially also musical theatre, popular, jazz, and other styles of music. Adrian, Mila, and Steve specifically sought out diversity of repertoire in their adult choruses. Rita was pleasantly surprised by the diversity of repertoire she encountered in CE. McPherson & Hendricks' (2010) study showed that most secondary students lose interest in school music. This study's six participants certainly did not, but they may be the

exception, not the rule. NAFME documents have consistently urged teachers to embrace as many styles as possible (FitzStephens, 2021), and most of the participants received quality instruction in several music styles, which is not the case for many students (Odena & Welch, 2009). Perhaps their teachers' competencies in multiple styles contributed to students developing lifelong learning skills.

Adrian, Phyllis, and Rita developed deeply personal connections to music thanks partly to their involvement in high school chorus. One of Adrian's teacher's goals was to help students develop personal connections with repertoire, which profoundly impacted Adrian. Several researchers have claimed that informal music learning practices (Allsup, 2003; Green, 2002, 2006; Koops, 2014) and the incorporation of popular music (Green, 2006; Kratus, 2006, 2019; Koops, 2014; Reyes, 2016) are the keys to helping students develop personal relationships with music. This study provides evidence to the contrary, that teachers can help students develop personal relationships with music in large ensemble settings with mostly classical repertoire. Perhaps the independent variable is not the repertoire, but the pedagogy of the teacher. Or, as some have argued (Kratus, 2019; Lamont & Maton, 2010; McPherson & Hendricks, 2010; Regelski, 2006), perhaps their teachers would have reached many more students with repertoire more closely related to students' lives, popular music.

Mila presented an interesting case regarding aesthetic experiences. Mila very much enjoyed her high school chorus program's repertoire and their sound but seemed to be primarily motivated by personal growth and achievement. She mentioned her high school chorus' success at competitions several times. When Mila joined a college chorus, she was very disappointed by the lack of beautiful sound the ensemble created and she was very bored at the concert. She did

not particularly enjoy the repertoire, but more so was disappointed in her ensemble's execution of the music and decided to stop her membership at the end of the semester.

Mila's attrition supports previous findings that quality aesthetic experiences are important to the singers' experience in a chorus (Asmus & Harrison, 1990; Jutras, 2011; Silvey, 2001). Asmus and Harrison (1990) found the "power of the aesthetic experience" (p. 258) to be the principal motivator for continued music involvement. Mila was undoubtedly ready for an ensemble that performed at a higher level, but her busy class schedule only left her with one choice, CE. One wonders whether she will ever sing in a chorus again. One also wonders if she had been in an ensemble with more experienced singers performing at a higher level, whether she may have continued her participation. Redman and Bugos (2019) found that when asked for a reason they might quit, respondents said if the music lacked aesthetic beauty. I wonder if I had posed the same question whether I would have received similar answers. I believe it is very possible.

Mila's experience supports the contention that teachers must choose repertoire that challenges singers to learn and grow but enables them to experience success (Forbes, 2001; Reames, 1991). Mila's musical skills exceeded the challenge of the repertoire, which left her bored or frustrated during rehearsals. She rarely skips classes but was happy to take her two consequence-free absences from CE just to get away from rehearsal. According to Csikszentmihalyi's flow theory, people derive pleasure from activities such as music performance due to the fully absorbing nature of engaging in a difficult pursuit, one that stretches a person's capacity, involves risk, and provides challenges to their skills (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). The experience of a flow state (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997) motivates people to engage in experiences again. Mila apparently spent little of CE rehearsal time in a flow state, fully engaged

in a challenging activity. It sounds like her high school choral program was more successful at keeping her in a flow state.

Although Mila's high school teacher explicitly mentioned music as a lifelong activity often, it sounds like he motivated students with a performance-approach or performance-avoidance achievement goal mentality. The public display of skills appears to have been the ultimate goal of his classes, rather than mastery of skills. Competitions and concerts were central, and Mila said their music teachers pushed them hard to succeed, believing many of them would aspire to careers in music. Katherine's teacher, on the other hand, did not take the students to competitions but pushed them hard to develop their musical abilities, which supports previous research (Holmquist, 1995) that a learned commitment to music performance motivates carryover behaviors from high school.

My finding of aesthetic experiences as a central motivator was expected and supported by previous research. Many previous researchers have come to similar conclusions (Arasi, 2006; Coffman & Adamek, 1999; Dabback et al., 2018; Redman & Bugos, 2019). Although other researchers have reached similar conclusions, I examined the topic in a unique way, through narrative inquiry resulting in narrative portraits, while most researchers utilized surveys given to adult musicians. I allowed participants time and aided them through longform, narrative explanations, a method that could have reached different conclusions than survey-style research. My method of documenting amateur musicians' musical life stories, including their reflections on high school chorus in retrospect from adulthood, has demonstrated connections between high school chorus and adult music making in a participant-understanding-centered, constructivist way.

The enjoyment of aesthetic choral experiences connects to the next theme, personal growth and achievement. Without singers putting forth effort to perform repertoire well, students are unlikely to create beautiful ensemble sounds. Participants found improving their vocal skills to perform challenging repertoire inspiring. They were eminently pleased by the finished products of their and their colleagues' hard work. Of course, not all choristers indeed care to challenge themselves, which can be frustrating to dedicated musicians like the participants in this study. As Mila said when comparing her high school and college choirs, "...it just sounds better when you want it to sound good, when you care if it sounds good or not" (Recorded Interview, December 8, 2021, Lines 245–246). After studying the musical life stories of three lifelong singers, Silvey (2001) described the challenge and reward of performing works of music well:

“Young musicians, when provided with sources of artistic inspiration and guided opportunities for musical experiences and success, are likely to sprout roots that will serve as the foundation for the development of their own aesthetic values. (Silvey, 2001, p. 216)

Thus, the reward of aesthetic experiences is related to the reward of personal growth and achievement. Without the personal growth and achievement that comes from challenging oneself, the sounds of a chorus do not happen. Without the reward of pleasing aesthetic experiences, singers may not develop the drive to develop their personal skills to achieve. The two motivators seem to feed each other; when one is present, the other increases.

Perhaps the aesthetic hook can reel students in, but then they need learning behaviors modeled for them by teachers toward dedication and effort to practice. That may be what is needed to lean into a mastery approach and develop the intrinsic motivation to do well and keep doing well. The beauty of choral sound motivated participants to return to choral singing again

and again. The beauty took effort, indeed from every member of the ensemble, and participants believed when they put effort in, they personally improved as well. Perhaps choral singing is a very natural way to develop the internal attributions of effort and ability. Participants and their teachers believed music was something that took practice to improve. When the ensemble sounded good, they felt rewarded.

