

SWAGGER, GENTLEMANLINESS, AND BROTHERHOOD: EXPLORATIONS OF LIVED  
EXPERIENCES IN A HIGH SCHOOL MEN'S CHORUS

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## **ABSTRACT**

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The purpose of this study was to explore, investigate, and describe the culture of a high school men's chorus. The following research questions guided this investigation: (a) How do singers in a men's chorus define their experience? (b) How are their experiences and behavior while participating in a high school men's chorus different or similar from their experiences and behavior in a high school mixed chorus? (c) How are their experiences and behavior while participating in a high school men's chorus different or similar from other nonmusical, all-male activities, such as sports? (d) What bearing, if any, does participation in a men's chorus have on the identities of these young men?

The participants in this case study were ten high school men's chorus members, two alumni of the chorus, and their choral music teacher from a suburban school in a Midwestern state. Data sources included individual and focus group interviews, written responses, the researcher's field notes and reflective journal, and other artifacts. The data were analyzed using the constant comparative method, and trustworthiness was ensured by prolonged interaction with participants, data triangulation across multiple sources, member checks, and peer review.

The ten themes to emerge were organized into two models according to their specific relationships. The overarching theme of (a) "brotherhood" encompassed three subthemes of (b) support, (c) pride, and (d) camaraderie. A second model was created to illustrate the remaining emergent themes, six of which were grouped into related pairs: (e) strength and sensitivity, (f) teacher authority and student ownership, and (g) work and play. Two remaining themes (h) trust

and (j) vulnerability, shared a specific codependent relationship, and theme “repertoire” (k) emerged as the final theme, functioning as central strand or “tightrope” intersecting the other themes. The teacher in this study served as a facilitator and navigator of themes within both models. Participants indicated that singing in the men’s choir had impacted their identity in one or more ways, and participants also identified similarities and differences between men’s choir and mixed choir environments and between men’s choir and all-male sports activities.

Interpretations of the data and implications for music education include: (a) Social benefits and camaraderie in tandem with musical excellence can create a rich male chorus experience, (b) Participants view singing as an act of vulnerability and thus require a safe and trusting environment, (c) Teachers may foster an atmosphere of trust and vulnerability by being personally trusting and vulnerable, (d) Participants in male choruses enjoy making excellent music and impressing others, (e) Participants in male choruses may have a broader view of male gender roles—learning to think outside of heterosexual and homosexual male stereotypes, (f) Participants in male choruses may participate more freely in class, as the opposite sex is not present, (g) Men’s choir rehearsals may be active and noisy, (h) Quality choral repertoire can provide a context for empowerment, self-discovery, connections, and character development, (j) Teachers may have greater success in teaching male singers when they navigate between strength and sensitivity, teacher autonomy and student ownership, and work and play, (k) Participants respond to invested, supportive teachers and clear structure, and (l) Teachers can establish male choruses that actively and effectively support peer mentoring. Suggestions for future research include examining the benefits of single sex choral experiences for high school students, and how or if the teacher’s sex impacts the single sex choral experiences of high school students.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES .....	xi
LIST OF FIGURES .....	xii
CHAPTER 1 Introduction.....	1
Personal Teaching Reflection 2006: Speaking the Language.....	1
Reasons for Singer Participation in Choral Ensembles .....	4
Personal Teaching Reflection 2008: A Sister in the Brotherhood.....	7
Choir as Community .....	9
Personal Teaching Reflection 2012: “Just Do the Music”.....	13
Summary .....	16
Purpose and Problems .....	19
CHAPTER 2 Review of Related Literature.....	20
Single Sex and Coeducational Learning in General Education .....	20
Experiences for students in single sex learning. ....	22
Scientific Considerations in Single Sex Learning .....	24
Male and female brain differences.....	24
Functional and sensory differences between male and female brains. ....	27
Male and female emotional responses. ....	29
Male and female developmental differences. ....	30
Implications for male and female learning. ....	31
Responsible application of gender-based brain information.....	33
Single Sex Choral Experiences .....	34
Male Chorus Experiences .....	35
CHAPTER 3 Methodology.....	42
Design .....	42
Researcher’s Lens .....	43
Case and Participant Selection.....	44
Procedures.....	51
Data Collection .....	53
Field notes, reflective journal, and video recording.....	53
Interviews.....	54
Written responses, emailed responses, and online forum posts.....	57
Additional artifacts and informal communication. ....	58
Data Analysis .....	58
Trustworthiness.....	60
Limitations .....	61
CHAPTER 4 Participants .....	63
Mr. Dover.....	63

Personal and professional journey. ....	63
Personality and teaching. ....	66
The Cedar High School Men’s Choir .....	69
Structure and characteristics. ....	69
Origins and accolades. ....	72
Student Participants .....	74
Written response participants.....	74
Written Response and Interview Participants. ....	75
Alumni Participants .....	79
Max. ....	79
Dan. ....	81
Summary .....	82
CHAPTER 5 Phenomenological Instrumental Case Study Findings: Brotherhood.....	84
Introduction.....	84
Support.....	86
Mentoring system.....	87
Accountability and responsibility. ....	91
Respect. ....	93
Pride .....	94
Pride in musical excellence.....	94
Pride in the privilege of membership.....	99
Camaraderie .....	101
Connections, bonds, and friendships.....	102
Rowdiness. ....	105
Shenanigans. ....	107
Crude Humor. ....	110
Traditions. ....	116
Summary .....	123
CHAPTER 6 Phenomenological Instrumental Case Study Findings: The “Tightrope” Model .	125
Introduction.....	125
Strength and Sensitivity .....	128
Teacher Authority and Student Ownership.....	133
Work and Play.....	138
Trust and Vulnerability .....	142
Repertoire.....	146
Strength and sensitivity.....	147
Teacher authority and student ownership. ....	148
Work and play.....	149
Trust and vulnerability.....	150
Summary .....	152
CHAPTER 7 Phenomenological Instrumental Case Study Findings: Identity and the High School Male Chorus.....	153
Introduction.....	153



Men's Chorus as Compared to Mixed Chorus.....	153
Closer and stronger bonds.....	154
More comfortable and more authentic.....	154
The opposite sex.....	155
Filtering behavior and self censoring.....	157
Male-specific vocal instruction.....	159
Preferred sound and preferred environment.....	160
Summary.....	162
Men's Chorus as Compared with Other All-Male, Nonmusical Activities.....	162
Brotherhood in men's choir and sports.....	163
Vulnerability in men's choir.....	165
Competition.....	166
Summary.....	167
Men's Chorus and Identity.....	168
Summary.....	172
 CHAPTER 8 Phenomenological Instrumental Case Study Findings: Mr. Dover as a Facilitator and Navigator of Emergent Themes .....	174
Introduction.....	174
Mr. Dover as a Facilitator-Navigator of Brotherhood .....	174
Support.....	175
Pride.....	177
Camaraderie.....	179
Mr. Dover as a Facilitator-Navigator of "Tightrope" Themes .....	182
Strength and sensitivity.....	183
Teacher authority and student ownership.....	185
Work and play.....	187
Trust and vulnerability.....	189
Repertoire.....	191
Summary .....	192
 CHAPTER 9 Interpretations and Implications .....	194
Introduction.....	194
Purpose.....	194
Methodology.....	194
Summary.....	195
Discussion and Interpretations.....	198
Social benefits (such as connections, bonds, support, and camaraderie) in tandem with musical excellence can result in a rich male chorus experience for singers.....	199
High school men view singing as an act of vulnerability, therefore trust and safety are important. A safe, trusting environment can be established and reinforced by the teacher to encourage expression, shared emotion, and sensitivity among male chorus members. .	200
A teacher who trusts his or her students and is willing to be vulnerable can create an atmosphere that fosters trust and vulnerability among his or her students.....	201

Participation in a men’s chorus can impact student identity by creating a sense of belonging, encouraging self-confidence, and providing a comfortable place to “be oneself.” .....	202
Singers of quality repertoire in male choruses are motivated to make exceptional music as well as use their voices to impress others. ....	203
Students who sing in a men’s choir may be more open and have a broader view of male gender roles—learning to think outside of heterosexual and homosexual male stereotypes.....	204
Implications for Music Education.....	207
Male choral students may be more participatory, open, and willing to be vulnerable within a male chorus environment, as they are not concerned with maintaining appearances in front of the opposite sex.....	208
Men’s choir rehearsals may be more active and noisier than mixed choir environments and may include more rowdiness, crude humor, and movement.....	208
Quality choral repertoire can provide a context for empowerment, exploration of self and one’s emotions, forging connections with others, and character development alongside music making.....	209
Teachers of male choruses may have greater success when they are able to efficiently navigate between paired themes of: (a) strength and sensitivity, (b) teacher authority and student ownership, and (c) work and play. ....	210
Being instructed by a teacher who is supportive, genuinely invested, and who believes in students is important to male chorus members. ....	211
High school male chorus students respond positively to clear structure and expectations as a prerequisite for maintaining order and achieving musical success.....	212
Teachers of high school male choruses can establish a teaching environment that actively and effectively supports peer mentoring. ....	212
Suggestions for Future Research .....	213
APPENDICES .....	215
APPENDIX A Exploring High School Men’s Chorus Culture Student Assent Form .....	216
APPENDIX B Exploring High School Men’s Chorus Culture Parent Consent Form .....	219
APPENDIX C Exploring High School Men’s Chorus Culture Teacher Consent Form.....	222
APPENDIX D Principal Permission.....	225
APPENDIX E Initial Written Response .....	227
APPENDIX F Email and Edmodo Questions.....	229
APPENDIX G Semistructured Interview Protocols .....	235
APPENDIX H Cedar High School Men’s Choir 2012-2013 Calendar .....	248
APPENDIX I Cedar High School Men’s Choir Rules .....	252
APPENDIX J Tournament Bracket to Select Mr. Dover’s Pseudonym.....	255
REFERENCES .....	257

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Male and Female Brain Considerations.....	25
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## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. The Brotherhood Model .....	85
Figure 2. The Tightrope Model. For the reader's clarity in viewing, "vulnerability" is depicted as wind, while "trust" is depicted as the safety net below the tightrope of "repertoire," traveled by both the teacher and student.....	126
Figure 3. The Tightrope Model. For the reader's clarity in viewing, "vulnerability" is depicted as wind, while "trust" is depicted as the safety net below the tightrope of "repertoire," traveled by both the teacher and student.....	183
Figure 4. The Brotherhood Model .....	196
Figure 5. The Tightrope Model. For the reader's clarity in viewing, "vulnerability" is depicted as wind, while "trust" is depicted as the safety net below the tightrope of "repertoire," traveled by both the teacher and student.....	197
Figure 6. Tournament Bracket to Select Mr. Dover's Pseudonym.....	256

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **Introduction**

#### **Personal Teaching Reflection 2006: Speaking the Language**

The room was too small to be a chorus room. The built-in seated risers made it possible, but certainly not comfortable. These raised wooden stair steps absorbed the bulk of the room, restricting the teacher to a pit-like amount of floor space—just enough room for the piano, the teacher, and some curious shelving. The walls were windowless cinder block. Bathed in fluorescent light, the space was dismal at best. Two cheerful bulletin boards on opposing walls made valiant but unconvincing attempts to brighten the room. What the room lacked in space and aesthetic, it made up for in heart and character. After six years in and out of this room as assistant choral director on a 7–9-grade junior high campus, I was now beginning my first year as head choral director for our new 7–8-grade campus.

With one women’s chorus rehearsal and my planning period behind me, I stood in the pit, glancing at my notes and mentally preparing for the next class. I had centered myself strategically, just behind the battered old Baldwin. It felt good to have that upright piano in front of me—a rugged fortress of sorts—a refuge of safety and accurate pitches. I glanced anxiously at the clock. In just five minutes, they would arrive. Fifty-five seventh and eighth grade boys would come bustling into the room for third-period advanced men’s chorus.

The bell reverberated in the tiny space, the door swung open, and the room filled with the active bodies, conversational outbursts, and unmistakable odorous musk of fifty-five adolescent males ready for adventure. The range of heights in the room was startling. There were six-foot behemoths as well as anxious seventh graders an entire foot shorter in stature. Greetings rang out in timbres from husky baritone to chirpy alto. The personalities traversed the spectrum:

reserved, boisterous, polite, rambunctious, eager, mischievous, inquisitive, and timid. All were represented. Some were familiar faces from last year, dispositions I knew well. Other students were less familiar; those were the ones I had only encountered briefly in auditions last spring. The sight of all of these young men *together* and the knowledge that *I* was to lead them was a formative moment in my journey as an educator. I had taught boys before, but always in classes with girls—and never this *many* boys at once. Once they were seated, I could barely move. I was simultaneously elated and terrified—completely overwhelmed by how very singular and *female* I felt behind that piano and how very collective and *male* they were on the opposite side. I had been teaching adolescent males for six years at this point in mixed chorus settings. Why was today so different? What made this dynamic so distinct? What was this phenomenon I was experiencing and why did it I feel so challenged by it?

In spite of my questions and internal trepidation, our first rehearsal was a modest success, and over the course of the year, third-period advanced men's chorus grew to be my favorite challenge. Pedagogical approaches that had been successful in mixed or female chorus settings were not always received similarly with these young men. At times, I had trouble understanding them. They seemed to have a unique language all their own, and I wanted desperately to speak it. Through trial and error, I struggled to discover what motivated them and what discouraged or distracted them. They kept me guessing at every turn and I certainly made my share of mistakes along the way. They also helped me to understand my own (often inaccurate) preconceived notions about adolescent males. One of these stereotypes surfaced in my selection of repertoire. My naïve assumption that all young men wanted to sing repertoire with perceived masculine appeal (i.e., sea chanteys or folk songs with hyper-masculine texts) was not altogether

unreasonable. Choral music publishers' catalogs are brimming with tunes of this nature marketed specifically to male choruses.

The inaccuracy of my assumption came to light in the spring semester when I introduced a lyric, legato piece to advanced men's chorus. The text was expressive poetry on the subject of love, and as we made our way through the first measures, I sensed some resistance from the young men. I began to doubt myself and worried that this choice had been a mistake. I felt inadequate, and once again, I feared I was not speaking their language. Yet, despite their banter and comments, I persisted with the song.

One day after rehearsal, an eighth-grade baritone named Jack lingered after class with this particular song in his hand. Jack was a well-rounded young man and one of my favorite students. Intelligent, athletic, and positive, Jack was popular with his peers and a quiet leader in our rehearsals. After the room had cleared, he approached me shyly but with great sincerity and said, "Ms. Ramsey, I love this piece because it's so *sensitive*." I was surprised by his comment and honored that he felt comfortable enough to share it with me. As students often do for teachers, Jack opened my eyes: he showed me that what adolescent males choose to project outwardly as a group may not always be congruent with what adolescent males feel inwardly as individuals. Jack also caused me to question my assumptions. Perhaps there were other young men in our chorus, like Jack, who also valued the opportunity to be expressive and sensitive while singing.

In spite of my poor repertoire choices that first semester, the men continued with chorus. As a young female teacher trying to learn the language of adolescent males, I was awkward. I made many mistakes and yet they forgave me. In spite of my confusion about how to properly lead this ensemble and my fear about whether I was "getting it right," the young men persisted.

Advanced men's chorus remained on their schedules, and they kept coming to rehearsal. Why? Why didn't they quit? Participation in choral singing is not easy. It can be arduous and exacting. Long hours of rehearsal and concert performances can place substantial demands on one's time. What positive experiences do singers gain from the choral experience to make it worth their effort? What factors motivate students to invest such time and energy to sing in community with others?

### **Reasons for Singer Participation in Choral Ensembles**

When Adderley, Kennedy, and Berz (2003) investigated the world of the high school music classroom, they interviewed 60 high school students (20 participants in band, 20 participants in choir, and 20 participants in orchestra). The researchers sorted the students' reasons for participation into four categories. Students indicated parent influence as one possible reason for participation in a music ensemble. Many students in the study acknowledged having a musical or nonmusical parent who suggested or encouraged the student's participation in band, choir or orchestra.

A second reason for participation was the enjoyment of music. Students commented that they either liked music or found joy in creating music in a collective setting. Students indicated a desire for balance in their life as the third reason for participation in a musical ensemble. Some students commented on the need to "get away from schoolwork" or the desire to be a well-rounded individual. The fourth and final category addressed the social benefits of performing in an ensemble. Students who named this as a reason for participation indicated their desire to feel a part of something larger than themselves. They placed value on the opportunity to spend time with friends or make new friends. This desire is articulated in a student's own words (Adderley, Kennedy, & Berz, 2003):



I'm drawn to, like, to singing and music in general, and then there's the social aspect, which is real fun because, like, walking into the chorus room breaks down like social barriers, and you get to know people a lot better than you would outside of the music room. (p. 195)

In examining self-reported reasons for secondary school students' participation in extracurricular music or team sports activities, Ebie (2005) looked at a total of 406 statements in responses from 160 students. These statements were scrutinized and placed in one of four appropriate categories: social/integrative, self-esteem, kinesthetic, or self-efficacy. Ebie found the majority of student responses to be social/integrative in nature. One hundred and twenty-three student statements referenced social/integrative reasons for participation in extracurricular music or team sports. These reasons included: the opportunity to experience teamwork, friends and socialization with people of like interests, performing well in front of others, and aspirations of sharing common goals.