### **Discussion of Theme Topic 2: Personal Growth and Achievement**

The most cited motivator connecting high school choral experiences to participants' motivation to continue making music was personal growth and achievement. My coding of the narrative portrait excerpts found 196 personal growth and achievement comments, 162 positive social experiences comments, and 117 aesthetic experiences comments. While the number of coded excerpts is not the primary indicator of a subject's importance (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the pervasiveness of the theme is relevant. Participants' stories revealed lifelong quests for self-improvement and education. All participants strove to improve their singing skills and learn about music and singing through their membership in adult amateur choruses. They spoke about how their high school teachers had taught them that vocal skills were valuable and rewarding. They appeared to wish to emulate their high school teachers' attention to detail, pursuit of musical excellence, and professionalism, and carried those habits into adulthood. The mean of mastery-related questionnaire questions was highest for CE members, who appeared to have taken the class primarily to improve vocal skills.

This study's sub-themes of teacher encouragement, teacher modeling of musicianship and professionalism, competition, accolades, and confidence, and performance skills mastery might well have been categorized into other themes. It would have been reasonable to categorize teacher interactions under the positive social experiences theme, but I believed the long term impact the teachers had on the students was less related to their relationships and more related to



the habits those teachers modeled and the way they made the singers feel about their skills. This assertion is supported by Holmquist's (1995) study that a learned commitment to music performance motivated continued performance after graduation more than teacher personalities or relationships. Indeed, only one participant, Steve, maintained contact with his high school teacher after graduating. Although each participant had influential teachers, the encouragement those teachers gave and the models of quality musicianship and professionalism they provided impacted the participants by motivating them toward personal growth and achievement. Karen, for example, mentioned specifically how her teacher modeled professional musicianship and the students followed suit.

The impact of teacher behavior modeling may be difficult for young students to consciously notice and talk about, but it is real. The teacher has the most impact on the motivational environment of the room (Anguiano, 2006; Droë, 2013; Lacaille, Whipple, & Koestner 2005). It seems likely that all six of the participants' teachers were good models, whether students consciously noticed or not. Observations of the participants' teachers, if possible, would shed more light on this topic. Teachers' high standards of musical performance and professionalism for themselves and their students motivated students to aspire to achieve as well. Those habits carried over to their current musical ambitions, through which each singer expressed the desire to educate themselves and perform to the best of their ability. Arasi (2006) also found this to be true when she studied a choral program led by a teacher with very high standards, which transferred to the students as well.

Competition, accolades, and confidence building were important parts of participants' high school choral experiences, but their motivational significance seemed to fade with time. As participants shifted to speaking about their adult ensembles, they mentioned competition and

accolades less and performance skills mastery more. The only participant to mention accolades in adult music making was Phyllis, who described her many successful auditions into high level ensembles. I address this further in the attribution theory and achievement goal theory section. The desire for personal growth and achievement motivating adults to participate in music ensembles was an expected result, as it is supported by previous literature (Arasi, 2006; Ayling & Johnston, 2005; Dabback et al., 2018).

Singers' motivational migration from competition to skill mastery as they age has been demonstrated in previous research (Battersby, 1994; Freer, 2011; Stamer, 2006). Stamer (2006) found a significant difference in how high school sophomores and seniors viewed their annual choral competitions. Sophomores were motivated by achieving success at competitions, while seniors comparatively placed more importance on high-quality music performance. Previous researchers have not regularly cited competition as a significant motivator for adults to participate in choral ensembles, however performance skills mastery has been repeatedly found to motivate adults to sing. It appears competition success can support early motivation and recruitment, but the impact soon wanes.

The most crucial of the sub-themes was performance skills mastery. All participants wanted to become better singers through their participation in adult choruses. This study suggests that at least some of their drive to improve came from their work with their high school teachers. Rita said of her adult singing, "I probably still would have been in choirs and so forth. I just don't know if I would be as maybe disciplined as I am" (Rita portrait, p. 146). The six interview participants appear to have been very fortunate to be in high school choruses that inspired them to master their instrument while simultaneously offering them hugely impactful aesthetic experiences. It is possible the teachers were experts at balancing the process versus product

conundrum, or the “performance-pedagogy paradox” (Freer, 2011, p. 164). Which is more meaningful, process or product? The participants seemed to get both at high levels. They received more than just creativity and fun in class, they also got to be involved in beautiful sounds and performances of which they were proud.

Although I knew there would be crossover between performance skills mastery and aesthetic motivators, I tried my best to discern the difference between the two as the participants described them. Previous researchers have blurred the lines between performance skills mastery and aesthetic motivators. Ayling (2005) did not clarify what their 92.30% of respondents meant by saying they “just like to sing” (p. 34), leaving one to wonder what it was about singing they liked. Was it the technical aspect, the sound of their voice, the sound of the ensemble? Sichivitsa’s (2003) study cited “the value of music” (p. 330) as one of the top two predictors of future musical intentions along with “social integration in the choir” (p. 330). Perhaps due to the survey method employed, the reader was left to wonder what exactly about music the participants valued. Did they value the development of skills, the sounds, or the emotions involved? Asmus and Harrison (1990) seemed to combine the two as a motivator they called “affect for music” (p. 258). Selph and Bugos (2014) cited “love of music” and “learning and improving their musical ability” (p. 32) as the two most important factors motivating participation in three adult community choirs. Our results share many similarities, and they tried to deconstruct the differences between enjoyment of the music and enjoyment of the learning and skill-building involved in music practice.

Although the two are connected, and perhaps cannot exist independently, I believe my narrative method helped establish some clarity between aesthetic experience and performance skills mastery motivators. Steve, for example, spoke of joining CCG to learn new styles and

experience the beauty of musical sounds. Mila joined CE specifically to keep her reading and singing skills up to speed. Many previous researchers have been unable to parse out the differences, I believe, because of the use of survey data. Surveys cannot get to the bottom of some of these motivators the way long conversations can. Asking someone on a survey to agree or disagree with a statement like “I like to sing,” or even having a respondent answer an open-ended question with “I enjoy” does not glean clear information because it does not require participants to reflect and deeply consider their answers the way a conversation does.

I will now more directly address the results as they relate to my theoretical frameworks of attribution theory and achievement goal theory. In keeping with a constructivist epistemological stance, I interviewed, collected data, and analyzed data keeping a focus on the participants’ ways of knowing and learning.

### ***Attribution Theory and Achievement Goal Theory***

In achievement goal theory, learner motivation is categorized as either mastery (task/learning) or performance (ego/ability) oriented (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Nicholls, 1984, 1989; Tan & Sin, 2020). Five of the six singers’ high school teachers emphasized success at competitions, which in achievement goal theory is called a performance-oriented motivation. It is unknown to what degree their teachers consciously focused on performance-approach goals, centered on competition with others and public accolades, and performance-avoidance goals, centered on avoiding public embarrassment. Adrian and Rita expressed being nervous before competitions, and their desire to have everything perfectly rehearsed.

While some researchers have found that competitions can have a negative effect on motivation (Anguiano, 2006; Lacaille, Whipple, & Koestner 2005), my data suggest that high school competitions may have contributed to lifelong participation for the six study participants.

Perhaps some of their classmates were intimidated by competitions and turned away from choral singing, but I did not ask. Rita, Adrian, Steve, Phyllis, and Mila appreciated how hard their teachers worked them to prepare for competitions. They found their teachers' attention to details motivating. Although Katherine's teacher did not take her chorus to competitions, he did demonstrate similarly high standards of performance without goals of winning or receiving public accolades. Were their teachers focusing on performance accolades or mastery, and did students discern the difference? Perhaps the value or detriment of school music competitions is not inherent in their existence but lies in the way teachers situate them for students. Steve's teacher seemed to have made it clear that his focus was not on winning or losing but on mastering skills and self-improvement, prompting Steve to have very positive memories of their annual competition.

Three of the older participants, Steve, Rita, and Phyllis, expressed strong desire to continue learning for mastery in adult choruses. They spoke of life as a "classroom" (Phyllis portrait, p. 180) and expressed the desire to continue learning and improving. In achievement goal theory, their desire to improve would be categorized as mastery-approach motivation. Whether or how much they learned this from their high school teachers is not known. It is possible they look at most things in life this way and did so before they took high school chorus. The participants did not mention competition, accolades, or public performances as motivators for their continued performance. They seem to have developed mastery-approach and mastery-avoidance achievement goals for their music endeavors.

At the outset of this dissertation, one of the goals was to examine how adult amateur musicians perceived their learning through the lens of attribution theory. According to Weiner's (1974) attribution theory, people attribute their success or failure to categories of reasons which

will influence their motivation to partake in the activity in the future. The theory consists of four major causal categories for attribution of success or failure on any achievement related task – ability, task difficulty, effort, and luck. People often view musical talent as something one either is blessed with or not, which can discourage participation for many people. In attribution theory, this would be called a stable internal attribution – ability – that does not change. Many music teachers reject this idea, believing that music performance is for everyone, not just the most talented.

My data suggest that the participants believed music performance was a skill that requires practice to improve, and that anybody can do it. As Rita put it, “practice makes better” (Rita portrait, p. 149). All six of them mentioned practicing, dedication, and effort as ways to overcome failures. Legette (1998), in a study of over 1,000 public school students, came to similar findings. He noticed that students were more likely to attribute their success or failure in music classes to ability and effort than luck or task difficulty. Additionally, the older students were (elementary school through high school), the more likely they were to attribute musical success to internal attributions, such as ability and effort (Legette, 1998). The participants in my study believed that effort was central to success in music. Effort is an internal-unstable attribution that can encourage future engagement. If a student fails and attributes the failure to their effort, they believe they can try again and get a different result. If a student succeeds and attributes their success to effort, they are more likely to engage in another effortful attempt in the activity. My findings align with previous studies on attribution theory and music (Asmus, 1986; Asmus & Harrison, 1996; Legette, 1998, 2012), which suggest that music teachers emphasize effort over ability due to its greater likelihood of encouraging further engagement with the activity.

How much their high school choral experiences contributed to the participants' attribution beliefs is unknown, but in their high school music classrooms (in which they spent four or five years), the teacher has the most impact on students' musical attributions (Anguiano, 2006; Sandene, 1997). The data indicate that the six interview participants all learned at least partly from their high school chorus teachers that, in music, effort leads to achievement. It is unknown whether they viewed music this way before entering high school chorus.

### **Discussion of Theme Topic 3: Positive Social Experiences**

As expected, this study provided further evidence that positive social experiences motivate people to sing in choruses. The open-ended questionnaire questions revealed the importance of social experiences, which many respondents said was their favorite part of their high school choral programs. Four of the six participants were affected by the relationships they made in high school choruses, and all six mentioned relationships as reasons for their adult involvement. Several researchers of adult choruses have concluded that a sense of belonging, teamwork, closeness, safety, or camaraderie were motivators for continued involvement (Adderley et al., 2003; Coffman & Adamek, 1999; Hillman, 2002; Dabback, 2008; Lamont, 2011; Rohwer, 2013; Redman & Bugos, 2019). This study is in line with those previous findings. The mean scores for relationship related motivators was higher in CCG (4.43) than in CE (3.98). In line with Hillman's (2002) study of older adults, perhaps age contributed to this factor being a higher motivator. Friendship researcher Marissa Franco contends that the two most important components to building and maintaining adult friendships are common interests and shared vulnerability (George, 2022). If true, then a chorus would be a perfect place to make adult friendships. In choruses, all members share the common interest of singing which many consider one of the most vulnerable things a person can do (Barefield, 2012).

Researchers have demonstrated that the words of peers, teachers, and family members strongly influence singers' sense of their ability (Durrant, 2005; Freer, 2008; Parker, 2015; Whidden, 2015). This study was not especially focused on that topic, but nonetheless aligns with previous research. All six of the singers received encouragement to sing from their family, and Katherine, Rita, Steve, and Phyllis enjoyed singing with their family members. Steve's entire church community seemed to support lifelong music making and he described people telling him they enjoyed his solos. According to attribution theory, people are more likely to partake in activities again if they believe they can succeed in the activity. Perhaps the positive comments singers received helped them believe they had the ability to succeed in music, or perhaps they believed their hard work had paid off. Unfortunately, I did not probe into whether singers attributed their positive reviews in music to effort, ability, task difficulty, or luck. It does appear, however, that the singers attributed their musical successes to their effort. Receiving such encouragement as a child, while skills develop, may have played a role in their persistence into adulthood.

Rita, Phyllis, Steve, and Katherine were drawn to music participation partly due to the spirituality of the experience and the connection between church and music. The motivator of spirituality has been found by previous researchers as a reason why adults continue singing in choruses (Rohwer, 2010; Selph & Bugos, 2014), especially church choruses. Somewhat the opposite, Katherine believed her experiences with music kept her coming to church. Rita, Phyllis, and Steve's church music involvement predated their high school chorus involvement. It is worth noting, however, that although all three sing in church, they felt the urge to sing in non-religious choruses as well. Perhaps the spiritual experience was a peripheral contributor, not a central contributor, to their motivation to continue.



All six participants cited sense of belonging and/or safety as motivators to continued participation. Adderley et al. (2003) found, “students are intellectually, psychologically, emotionally, socially, and musically nurtured by membership in performing ensembles” (p. 204). Although Katherine and Rita did not have feelings of belonging in high school chorus, they enjoyed the way their adult choruses made them feel. For Steve, Phyllis, Mila, and Adrian, the relationships they formed through high school chorus influenced their decisions to be in choruses as adults. Mila was the only participant who felt isolated in her adult chorus experience, and it may have contributed to her decision to discontinue singing in the ensemble.