Seeking to understand high school choral students' perceived meanings of the choral experience, Hylton (1981) administered a Likert-type scale to 673 high school students in 14 different choral ensembles. Six factors of meaning emerged among the students. These six factors of meaning and their accompanying descriptions are:

1. Achievement: Students found meaning through feelings of musical accomplishment, success, or pride in their effort.
2. Spiritualistic: Students found religious or spiritual meanings within the high school choral experience. Students believed their singing to spiritually uplift others, a means of worshipping God through music, or a way to share God's gift of music with others.

3. Musical-Artistic: Students placed meaning on heightened musical awareness, opportunities for growth in musical knowledge, experiences in creating musical artistry, and learning about and performing many different kinds of music.
4. Communicative: Students who found communicative meaning valued choral singing as a way of reaching out to others or expressing feelings and ideas to an audience.
5. Psychological: Students found the choral experience valuable in creating introspective thought and causing one to reflect upon oneself and one's personal identity.
6. Integrative: Students found meaning in working with others, socializing, meeting new people, and being part of a group.

In discussing his findings, Hylton (1981) states:

The idea that music programs confer social benefits upon student participants is substantiated empirically. For some students a meaningful aspect of their high school choral singing is expressed in terms of the integrative dimension that emphasizes their relationships with other members of the group and resultant feelings of belonging. (p. 301)

These studies lend insight into high school students' reasons for participation in music and illustrate the value high school music students place on the social aspect of music making. Clift and Hancox's study in 2001 focused on university choral singers, although the researchers were not examining reasons for participation in choral music. Rather, they were examining the perceived benefits of singing among members of a university college choral society in the United Kingdom. The researchers found that the 84 singer participants in the study reported six areas of importance in surveys. These six areas included: benefits for well-being and relaxation, benefits for breathing and posture, social benefits, spiritual benefits, emotional benefits, and benefits for

the heart and immune system. In further detail, women were found to be significantly more likely to experience benefits for well-being and relaxation, while younger people were more likely to report social benefits, and those individuals who professed religious beliefs were more likely to experience spiritual benefits (Clift & Hancox, 2001). While these perceived benefits cannot be assumed to be reasons for participation in choral ensembles, the inclusion of social benefits as a category of importance to choral society members is noteworthy. In fact, 87% of respondents to Clift and Hancox's survey indicated experiencing social benefits through participation in a university choral society.

It remains to be seen if socialization also functions as motivation for a singers' participation in chorus. In her examination of college choir members' motivation to persist in music, Sichivitsa (2003) found that only 4% of college choir students reported fellowship with other singers as a reason for re-enrollment in chorus. Her study examined 154 students in traditional mixed choruses in the southern United States. She did note that students who were satisfied with their conductor's professionalism, the level of musical material, and their own performance were more likely to enjoy socializing with other members of the choir. What is unknown is how the results of this study might have differed were the researcher to have examined single sex choirs instead of traditional mixed ensembles. Is it possible that students participating in single sex choruses might place a higher value on fellowship with other singers than those in Sichivitsa's study?

### **Personal Teaching Reflection 2008: A Sister in the Brotherhood**

This choir room is large and spacious—resonant and bright. There are tall ceilings with ample lighting and spacious windows that usher in copious sunshine, gifting each of us with the scenery of blue skies and treetops just beyond the glass. The aesthetic of our fourth-floor vista

enhances the rich sonorities that are already ringing between the walls. The liquid harmonies of this university men's glee club settle into a deep and resonant chord. I cue the release, and there's a slight suspension of time. For a moment, the singers and I experience together that subtle, sacred space between the creation of music and the return to life as usual.

Acknowledging the end of rehearsal, I invite the men to gather around the piano. We crowd into a dense circle, myself included. I am part of this circle. Some men remove their hats, and with our arms around each other's shoulders, we sing. The university alma mater rings forth from the men's voices in heartfelt unity. My voice mingles with theirs—the only one sounding an octave higher. There is a sense of mutual respect and brotherhood as these men acknowledge a century-old rehearsal tradition. It is hallowed—intimate. Each time we partake in this ritual, I am humbled. I feel as if the men, unspoken, have extended to me the privilege of being an honorary sister in their brotherhood. While it is the making of music that has brought these men together, camaraderie is ever-present in rehearsal. It is a camaraderie born of the musical experience—not a pre-existing condition. It is a camaraderie that may or may not endure beyond the evanescence of our music making, but it is as real and felt within that rehearsal space as the sunlight streaming through the windows. We are creating this *together*.

I was assigned to conduct the men's glee club at this large Midwestern university as part of my graduate student assistantship. It was an honor. The repertoire these men could sing was more challenging, their musicianship and artistry was more advanced, and there were far fewer behavioral concerns than there were in my times of public school teaching. Still, in my role as teacher, I experienced striking similarities between these collegiate men and my junior high advanced men's chorus.

The atmosphere in both settings was charged with a strong desire for excellence. Tenors would take amiable jabs at basses for missed notes or rhythms (or vice versa), and basses would respond with witty banter of their own, stepping up their musicianship in response. This kind of needling back and forth was not derogatory, but jovial in nature and often sharpened the musicality of the ensemble. Both choruses wanted to prove their ability.

The members of these choirs were very individually different in their personalities, social groups, and interests, yet they formed unique connections with one another through our concerted musical effort. The dynamic, intangible qualities of the male chorus environment I had experienced with my seventh and eighth grade advanced men's chorus were surfacing in similar form with the collegiate men's ensemble. With each group, music making occurred, but there were ancillary dimensions of community and camaraderie that seemed to be equally important to the men.

### **Choir as Community**

Ethnomusicologists have documented the social functions for music in almost every culture: expressing emotion, inducing pleasure, accompanying dance, validating rituals and institutions, protesting injustice, and promoting social stability (Ball, 2010). Music making may function as part of community, but those who make music can also *become* community. Community is a present element in choruses, acknowledged by ensemble singers, and worthy of further scrutiny.

Jorgensen (1995) defines community as “place”—this may be a geographical location, but it does not have to be. According to Jorgensen, “place” can also be social. Individuals can experience community within a social space when they participate in societal institutions and

social groups. The choral ensemble, as a societal institution or social group is then, by Jorgensen's definition, an example of community.

When community exists as "place," Jorgensen extols there are five defining characteristics. The first characteristic of community as "place" is a sense of "boundedness." "Boundedness" establishes that there are those who are inside the community's bounds and those who are outside the community's bounds (Jorgensen, 1995). Communities may differ in their degree of exclusivity or openness to others, but all share in boundaries of some sort. Members of the community are expected to adopt certain defining practices and expectations of the community. "Boundedness" can be typified in the choral setting through attendance policies, rehearsal expectations, and the variety and quality of audition procedures a chorus requires of its members. Choruses may range from those that are highly exclusive to those that are open to all who enjoy singing. Whether singers take pride in being part of an exclusive ensemble, or relish the freedom of the nonauditioned chorus, they are still participating in a bound organization and a place of community.

Another defining characteristic of community as "place" according to Jorgensen (1995) is "rootedness." When "rootedness" is present in a community, individuals share ties that stabilize beliefs and practices. "Rootedness" creates traditions, personal feelings of identity, a sense of security and connectedness with the "place" and the people in it. "Rootedness" may best be summed up as a commitment to community, so that one not only identifies with the group but also belongs to it. Countryman (2009) interviewed 30 students about their experiences in high school music programs. All 30 students who were interviewed discussed the importance of friendships and community in their music making experiences. Countryman believes that because of demands on time, embodied practices within music making, and the social nature of

ensembles, music departments can become spaces of belonging for students in ways that traditional academic departments cannot. This idea of music as a ‘space for belonging’ effectively illustrates Jorgensen’s concept of “rootedness” in community.

Interconnectedness is the third characteristic of “place” in community, according to Jorgensen (1995). Interconnectedness is a held belief that one is part of a larger group of persons, but that the individual has something to offer the group, and likewise, the group has something to offer the individual. It is the belief that one is interdependent with others for one or many things such as: comfort, personal affirmation, intellectual stimulation, goods and services, or friendship. Faulkner and Davidson (2006) explored male choruses in rural Iceland and found that participants’ needs for vocal collaboration *and* social connectedness were fulfilled through choral singing. Of the men’s experiences, they shared that vocal collaboration in harmony became synonymous with social connectedness. The personal affirmation, friendship, and social benefits experienced by the men in Faulkner and Davidson’s study provide an additional example of interconnectedness within a choral community—in this case a male chorus community.

In a study of 78 undergraduate and graduate students, Kokotsaki and Hallam (2007) examined the benefits of participative music making as perceived by the students. The responses of the students in Kokotsaki and Hallam’s study shed light on Jorgensen’s idea of “interconnectedness.” Through participation in music, students valued learning to compromise, offered support and encouragement, and learned to work together as a team. Similar feelings of interconnectedness were expressed in Countryman’s interview with one high school choral student, “Erikah” (2009):

Music in high school was definitely social. I was friends with the people in the class and I was friends with the teachers . . . for me music was one of the few classes where I felt like I was collaborating with everyone, not like I was being talked at. Just knowing how special it feels to sing with other people—if that isn't some kind of bonding experience, I don't know what is! . . . That community part was really great. (p. 95)

The fourth characteristic of community as a 'place' as defined by Jorgensen (1995) is "feelingfulness." This describes an emotional and cognitive attachment to the community that can also be physically experienced by the members. "Feelingfulness" describes the affect experienced by community members as they live within the "place." In Rohwer's study (2009), high school choral students in Texas were asked to write letters to freshmen entering the choral program. Many of the students' letters provide evidence of "feelingfulness" within their choral community. One student wrote, "Choir gives me an outlet to experience moments of closeness with others that only choir kids know" (p. 257). From another student: "The music we make together gives me chills. We have learned to take every song . . . whether we like it or not and turn it into something that moves us" (p. 257). A final student adds, "Choir is not a mindless kind of thing; it takes dedication and heart" (p. 258). These rich emotional connections to the music and to one another are aligned with Jorgensen's concept of "feelingfulness."

The final characteristic described by Jorgensen (1995) that relates to community as "place" is a sense of empowerment. Individuals who are part of the community feel empowered to accomplish more collectively than they are capable of alone. Individuals within a community may experience empowerment through being interconnected with others and enjoying the security of one's place within the community. Kokotsaki and Hallam (2007) found that undergraduate and graduate students who participated in music making felt empowered as they



fulfilled useful and important roles within the musical group. The students in Kokotsaki and Hallam's study believed their contributions were meaningful, and the students also expressed the feelings of pride and achievement they experienced as part of the group's success. Adderley, Kennedy, and Berz (2003) also noted that high school students in school music programs enjoyed "feeling a part of something."

### **Personal Teaching Reflection 2012: "Just Do the Music"**

As I was ushered into the spacious sanctuary of this Southern church, I noticed the large group of high school-aged men seated in chairs on the marble steps at the front. Soon I would join them. A rainbow of butterflies swirled in my stomach at the thought. My eyes scanned the high ceilings and white columns. There were many teachers who were already nestled into pews, ready to observe the first rehearsal. In just minutes I would be in the front of this sanctuary, in front of these men, conducting my first all-state chorus—and it was an all-state *men's* chorus. The church's sound technician slowly and methodically worked to situate my headset microphone. My own anxiety and eagerness made me want to help speed his process along. *Let's get this thing started already.* Instead, I smiled and took a deep breath while he made the necessary adjustments for me and affixed the microphone properly. I introduced myself to Molly, the pianist, and I found a strange sense of comfort in knowing there would at least be one other woman in the room with me.

The men were tall in their places, and I could sense how proud they were to be here. A smattering of heights, weights, ethnicities and social groups: I drank in the diversity. Some were broad-shouldered with facial hair. Others were baby-faced. A few more bore the assorted emblems of teenage awkwardness: orthodontics, acne, and the like. All were exceptional in their own ways. These would be athletes, poets, scientists, doctors, artists, actors, lifelong musicians,

fathers, inventors, scholars, and dreamers. They were stunning in their possibility. I led them silently through rhythmic and physical warm-ups. The first rehearsal commenced. Laughs were had. Improvements were made, and rapport was established. There was much work to be done, but progress had been steady, and most importantly I felt the men were on my side. The turmoil of my nervousness had subsided for now. The butterflies were gone and the advice of an esteemed colleague had proven to be true.

In the months leading to this event, I had been on edge. I was genuinely in disbelief when the leadership of this Southern state asked me to conduct their all-state men's chorus. I had always assumed that if I were ever extended an invitation to conduct an all-state chorus, it would be for an all-state women's chorus. My mind sifted through memories of dynamic male chorus clinicians I had observed over the years. I had watched these men transform the rehearsal environment into an energetic, testosterone-laden, musical fraternity. As a female, I wondered, could I create such an environment? Was that a realistic expectation? Should that even be my goal? Would the men feel cheated without the leadership of a male conductor? Could *I* be enough? The questions persisted. I had no role model for this situation. I had never seen a female conduct an all-state men's chorus, or any men's honor choir for that matter. Tirelessly dogged by these worries, I vented to a close friend and colleague in my doctoral program. He smiled reassuringly and said to me, "Just do the music, Andrea." From his kernel of common sense, I began to unravel the reality that my anxieties were rooted in generalizations I still held about male choruses. These were generalizations I had created based on the male-instructional model I had observed so many times before. I reviewed what I knew to be true: that whether male or female, singers desired enjoyable and powerful musical experiences. I had taught men

before. I could teach them in this setting. I began to believe that I was capable of facilitating an enjoyable, powerful experience for these high school men. I could “do the music.”

The final morning of the clinic, I jotted a list of ‘must-accomplish’ items, grabbed a quick breakfast and headed to the rehearsal space. Seated in front of them on a stool, I scanned the room full of men and spoke with a confident authority: “You’ve *got* this. You *know* that, right? You’ve *so* got this.” Pause. I surveyed the room purposefully. I could feel their attentive eyes. Several heads nodded. The room was eerily quiet. “We have a handful of things to hammer out—a handful of things to make right this morning and then you’re going to blow them away this afternoon.” I could see the men believed this too. We went wholeheartedly into the core of that music. Our collective effort combined with the energy from a solid evening’s rest, and the presence of our additional instrumentalists raised everything to a higher plane. The men were rejuvenated, and palpable excitement was spreading through the room by the second. It was truly electric. I think I could have lived in that brief space for days and been nourished solely by the rehearsal environment. Smiles were ample, boyish exuberance abounded, and we all knew something exceptional was happening. *We had this.*

Conducting the men at the concert that afternoon, I felt and thought so many things all at once. I struggled to stay present in the musical moment, but my mind wandered. I thought about my gesture. I thought about where I was in the score. I wondered what my face was conveying to them. Some things had sounded much better in the morning rehearsal, and in other places, the music came to life in fresh and exciting ways. I felt my heart race sympathetically with the soloists. I boldly trusted the men in certain measures, while fearing for our collective survival in others. I was moved by the culmination of our journey. There were so many impassioned facial expressions across that ensemble—so many young chests puffed with pride in their

accomplishment. Their singing and my conducting continued until we reached the final fortissimo chord. The pipe organ rumbled, the men were at full volume, and there were no more pages to turn in my folder. I released the chord, exhaled, and turned to face the audience. Acknowledging the men, and absorbing the scene, I felt an immense and overpowering sense of relief wash over me. We had *done* this. The men's faces beamed with self-assurance. They felt it too.

Our time together had been short—just three days. Yet, even in this expedited time frame, a special environment existed. A distinct, unique, men's chorus environment was brought to life in that Southern church—just as it was brought to life in the “too small” choir room with the junior high advanced men's chorus and the resonant rehearsal space of the university men's glee club. When men gather to sing, something happens. It is this “something” that I want to understand in a deeper way.

## **Summary**

Studies indicate there are multiple reasons singers choose to participate in musical ensembles: (a) influence of parents, (b) simple enjoyment of music, (c) desire to be well-rounded, (d) social reasons such as making new friends or interacting with people of like interests, (e) working as a team and sharing common goals, and (f) performing well in front of others (Adderley et al., 2003; Ebie, 2005). Students also extract meanings and benefits from ensemble participation. Six factors of meaning emerged from Hylton's (1981) study of high school choral participants: (a) achievement, (b) spiritual or religious, (c) musical-artistic, (d) communicative, (e) psychological, and (f) integrative. In Clift and Hancox's (2001) survey of university college choral society members, singers experienced the following benefits while

participating in a choir: improved relaxation, breathing and posture, spiritual awareness, emotional well-being, improved heart and immune system function, and social benefits.

Additional studies note that ensemble members often learn how to compromise, be supportive, and work as a team (Countryman, 2009; Kokotsaki & Hallam, 2007). Jorgensen (1995) labels these kinds of social interactions as “interconnectedness.” She suggests that “interconnectedness” is one of many characteristics that can define community as “place,” including: (a) “boundedness”—observed through group attendance policies, rehearsal expectations, and audition procedures; (b) “rootedness”—found in traditions, feelings of identity, senses of belonging; (c) “feelingfulness”—present in singers’ rich emotional and cognitive connections to the music; and (d) “sense of empowerment”—noted when students feel useful, contributory, and “part of something.”

The discussion of community and social interaction is relevant to the choral setting. Choral singing, by design, is social. A choir’s mere existence demands social considerations such as societal rules, structures, and specific ways of interacting with other human beings while creating vocal music. Singers may rehearse their vocal parts alone, but no human being is capable of creating “choir” as an individual. It is a shared human experience. Clifton (1983) writes that music has meaning specifically because of this—because it is “ours.” Rather than being something a person can “have,” music is a presence in which one dwells. Music is what we are when we experience it. Music, according to Clifton, is a collaborative experience in which possession is always mutual. Clifton’s philosophy yields a chorus that is collaborative, mutually possessed, and even inhabitable. The chorus can become a unique entity unto itself—a “dwell-able” musical presence that envelops its occupants. Furthermore, the male chorus may be

an even more specific type of societal entity, as it is comprised of only males and creates distinct sonorities.

Turino's (2008) term "cultural cohort" could provide an additional framework for understanding the male chorus entity. Consider his description:

Within any society, each individual is a vector for cultural similarities and differences with others along a variety of habit trajectories because of similar or different experiences, social positioning and aspects of self. Thus rather than thinking about "culture" as a unified entity, it is better to conceptualize the *cultural realm* in a more flexible way. Since people will identify with others because of shared habit trajectories, I suggest the terms *cultural cohort* or *identity cohort* to refer to social groupings that form along the lines of specific constellations of shared habit based in similarities of *parts* of the self. (p. 111)

"Cultural cohort" could be a suitable term for the male chorus phenomenon. While singers share in their similarity of being male, as well as the differences (and similarities) of personal interests and preferences, they are situated within the greater functional whole of music making. Singers could have differing social positions and "aspects of self," but all members of male choruses share the common "habit trajectory" of participatory singing with other males in the chorus. As I considered the three teaching reflections shared earlier in this chapter, I wondered: Could it be that the uniquely similar group dynamic I observed in my teaching experiences with junior high, collegiate, and all-state high school male choruses was partially attributed to Turino's concept of "cultural cohort?"

In desiring a better understanding of male chorus culture, the meanings singers derive from the male chorus experience, and how these meanings impact the singers' identities, I

decided upon this study. Exploring the male chorus entity through the richness of qualitative methodology could prove helpful to teachers in making their own decisions and interacting with their own men's choruses. These reasons, along with my personal curiosity from years of teaching male choruses, were the primary motivators for this study.

### **Purpose and Problems**

The purpose of this study was to explore, investigate, and describe the culture of a high school men's chorus. The following research questions guided this investigation:

- How do singers in a men's chorus define their experience?
- How are their experiences and behavior while participating in a high school men's chorus different or similar from their experiences and behavior in a high school mixed chorus?
- How are their experiences and behavior while participating in a high school men's chorus different or similar from other nonmusical, all-male activities, such as sports?
- What bearing, if any, does participation in a men's chorus have on the identities of these young men?

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Review of Related Literature**

As this study will explore and investigate men's chorus culture, it is worthwhile to examine the impact a single sex environment may have on education in a broader sense. This literature review will discuss: (a) what studies have to say about the nature, quality and experiences of students who are learning in single sex environments and how those learning experiences are different or similar to students learning in coeducational settings; (b) the unique neurological and developmental differences between males and females; and (c) the literature specific to single sex choral settings.

#### **Single Sex and Coeducational Learning in General Education**

The assumption that males and females receive equal education in a coeducational setting, provided they are in the same classrooms with the same teacher and same textbooks, may be false. Boys often receive more praise as well as more teacher-initiated contacts. Furthermore, classroom activities often are chosen to appeal to boys more than to appeal to girls. Also, white males have been found to receive more praise, acceptance, remediation, and criticism from teachers (Hall & Sandler, 1982; Sadker & Sadker, 1994).

The 1980s and 1990s brought about an increase in studies designed to compare single sex and coeducational schools, however, most of this research took place outside of the United States in countries such as Australia, Great Britain and Thailand where there are large numbers of single sex schools sponsored by the government. During this same time in the United States, almost all single sex schools were private schools. Creating functional studies to compare these schools with public coeducational settings is problematic because private schools often provide more academic support or cater to affluent, well-educated clientele. Because of the preexisting



advantage held by many students in single sex private schools, a direct comparison with coeducational public schools is almost impossible. In 2006, the United States Department of Education relaxed Title IX regulations to give schools more latitude with single sex education. This adjustment required that for each single sex program within a school, a substantially equal program for members of the opposite sex could also be provided, with the provision that the second equal program could be coeducational (M. R. Davis, 2006). As the numbers of public single sex education opportunities increase, perhaps the opportunity for more direct comparisons will as well.

The existing body of research as it stands certainly is confusing. For almost every international study showing an advantage to single sex education there is another existing study to show a different or more complex result (Fennema & Peterson, 1987). Similarly conflicting results exist among U.S. studies. Lee & Bryk (1986) found no significant difference in mathematics achievement test scores between female students in Catholic single sex high schools and public coed high schools. Yet Riordan (1985) found females in Catholic single sex high schools significantly outperformed females in Catholic coeducational high schools on mathematical achievement tests. Riordan also examined male students in similar context, but found there to be no significant difference in the math achievement test scores of male students in single sex or coeducational environments. However, in a different study in 1990 (after controlling for initial ability, race, and home background), Riordan found that at-risk males in Catholic single sex schools significantly outperformed at-risk males in Catholic coeducational schools on mathematics achievement tests. According to Riordan (1994), the more disadvantaged the student is, the more likely they are to gain an advantage from attending a single sex school.

Studies addressing students' science achievement, and verbal and English achievement in single sex and coeducation environments yield similarly conflicting results: Some studies find significant differences, others find no significant differences (Harker, 2000; Lee & Marks, 1990; Marsh, 1991). Though different age groups and different content areas are addressed in a variety of studies, no compelling trends emerge to indicate that one method of education is more effective than the other.

**Experiences for students in single sex learning.** DeBare (2004) writes that females in single sex schools experience the advantages of being freed from constant pressure to please boys or be popular with the opposite sex and that that young women in single sex settings have the opportunity to play all roles: the math scholar, star athlete, student council president, etc. This kind of freedom to be involved in all capacities can impact self-esteem and attitudes about ability. Though girls and boys enter school roughly equal in measured ability, twelve years later girls are often behind their male classmates in self-esteem (Wellesley College & American Association of University Women, 1995). Could a single sex learning experience increase the self-esteem of high school females? Riordan (1990) found that white females in single sex Catholic high schools reported significantly higher self-esteem than did white females in coeducational Catholic high schools.

Spielhagen (2007), though not looking particularly at issues of self-esteem, interviewed gifted middle school females on their experiences in single sex classes as part of a mixed methods study. Spielhagen's participants had the option to participate in coed or single sex classes for core academic subjects, but indicated they preferred single sex classes for the following reasons: (a) boys would not make fun of them or pick on them, (b) they experienced a sense of freedom to be oneself, (c) they did not experience fear or discomfort about being

“smarter than the boys,” and (d) they believed single sex classes had fewer distractions and disruptions. In fact, 84% of the female students Spielhagen surveyed indicated they felt they could concentrate better in single sex classes. While these responses may not be generalizable to a larger population, they do provide possible insight on why some females may report higher self-esteem in a single sex environment.

Does the single sex setting have a similar effect on the self-esteem of male students? The answer may depend on the students’ ages. When looking at boys attending a Catholic single sex school, Brutsaert & Bracke (1994) found that the boys indicated significantly higher self-esteem than boys in Catholic coeducational elementary schools. They suggested that one possible reason for this finding could be the impactful presence of male faculty in single sex schools. However, other studies examining male students in high school or middle school single sex learning environments indicated either: (a) that male students experienced no significant difference in reported self-esteem from coed to single sex (LePore & Warren, 1997), or (b) that male students experienced significantly lower self-esteem in the single sex setting (Riordan, 1994).

When gifted male middle school students were given the option of single sex or coeducational classes for core academic subjects, the choices of adolescent males varied. Some male students professed an affinity for or an indifference toward single sex classes, while other boys indicated they disliked single sex classes, naming specific reasons such as: (a) other boys try to act “tougher,” (b) other boys behave better in classes when girls are present because they want to impress them, (c) single sex classrooms brought about increased instances of bullying, or (d) students were afraid of being perceived as gay for choosing to learn in a single sex classroom (Spielhagen, 2007).

Incidents of bullying in the single sex environment are not restricted to the all-male setting. DeBare (2004) cautions that all-female settings may become hotbeds of rumors, nasty comments, and heightened emotions. Fewer instances of concerns with homophobia are raised pertaining to the female single sex environment, but concerns about heterosexual social development are voiced readily in the literature. DeBare writes that young women in single sex environments may sometimes grow to feel intimidated by men or socially hampered as a result of their experiences in an all-female learning environment. According to DeBare, sexism (albeit usually in subtle form) can also be a detriment of single sex education in cases where young women are occasionally coddled under the banner of self-esteem, or if female teachers encourage their female students to engage in dependent or childlike behavior.

“Locus of control” is a phrase used to describe whether people feel that control of their lives rests with them (internal locus of control) or in the hands of others (external locus of control). Riordan (1990) found that white females and at-risk males both reported higher senses of internal locus of control in single sex rather than coeducational schools—again providing insight that females and at-risk populations may have the most to gain from single sex learning.

Chadwell (2009) writes that it is not uncommon for females to underestimate their abilities, viewing their success as the result of hard work, while males may tend to overestimate their abilities, viewing their success as the result of being smart. These differences in perception may not just be a result of socialization and environment. An explosion of brain research is beginning to illumine authentic neurological differences between males and females.

### **Scientific Considerations in Single Sex Learning**

**Male and female brain differences.** Sax (2005), Ph.D. and medical doctor, writes that boys’ and girls’ brains have hardwired differences. With neuroscience to support his argument,

Sax does not believe that it is chauvinistic to acknowledge these differences between males and females, and he encourages teachers to recognize and embrace gender-separate educational opportunities. Gurian (2011) outlines several brain differences and how those differences impact males and females. The differences most pertinent to male and female learning experiences are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

*Male and Female Brain Considerations*

<b>Part of Brain</b>	<b>Function</b>	<b>Differences</b>	<b>Significance</b>
Amygdala	Involved in the processing of emotion (especially anger and fear)	Tends to be larger in males	May cause males to be more aggressive
Frontal lobe	Facilitates speech, thought and emotion; produces neurons for skilled movement	Maturs earlier in female brain; tends to have increased blood flow in female brain	May lead to less risk taking in females and improved verbal communication in females
Limbic system	Contains a number of structures including hippocampus; plays a role in how boys and girls learn and perform differently	More neural connections between the limbic system and verbal processing areas in the female brain	Females may respond verbally to stressful and emotional experiences more quickly than males; females may access emotively descriptive language in written assignments with greater ease
Basal Ganglia	Controls movement sequences such as walking	Tends to activate more quickly in male brain	Males tend to react more quickly to the attention demands of their physical environment
Brain stem	Connects the brain to the spinal cord, handles primitive drives such as “fight or flight”	Male brain tendency to be at rest in this area more frequently	Males may be more likely to respond with a physical response when they feel threatened or emotionally charged
Broca’s area	Motor area of the brain used for speech and processing grammar and words	Tends to be more active in females than males	May result in improved verbal and communication skills in females

Table 1 (cont'd)

Wernicke's area	Responsible for linking language to thoughts; aids in word comprehension	Active at higher levels in females	May result in improved verbal and communication skills in females
Cerebellum	Integrates sensory perception, motor control and coordination	Tends to be larger in males	This, along with higher levels of spinal fluid in males, speeds messages between the brain and body resulting in a male tendency move more quickly and have less impulse control
Cerebral cortex	Promotes higher intellectual functions and interprets sensory impulses	Female brain has more neuron connections and increased blood flow in this area	Increased processing speed in the female brain; may help females respond to information faster than males; may improve transitions and multi-tasking in females
Gray and white matter	Gray matter is brain tissue comprised of cell bodies of nerve cells, while white matter is brain tissue composed of filaments that extend from cell bodies to transmit electric signals between neurons	Males tend to have more gray matter; females tend to have more white matter	Males tend to learn more effectively through focusing on a specific task or project, while females tend to move information quickly from area of the brain to another, resulting in enhanced multitasking capabilities

The presence and levels of certain hormones in male and female brains also have significance. Females tend to have higher levels of estrogen, which not only result in lower tendencies toward aggression, but also lower tendencies toward competitiveness, self-reliance, and self-assertion. Oxytocin—a hormone tied to social recognition, bonding, and the development and maintenance of friendships—is more functionally present in the female brain. As a result, females often are biologically motivated to please parents, teachers, and peers as they strive to establish and maintain relationships. Testosterone, the male sex and aggression

hormone, is present to a greater extent and more functional in male brains. Male testosterone levels tend to rise when males “win” and tend to decline when males “lose.” In contrast, female testosterone levels typically remain constant, displaying less fluctuation in response to winning or losing. Cortisol, dubbed the “stress” hormone, increases similarly in both male and female brains when stress is present. However, the difference between the sexes appears after the stressful experience. When the stressor is removed, male cortisol levels usually decrease more rapidly than female cortisol levels. For this reason, females may be more likely to “stress” about things for longer periods of time than males (Gurian, 2011).

**Functional and sensory differences between male and female brains.** Brain differences between males and females extend to sensory intake, memory function, and even how the brain uses its cell and blood activity to process information. Through PET scan and MRI technology, researchers have learned that the female brain is almost as active during rest times as the male brain is during active times. Possessing a brain that is never truly at rest, females may benefit from a learning advantage, as they will tend to be more consistently engaged, even when they are bored (Gurian, 2011).

As seen earlier in Table 1, females are likely to have an advantage in verbal fluency due to higher activity in the Broca’s area and the Wernicke’s area; however boys hold the advantage when it comes to remembering facts (Ackerman, Bowen, Beier, & Kanfer, 2001; Lynn, Irwing, & Cammock, 2002). James (2007) describes boys as “walking encyclopedias” of information on whatever topics they find most interesting. He writes, “Those teachers who have taught boys have probably experienced the male student who begins conversations with, ‘Did you know that . . . ?’” (p. 62). Males’ apparent dominance of fact recollection is not an indicator that boys have better memories than girls. Rather, boys and girls have different strengths in memory. Girls

demonstrate greater ability in episodic memory when they must recall details of events and memories from earlier in their lives (P. J. Davis, 1999; Herlitz, Airaksinen, & Nordström, 1999). Females may also perform memory tasks better than boys when those tasks involve words (Halpern, 2000).

Male and female differences in sensory perception are also pertinent to this discussion, as the senses (hearing, vision, touch, taste, and smell) link directly to the brain (James, 2007). Girls and women generally tend to hear better than boys and men. The cochlea—the coiled, fluid-filled spiral tube that transforms sound energy into neural energy—is longer in males. This means that it takes slightly longer for boys to hear sounds than girls (Don, Ponton, Eggermont, & Masuda, 1993; McFadden, 1998). Girls also have increased sensitivity to sound and can hear softer sounds than boys. For this reason, boys generally have a much higher tolerance for noise than girls do (McFadden, 1998; Velle, 1987).

Where vision is concerned, males and females literally see things quite differently. Men tend to have greater visual acuity, resulting in the ability to see both stationary objects and moving objects more clearly than women (Velle, 1987). Male and female occipital lobes also respond differently to light sensitivity. Females will generally see better in low light, while males tend to see better in bright light (Gurian, 2011).