Once again, Mila’s attrition from her college chorus provided an interesting case. Rita and Adrian sang in the same chorus as Mila and they enjoyed the social atmosphere and meeting all the diverse people in the ensemble. Mila, however, was absorbed by how poor the chorus sounded, and how she thought the music was too easy, but also mentioned how there was not time to make social connections. One wonders whether a lack of a sense of belonging was more of a contributor to her attrition than she realized. She also mentioned in her follow up email to me that CE’s predominantly White population was small contributor to her exit from the group. Researchers have found that people are more likely to stay involved in music groups if they have friends and feel like they belong, and more likely to quit if they feel alone (Freer, 2016; Johnson et al., 2017; Yoo, 2021). If she had made a good friend in the group, her story might have been different.

### **Race**

Some scholars claim U.S. schooling functions to perpetuate existing racial inequalities in American society. Music education is not exempt from societal inequalities but rather is centrally positioned within American culture as part of the culturally defining traditions of music and education. Music education both reflects and influences societal trends and is significantly

involved in rearing future generations' musical understandings and practices. This position bestows upon music education the power and responsibility to be an influential force in changing or preserving societal power structures.

Mila's candid response that race did indeed play a small factor in her exit from CE was the tip of the iceberg on the topic of the Black experience in predominantly White choruses led by White teachers. Although a recent study found that American high school chorus students do indeed reflect the larger demographics of the population (Elpus & Abril, 2019), White music teachers continue to dominate the American landscape (Elpus & Abril, 2011; Hess, 2018; Rickels et al., 2013). A recent study found about 86% of music teachers identified as White (Elpus, 2015). The experiences of Black high school students in predominantly White choruses and with White music teachers are under-researched (Palmer, 2011). If a person cannot see someone who looks like them being successful in an endeavor or career, they are less likely to persist in that activity (Gaines, 1996; Grose, 2011). Phyllis's story has much to offer. She entered mostly White spaces her entire life and refused to be excluded. How did that feel? How did White and Black people react to her? As a White teacher of predominantly White high school chorus classes, I plan to learn much more about this topic in my future work.

Mila told me her high school student body was almost entirely Black. She remembered two White girls in the chorus and a few Hispanic students. Her experience shifting from a predominantly Black chorus (led by a White man) to a predominantly White chorus (led by a White woman) was significant to her. Her experience points to an interesting topic with choruses – that they are often segregated. School choruses likely reflect the population of their surrounding communities, which are often segregated. The separation often continues into adulthood, where people frequently sing in choruses with people who look like they do, in

church or otherwise. The impact of self-imposed segregation on students and their musical life stories is a topic in need of further research.

Perhaps the repertoire of CE contributed to Mila's distaste for the experience. She loved the popular a cappella music she performed in her high school chorus but did not love the more traditional repertoire of her collegiate ensemble. Higher education's elevation of Western Classical repertoire and marginalization or exclusion of other musical traditions can silence and erase voices from diverse musical traditions (Kindall-Smith et al., 2011). The repertoire styles of higher education are handed down to K-12 music education ensemble conductors, creating a feedback loop. Choosing repertoire almost exclusively from one tradition marginalizes all other traditions. Paradoxically, when ensemble teachers program an occasional piece from outside the dominant tradition, the piece is viewed through the primary lens of Western Classical Music, which can thus serve to further marginalize that tradition (Hess, 2015). Mila and Adrian were both excited to learn a piece in an African language for their fall concert, but they were both very disappointed when the conductor cut the piece because it was too difficult for the ensemble.

Koza (2008) pointed out how difficult it is for students of color to gain access to predominantly White institutions (PWIs), arguing that the audition and admission practices in higher education perpetuate inequality gaps in K-12 music programs. Eurocentric music dominates the curricula and serves to marginalize other culture's styles of music making. Students who learn music in other ways and come from different cultural traditions, often nonwhite students, are disadvantaged and thus rarely advance to higher education music study. In this study, Mila briefly sang in a college chorus but never considered becoming a music major. Perhaps it always appeared to be something that was not for her, because she saw

primarily White people leading music ensembles, then primarily White people singing in the collegiate ensemble.

Institutional Whiteness, Eurocentric music choices celebrating White musicians, mostly White teachers, and silence on racial inequalities resultingly exclude Black people from music education. If Black people are seated at the table at all, they do not feel welcomed. Hendricks (2010) used Du Bois's idea of double-consciousness to situate a storytelling of a Black man named DeeJay's emotionally taxing journey through education and collegiate music education. DeeJay found himself a fish out of water in a PWI in the Midwest. DeeJay's Gospel singing background did not prepare him for his university experience, where he felt marginalized. He had hoped to expand his knowledge of Black Gospel music but found himself forced to study "the uniqueness of Whiteness and the superiority of White ingenuity" (Hendricks, p. 34). According to Hendricks and Du Bois, Black people constantly struggle between two competing ways of looking at themselves—through their own eyes and through the eyes of White-dominated society. The societal definition the Black person gathers from others is that of inferiority, and the process of coming to that realization, normally during youth, Du Bois (1903) called *nigrescence*. Feeling like the other wears on people and keeps them from being their best selves. In 1978, Phyllis was admitted to a PWI as a vocal performance major. Experiences like hers as a Black girl at a 98% White university performing music most people considered "White" deserve further study. She was likely made to feel uncomfortable in many ways we did not explore in this study. Her persistence appears to have been nothing short of heroic.

### **Beyond-the-classroom**

Five of the six participants enthusiastically described high school competitions and trips away from school, and all six mentioned performing outside their school's walls. They were not simply interested in going on field trips to get out of classes. In differing levels for each

participant, they enjoyed the camaraderie, competition, pride, adventure, exploration, and preparation involved in performing out in the world. Trips and gigs are staples of most well-established school choral programs. Teachers take students to sing at competitions, nursing homes, Rotary Club meetings, festivals, ceremonies, churches, dinners, theme parks, and more. My data suggest that those events were highly motivating and very memorable for participants. They excitedly took the musical skills they learned in the classroom outside the classroom during high school and after graduation.

Student musical exploration outside the classroom should be a goal of every music teacher and promotes lifelong music education (Madsen, 2000; MENC, 1999). The beyond-the-classroom component of a high school music program could be seen as rehearsing students to take their musical skills out into the world to use after graduation. If indeed musical amateurism is a central goal of music education, as reiterated time and again by leaders in the profession (FitzStephens, 2021), teachers must cultivate in students the ability to make music independently and in small groups, for their personal enjoyment, and in a variety of styles with modern instruments. The six participants in this study were fortunate to have teachers who walked the walk when it came to taking music beyond-the-classroom, and several of them preached lifelong musicianship in class as well. The participants seemed to be impacted toward lifelong learning.

All six of the participants' teachers brought the students to public performances outside the classroom, as listeners and as performers. The impact of experiencing live music performances in a time when recordings and home entertainment are so pervasive could change lives. Indeed, it seems to have done so with my study's participants. Seeing local adults as music performers could have influenced the participants to become musical adults themselves. Previous researchers have shown that musical adults can positively influence younger people's

musicianship (Beynon & Lang, 2018; Hughes & Hurty, 2017). Katherine believed some of her musical experiences beyond-the-classroom were valuable because she got to see musicians functioning as professionals, and she advocated for the same experiences for her children. Rita and Phyllis were both exposed to family members making sacred and secular music in church, professionally, and as amateurs. Steve saw, and sang next to, adults making music in church. Teachers could encourage lifetime music making by bringing students into the community for performances to allow them to experience live music as part of their community life.

Three of the six participants composed music outside of class and all made music outside of class in non-choral venues. They had the ability to do so partly thanks to their chorus teachers' work. All six participants would be considered musical amateurs by Kratus's (2019) and Reimer's (2003) standards. They make music for the love of doing so and make it a hobby into which they put much effort. Kratus (2006, 2019) argued that one of the most important things music teachers can give their students is the ability to make music independently, as amateurs do. Perhaps the participants continued making music as adults partly because of the independence their teachers helped them achieve. However, it appears five of the six participants were already musically active as amateurs before they entered high school chorus.

Performing beyond-the-classroom can motivate not only because of the performance aspect, but also due to several associated factors. Participants worked hard in rehearsal and were very excited to share their music with others. They also built camaraderie with their colleagues due to the extended time together and shared goals. Performing beyond the school walls has a way of upping the ante, making the performances more real and less parochial. It does appear that achievement goal theory's performance goals were a motivating factor, not solely mastery goals, in these cases. One cannot be sure whether participants were more motivated more by

performance-approach or performance-avoidance goals. Were participants motivated to succeed publicly, or just to avoid public embarrassment? Based on the way they spoke about their performances, I believe they were motivated not only to succeed publicly, but to share aesthetic experiences they found meaningful as gifts to their audiences.

As mentioned, the six interview participants graduated from well-funded high school choral programs. The opportunities for travel, competitions, and extra-curricular performances greatly enriched participants' experiences and contributed to their development of lifelong musicianship. Not every school has the funds to enable off-campus choral performances, but the results of this study exposed the significant impact the funding of those performances can have. This study's findings regarding the impact of beyond-the-classroom performances should encourage teachers and administrators to prioritize those kinds of experiences for students when considering budgets. The programs in this study seemed to build enthusiasm around their beyond-the-classroom experiences, which made them memorable and likely contributed to student retention. Public school budgets are always in debate, especially the portions that go toward fine arts endeavors. This study's results provide evidence for the lifelong value of not only high school choral music programs, but also the sometimes expensive beyond-the-classroom efforts, which can be presented in pursuit of more funding.

### **Implications**

One of the goals of this dissertation was to identify characteristics of high school choral programs that are successful at graduating adults who sing. My analysis of the data suggests high school choral programs can inspire and enable students to become lifelong musicians by giving them opportunities to experience the aesthetic beauty of vocal music, experience personal growth and achievement, and have positive social experiences in chorus.

#### ***Implications of Theme 1: Aesthetic Experiences***

Aesthetic experiences included sub-themes of self-expression and healing, learning new styles in chorus, and appreciation of music's beauty. Chorus teachers can teach students to appreciate music's beauty by listening to recordings and discussing components of music and performance, and by learning repertoire of suitable difficulty that singers can perform well. Teachers can lead students through lessons that deepen students' personal connections to musical works. Through discussion in safe spaces, free of judgement, teachers can share their own personal connections to musical works and encourage students to do so. If a more private experience is desired, students can write down their ideas when prompted to deeply think about the music.

This study's findings suggest that singers enjoy learning about the backgrounds of pieces of music, their composers' history, symbolism, their culture of origin, and more. Chorus teachers can increase the likelihood of inspiring students by diversifying the repertoire they teach in class to cover as many styles, languages, genres, time periods, and cultures as possible. Students can help pick repertoire, which can help them more easily make personal connections to music. Students want to know the translations of pieces in foreign languages, and they want to understand where the music came from. Sharing more than just performance skills with students could help them become lifelong musical professionals, amateurs, or aficionados (Reimer, 2003).

Teacher education programs are often asked to turn very inexperienced 18-year-old singers into professional music educators in just four short years. While the task is indeed Herculean regarding just one musical style, teacher educators are also charged with developing their graduates' skills in as many diverse musical styles as possible. This study's findings did provide evidence that diverse high school musical experiences contributed to lifelong musicianship, but only so much that can be done in four years. When in-service teaching begins,



however, school administrators, professional organizations, and professional development organizations can offer skill development in diverse genres. Teachers' own curiosity must also be a contributor to their expanding knowledge of repertoire.

Teachers can incorporate amateurism into existing ensemble classes to make those classes more dynamic and attractive to students traditionally left out of school music programs. Rather than solely rehearsing under the pressure of the next concert or competition, students can spend more class time listening, composing, songwriting, and arranging many music styles. Teaching amateurism emphasizes the person making the music, their musical skills, creativity, enjoyment, well-being, and conceptual understanding.

Teachers can incorporate elements of amateurism into large ensembles, or school districts could reach more music students by expanding course offerings to include alternative music classes, as leaders in music education have recommended for many years (FitzStephens, 2021; Williams, 2011). For various reasons, many students do not enjoy large ensembles, but if classes in music technology, guitar, ukulele, music appreciation, songwriting, and composing were offered, perhaps more students could benefit from music education. Expanding high school offerings could help dispel the myth that music is only for those with the most God-given talent (FitzStephens, 2021; Kratus, 2006, 2019) and enable music educators to reach more students. "Enjoyment that can be derived from the process of learning should not be overlooked in favor of perfect performances by the talented few. Educationally this is as true for children in schools as it is for adults in the community" (Richards & Durrant, 2003, p. 87).

Many of this study's participants were fortunate enough to be engaged in musical activities from a young age, singing in church, taking piano lessons, etc. Most students do not come from such backgrounds, and their only music instruction comes from their public-school

teachers. To engage students in other ways of interacting with music, expanding the music curriculum, as many have called for (FitzStephens, 2021; Kratus, 2019; Reimer, 2003) could include many more activities than performing. Creative activities such as composing and arranging can encourage students to take music into their own hands. Improvising, an often-overlooked national standard (Langley, 2018), inspired Katherine and contributed to her lifelong musicianship. The teaching of active music listening must not be overlooked, as that is how most adults interact with music.

Singers and school chorus teachers often have no control over the skill levels of the people who enter their choruses. Four of the six participants attended schools with advanced choirs that required auditions. Adrian and Katherine especially appreciated the beautiful sounds their more advanced ensembles made, which contributed to their desire to further their musical involvement. This has been true in my experience as well, and I have seen hundreds of students become more highly motivated to sing after finding beautiful sounds, and often a feeling of community with like-minded students, in more advanced ensembles. Tiered choral programs with multiple skill levels appropriate to challenge each student and keep them learning in Vygotsky's (1978) "zone of proximal development" (p. 84) could contribute to retention and lifelong learning. Themes one and two are connected, thus tiered choral programs could contribute positively to students' aesthetic experiences as well as their personal growth and achievement experiences, continually challenging students to grow.