For both taste and smell, women display greater sensitivity than men and are usually more accurate in identifying tastes and smells (Velle, 1987). Females may be more sensitive to bitter flavors and more likely to prefer sweet tastes. Males tend to be more attracted to salty flavors (Gurian, 2011). When it comes to skin sensitivity, men generally display a higher tolerance for pain and cold weather than do females (James, 2007). Females may tend to react



sharply and quickly to pain; however their overall resistance to long-term discomfort is usually stronger than that of males (Gurian, 2011).

**Male and female emotional responses.** Emotive processing is one of the least understood areas of brain difference (Gurian, 2011). When it comes to differences between male and female emotional processing, the existing stereotype is that boys are not open about their feelings and emotions. However, male brains are capable of intense emotion, so the stereotype does not seem to make sense (James, 2007). Sax reasons that boys certainly experience strong emotions but simply are not as capable of expressing them (2005). According to Gurian (2011), it can sometimes take hours for boys to emotionally process the same information that girls process in minutes. He elaborates:

This lesser emotive ability makes males more emotionally fragile than we tend to think. A boy who has had a crisis at home in the morning may . . . be unable to learn for much of the morning, whereas his sister may quickly process . . . and learn efficiently the very same morning. . . . Brain research pointing out ways in which boys are more emotionally fragile than girls is not offered to take attention away from girls' emotional needs. It is offered to inspire us to a new vision of males. Males are simply not as tough as we think; often females are emotionally tougher (though it doesn't appear so when they overtly show distress in tears and in talk more than do boys). (p. 31)

When emotive content enters the female limbic system, the brain activity tends to move into the four lobes at the top of the female brain where verbalization and reasoning occur. In contrast, male brains will tend to move the emotional content quickly to the bottom of the limbic system toward the amygdala and the brain stem, where aggression and physical responses are triggered. In practical terms, females may be more likely to process emotional pain by talking about it and

getting help from others, while males may be more likely to become physically aggressive (fight) or withdraw (flight) (Gurian, 2011). James (2007) agrees that males in stressful situations will tend to stand and defend themselves or flee the situation. This “fight or flight” response exhibited by males in emotionally stressful situations may be replaced in females with a response labeled “tend and befriend.” In the “tend and befriend” response, females under stress will turn to one another for support and defend each other from any perceived threats to help manage their stress levels (Taylor et al., 2000).

**Male and female developmental differences.** Male and female brains also grow and mature at different rates. Girls’ brains develop substantially faster, and boys do not catch up until well after high school graduation. Myelin (a waxy material that insulates nerve fibers and helps parts of the brain communicate with one another) develops in girls’ brains at a rate that is three to four years ahead of the development of myelin in boys’ brains. Girls also integrate the emotional and rational parts of their brains at an earlier age, providing a plausible reason for why sixth-grade females often appear more mature than their sixth-grade male counterparts (Sax, 2005). Girls tend to speak earlier, speak in complete sentences earlier, and develop fine motor skills before boys do, and girls also develop physically and sexually ahead of their male peers (Gurian, 2011; James, 2007; Roulstone, Loader, Northstone, Beveridge, & Team, 2002).

Hormones greatly impact development and behavior in adolescents. Aggression-inducing testosterone increases in the male body and brain during puberty. Middle school boys tend to be more talkative in class and actively seek attention. In one study, eighth grade boys were fifty percent more likely to be held back a grade than eighth grade females (Gurian, 2011). For females in adolescence, increased estrogen levels usually result in greater activity in the

brain and increased concentration. Middle school girls are more likely to remain quiet in class, even when confident, and are less likely to be held back academically (Gurian, 2011).

**Implications for male and female learning.** Many scholars have sought to apply the knowledge of these neurological, developmental and emotional sex differences to the educational setting. How might male and female differences inform teachers in their day-to-day classroom decisions? Noble (2000) offers several suggestions to help teachers meet the preferred learning styles of male students: (a) Split class periods into separate, distinct tasks. Have clear learning objectives and keep lessons short, sharp and finite; (b) Make learning active and challenging—infuse learning with physical movement, discussion, competition, and games to keep boys engaged; (c) Make learning sociable—allow boys to work in groups and pairs; and (d) Vary teaching styles and vary learning activities—explore the option of oral presentations or role-plays instead of written assignments, incorporate elements of risk-taking into lessons, and employ audio-visual aids. James (2007) echoes many of the ideas put forth by Noble, such as movement, activity and structure. He argues that teachers should consider letting boys stand in class if the boys prefer to do so. Sax (2006) reports that many boys may actually learn better and pay better attention when they are standing instead of sitting. Gurian (2011) supports a variety of classroom activities to keep boys attentive and engaged, noting that boys tend to get bored more easily than girls. He also writes that boys tend to require more space when learning:

When a girl and a boy are put together at a table, the boy generally ends up spreading his work into the girl's space, not vice versa. Boys tend to learn by using more physical space than girls do. This natural tendency can affect psychosocial dynamics. Unaware of how necessary it is for many boys to use space, teachers inadvertently consider the boys

impolite, rude or out of control. In fact, they are often just learning in the way that their spatial brains learn. (p. 47)

According to Noble (2000), boys learn best when they have a valid reason for learning. Teachers will be more apt to find success when they provide male students with that reason. James (2007) adds, “Boys have a hard time . . . if they do not see any reason for the exercise.” Boys may not always get the long-term ramifications of learning, and if teachers can help them make connections between assignments and real-world benefits and relevance, boys may be more actively engaged. The relationship between male students and their teacher is also an important factor in boys’ ability to learn effectively. James (2007) writes:

Boys will not work for a teacher who they believe does not like them. Usually a boy draws this conclusion based on the teacher’s failure to understand how he learns. Boys tell me that teachers they do not like will not listen to their explanations of why they cannot do the work the way the teacher wants, or will not respond to their learning needs. The fact that the student may not have discussed these problems with the teacher will not change the boy’s attitude toward the teacher. (p. 120)

For teachers who may encounter a male student shutting down and refusing to work, James offers the following suggestions: (a) ask the student what the problem is, and if the answer is unclear, talk with other teachers with whom the boy has a positive relationship; (b) embrace the child’s family or the school counselor in helping you and the boy student to understand each other’s position; and (c) consider including male students in planning classroom activities. They will enjoy being part of the planning process and it will give them insights regarding why the lesson is structured the way that it is.

In general, boys are more likely to be risk takers in and outside of class. Differences in frontal lobe development may be partly responsible for this. According to Hannan (1997), boys are more apt to raise their hands in class at a ratio of 6:1 over girls. He suggests that hand raising is a form of risk-taking for the boys and integral to their preferred learning style. Noble (2000) describes it this way:

Being exposed to the possibility, often the probability, of being wrong and the mild ridicule of your classmates is easily outweighed by the glorious benefits of the teacher's and whole class's attention and the nirvana of getting it right. The problem is that boys set themselves up to be knocked down. They are, in this sense, vulnerable learners. (pp. 24–25)

Girls, on the other hand, are less likely to take risks and less likely to be vulnerable learners. Noble (2000) argues that schools do not do enough to encourage girls to explore and appreciate the positive aspects of risk-taking. He writes: “One of the reasons why the glass ceiling continues in the world of work, some argue, is that not enough women are prepared to risk breaking through it” (p. 25).

**Responsible application of gender-based brain information.** There is an old cliché: “With knowledge comes power, and with power comes responsibility.” This adage may be especially applicable to the information shared thus far. The unique differences between male and female brains should not be used to suppress or disparage either gender. Sax (2005) cautions teachers against allowing these differences to be interpreted in a way that reinforces inaccurate gender stereotypes such as “girls are more emotional” or “boys’ brains are better at math and science.” While Sax believes the neuroscientific case for single sex education is the strongest argument, he advises that neuroscience is a developing science and highly complex. Similarly,

Gurian (2011) admonishes that awareness of brain differences should not be used to categorize children, but rather to add wisdom to our understanding of each child's individuality. As with everything, there are exceptions. Gurian (2011) acknowledges the reality of "bridge brains"—boys and girls who possess nearly equal qualities of both male and female brains. It cannot be overemphasized that no brain falls neatly into a category. Every child is unique and the information provided here should not be used for broad generalizations or as evidence for gender superiority or inferiority. Rather, it is provided as a window of insight for educators into documented neurological, emotional, developmental, and educational differences between the male and female sexes. Teachers should allow the literature to inform but not confine.

### **Single Sex Choral Experiences**

Single sex choruses can be found in K-12 schools, colleges, universities, community choir organizations, and children's choir organizations throughout the world. The literature suggests that single sex choruses may be particularly advantageous for adolescent students, as males and females both are coping with unique physiological, vocal, and social challenges during puberty. The male voice change is well documented within the research literature as theories about the male voice change have evolved and been adapted over time (Barham & Nelson, 1991; Collins, 1999; Cooksey, 1999; Cooper & Kuersteiner, 1970; Herman, 1988; Leck, 2001; McKenzie, 1956; Swanson, 1977). Similarly, Gackle (1991) has codified the various stages of the adolescent female voice change. Having to process these physiological changes can be challenging enough for young singers, but facing these vocal changes in a coeducational setting can even further complicate things for adolescents. Freer (2007) advocates that separating adolescent boys and girls into single sex choirs also can help teachers facilitate specific teaching strategies to address each sex's unique needs. Adolescents also may find a

higher comfort level in the single sex choral setting which can be less intimidating and void of the posturing, flirting, and attention seeking that can occur in mixed chorus settings at this age (Jorgensen & Pfeiler, 2008). Additional research claims that male choruses may provide a sense of security or sanctuary for young male singers, and suggest that it may be easier for teachers to nurture male singing in a single sex setting rather than in a coeducational environment (Kennedy, 2004; Young, 2012).

For high school singers or community chorus members, there are other practical reasons for the existence of single sex ensembles. Combining all male or all female voices in song can create unique and distinct sonorities. Single sex choirs also can afford singers the opportunity to explore a variety of repertoire available for male and female voices—from works within the choral canon to contemporary repertoire. As this study is concerned with the lived experiences of students within a male chorus, I will now explore literature related to the experiences of adult and adolescent males who participate in choral singing.

### **Male Chorus Experiences**

The available literature related to male choral experiences tends to focus upon three areas: (a) the problem of “missing males” in choral music education, (b) adolescent male perceptions of singing—particularly with how singing relates to masculinity, gender roles, personal identity, and peer acceptance, and (c) the vocal and developmental challenges of working with the adolescent male singer.

Freer (2007) has extensively addressed concerns with “missing males” in choral programs, voicing particular concern over how many young men are “lost” from choral singing during adolescence. He writes that teachers have failed in many cases to be attentive to meeting the needs of male singers during the critical years of middle or junior high school. According to

Freer, adolescent boys enjoy variety in instruction, like to move and interact with one another, and appreciate frequent changes in activities (2012).

Freer also suggests that teachers should program choral repertoire that provides singers with opportunities to succeed and to be musical. Abrahams (2012) adds that teachers should select music that aligns with students' interests and is appropriate for their vocal range. While appropriate voice ranges are certainly desirable, this does not mean that repertoire must be dull or overly simplified. Freer writes that choral conductors sometimes assume because a boy's voice may be limited vocally during adolescence, that his musicianship is similarly limited. As a result, some teachers may select repertoire with static rhythmic figures, unappealing melodies, or otherwise disinteresting material with the belief that they are helping their students. However, when teachers program such works, they may actually increase frustration for the adolescent male singer. Young men are capable of great musicality. Research shows that young males want to be challenged to improve their skills by singing repertoire that is difficult, yet attainable (Stamer, 2009). Boys desire skill and competence, but also seek out experiences that will allow them to succeed (Freer, 2010). According to Freer, if a boy can use his developing body to be successful in athletics, while simultaneously experiencing failure in choral music, he is more likely to continue with sports than chorus. Providing opportunities for males to succeed in choral singing is paramount for retaining male singers. The relationships teachers establish with their male singers are also important. According to Freer (2009) adolescent male choral singers most enjoy a teacher who is interested in their individual musical needs and provides helpful feedback.

In an ethnographic study designed to describe and interpret a particular culture of boys with changing voices at the American Boychoir School, Kennedy (2004) found that young men benefited from frequent monitoring of their individual voice and small-group vocal sessions.



Kennedy wrote that it was critical to provide singers with knowledge of good vocal technique and an understanding of their personal vocal capabilities to prevent singers from doing vocal harm. In addition to tending to students' vocal needs, Kennedy found that "helping a young man navigate through the frustration that can occur when the voice is in the throes of change appears critical to his emergence out the other side" (p. 277). Kennedy's analysis of data also suggested that a single sex environment might be beneficial for boys during the time of their voice change.

While boys may withdraw from chorus due to frustration with their voice change, lack of support from their teacher, or a lack of peers who participate in the chorus, research shows that some may be dismissive of choral singing because they perceive choral music as a predominantly feminine activity (Freer, 2009a; Harrison, 2008). Harrison (2003) found that "almost all the existing literature . . . indicated that a gender stereotypical bias exists in music." According to Harrison, "participation in activities that are soft, gentle, small, and high-pitched is not considered the domain of males" (p. 224). Unfortunately, adolescent males' perceptions of singing as a feminine or effeminate activity are well established. Green (1997) found that boys who participated in music were often called "sissies" by their peers, and suggested that boys who joined choir took a risk with their symbolic masculinity. Hanley (1998) wrote, "boys don't sing because they are hung up on the image that . . . those who do are gay or sissies or weak . . ." (p. 51). Abrahams (2012) contends that young men in middle school are fearful that if their peers pronounce them "gay," they will indeed be gay, citing homophobic harassment as one of the leading reasons young men choose not to sing in choir. Abrahams stresses the teacher's role in being attentive to such concerns, writing:

Those teachers who ignore the inner struggles of young men in middle school to develop their self-identity and dismiss how those struggles impact decisions students make

regarding their participation in choir give legitimacy to the peer pressures outside choir that influence young men in negative ways. (p.82)

Harrison (2008) noted that verbal bullying in the form of homophobic name-calling when paired with complacency on the part of a music teacher is not only damaging to homosexual and heterosexual students but can also reinforce fears young men may have about singing in choirs. Gender is a complex combination of separate but interconnected issues, according to Harrison (2007). As gender is a fluid entity defined by situation, culture, and environment, Harrison believes the male chorus can be an opportune place for young men to gain a broader understanding of themselves in the face of societal stereotypes.

In 2007, Harrison conducted a mixed methods study, which determined that masculine-feminine perceptions of musical participation continue to exist in the minds of musicians and the larger population. He interviewed adult males about their musical experiences as students and found that many recalled vivid memories of school-age musicians being hassled, mocked, ridiculed, or bullied for choosing to sing or play instruments. Harrison suggests that music educators should be vigilant in addressing this problem.

Furthermore, Harrison offers several research-based strategies for the purpose of engaging more males in choral singing: (a) an increase in teacher, community, industry, and student role models; (b) the engagement and training of suitable teaching personnel; (c) teachers and choruses that produce music of a high standard commanding respect from the community; (d) teachers using sport analogies cautiously; (e) teachers' careful selection of repertoire; (f) teachers being sensitive and attentive to uniform design; (g) the achievement of a critical mass—involving so many boys in chorus that the notion of minority is negated; (h) attention to flexible

scheduling, particularly in relation to conflicts with sports and work; and (j) a zero-tolerance approach to bullying (Harrison, 2004, 2007). Harrison further exhorts,

Too few students are able to realise their potential as a result of stereotyping and other gender-related societal forces. . . . Research and practice must interact to resolve these issues for the sake of boys and girls involved (or, more importantly, not involved) in fully experiencing music. (pp. 278–279)

Freer noted that adolescent males desire autonomy, activity-based learning, and ownership (2009b). Abrahams (2012) also champions opportunities for young men to own their musicianship. He writes, “Once singers take ownership of the music, they are empowered” (p. 27).

Young (2012) offers that rehearsal rooms should be active and that musical games and activities should be incorporated throughout an adolescent male’s education. Games and play have a place in the choral classroom, and Ashley (2009) even referred to singing as “social play” (p.146). The great educational philosopher, John Dewey, even advocated for the value of play as part of education—suggesting that work *and* play were both important, as they engage the student in learning and reduce the artificial gap between life in school and life out of school. According to Dewey, work that is permeated with the “play attitude” is “art” (1944). Play manifested itself as “silliness” in a qualitative exploration of male middle school choral students (Sweet, 2010). Students in Sweet’s interview engaged in silliness for (a) entertainment purposes, (b) as a bonding experience, and (c) as a defense or coping mechanism to deal with how some peers treated them negatively for singing.