### ***Implications of Theme 2: Personal Growth and Achievement***

Data indicate focusing on performance skills mastery and giving students appropriate levels of challenge can motivate further learning. If students receive repertoire that is too difficult for them, they could get the impression that choruses sound bad or they are not good

enough to sing in a chorus. If students work on repertoire that is too easy for them, they can become bored, as Mila did. The driven singers in this study were happy to be challenged by the difficult repertoire their teachers assigned them. Data also indicate that many students are motivated by competition as well, but a focus on mastery supports lifelong learning. A pedagogical focus on skill mastery aligns with studies on achievement goal theory (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Nicholls, 1984, 1989; Tan & Sin, 2020) that indicated mastery-approach motivations inspired future engagement with subjects.

Perhaps a value of competitions is that they help teachers and students focus on “powerful conceptual knowledge” (McPhail, 2018, p. 176) mentioned in Chapter Two. Music educators associations detail the components of quality choral music performance in rubrics for events. Many teachers make the rubrics part of their regular activities, which focus students’ efforts on specific and clear performance concepts. It would be up to the teacher then, how to situate the rubric and the competition in relation to the performance or mastery of musical skills. The participants in this study were not simply motivated by defeating opponents at competitions, or even by achieving success at evaluations. They seemed genuinely driven to improve their musical skills, and competitions gave them opportunities to challenge themselves. Teachers, therefore, should seriously consider how they express the purpose of competitions and performances through their language during rehearsals.

### ***Implications of Theme 3: Positive Social Experiences***

Five of the six participant stories suggest that seeing older people singing can motivate younger people to sing. Recruiting trips where high schoolers sing for middle and elementary students could increase enrollment. Field trips to community and professional music events, where students see adults making music or make music with them, could increase persistent

involvement into adulthood. Singing in intergenerational choirs could increase the likelihood of developing lifelong learning habits.

While teachers have little control over the friendships formed in their classes, they can make the choral classroom a safe space to be, which can make it feel like a second home (Adderley et al., 2003). Explicitly stating that one's class is a safe space is a start and choosing classroom activities that allow for teamwork and team building can help students build relationships. Trips and competitions can help students build bonds and motivate others to join. Teachers' words of encouragement and kindness can go a long way when they are asking students to do something that takes as much bravery as public singing.

### ***Implications for Funding and Access***

This study's findings demonstrate the lifelong value choral music programs can have, especially when they are well-funded. "I tell you, that was one of the best experiences I've had in my life," Rita said (p. 141), and it seems most of the interview participants would say the same. In an education system often oriented toward testing metrics, it can be difficult for teachers to successfully advocate for fine arts funding. The lifelong impacts of music classes, published in studies like this, could provide evidence for fine arts funding advocates. When administrators or board of education members talk about cutting arts funding, teachers, students, former students, parents of current and former students, and community members can rise to share the less easily measured values of those programs, that have lifelong impact.

Stakeholders can help administrators and others in power in education take note of several factors related to the development of lifelong music learners. The participants in this study had opportunities to learn from music teachers who were excellent musicians and teachers. Their programs all had enough funding to take trips and participate in competitions. Two

participants' programs had piano accompanists in class every day and three more had accompanists for concerts and other events. The programs were likely well-funded due a constellation of decisions by politicians, administrators, students, teachers, booster organizations, and community members. The efforts and the donations are not in vain and can contribute to graduates' lives deep into adulthood.

Katherine, who is 51 years old and paused singing in choruses during her 30's said, "I realize when I when you make me think about it, and I look back, I never stopped my connection with music. I just stopped singing because I didn't have a, a venue" (Katherine portrait, p. 157). What does it mean to not have a venue? Do singers of the understudied 21–44 age group (missing from this study as well) often stop singing in choruses because they are too busy with careers and children to make the time? People in that age group may not have access to choral ensembles due to barriers such as money, transportation, required time commitments, or simply a lack of local opportunities to sing. Barriers are not unique to any age group, in fact they exist for all age groups, but the 21–44 age group seems underrepresented in choruses. Schools, of course, vary in their offerings based on their funding, zip code, local culture, and more. For adults looking for community choir opportunities, communities also vary in opportunities.

The participants in this study not only had the motivation to sing, but they also had access to opportunities to sing in good groups, and the time to do so. Motivation without access is a dead end, and access without motivation is a nonstarter. The participants had both. One cannot be sure whether their positive results were due more to access or to motivation. American governments do not fund public education equitably, and thus enables some students access to vastly different experiences than others. Some of the participants, such as Mila and Adrian, were in a financial position to pay their high school choral program hundreds of dollars annually for

their beyond-the-classroom activities. Money for uniforms, trips, competitions, or even the perception of financial burdens can discourage many students from choral participation. Some adults do not have choruses in their neighborhoods. Some are too busy working two or three jobs or caring for their children or parents to sing. Some have chorus teachers/conductors who are not knowledgeable or professional. Another hurdle for those trying to build choral programs is lack of adult music participation. In this study, participants mentioned that when they were young, they saw older people singing. Steve, Rita, Phyllis, and Katherine all regularly saw adults in their family and community singing. Many communities do not have that due to lack of access to choral opportunities.

In addition to the logistical needs of a group of singers, a location, a leader, a keyboard, music selections, etc., the people in the choral venue, especially the conductor/teacher, must facilitate within the singers, feelings of safety and a sense of belonging. For many, a welcoming venue does not exist. Mila, as a somewhat related example, felt being in a racial minority in White-dominated choral rehearsals made her feel like she lost her preferred venue, so she left. To ensure effective choral venues, this study's findings encourage conductors and teachers to make every effort to connect to ensemble singers and to get them to connect with each other. Music teacher educators thus have a difficult challenge. To maximize the reach of choral music, they need to train their graduates to facilitate those kinds of classroom environments. In-service teachers can learn to listen, encourage, and motivate people to find the joy of singing, then continue it in adult choruses.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

I hope my study is just the beginning in a career of studying teaching for lifelong learning. I feel like I have only touched the tip of the iceberg. There are many topics related to my study that deserve more attention. From my work examining connections between high

school and adult choral involvement, researchers could further study the motivations of adults who make music in other ways than in choruses. Amateurs make music in many ways. To most choral educators, it is less important that graduates continue making music in choruses and more important that they continue making music somehow or become aficionados who still reap benefits from listening and analyzing music (Reimer, 2003). Researchers could focus on people who perform at open mic nights, karaoke bars, churches, and on YouTube, and compare their motivations. Indeed, one of the purposes of teaching people how to be musical amateurs is so they can make music independently, without the commitments of time and logistical hurdles associated with large ensemble music making (FitzStephens, 2021).