The literature regarding male singers as adults is comparatively sparse when compared to the wealth of literature addressing the adolescent male. Faulkner (2003) explored the role

singing played in the construction and performance of men's gender identity in a qualitative study that engaged male singers in rural male choruses of Iceland. He inquired of the men about their singing experiences within and without the chorus. Men indicated that they often enjoyed singing while alone, and described the joy of singing while working in the barn or outdoors. As one participant shared: "It's pretty good to sing there with the rocks, and the mountains to throw the sound in between." Another singer shared that he sang loudly when he was alone, maybe to "test himself," while another singer shared about how he thought he sounded pretty good when he sang in the empty milk tanks or silos on the farm. Faulkner wrote that these vocal gestures were statements about the men's personal identities, however private and fleeting. "Like the inability to pass a mirror without looking at one's self," he said, "the men vocally and aurally check themselves out—a reflective, 'Who do I *hear* I am?'" (p. 70).

The Icelandic men in Faulkner's study also described singing as a therapeutic means of self-regulating mood and emotion in their daily existence. They shared that it helped them to unwind, forget about problems, or to express their feelings in a creative manner. As the men described singing in four-part harmony, they did so in "embodied" and almost sensual terms. The men spoke of being in close physical proximity with one another, or with arms around each other as they huddled together. One man wrote, "The harmony—landing inside of it—I fell for it straight away. Completely absorbed by it" (p. 71).

When discussing memorable repertoire with the men, Faulkner found that none of the men mentioned repertoire associated with hegemonic masculinity, but contrastingly most peak music-making experiences for the men were during the singing of unaccompanied, four-part, sustained songs at slow tempi with more contemplative themes. The men valued exploring

sensitivity, and one participant wrote, “. . . singing gentle, beautiful, clean, and pure. You’re not less of a man for that, you’re more” (p. 72).

As seen in this chapter section, the current literature pertaining to the male chorus experience is often focused on the experience of adolescent males who are navigating vast physiological, emotional, and developmental changes. Other studies explore the male chorus phenomenon in community settings with adult males. There is a gap in the existing literature with regard to men who participate in high school men’s choruses. Previous studies may have examined male high school students’ reasons for participating (or not participating) in choral music, but studies have not fully addressed the lived experiences of high school male chorus participants. The present study seeks to address this gap in the literature by exploring: (a) the lived experiences of participants within a high school male chorus, (b) how they define the experience and how the experience impacts their identity, and (c) how these experiences compare to mixed choral experiences and all-male, nonmusical experiences such as sports. The methodology of this study will be discussed thoroughly in Chapter 3.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Methodology**

#### **Design**

This study is a phenomenological instrumental case study of a high school men's chorus using ethnographic techniques. Phenomenology focuses on questions of meaning, seeking to describe the phenomenon being studied with as much richness of detail as is possible. Also a mode of philosophical inquiry, phenomenology illuminates the richness of lived experience—not through matters of general fact, but rather through “essence” (Faulkner, 2003). In a phenomenological study, the focus is on the “essence” or structure of an experience or phenomenon (Merriam, 1997). The researcher concerns him or herself with investigating the core meanings that mutually are understood within a commonly experienced phenomenon (Patton, 1990). As the researcher becomes increasingly close to the phenomenon being studied, the findings and implications of the study often bear more of the researcher's fingerprint than in quantitative studies where the researcher is separated from the research. Unlike in quantitative methodologies, the connection between the researcher and the research is embraced in qualitative research—perceived as a potential strength, influencing the meaning of the findings and their application (Randles, 2012).

In an instrumental case study, the case facilitates our learning of something beyond itself—playing a “supporting role” to provide insight into something greater. In this case, the study of singers in the Cedar High School Men's Choir is instrumental in that it provides a better understanding of how high school students define their men's chorus experiences. Data were collected using ethnographic techniques such as observations, field notes, reflective journaling, recordings of semistructured interviews, program artifacts such as choir rules and concert

programs, and written responses from student participants. All ethnographic data were analyzed and coded for emergent themes.

### **Researcher's Lens**

My interest in this topic of study was cultivated over the past twelve years. In the eight years I served as a public school choral teacher, I observed distinct dynamics among the single sex and mixed choruses I taught at the middle school level. The male chorus rehearsal environment was markedly different from the female chorus, and there was a qualitatively unique rehearsal culture in the gendered choirs unlike the mixed chorus environment. The male choruses I taught seemed to display exuberance and playful freedom. When these young men focused the intensity of their natural energy on making music, the results were heartfelt and earnest. Young men in the single sex setting appeared more willing to sing out fully and take risks in rehearsal. Young women in single sex choral settings seemed to assume leadership roles more readily than in mixed-gender settings and demonstrated greater freedom in sharing their thoughts and ideas. The absences of males in the women's rehearsal environment seemed to foster an element of security that encouraged openness and vulnerability. I was (and still am) fascinated by these differences.

As mentioned in the teaching reflections in chapter one, I also observed a special dynamic among the men of the university men's glee club I was assigned to conduct as a masters student in choral conducting. While conducting that ensemble for three semesters, I often pondered the convivial quality of the rehearsal environment. The men valued the social relationships and traditions of the ensemble almost as much as the music making.

In my time as a doctoral student, I have enjoyed the privilege of singing for three years with the Michigan State University Women's Chamber Ensemble. Singing in community with

these women, I have experienced firsthand the unique dynamic of participating in a single sex ensemble. While I certainly enjoy singing in mixed gender choral ensembles as well, I have found that I am more willing to be myself, more likely to take risks, and more open to share my thoughts in the single sex choral setting.

In a previous qualitative study with a high school women's chorus (Ramsey, 2011), I attempted to learn more about this unique dynamic. How did women define their experiences in women's choruses, and what bearing (if any) did these experiences have on their identities? The interesting themes that emerged from the 2011 study led me to wonder what I might find if I pursued a similar investigation with a high school male chorus. This curiosity was the impetus for this study. It is my hope that the findings from this study will provide conductors, teachers and scholars with greater detail and understanding of the male chorus phenomenon as experienced and lived by the participants of this men's choir.

### **Case and Participant Selection**

Once the topic of this study was decided upon, my next thought was that Mr. Dover and the students of the Cedar High School Men's Choir would be an excellent case for the study.<sup>1</sup> Cedar High School was desirable as a case for many reasons: (a) the established quality of the men's choir program, (b) Mr. Dover's reputation as an excellent and invested music educator, and (c) geographical proximity and ease of access for the researcher.

I first contacted Mr. Dover by phone late in July of 2012 with high hopes he might be willing to participate. After sharing with him the nature and purpose of the study, he responded with excitement saying, "We're in, and we're in 100%. Whatever you need." Thrilled with his

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<sup>1</sup> The names of all participants and the school district have been changed to ensure anonymity.

Some participants selected their own pseudonyms.



enthusiasm and eagerness to be involved, I invited Mr. Dover to lunch a few weeks later to discuss more details. In the weeks following this lunch meeting, I underwent a voluntary background check as required by the administration of the Cedar Public School District and obtained written permission from the building principal (see Appendix D) to conduct the study at Cedar High School. I also initiated the human subjects approval process through the Michigan State University Institutional Review Board.

Cedar High School is a mid-size high school in the Midwestern United States with a student population of approximately 890. The high school is situated in the small town of Cedar, with a population of approximately 11,000 people—yet it is part of a greater population area surrounding a large Midwestern university. Cedar was featured in *Forbes* magazine in 2011 as a “top education town.” The Cedar Public School District has one high school, one middle school, two elementary schools, and one early childhood center. Serving 2,700 students district-wide, Cedar Public School students come from all backgrounds but are predominately Caucasian. The community of Cedar is largely suburban and middle class. It is a community actively supportive of education, having approved three bond issues since 1990 totaling more than \$61 million dollars to expand and improve school facilities.

The music department in the Cedar Public School District is fairly small in size. It consists of two full-time elementary music teachers and two full-time secondary band instructors (one who teaches middle school and high school band, and one who splits time between teaching middle school band and kindergarten music classes.) There are also two full-time choral music teachers. One choral music teacher works primarily at the middle school (four hours at the middle school, one hour at the high school) while the other teacher, Mr. Dover, works primarily at the high school (three hours at the high school and two hours at the middle school). In

addition to these, one additional music teacher with middle school and high school band and teaches additional elementary music classes.

Three levels of curricular choir are offered at Cedar High School. The beginning choirs are separated by gender. Beginning Men's Choir consists of 35–40 male singers and is approximately 95% freshmen. Beginning Women's Choir consists of 75–90 female singers and is approximately 70% freshmen. Concert Singers is the intermediate choir at Cedar High School, and it is comprised of 60–65 male and female voices of which approximately 80% are sophomores and juniors. The advanced chorus at Cedar High School is Camerata, which is smaller in size with just 30–35 male and female singers of whom approximately 95% are seniors and juniors. Two extracurricular choirs are open to singers in grades 9–12 by audition at Cedar High School: Advanced Women's Ensemble and Men's Choir. Any singer who participates in extracurricular choirs must also be a member of a curricular choir at Cedar High School.

In addition to the choruses offered at Cedar High School, students also may participate in band, which is offered as a combined marching band for the fall semester and split into two concert bands (intermediate and advanced) for the spring semester. There are no additional musical offerings at Cedar High School beyond instrumental and choral ensembles. Previously, a music theory course had been offered every two years when the student numbers supported it. The band teacher previously taught the course "*gratis*," but as administrative support for the course faded, it was no longer offered.

The Cedar High School Men's Choir is an extracurricular, all-male choral ensemble that performs three- and four-part choral music. The current ensemble is comprised of 41 singers, grades 9–12. The choir rehearses twice weekly for approximately one hour per rehearsal. Rehearsals take place in the chorus room at Cedar High School. The rehearsal space is

pleasantly functional in acoustic and design, with high ceilings and tiled flooring. The concrete walls are painted white and the room has dark blue accents—a nod to the school colors. Five small windows rest within the back wall of the room. These windows line the highest part of the wall, likely functioning as skylights in the daytime. However, when the men’s choir rehearses, it is evening and these windows are always pitch black.

The walls of the Cedar choir room are sparsely decorated, marked only with a half-dozen handmade posters designed by students bearing student-created slogans for each voice part, photos from choir council retreats, or mementos from past musical productions. The back wall of the room bears a large staff crafted from five lines of black electrical tape running the span of the wall. The room is also equipped for technology with a digital projector suspended from the ceiling, a large pull-down screen for projection, a wide-screen television, and a DVD player.

Singers stand or sit on a platform of three-row seated risers with a guardrail on the back row. The students’ black chairs are sturdy—designed to support healthy singing posture. A grand piano rests between the front of the room and the risers, along with a music stand and a stool for Mr. Dover (though he rarely made use of it in my observations). A large white wipe board and several bulletin boards deck the front classroom wall. These boards contain announcements of upcoming events, due dates, activities, performances, and calendars. Above the large wipe board is a row of approximately ten photos, unframed and printed on standard letter-sized paper from a basic color printer. Each photo displays a picture of a male high school choir student posing dramatically with the words “AWE Man of the Week” typed above their photo. The photos are the resulting work of the Advanced Women’s Ensemble at Cedar High School, which identifies one male singer per week who has demonstrated exceptional character or helpfulness and recognizes the student by immortalizing him photographically on the choir

room wall—at least for the course of the semester. These men are inducted into a sort of “wall of fame” and it is evident by the gregarious poses and proud facial expressions of the young men who have received this honor that “AWE Man of the Week” is a coveted title.

Over the course of my twelve weeks at Cedar High School, the Cedar Men’s Choir participated in three concert performances, performing one selection on the Cedar Middle School Fall Concert in October, three selections on the Cedar High School Fall Concert (also in October) and three different selections on the Cedar High School Holiday Concert in December. During these three months, the Men’s Choir also participated in one statewide male chorus festival sponsored by a university, and performed as a demonstration choir for a well-known conductor’s presentation at a state music conference. In addition to formal concert performances, the men sang the National Anthem for school assemblies and special sporting events. Repertoire that was rehearsed during the twelve weeks of this study included: “Pirate Song” by Tim Y. Jones, “Jonah” by Rollo Dilworth, “And Draw Her Home With Music” by Nancy Hill Cobb, “Let the Bullgine Run” arranged by Alice Parker, a traditional setting of the Star Spangled Banner for sporting events, “Loveliest of Trees” and “When I Was One and Twenty” from *Songs of a Young Man* by Richard Nance, and “Noel” by Stephen Sametz.

Before attending my first Cedar Men’s Choir rehearsal on October 1, 2012, Mr. Dover and I spoke by phone to discuss how we would introduce the study. I was initially concerned the men might be hesitant to participate in the study given I was both a stranger and a female. Mr. Dover and I agreed that it was important for him to transfer his trust to me in my first interaction with the men’s choir. He introduced me to the choir in a manner that conveyed his confidence in my background as a conductor and a composer and his trust in my current role as a researcher.

Mr. Dover expressed his belief to the students that it was an honor for their choir to be selected for the study and his hope that all the students would choose to participate if they were able.

After this introduction, I spoke briefly to the choir to explain the nature and purpose of the study and to reiterate Mr. Dover's invitation to participate. I distributed parent consent and student assent forms (see Appendices A and B) to all students and encouraged each of them to discuss the study with their parents and make an informed decision about what was right for them. Mr. Dover was also provided with a consent form as the teacher, which he signed and returned (see Appendix C).

Mr. Dover and I both hoped the men would come to view me as trustworthy and approachable. In brainstorming ways to facilitate this, I suggested to Mr. Dover the idea of a game whereby the members of men's choir were allowed to choose Mr. Dover's pseudonym for the study. Mr. Dover agreed, and we both thought it would be a fun way for me to interact and build rapport with the men. When I shared the idea with the men, they responded enthusiastically, and in the second week, I brought index cards to rehearsal. Each student was allowed to write one pseudonym suggestion for Mr. Dover on his card and turn it in at the end of rehearsal. Suggestions could be anything so long as they were appropriate.

I gathered the completed cards and sorted through the suggestions. Any suggested pseudonyms that were offensive or female in gender were discarded. A few suggestions toed the line of what was appropriate (Ben Dover, I.P. Freely), but they were humorous and not offensive, so I left them in the mix. With the men's suggestions, I then created a "March Madness" style tournament bracket with each of the suggested pseudonyms listed as a "team" (see Appendix J). A printed copy of the bracket was given to each member of the men's chorus to keep in his music folder for the duration of my twelve weeks at Cedar High School. Whenever Mr. Dover

sensed the men needed a break from rehearsal or a lighter moment, he would call on me to “do brackets.” For each of these sessions (depending upon the length of break desired) I would lead the men to vote on one or more of the tournament match-ups, choosing by count of hands which pseudonyms advanced to the next round of the tournament.

In the final weeks of the semester, we reached our pseudonym “Final Four” of Ben Dover, I. P. Freely, Mr. Clean and Marty McFly. The men were increasingly boisterous, and it was soon apparent that “Ben Dover” was an overwhelming favorite. They cheered as they voted “Ben Dover” into the finals, while Mr. Dover reacted in protest to the increasing likelihood of his fate. He joked with the men, calling them out for their decision, “You guys suck!” The men laughed, and responded by gleefully voting “Ben Dover” through to victory the following week.

From the 32 willing participants in the Cedar High School Men’s Choir, I set out to choose a purposive sample of ten students for this qualitative study. In purposive sampling, the researcher selects participants strategically to inform a richer understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study (Creswell, 2007). In choosing this study’s sample, I looked for students who possessed the following criteria: (a) excellent verbal communication skills, (b) engagement in rehearsals and contribution to the ensemble, (c) attentiveness and reflectiveness, (d) willingness to share thoughts and opinions, and (e) Mr. Dover’s recommendation.

In my first three weeks of observation, I paid attention to students’ interactions, attendance, personalities, and attentiveness. I made notes of possible participants in my journal and spoke with Mr. Dover intermittently to inquire of his thoughts. At the end of the third week, each student who had indicated a willingness to participate in the study (and had returned parent consent and student assent forms) was given an initial written prompt to take home and complete

(see Appendix E). This prompt was designed to gain insight into the student's activities, interests, personalities, and thoughts on the men's choir experience. Their responses also gave me a glimpse into how effectively the students could translate their experiences into writing.

Thirty-two students completed and returned the responses. After reading the responses, I looked for students who were able to express their thoughts richly and who had diverse backgrounds and interests. I also considered each student's involvement in the rehearsals I had observed as well as my previous conversations with Mr. Dover. In doing this, I was able to narrow the pool from 32 to 20 possible participants.

Mr. Dover and I met before rehearsal in the fourth week to discuss each of these 20 possible participants individually. Working together, we narrowed the list to 10 students and arranged for these 10 students to stay after rehearsal for a meeting to see if they would participate in the project. Upon inviting them to participate in the study, all ten seemed enthusiastic about being selected. I collected their email addresses during this meeting and explained I would be sending them one question per week either through email or through an online forum. I also explained that some of them might be asked to participate in focus group or individual interviews. All students indicated they understood their current and potential involvement in the study and maintained their willingness to participate.

## **Procedures**

In order to engage all ten participants in written responses, I requested their email addresses. These email addresses were used solely as a means of communication with participants regarding topics for written reflection, scheduling of interviews (if applicable), and Edmodo notices. Edmodo is a free web-based platform that uses the power of social media to provide teachers and students a secure place to collaborate, share content, and engage in

discussion. For this study, all ten participants were emailed a code that allowed them to access our online community in Edmodo. No one other than the participants and myself were able to view comments shared in our Edmodo forum.

These ten participants shared their thoughts via emailed responses and our public Edmodo forum (see Appendix F). From our ten participants, Mr. Dover and I selected five students to participate in a focus group interview. From these five participants, two students were also selected to participate in individual interviews as a follow-up to our focus group interview.

As part of this study, I interviewed Mr. Dover on three separate occasions: one interview early in the study, one interview midway through the study, and one interview at the conclusion of the study. In the course of these interviews, much was shared pertaining to the history and legacy of the Cedar High School Men's Choir. These were ideas that were also discussed in the student interviews. For these reasons, I decided it might be beneficial to understand the perspective of students who had at one time been in the Cedar High School Men's Choir, but had since been graduated. Based on the recommendation of my dissertation chair and area choral colleagues, I contacted three different alumni of the Cedar High School Men's Choir who were studying and/or teaching in the area that they felt might be informative. Scheduling proved to be challenging for one of the potential interviewees, so I opted to interview only the remaining two alumni of the Cedar High School Men's Choir. Both of these former members were contacted by email and each agreed to be interviewed for the study. This kind of in-course adjustment to the design of a study is anticipated in qualitative methodologies which are emergent, flexible, and responsive to the changing conditions of the study in progress (Merriam, 2009).



## **Data Collection**

Data collection occurred in the span of three months from October to December of 2012, including two school visits per week for each of the twelve weeks. Multiple forms of data were collected to provide richness of perspective and to allow for triangulation of data—one possible means of increasing the study's trustworthiness (Creswell, 2007). Forms of data that were collected include: rehearsal observations, field notes, video and audio recordings, written responses, interviews, emailed responses to questions, and electronic posts in our Edmodo forum.

**Field notes, reflective journal, and video recording.** For the three months of data collection during this study, I took both descriptive and reflective notes. In writing field notes from rehearsal observations, I paid attention to how Mr. Dover interacted with his students, how the students interacted with one another, and how the students and Mr. Dover interacted with the music. I wrote thick descriptions of the rehearsal setting as well as the participants and made notes of interesting statements, activity, and interactions. Purely descriptive in nature, the field notes documented the happenings and settings of the observations.

In addition to the field notes, I maintained a separate reflective journal. Within this reflective journal, I made note of any personal questions, impressions, musings, or suspicions. According to Janesick (2004), journaling is an appropriate data source, as it provides the researcher's perspective on the research and also highlights the role of the researcher as a research instrument. This type of reflective journal also allows researchers to keep their interpretive thoughts separate from the analysis of the data.

On two occasions, I was unable to attend rehearsals due to preexisting commitments. In these instances, I left my Flip Ultra HD video camera with Mr. Dover, who delegated a student

helper to set it up and record both rehearsals. At a later date, I viewed the footage of the rehearsals, taking field notes and writing in my reflective journal. In both cases, the video camera was positioned within the rehearsal space to ensure that the identities of nonparticipant singers were protected.

**Interviews.** Based on students' written responses and with the help of Mr. Dover, I selected five students from the initial ten participants to take part in a semistructured focus group interview. Mr. Dover and I met with these students after rehearsal during the week prior to Thanksgiving break. In this meeting we coordinated schedules and agreed on November 26, 2012 as a workable date for the focus group interview. Mr. Dover generously agreed to allow the participants to miss the last half of rehearsal, and the participants also agreed to stay beyond the end of rehearsal until the interview was finished. In the week prior to the focus group interview, I emailed all five participants a list of possible interview questions (see Appendix G) to help them feel more prepared and at ease about what we would be discussing.

On the evening of November 26, 2012, the participants and I met in an auxiliary classroom where Mr. Dover and I had set up one large round table, six chairs, my materials and my recording devices. Relying on twelve years of teaching experience, I was hopeful I could establish an environment conducive to open dialogue. To help in this effort, I baked an apple pie for the participants, believing it would make them feel welcome and settle any nervousness they might have been feeling about the interview.

As the men entered the room, I invited them to have a seat around the table. They were visibly enthusiastic about the apple pie, and I asked them if it would be acceptable to begin the interview and take a break for pie after a few questions. They agreed. I thanked them for their willingness to participate in the interview, and before starting, I requested that they self-select a

pseudonym for themselves. After some discussion, much laughter, and a bit more discussion, the pseudonyms were chosen. Three of the participants opted for typical male names: Eli, Levi, and Steve. However, two of the participants selected names usually assigned to females: Alice and Janice. The humor of their pseudonym choices manifested in conversation during the focus group interview, for which reason I am acknowledging their original pseudonym selections here. However for the clarity of this study as a focus on singers in a male chorus, these participants' pseudonyms have been abbreviated from Alice and Janice to the male analogs of those names, Al and Jan, for the remainder of this document.

The interview lasted approximately 90 minutes and I was impressed with how eagerly and honestly the men shared with me. Midway through the interview, as promised, we took a break for apple pie. I left the recorder on during this time. Once most of the pie had been consumed, we resumed with the interview.

In my time with the focus group, I perceived two students as slightly more adept in sharing detail and feelings about their men's chorus experiences. These students, Al and Levi, identified themselves as "informants" through their detailed and articulate sharing. The term "informant" has its origins in anthropological research, used to describe those interviewees who richly inform the culture (Seidman, 2006). Because of their helpful input in the focus group interview, I asked both Levi and Al to participate in individual interviews during the tenth week of the study. They agreed and individual interviews were conducted.

I interviewed Al on December 10, 2012. Two days later on December 12, 2012, I interviewed Levi. In both instances, the individual interviews were held in the same auxiliary room as the focus group interview. However, I did not bake pies for the individual interviews, as rapport had already been established. I did still provide interview questions to Al and Levi in

advance of the interview to assist their thought processes and to ease their nerves. For these individual interviews, Mr. Dover continued his generosity with rehearsal time. Both Al and Levi were allowed to miss the last quarter of rehearsal, and both agreed to stay beyond the end of rehearsal until the interview was finished. Al's interview lasted approximately 30 minutes, while Levi's interview was slightly longer—lasting almost 45 minutes.

The three interviews I conducted with Mr. Dover took place on October 3, 2012, November 2, 2012, and December 20, 2012. Each interview was conducted in Mr. Dover's office during his lunch hour. Each interview was between 30 and 45 minutes in duration. Mr. Dover was provided the interview protocol in advance of the interviews (see Appendix G).

Two alumni participants also were interviewed for this study. I interviewed Max on November 27, 2012. We met at the student union on the campus of a large Midwestern university. After purchasing coffee for the both of us, I found a cozy table and chairs away from any distracting noise where I could conduct the interview. The interview with Max lasted approximately 40 minutes. Several weeks following my interview with Max, I interviewed Dan, the second of the alumni participants. I treated Dan to lunch at a local Mexican restaurant and the interview took place alongside our meal, resulting in a longer interview time of approximately 70 minutes. Both Dan and Max were provided with the interview protocol in advance of our interviews (see Appendix G).

All interviews were audio-recorded using the iRecorder-Pro software application on my iPad. I also used a secondary recorder for back up. Each interview was transcribed within 48 hours of occurrence. All individual and focus group interviews were semistructured and the interview protocols may be found in Appendix G. Interviewing with semistructured protocol ensured participants had a list of interview questions in advance, but also allowed for researcher

freedom to deviate from questions if desired, to clarify responses as needed, or to ask follow-up questions of the participants.

**Written responses, emailed responses, and online forum posts.** Written responses were collected from ten student participants through private email responses and a public online community established through the educational web-based platform, Edmodo. In an email communication sent to participants on November 6, 2012 (see Appendix F), I explained the nature and purpose of our email and Edmodo communications and provided an access code so participants could join our Edmodo community and respond to the first question posted there.

Through the online community, participants were able to share and read each other's responses, which allowed for researcher follow-up questions, and interaction of participants. Participants were asked to respond to three questions on Edmodo posted on November 6, 2012, November 25, 2012, and December 11, 2012. In addition to responding to these posts, all participants also were encouraged to share via Edmodo at any time they desired, even without my prompting. I hoped the study participants might utilize our Edmodo forum as an additional means of discourse, but found that the participants generally did not choose to share via Edmodo unless prompted by my posts or follow-up questions.

Participants also were asked to respond to three separate questions via private email sent on November 14, 2012, December 5, 2012, and December 17, 2012. In these instances, the participants' responses remained private; only the researcher was able to read their responses. The use of two different methods of written data collection (individual email and shared online community) was intentional. Providing a private option (email) for participants to respond to questions of greater sensitivity was included in the study to help participants feel more comfortable in answering honestly. In cooperative contrast, a group forum (Edmodo) was

maintained with the hope of facilitating synergy among participants in discussions of topics that required less personal vulnerability. Presenting both of these response options honored the findings of previous studies that boys may have both a public and private persona (Bradford & Noble, 2000). Appendix F includes the questions asked of participants through email and via the online community established in Edmodo.

**Additional artifacts and informal communication.** On occasion, points of interest would arise during informal conversations with Mr. Dover or student participants. These items of interest from informal conversations were documented in either my field notes or my reflective journal and counted among other data. In addition to information from informal conversations, artifacts such as concert programs, choir rules, choir schedules, written communications from Mr. Dover to the choir, and informal email correspondences between the researcher and participants/Mr. Dover also were considered data for this study.

## **Data Analysis**

The data in this study were analyzed using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This method of data analysis involves comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences and is widely used in many kinds of qualitative studies (Merriam, 2009). All data were coded. For the first cycle of data coding, I used “descriptive coding” and summarized the basic topic for each passage of qualitative data. This method is appropriate for all qualitative studies and helps the researcher to develop a basic vocabulary of data to form “bread and butter” categories for further analysis (Saldaña, 2009). In the second cycle of coding, I employed “pattern coding.” Pattern coding is often used after an initial first round of coding to help pull a great deal of material into a more meaningful unit of analysis. Pattern coding can be especially helpful in examining social networks, patterns of

human relationships, and the development of major themes (Saldaña, 2009). Miles and Huberman (1994) describe pattern coding as a way of grouping summaries into a smaller number of sets, themes or constructs. Using these two cycles, early descriptive codes were grouped into pattern codes, and ultimately themes.

As this study is phenomenological in nature, two phenomenology-specific analysis techniques were also employed: *epoche* and imaginative variation. In *epoche*, the researcher attempts to remove or at least become aware of his or her prejudices, viewpoints, or assumptions regarding the phenomenon being studied (Merriam, 1997). Having previously conducted a similar study with a high school women's chorus, I employed *epoche* by setting aside those themes I had found in the women's chorus study and attempting to view this study's data through fresh eyes. Furthermore, I outlined my own personal prejudices and assumptions as a former teacher of both middle school and collegiate men's choruses and tried to set those aside as well.

The second analysis technique specific to phenomenological studies employed in this study was "imaginative variation." In imaginative variation, the researcher makes it his or her goal to see the phenomenon of the study from multiple angles and perspectives. In varying the frames of reference and choosing to approach the phenomenon from divergent perspectives, the researcher aims to arrive at a structural description of the experience by understanding the underlying factors that are responsible for what is being experienced (Moustakas, 1994). I employed imaginative variation as I analyzed interview transcriptions from student, teacher, and alumni participants. Each person interviewed in the study, whether student, alumnus, or teacher, had specific experiences and opinions dependent upon his perspective, and I sought to honor his unique vantage point.

## **Trustworthiness**

Yin (2010) describes “transparency” as important for building trustworthiness and credibility in a qualitative study. In an effort to ensure transparency, I have documented all procedures and worked to ensure that the evidence to support my findings was clear and could withstand academic scrutiny. To ensure the accuracy of interview transcriptions, I employed member checks with all student, alumni and teacher participants. All participants were provided written copies of each interview transcript and asked to read and edit their responses as needed to make sure their voice was accurately represented in the study.

To help establish the credibility of emergent themes, data in this study were also triangulated. According to Merriam (2009), triangulation using multiple sources of data involves comparing and crosschecking data that are collected through observations, interviews, and other sources. As I conducted the study, I looked for themes and relationships across the breadth of the data (field notes, written responses, interview transcriptions, email responses, and Edmodo posts), ensuring that themes emerged in more than one data source. To facilitate even greater trustworthiness, two additional experienced researchers examined my data findings to confirm or disagree with my decisions regarding emergent themes. Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to the role of the peer reviewer as “devil’s advocate”—one who asks hard questions and keeps the researcher honest. The peer review process enacted for this study strengthened and improved the ultimate findings by confirming or refining my initial findings.

Through the course of this study I took the following measures recommended by Creswell (2007) to help validate my findings: (a) prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field, (b) data triangulation, (c) peer review to provide an external check of the



research process, (d) member checks to preserve the views of the participants, (e) rich, thick descriptions to enable readers to make decisions regarding transferability to their situations, and (f) clarifying researcher bias from the outset of the study. In the remainder of this chapter, I will discuss the limitations of the study and share my biases as a researcher.

## **Limitations**

As with all qualitative research, the results of this study will be specific to this particular setting and should not be generalized to other settings. However, the results may be helpful for teachers who wish to better understand male choruses. The findings may provide insight that is beneficial to music educators, and some information may be transferable or inform teachers as they make decisions in their own rehearsals (Creswell, 2007).

As a previous teacher of male choruses, I bring to this study my unique perspective. As the researcher, I served as a participant observer with this men's chorus—part of the environment for the three months of data collection. The teacher of this male chorus (Mr. Dover) and I had a preexisting positive and professional relationship. I was thoroughly welcomed into the rehearsal environment. Though I primarily remained a quiet observer, there were a handful of instances where I interacted directly with the chorus. On these occasions, my interaction with the young men was relegated to either: (a) affirming Mr. Dover's teaching, (b) being asked to provide insight on what I heard or felt could improve the sound of the men's choir, or (c) interacting with the members of the chorus as we selected Mr. Dover's pseudonym for the study through our tournament bracket. Though it was my goal to remain unbiased as a researcher, I acknowledge the possibility that my past experiences as a teacher of men's choruses, my professional relationship with the teacher, and my participant-observer involvement with the men's chorus may have influenced my interpretation of the data.

In a study previous to this one (Ramsey, 2011), I explored the meanings of the female chorus experience by spending time with a high school women's chorus. In the course of this study, I did my best to set aside the themes found in the women's chorus study and to examine the male chorus data separately; however, it is possible that some cross-pollination may have occurred. While this study was examined separately from the women's chorus study and every attempt was made to remain unbiased, it is possible that my advance knowledge of the themes found in women's chorus settings may have influenced my examination of male chorus data and impacted my findings in this study.

Another possible limitation in this study is my gender. As a female researcher, it is possible that the males in this study may have felt inhibited to share candidly with me about their experiences. The men appeared to be authentic with me in their interviews and written responses, but it is possible that they were not as truthful and forthcoming with me about their experiences as they might have been when sharing with a male researcher about this topic.

The final limitation of the study was the duration. I observed rehearsals and collected data from the Cedar High School Men's Choir over a period of three months, due in part to the school's schedule and in part due to the time constraints for the study. While three months is substantive, it proved to be a limited window from which to view this men's chorus. A longer observation might have been more ideal, but was not within the scope of possibility for this study.

## CHAPTER 4

### Participants

I always exit interview them [Men's Choir students] in front of each other, because I think it's important for the young boys to hear what the older boys have to say. One of the seniors last year said, 'You guys know that my father is an ex-Marine and he is a pretty gruff man. He and I don't always connect, but it's through *this* ensemble [Cedar Men's Choir]—it's through *this*. My father always loves to hear men sing. And *this* is what helped me connect to my father.' Now how cool is *that*? (Mr. Dover, interview)

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In this chapter, I will introduce Mr. Dover, the Cedar High School Men's Choir, and the twelve student and alumni members of the choir who participated in this study. I will explore Mr. Dover's personal and professional journey to choral music education as well as his personality and characteristics of his teaching. I will examine the origin of the Cedar High School Men's Choir, its structure, and how it is situated in the greater choral landscape at Cedar High School. Finally, I will provide a descriptive profile of each student and alumnus participant in the study.

#### Mr. Dover

**Personal and professional journey.** Mr. Dover's earliest musical performing experiences were in instrumental music. An enthusiastic band student, Mr. Dover did not envision himself as a choral music educator.