What Reimer (2003) called “aficionados” (p. 254) also deserve more research. Like Kratus (2019), Reimer (2003) argued that school music curricula are excessively focused on preparing students for professional music careers. Reimer, however, went a step further and contented that the core of adult music involvement is as aficionados, those who “eagerly, delightedly, and intelligently seek musical experiences in their lives in one or several or many of the ways their culture makes them available” (Reimer, 2003, p. 254). Aficionados mostly listen to music, analyze it, think about it, and discuss it with others. Aficionados deserve more study because there are many ways to be musically active that do not involve performing. Other ways of interacting with music than performing are valid and under-taught and under-researched (Reimer, 2003). Additionally, researchers could apply my methods to singers in other kinds of choruses and compare motivations. As mentioned in Chapter Three, there are choruses focused on many other topics, genres, and identities.

Although attrition from school music programs has been heavily studied, a group that deserves attention is people aged 21–44. As mentioned in the Implications section, this group is

under researched and was not represented in this study's interview participants. The motivations, access and opportunities of this age group deserve further research. If we are indeed hoping to make music a lifelong activity, we should aim to keep people engaged during what many consider the prime of their lives.

The intersection of race, ethnicity, and choral singing deserves more study. The experience of Black and non-White students in predominantly White choruses, and/or with White teachers deserves more study, hopefully toward the goals of inclusion and equity. There is extant research on race and music in higher education PWI's, but less so in the K-12 institutions that feed those colleges and universities. Researchers should explore questions of access, motivation, and opportunity related to geography and race. The relationship between race, music attrition, and lifelong learning warrants additional research. Foregrounding Black and other non-White voices through methods like narrative inquiry and counterstories can challenge the dominant narratives (King & Pringle, 2018) and allow them to be heard.

The reader may notice that the themes in this study also have several sub-themes each. Rather than a flaw, I see the nuanced results as a testament to the value of laborious qualitative research, and especially narrative inquiry. The interviews and analysis of the narrative portraits offered unique opportunities to capture long-term meaning and a range of answers. The retrospective narrative approach I took has a unique value researchers cannot gain through surveys of students. Young students, without the benefit of time for reflection and retrospection, may not be able to evaluate the value or meaning of their own education whilst they are engaged with it (Matsunobu, 2022). Most teachers know the experience of a former student sharing that, only years later, did they realize the value of their teacher's influence and education. Narrative inquiry also reveals what observations cannot because teachers' impact on students can be



“easily hidden from the view of a biographer-stranger and even...from the learner themselves” (Barone, 2001, p. 125). To understand the lifelong impacts of music education, I believe further research should be employed using narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry keeps the learner at the center of their story and can unveil students’ understanding of their own learning.

Longitudinal studies of high school music programs are needed to fully understand their long-term impact. A recent article by Matsunobu (2022) revealed the researcher’s novel approach to studying the long-term impact of music education. Matsunobu engaged in a longitudinal study of music education students in Japan and in the article proposed a methodology for assessing the long-term impact of music education. Their work values the learners’ retrospective interpretations of their education and engages them periodically after graduation. However, rather than just perform interviews, Matsunobu (2022) recommended video recordings, focus group interviews, contributions from teachers, and input from parents. Matsunobu also recommended verifying memories with other parties, and facilitating learners’ valuation of their own experience, which they accomplished by talking to students from other schools and comparing stories. Matsunobu’s (2022) method, although laborious due to its longitudinal nature, is an example of narrative research that could make a difference in music education’s relationship with lifelong learning.

The beyond-the-classroom component of my study also deserves further research. Researchers could study the long-term impact of trips and special performances. How central are trips to building relationships in ensembles and promoting lifelong learning? Are they simply recruiting strategies and ways to convince students to persist in school music programs, or do they have lifelong impact? My data suggest that trips could have a lasting impact. Competitions were a large part of participants’ high school choral experiences, however, none of their adult

choruses took part attended competitive events, but some took trips. More research on competition and accolades in adult music performance is needed. There are adult ensembles that participate in competitions, such as barbershop groups, which could be interesting to study.

Three singers composed music, one played in orchestra, three took private voice lessons, two played piano, and four of the six sang solos in their churches. The participants certainly had more opportunities outside their high school than many people, but perhaps choral teachers can teach students the skills of independent musicianship to make music a part of their lives after they leave the classroom. Kratus (2019) claimed teachers can inspire lifelong musical amateurism by putting the curriculum in students' hands and encouraging them to make music as amateurs do rather than for the accolades of public performances and ratings (Kratus, 2007). Studies like the Koops et al. (2014) examination of the Lakewood Project expanded our understanding of school music programs that focus on students' musical desires and promote creativity, success defined by the participants, and music made in small groups or by individuals. More research connecting the carryover of such programs is needed.

Amateur musicians deserve more study in general. Because most high school graduates who persist in music do so as amateurs (or aficionados), not as professionals, I focused my study on amateurs. If researchers in the field learn more about adult amateur musicians' motivations for continued participation, perhaps teachers and professors would target their curricular and pedagogical decisions toward lifelong amateurism. Amateur musicians who are not in choruses are worthy of further research. The lifelong impact of high school chorus classes is not only meaningful if graduates continue singing in choruses. Additionally, adult amateur musicians who had poor or nonexistent high school chorus experiences merit study. Perhaps a study will find that missing high school music classes decreases graduates' likelihood of becoming lifelong

music learners, or the reverse. The habits of graduates who attend concerts, play music in small groups, listen to music, and play privately in their homes deserve more study. Those adults are the most common type of adult musicians and need to be more understood.

Amateurism also holds opportunities for music education to become more personally relevant to students, as they would work individually and in small groups to create performances of chosen and created music. Keeping students' futures and the long-term usefulness of concepts in mind as north stars guiding lesson planning could make a world of difference in our students and adults. Amateurs make music for their enjoyment, not for the approval of others, and intrinsic motivation to make music increases the likelihood of sustainability (Lowe & Coy, 2016). Focusing on mastery-approach goals and internal-unstable attributions (effort) could help students become lifelong learners.

My studies of amateurs remind me of my time in UMMGC (University of Michigan Men's Glee Club), in which about 100 students gathered Thursday and Sunday nights for rehearsal. We performed on an annual tour, sang at football game tailgate parties, played hacky sack in the hall during breaks, fielded a flag football team, and learned choral works in many different languages. Most of the singers were not music majors, just passionate amateurs who sang challenging music, and after rehearsal went to Cottage Inn restaurant for pizza, the singing of traditional songs, and merriment. The pizza was always free, paid for by a wealthy alumnus who loved his time in the club. Every program, letter, and email closed with *in T, C and ME*. That closing still pulls me in. It stands for tradition, camaraderie, and musical excellence.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A Preliminary Questionnaire

Your name: First \_\_\_\_\_ Last \_\_\_\_\_

Your age \_\_\_\_\_ What gender do you most identify with? \_\_\_\_\_

What do you self-identify as your race? (optional) \_\_\_\_\_

Email address/phone number (to contact you for interviews) \_\_\_\_\_

*Please check one for each statement*

*If you did not take high school chorus, please write which previous chorus you're talking about here: _____	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
I enjoyed singing in my high school chorus program.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I liked HS chorus concerts.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I often felt bored in my HS chorus.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The sounds my HS chorus made were beautiful.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

I really liked the music my HS chorus sang.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My HS chorus sounded terrible.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I liked improving my singing skills in HS chorus.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I did not like my HS chorus teacher	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I wanted our HS chorus to do well at competitions and concerts.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I enjoyed rehearsing to be a more successful singer in HS chorus.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I enjoyed learning how to read music in HS chorus.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I did not enjoy being in my HS chorus.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I did not like the people in my HS chorus.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
One of the best parts of HS chorus was the relationships.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Improving my singing voice was one of my favorite parts of HS chorus.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I felt like I really belonged in my HS chorus.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I enjoyed learning vocal technique in HS chorus.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I liked the beautiful harmonies my HS chorus created.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I liked my HS chorus teacher.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
HS chorus did not help me improve my singing voice.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

1. How many students were in your high school? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Was your high school rural, urban, or suburban? Please describe the community.
  
3. How many years did you participate in high school chorus? \_\_\_\_\_
4. How many choruses were in your high school? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Were auditions required? \_\_\_\_\_
6. What types of music did your high school chorus learn? Describe one of your favorites.
  
7. How did the teacher motivate the students?
8. What motivated you to sing?
9. Did your chorus perform at competitions/festivals? If so, how did you feel about them?
  
10. What did you enjoy most about your high school chorus program?
  
11. What do you think the teacher wanted you to learn?
  
13. Why do you continue to sing in a chorus?
  
- 14 What do you enjoy most about your current chorus?



## **Appendix B**

### **Semi-structured, Individual Interview Guide**

#### **Interview #1**

##### **Grand Tour question**

1. Would you please tell me about your remembrances of your high school music experience?
2. Why did you get involved in high school music?
3. What relationships were related to your high school music experiences?

Let's talk more specifically about the activities in your school program.

4. Describe a typical rehearsal and concert in your high school chorus program
5. What did you enjoy/not enjoy about the class activities of your high school choral program?
6. What do you remember about how you were graded?
7. Was it expressed that you were supposed to use this knowledge after high school?
8. Did students and teachers express desire to earn good ratings at competitions and festivals and how did you feel about them?
9. If you failed at a singing task, why did you believe that happened? If you succeeded, to what did you attribute your success?

#### **Interview #2**

**Let's speak to your post high school music experiences and if and how they built on your previous experience.**

1. Would you please tell me about your remembrances of your musical experiences since high school?
2. Did you and do you still use what you learned in high school chorus?
3. Did you ever stop singing in a chorus for a significant amount of time?

Let's talk about the current chorus you sing in.

4. Describe a typical rehearsal and concert in your current chorus.
5. What do you enjoy/not enjoy about the activities in your chorus?
6. How does the conductor motivate the ensemble members?
7. Why do you participate in the ensemble?

Let's talk about how you feel about your singing in your current chorus.

8. Do you feel like you are good at singing? Why or why not?
9. How do you feel your high school chorus experience relate to your current choral singing life story?

## Appendix C

### Georgia State University College of Education and Human Development Informed Consent

Title: Why Do Adults Sing? The Impact of the High School Experience

Principal Investigator: Patrick Freer

Student Principal Investigator: Thomas FitzStephens

#### **Introduction and Key Information**

You are invited to take part in a research study. It is up to you to decide if you would like to take part in the study. The purpose of this study is to identify the potential relationship between high school choral experiences and adult amateur musicians' motivations to continue making music. Through this study, we hope to learn more about what motivates adults to continue singing in choruses and how that motivation relates to their high school choruses.

You will be asked to complete a survey, and a small group will be selected for two individual interviews. You will be asked questions about your high school music class experiences, your music activities since then, and your reasons for singing in choruses. If you only take the survey your role in the study will last 15 minutes. If you choose to take part in the interviews, your role in the study will last for about five hours over the next three months.

This study will not expose you to any more risks than you would experience in a typical day.

This study is not designed to benefit you. We hope this study will help future music education students and teachers.

If you do not wish to take part in this study, the alternative is to leave rehearsal early. You are invited to take part because you are a graduate of a high school choral program, and you continue to make music in a chorus. A total of 150 people will be invited to take part in this study.

#### **Procedures**

If you decide to take part, this study has two phases. You may take part in zero, one, or two phases. The first phase is a survey that lasts about 15 minutes. I will select four to eight singers for the second phase. The second phase consists of two individual interviews.

- Each interview will last about an hour and take place at the most convenient and private location for you, your home or in the rehearsal building.
- After the interviews, I will email you the summaries and ask for your ideas as we write your musical life story together.
- I may ask to meet with you on Zoom or on the phone a few times to discuss written summaries of the interviews.
- This will require about five hours of your time between November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021, and March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022.

I will be the only person you interact with. All meetings will be audio and video recorded and stored on a password-protected dedicated external hard drive under lock and key until the study ends, at which point they will be destroyed.

#### **Future Research**

Researchers will not use or distribute your data for future research studies even after identifiers are removed.

### **Risks**

In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life. No injury is expected from this study, but if you believe you have been harmed, contact the research team as soon as possible. Georgia State University and the research team have not set aside funds to compensate for any injury.

### **Benefits**

This study is not designed to benefit you personally. You could however, add to the development of music education for lifelong learning.

### **Alternatives**

The alternative to taking part in this study is to not take part in this study.

### **Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal**

You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may skip questions or stop taking part at any time.

### **Confidentiality**

We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. The following people and entities will have access to the information you provide:

- Dr. Patrick Freer
- Thomas FitzStephens
- GSU Institutional Review Board
- Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP).

We will use a pseudonym rather than your real name on study records. We will shred all paper surveys at once after the results are typed into a file on a password-protected, dedicated external hard drive under lock and key. Audio/video files, transcription files, and the key linking your name with the pseudonym will be stored on the same hard drive. All information will be destroyed when the study ends, most likely in May of 2022. When we present or publish the results of this study, we will not use your name or other information that may identify you.

### **Contact Information**

Contact Dr. Patrick Freer at [pfreer@gsu.edu](mailto:pfreer@gsu.edu), or 404-413-5949, or contact Thomas FitzStephens at 989-307-9215 or [tfitzstephens1@student.gsu.edu](mailto:tfitzstephens1@student.gsu.edu)

- If you have questions about the study or your part in it
- If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the study

The IRB at Georgia State University reviews all research that involves human participants. You can contact the IRB if you would like to speak to someone who is not involved directly with the study. You can contact the IRB for questions, concerns, problems, information, input, or questions about your rights as a research participant. Contact the IRB at 404-413-3500 or [irb@gsu.edu](mailto:irb@gsu.edu).

### **Consent**

We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.

If you are willing to volunteer for this research, please check one and sign below:



- ☐ I am willing to take part in the survey only.
- ☐ I am willing to take part in the survey and interviews.

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Participant

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Date

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Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent

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Date

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