It never entered my mind that I would do choir, you know? I was a band kid all the way through, and then my freshman year in high school, I auditioned for and got into the musical and that was so fun, so I joined choir my tenth grade year and it kind of went

from there. I was a much better singer than I was a percussionist. (laughs) Let's just say it that way!

He participated in both mixed and men's choruses while in high school, gaining confidence in his vocal abilities. Heeding the advice of his high school choir teacher, Mr. Dover applied for admission at a large university in central Michigan. He was accepted and made the decision to attend and study music education. While pursuing his undergraduate degree, he did not always self-identify as a strong student or musician in his new environment.

I don't want this to be a finger-pointing situation at *all*, but I remember very specifically when I was doing my undergrad that there were a lot of people that were better singers and a lot of people that were better musicians and a lot of people that were better at a *lot* of things, and I always kind of felt like a second-class citizen. And because of that, (mischievous smile) my behavior probably *displayed* that. (laughs) You know, I was kind of the frat boy that was going through the motions. I knew that . . . but the one thing I knew very deep in my heart, all the way down, was that I just wanted to *teach*.

Mr. Dover's desire to be a teacher began at an early age. Even as a second grader, he was thinking about how and what he would teach. He shared with me some of these formative moments in our second interview.

Mr. Dover: In second grade, the teacher put [on the board] "Stop, look, and listen before you cross the street. Use your eyes, use your ears, and then you use your feet." I still remember this—isn't that scary? (laughs) And it was our job in second grade to copy that because we were practicing penmanship, but I remember seeing that it was a dual lesson as a second grader, thinking, "Even though I'm practicing handwriting, this is a message that I should follow and I need to teach this to *my* second graders when *I'm* a

teacher.” As a *second* grader! *Very* clear. And then in third grade, my teacher—she had this whole leadership system and I remember thinking, “When I teach third grade, I’m going to use the *leadership* system!” (laughs) So there was something in *every* grade . . .

Andrea: So in every grade, you thought, “When I teach *this* grade . . .”

Mr. Dover: Exactly! I always *knew that*, that was it . . . there it is. Teaching was the first thing. Music was the vehicle. I *still* don’t think I’m a very good musician or singer, but what I *love* to do is teach kids.

While working toward his undergraduate degree, Mr. Dover participated in the university men’s glee club and an all-male collegiate a cappella ensemble. He grew to be particularly close with the young men in his a cappella group. A self-described “frat boy,” he reflected on the experience:

I’m not embarrassed to admit this—I was in a fraternity and that was a big part of my undergrad experience. Those guys were all great and I really liked them, but the collegiate a cappella men—those were my *brothers*. Those were my buddies. Those were the guys I lived with and hung out with.

Mr. Dover eventually became the director of his collegiate a cappella ensemble and the fulfillment he found in being both singer and director of this group would later serve as a catalyst for his decision to start an all-male choral ensemble at Cedar High School.

With his degree completed, Mr. Dover was hired to teach choral music to students at Cedar High School and Cedar Middle School. He has remained ever since, having now spent 22 years in the district. Mr. Dover’s wife is also an elementary teacher in the Cedar Public School district. Together, they have one daughter in the fifth grade who enjoys dance and has also participated in a local community-based children’s choir.

The bulk of Mr. Dover's teaching now occurs at Cedar High School, but he is still involved in Cedar Middle School where he teaches half of the seventh grade choral students, works collaboratively with the middle school choral music teacher, and maintains an active presence—eagerly recruiting singers for the high school choir program. His work at the middle school allows for a certain amount of longevity in teaching relationships with students—something he considers a privilege. Mr. Dover enjoys watching students over the course of several years as they grow, change, find their voices, and have those “a-ha” moments.

A lifelong learner, Mr. Dover has sought opportunities to hone his craft and improve his understanding. He earned a master's degree at a nearby university while continuing to work full time at Cedar High School and he is quick to acknowledge the mentors who have shaped his journey. These past professors, clinicians, and colleagues have influenced his teaching and sharpened his musical skills. He credits one in particular for helping him better understand the nature of working with boys and how they process information.

I remember when he [the professor-mentor] came in to observe a student teacher, and when the student teacher was done with his lesson, there was some time left, and this was during the freshman beginning men's choir and he [the professor-mentor] said, “Hey, can I work with the boys?” and I said, “Oh yeah, *please!*” and I *watched* him and it was maybe twenty minutes and I will *never* forget this and I thought, “Oh, *that's* how you do it!” Just watching him work—suddenly so much clicked into place for me in those 20 minutes—it just opened up my whole world so to speak. So that was a key moment for me in learning how the boys learned.

**Personality and teaching.** Mr. Dover's enthusiasm borders on electric at times. He exudes positive energy, greeting his students with a pearly smile and engaging them in

conversation before and after rehearsal. His warm eyes crinkle at the edges—the visible traces of smiles and laughter over the course of his 22 teaching years. Never monotonous or predictable, Mr. Dover’s rehearsals are productive, motivational, and steadily infused with lighter moments and humor. His unmistakable hearty laugh often rings out in response to a student’s joke (or to his own.) Possessing a sharp wit and a quick response, he is a self-proclaimed smart aleck:

Well, I’m a big smart aleck, and that’s part of my overt personality, which tends to rear its head mostly when I’m in front of kids. So, I can’t *not* teach that way. My classrooms are *loud*. There’s a lot of business going on, and that’s who I am. I’m big and loud, and that’s just *me*.

In my three months at Cedar High, I observed the active and vibrant classroom described by Mr. Dover. Students occasionally had side conversations while he bounced boisterously from section to section sharing fresh inspiration and energy with the singers. However, I also observed moments of quiet concentration, as he and the members of the choir would engage in thoughtful reflection about a composition’s structure or wrestle with the profundity of a song’s poetic text.

The impact of Mr. Dover’s teaching is far-reaching and acknowledged within the community. He has received the “Inspiration Award” from the Cedar Public Schools Foundation, an award that recognizes individuals who have contributed outstanding service to the community and school district. He is hard working and dedicated, yet quick to deflect praise by deferring it to his students or shrugging it off through self-deprecating humor. When I asked about his award, he humorously responded: “Basically, they *had* to give it to me because I’ve been around so long. I think they just felt sorry for me!”

While Mr. Dover may be reluctant to share his own accomplishments, he has no qualms about praising his students. Students are his priority and focus. He values their individuality and believes that teaching the whole student is his utmost responsibility as a teacher.

Mr. Dover: . . . I've always felt like I teach an individual, a person *first*. . . so I'd say teaching a *whole* child is certainly the most important thing—my most important goal.

Andrea: Well, what does that look like exactly? Teaching the whole child—

Mr. Dover: . . . It is [growing] an individual who feels empowered to keep learning and [who] knows how [to learn], and feels valued in their intelligence. Right now—okay, I'm gonna get on my high horse—but right now in our society the belief is that you don't have a lot of worth unless you are an academically high-achieving student who is really great in math, and a really great writer, and *there's* your identity and we have to *compete*, and you've got to hit these benchmarks and standards or you're a failure, and *blah blah blah* . . . but you know, that is an *awful* lot of pressure when we teach *everybody*, and so I strive to make sure that students understand that there are several different intelligences, not just linguistic or mathematic, and that they can be strong people by embracing those other areas. So, that's a big part for me. Of course I want to encourage their intelligence in the core areas as well, but they need to be well rounded. They can't just be academically smart, which they have to be . . . but they also have to be well-rounded artists, and artists in this case through musicianship. I want them to be lifelong musicians. It's part of their whole being. It's part of who they are and so I want them to really feel that they're exploring that piece—the artistry piece—the musical artistry piece.



## **The Cedar High School Men's Choir**

“Welcome to the most FUN room in the school!”

(Student-created sign on the Cedar High School choir room door)

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**Structure and characteristics.** The Cedar High School Men's Choir is one of six choirs serving approximately 220 singers (grades 9–12) in the choral program at Cedar High School. Mr. Dover teaches four curricular choirs during the school day and two extracurricular choirs in the afternoons and evenings, the Cedar High Men's Choir being one of these extracurricular choirs. Members of the men's choir rehearse twice weekly for approximately one hour per evening. The schedule varies considerably from week to week as Mr. Dover builds his rehearsals around the sports calendar at Cedar High School to ensure athlete-singers are able to participate in both (see Appendix H).

In order to be a member of men's choir, singers must audition for the choir and also be a member of a curricular choir at Cedar High School. The audition process for men's choir is fairly relaxed, according to Mr. Dover.

The only time I don't put a boy in is if I feel that it's [going to be] really vocally detrimental [to him]. You know? If we ask a 14 year old boy who's going through a voice change to sing with an 18 year old boy who has been studying with an established voice professor and has this huge horn and he [the 14 year old] tries to emulate that, there's nothing but tension and bad things that are going to occur, so we have to take care of them first vocally, but mostly, if they can sing, they're in.

As the choir is extracurricular, no grade is given. Accountability to the group is maintained through a simple set of men's choir rules. Direct and concise, the rules provide clear

guidelines about the expectations of each member and the commitment required to remain in the choir (see Appendix I). Rule number one is applied almost weekly: “We go one hour from the last guy to walk in and sit.” According to Mr. Dover, this keeps the men responsible and safeguards valuable rehearsal time. If a student is ten minutes late to rehearsal, the rehearsal will last ten minutes past the normal ending time. Another rule in frequent play is rule 5c (see Appendix I), which addresses each student’s responsibility to bring his music folder to rehearsal. Students who fail to bring their music will sing a short solo of Mr. Dover’s choosing on an excerpt of their current concert music at the conclusion of rehearsal. I asked Mr. Dover about this rule in our first interview. He responded,

If they forget their folder or their music, I don’t make them do pushups, because that’s what they have to do in their athletic things and almost all of them are involved in that in some way, and I want this to be artistic. And quite frankly, pushups don’t intimidate them, but singing solo does. *Except* we make sure it’s a safe environment. So if an older boy [forgets his folder] generally they have enough confidence that they’ll just get up and sing the solo. If it’s a younger boy [who forgets his folder], it’s an unwritten thing that their big brother will jump up and sing with them—*or* some other older member of the group so that they’re not out there alone. We’ll *never* hang a kid out to dry, but there is that intimidation factor there—not in a bad way, because again, whether they’re terrible or whether they’re wonderful, the [rest of the] boys are gonna applaud for them and say “you did well.”

Support is built into the Cedar High School Men’s Choir in more ways than applauding for the solo performances of singers who fail to bring their music to rehearsal. A system of

mentorship is alive and well, most readily seen in Mr. Dover's assignment of big brothers and little brothers.

We have big brothers and little brothers . . . Our philosophy is that we *nurture* and we *demonstrate*. We show what we want and we nurture and when a behavior needs correcting, we *suggest* and *model* as opposed to (pauses to think) "student [initiated] discipline" which can be very unhealthy.

Mr. Dover assigns big brothers and little brothers strategically, working to stay within a section if possible (i.e., pairing an older tenor brother with a younger tenor brother) and also taking personality types and interests into consideration. Occasionally, he will pair brothers for the specific purpose of correcting unwanted behavior, as seen in the interview fragment below.

For example, I have a bass who is really trying to figure out his place in this world and a lot of what he says—what comes out of his mouth is inappropriate testing—inappropriate language. Not necessarily cursing, but just things that are inappropriate. I've purposefully placed him with boys that are *unlike* him so that he could always be politely reminded [not to be inappropriate].

While older singers often assume mentoring roles in the choir, exceptionally strong musicians in the choir may assume musical leadership roles as well. Mr. Dover believes in giving musically advanced students the opportunity to lead sectional rehearsals, facilitate choral warm-ups, and in some cases, even teach and conduct the younger choirs within the Cedar High School choral program.

The current Cedar High School Men's Choir consists of 41 young men. It is a youthful choir this year with the bulk of the ensemble comprised of freshmen and sophomores. There is also a large, talented junior class, and a small group of seniors that Mr. Dover describes as

“quirky, but lovable.” Musically, the tenor sound is lighter than Mr. Dover had anticipated, and the bass section has proven to be the greatest artistic challenge, with a handful of students who are having difficulties with intonation.

They [basses] are having a hard time grasping pitch, so that’s something I’m having to work around, but they have *heart*. They have tons of *heart*! They seem very pleased to be there. Very excited. They seem genuinely invested in one another.

**Origins and accolades.** The men’s choir at Cedar High School began modestly in 1991. With approximately 11–12 singers, Mr. Dover established the group in his first year of teaching. Inspired by the memories of his all-male collegiate a cappella ensemble, Mr. Dover thought it was important for his singers to experience something similar. In the first two years, the group performed only fun, light, pop music, but by the third year, the choir had grown in size and Mr. Dover decided they should sing at festival, so the ensemble switched to concert repertoire and did just that.

In 1994, the men’s choir disbanded for a season, eventually reforming with improved structure and focus in 1996.

Mr. Dover: An interesting historical piece I think about the group is that at one point, we did disband. We got to the point where they were saying things like, “Hey Mr. Dover, can we go a half hour later [to rehearsal] than we planned because there’s a hockey game on [television] and we want to finish it before we come?” or “Can we go early because there’s a football game?” And at that point it just didn’t seem like there was a big enough group of men who were really going to be able to be committed and I said, “Fellas, let’s be done. I’m not going to do men’s choir [anymore] because it seems like there are other priorities for you, and that’s fine.” So we disbanded for a couple of years and didn’t sing,

and then three years into that, many of the boys came back—and many were younger brothers of boys that had graduated and they said “We want that back. We want that back so badly.” So at that point, I really took the time to establish the ground rules about the group and I made a commitment to the group at that time to say, “I will work around all of your athletic things, or *most* of your athletic things, and that’s why the group meets Monday and Tuesday on one week and Tuesday and Wednesday on one week and Wednesday and Thursday another, and sometimes 8:00, sometimes 8:30 because we are always waiting for their athletic things to get over, but *their* side of that is, if they are going to be in men’s choir, they are going to be committed. They can’t miss because there’s a hockey game [on television], or because they have a lot of homework. They have to be responsible.

After re-forming with a clear framework of expectations, the men’s choir gained momentum, growing and improving in their sound and technical ability. The Cedar High School Men’s Choir is now a staple of the community—known in their state and beyond. The choir has been selected four times to appear in performance for a statewide youth arts festival, and has also been involved in four performances and/or workshop presentations at their state music conference. The choir has made four appearances at divisional conventions and one appearance at a national convention for the American Choral Directors Association. Beyond convention and conference appearances, the men’s choir has also benefited from a Weill Institute grant from Carnegie Hall. Fully funded, the Weill Institute paid for all singers’ travel expenses and music, providing the ensemble with the opportunity to visit New York City and perform in Carnegie Hall with other choirs under the baton of a renowned guest conductor.

## **Student Participants**

Affectionately nicknamed “The Big Ten” by Mr. Dover (a nod to the Midwestern collegiate sports conference of the same name), the ten participants of this study who are current members of the Cedar High School Men’s Choir have unique and interesting backgrounds. Five of “The Big Ten” participated through written responses only, while the remaining five participated in written responses and through interviews. Each student participant will be profiled here according to the depth of his involvement in the study.

**Written response participants.** Five members of “The Big Ten” participated in this study through written responses only. These students contributed to the study responses via email or our Edmodo forum, but did not participate in focus group or individual interviews. I will provide a brief description of these five members (Trent, Simon, Oscar, Harry, and Miles) in the paragraphs to follow.

Lean in stature, athletic, and clean cut in appearance, Trent is a junior tenor with short dark hair and large brown eyes. He takes private voice lessons, is on the school lacrosse team, and is an enthusiastic participant in men’s choir theme nights—most memorably wearing his mother’s hideous (and hilarious) Christmas sweater on ‘ugly sweater night.’ Like Trent, Simon is also a junior. Tall and quiet with wavy hair and dark-rimmed glasses, he stands as a solid tower on the back row of the baritone section, attentive, and committed. In his free time, Simon enjoys hiking, swimming, and cycling. He describes himself as an “almost Eagle scout” who is “not as involved in choir as everyone else” but still enjoys it as a side activity.

Oscar is a senior with a stocky build and floppy brown hair. Laid-back and easy-going, he can often be seen laughing in rehearsal, cracking a joke, or having a side conversation with

another bass in his section. Social and friendly, Oscar regards himself as a “normal teenager with a girlfriend and friends.”

Harry is a junior baritone with a charming smile and thick dark hair. He describes himself as goofy, though he is quite dedicated to his studies. Harry enjoys science, math, and history. He hopes to pursue a Ph.D. in aerospace engineering and writes that he enjoys making others laugh and feel good. The final of these five students is Miles, who sings second tenor and serves as a strong student leader. As a high school senior with advanced musical ability, he is often trusted by Mr. Dover to facilitate choral warm-ups and sectional rehearsals. Miles enjoys composing, orchestrating, and playing the piano. He is tall and fair in complexion with blue eyes and mid-length blonde hair. Eager to converse about all things related to college football and basketball, he describes himself as very competitive. Because he takes rehearsals so seriously, those who do not share his same level of musical commitment can sometimes be a source of frustration to him.

**Written Response and Interview Participants.** The five remaining members of “The Big Ten” participated not only in written responses but were also involved as interview participants in the study. All five of the students profiled here participated in our focus group interview, and two students (Al and Levi) were also interviewed individually. Since these participants’ choral experiences were explored in greater depth through interview(s), they will be profiled in greater detail than the previously described students who participated in written responses only.

**Steve.** Described by Mr. Dover as even-tempered and focused, Steve is organized, quiet, and respected by his peers. Though he is introverted, he is well spoken and when he chooses to speak, his classmates listen. Of average height, Steve has an athletic build, noticeably good

posture, and maintains his light brown hair in a closely trimmed buzz-cut. He is a member of the varsity bowling team at Cedar High School and serves on the choir council as the choir treasurer. Steve uses the words warm-hearted, positive, and helpful to describe himself, and these are all traits I found to be true of him in my rehearsal observations.

A 17-year-old senior, Steve aspires to a career in engineering beyond graduation. A second tenor, he is prompt to rehearsals and achieves a healthy balance of serious concentration mingled with smiles and laughter. He has been a member of the men's choir for four years and participated in the musical for the first time just this year. Mr. Dover identified Steve's participation in the choral program as "peripheral" until the end of last year when he really began to find his home and identity in the choral program.

***Eli.*** A 15-year old sophomore who sings second tenor, Eli frequently wears a mischievous smile and makes conversation with ease. Relaxed and social, he describes himself as a happy person who is normally energetic and fun. He enjoys playing soccer and golf. Upon graduation, he hopes to study something business-related and play golf at a Division II school. His fair skin is dotted with light freckles, and his shaggy blonde locks rest just above his blue-green eyes.

Mr. Dover describes Eli as funny, likable, and smart. However, Mr. Dover also hints at Eli's having a greater complexity as well—"a hard one to peg," as he puts it. Eli's two older sisters were previously in the choir program at Cedar High School, but did not stay through their senior year. Mr. Dover expressed concern that Eli might follow a similar path: "Sometimes I worry I'll lose him. I hope not."

***Al.*** "A natural-born charismatic young man" is the phrase Mr. Dover uses to describe Al. He elaborates that Al is well liked by all kids, not just choir kids, and that he is a talented actor, a



lovely singer, and a terrific leader—even as a 15-year-old sophomore. Highly intelligent, Al is one of those rare students who enjoys the theoretical aspects of music as much as the aesthetic. His eyes dance and his speech is lightning quick. Always thinking, always processing, his mind runs at a frenetic pace, active, and sharp. Average in height, with short brown hair, Al describes himself as friendly, fun loving, and hard working. While he is involved in the peer mentoring program and student council at Cedar High School, he names choir as his “main area of expertise,” sharing that he has been singing in choir since second grade and taking piano lessons since third grade. Al sings first tenor or second tenor depending on the repertoire and where Mr. Dover needs additional vocal strength.

When asked what he’d like to do after graduation, Al shared in the focus group interview that while he was unsure, he thought he might like to be a political analyst. Yet, when interviewed apart from the group, he expressed interest in pursuing musical studies: “I’m not sure yet if I want to major in music or go into something in music, but I *love it*, and I definitely want to be in my collegiate choir because I just can’t imagine *not* being in anything like that...”

**Jan.** Tall and slender with curly brown hair, Jan is the subwoofer of the bass section at Cedar High School. A self-described “good guy,” Jan says he cares more about others and their pain than he does about himself. He is 16 years old and in the 11th grade. After graduation, he’d like to pursue a career in law enforcement—specifically within the FBI or CIA. Jan plays guitar (both by ear and by reading notation) and is currently teaching himself piano and harmonica. He also loves sailing, something he has done his entire life. Jan is helpful and considerate, yet singular. According to Mr. Dover, Jan marches to his own beat.

Jan is my different drummer. He is a lone wolf, and the kids really like him, but he consistently removes himself from the group. Not musically, not artistically, not within

the confines of the working rehearsal, but in all other ways. He's always off to the side. Always removed. And they don't dislike him for it; they respect him for it. And I just love him because he *is* such an individual and such his own man, but there is always that separation, and it's okay.

**Levi.** Athletic, handsome, smart, charismatic, charming, All American—these are all fitting descriptors for Levi, a 17-year-old junior at Cedar High who seems to have it all. Levi is a starting player for the Cedar High School varsity basketball team, and also garnered the lead role in the school musical this year. A leader within the school and within the men's choir, Levi understands that others look up to him and often ask him for help. This is a role he embraces, sharing that he has always wanted to lead and that he enjoys helping others and picking them up when they are down. Levi is confident in his abilities, but not self-absorbed. Beyond high school, he wants to pursue acting and film and hopes he can continue to play basketball at the collegiate level. Tall and lean, Levi's large brown eyes are expressive yet calm. He keeps his dark brown hair trimmed short. His speech is relaxed, and his words flow with ease.

Levi first began to recognize his musical ability in the eighth grade when a friend pressured him to try out for the school musical and he surprised himself by landing the lead role. Mr. Dover spoke proudly of Levi's strength as a singer and leader, but also divulged that Levi struggled early with his musicianship identity—wrestling with whether or not it was okay to be an artist, actor, or performer in a school where athletics seemed to dominate the scenery. Levi's family is very supportive of him being a well-rounded student. He shares that they love the physical aspect of his involvement in sports, and also the creative/artistic side of his involvement in music. Both sides of his family are musical, and he cheerfully boasts of his uncle who is an accomplished bluegrass artist currently touring internationally.

## Alumni Participants

**Max.** A member of the Cedar High School Men's Choir from 2008–2011, Max is currently a sophomore music education major at a large university. Incredibly articulate, he is thoughtful and reflective, with a gentle spirit and maturity beyond his years. Of average height and build, Max is clean-shaven with short, blondish-brown hair. His eyes are warm and his smiles are subtle. While he shared openly and vulnerably in our interview, he seems to be fairly reserved in disposition.

Max began his musical journey in Cedar Middle School where he first began to play French horn and sing in the choir. Growing more and more enamored with music, he was a fervent participant—singing in two choirs, playing in marching band, and participating in musical productions during all four years he attended Cedar High School. However, when I inquired about his decision to join the men's choir, Max shared that he was initially hesitant about participating in this specific ensemble.

I remember in 8th grade, Mr. Dover would have groups come down from the high school to encourage us to stick with choir . . . and one day the men's choir came down and sang to us . . . and a lot of the guys were *really* into that. They were like, "This is so cool! I want to do that!" and I was thinking, (ambivalence) "Eh, I *guess*." It didn't really appeal to me at first. At the time I was struggling with my identity as a gay man, so I wasn't comfortable around that . . . I didn't think it would be a good environment for me 'cause it was all men and I said (dramatically) "No!" (laughs) . . . I wasn't *comfortable* with straight men, because you know, in movies I always saw the gay guy get picked on by the straight man and it never occurred to me that [heterosexual] guys would be okay with my homosexuality. But when I started my freshman year of high school, Mr. Dover

approached me and encouraged me to consider it. And we sat down and had a chat and this was before I had come out, but he encouraged me to consider it and maybe come to a couple of rehearsals and see what I thought, and so I did. And I came to realize that the guys were actually very much like my girl friends, but they just had a different way of *thinking* and it's not a way *I* thought. I was mostly afraid of relating to them. I was worried we wouldn't have anything in common, but when I got in there, I realized they were there to have fun, but that they also appreciated the music and that I didn't give them enough *credit*. I [initially] thought "They're guys. They don't know art. They don't appreciate music." But I kind of learned they *did* appreciate it in their own way . . . and when I figured that out, it was kind of like, "Maybe this is something I *should* stick with."

Mr. Dover describes Max as a natural teacher and musician—one who was respected by his peers for his ability and leadership. Mr. Dover also admired Max's courage to be open about his sexual orientation as a high school student:

One of the things I love most about Max is that within the musical community here [at Cedar High School], he found his strength to say, "Hey, I'm gay. This is who I am. You all are either going to be able to deal with this or not, but either way, this is who I am." And then that [courage] kind of generated throughout the school, so this was such a great strength for him. He grew up as a leader through that—marching band drum major and choir president, and in his senior year he conducted the concert choir on a couple of things and he was wonderful. *Wonderful!* And they [the students] would work *beautifully* for him because they had such respect and because he has such natural ability. He is a natural teacher and musician.

Max indicated that the experience of leading an ensemble in high school was pivotal for him— impacting his identity as a leader and resulting in his decision to pursue a degree in music education.

**Dan.** Dan has short blonde hair, spiked slightly in the front. His cheeks bear a natural rosy blush hidden slightly beneath a small bit of blonde stubble. Average in height with an athletic frame, Dan has an enthusiastic and motivational personality. His speech varies frequently in intensity and pitch. Mr. Dover speaks of Dan, a member of the Cedar High School Men’s Choir from 2002–2005, as a leader in the program, collaborative, and always looking for ways to help. While in high school, Dan was an active student. He sang in two choirs, participated in musicals and plays, was involved in Science Olympiad and Quiz Bowl, played on the hockey team, and served as class treasurer for the student council.

Dan’s choral experiences in the Cedar Public Schools began in the sixth grade when his family moved the district specifically for the music program. Mr. Dover speaks to Dan’s early musical experiences:

You know, we recognized Dan’s musical abilities and his vocal ability early on. Here is this beautiful soprano [voice] and [he was] not afraid. *Not afraid.* We had him come up and do some special things because of it, *with* the choir. You know, he did a soprano solo at one point, and when we did “The Sound of Music,” he was the younger [Von Trapp] brother as a seventh or eighth grader because he wasn’t afraid of that. He was really into it. And then of course, the voice just flipped over into this gorgeous tenor.

Developing as a singer through middle school, Dan began studying private voice in high school with a professor of voice at a nearby university. Growing in his abilities and confidence, Dan first considered pursuing a degree in music during his sophomore year. He would

eventually decide to do just that, studying vocal music performance and music education at a large in-state university. During his undergraduate studies, he continued his involvement in choral singing by participating in the university's larger mixed choruses and the men's glee club. He eventually became president of the university men's glee club, sharpening his administrative skills and helping to organize a European concert tour for the ensemble. His enthusiasm for men's choruses even bubbled over into his student teaching assignment, where he started an extracurricular men's choir with the support of his cooperating teacher.

After finishing his undergraduate degree, Dan auditioned and was accepted to graduate school for vocal performance at a large university in a neighboring state. There he gained a master's degree and two years of experience teaching undergraduate classes and voice lessons. Upon completing his degree, Dan described himself as "burnt out and wanting a change," so he booked a flight and spent the bulk of the summer exploring Europe. When he returned to the United States, he was presented with the opportunity to teach choral music as a long-term substitute at a high school with an accomplished choral music program in his home state. Dan accepted the job and has relished the opportunity to teach choral music for a semester.

## **Summary**

The thirteen participants in this study consist of Mr. Dover, ten current students, and two alumni of the Cedar High School Men's Choir. Each participant's background provides a lens into their interests and lived experiences. This information may provide insight and better understanding of the perspective from which each participant filters their male chorus experience. The structure and history of the Cedar High School Men's Choir is also pertinent. By exploring the creation and evolution of the Cedar High School Men's Choir and how it is

situated within the greater choral program, the context and organizational framework in which these men and their teacher experience choral music becomes more apparent.

## CHAPTER 5

### Phenomenological Instrumental Case Study Findings: Brotherhood

#### Introduction

. . . That sense of brotherhood is a big one—saying, ‘Hey, we’re gonna have fun and it’s okay for us to joke about girls or sports, but at the end of the day we’re gonna work hard and we’re gonna make something really special.’ That sense of ‘We’re gonna be open here. We’re gonna be brothers here. We’re gonna support each other here. If somebody’s struggling with some pitches, we’re all gonna support that person.’ That sense of brotherhood is one that I think is so important. And safety. Comfort. You can be yourself. You’re able to be free and open and respect each other. (Dan, interview)

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This phenomenological instrumental case study was designed to investigate and describe the culture of a high school men’s chorus. The following research questions guided the investigation: (a) How do singers in a men’s chorus define their experience? (b) How are their experiences and behavior while participating in a high school men’s chorus different or similar from their experiences and behavior in a high school mixed chorus? (c) How are their experiences and behavior while participating in a high school men’s chorus different or similar from other nonmusical, all-male activities, such as sports? (d) What bearing, if any, does participation in a men’s chorus have on the identities of these young men?

Ethnographic techniques were employed in the collection of data including individual interviews, focus group interviews, written responses, reflections, observations, and field notes. As phenomenology seeks to illuminate the richness of lived experience—not through matters of general fact, but rather through “essence,” these techniques aided in exploring the high school



men's chorus phenomenon in richer detail (Bowman, 1998). The findings attained from an analysis of the data are shared in this chapter.

As themes emerged from the data, unique relationships among the themes also developed. All emergent themes and relationships will be explored exhaustively in chapters five through eight, but this chapter will focus squarely on the theme and subthemes of "brotherhood." Three subthemes exist within the theme of brotherhood: (a) support, (b) pride, and (c) camaraderie. The subtheme of pride was further divided into the following two additional categories of meaning: (a) pride in musical excellence, and (b) pride in privilege of membership. Also worth noting is that the teacher in this study, Mr. Dover, emerged as a facilitator of the brotherhood theme as well as many of the subthemes. His role as teacher and facilitator of themes will be explored in chapter eight. To aid the reader in better understanding the nested relationship of the subthemes within the brotherhood, a visual depiction has been provided in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The Brotherhood Model



For interpretation of the references to color in this and all other figures, the reader is referred to the electronic version of this dissertation.

In this chapter, I will explore the themes of brotherhood and accompanying subthemes as they relate to how participants define their male chorus experience. In an attempt to convey the

richness of the participants' experiences and preserve their voice, I will share excerpts from interviews, field notes, and written responses to illumine the emergent themes.

The words "brother" and "brotherhood" permeate all data sources in this study. The men view their choir mates as brothers and take pride in being part of a singing brotherhood. They speak of the brotherhood as comfortable, supportive, fun, and acknowledge the great music they are making as well as the bonds and connections they feel with one another. As Jan says, "I've been a part of men's for so long now that it is one of the places I feel most comfortable. They are my brothers and Mr. Dover is like another father to me." Alumni participant Dan indicates he still keeps in touch with "brothers" from his times at Cedar High School.

I still stay in touch with so many of the guys. Some of them I text and talk with every week, and then there are other guys that I still see several times a year, still stay in touch, you know? One of them just got married a couple of weeks ago. One of them I texted over Thanksgiving. Another one—we had a beer over Thanksgiving break, so just that kind of thing.

Three major subthemes emerged as part of the larger, overarching theme of brotherhood. These themes are: (a) support, (b) pride, and (c) camaraderie. Within each of these subthemes are even smaller categories of meaning worthy of exploration. The subtheme of support includes a mentoring system, the importance of accountability and responsibility, as well as respect for one another and Mr. Dover. Each of these subthemes and their contents will be explored in greater detail through the course of this chapter.

## **Support**

In an earlier quote, Dan described the brotherhood by saying "We're gonna support each other here. If somebody's struggling with some pitches, we're all gonna support that person."

The importance of supporting one another acknowledged by Dan, who graduated in 2005, is a sentiment echoed by current members of the Cedar High Men's Choir during our focus group interview:

Al: I mean, if somebody is making mistakes, we *help* them. It never helps if you get frustrated with them, and say things behind their back, but if you work with them and say, 'Hey, I think this is a step lower' or you just try to help them out, then we're all on the same page.

Steve: Even if you just turn and sing it a little bit more in their ear so that they can tune in a little bit more.

Levi: And I think it helps that everyone knows that we're not there to show anyone up—we're all there to make a sound as *one*.

The Cedar High School Men's Choir seems to support one another in nonmusical endeavors as well. In a November rehearsal, Mr. Dover took time from rehearsal to congratulate a student named Brad who had just been selected for the school hockey team. The announcement was met with an outburst of cheers from the ensemble, and the boys seated near Brad jostled him on the shoulders and slapped him on the back in support of his accomplishment. Support among members of the Cedar High School Men's Choir is also evident in: (a) a mentoring system consisting of formal and informal leaders as well as "big and little bro" assignments; (b) accountability and responsibility of members to Mr. Dover, one another, and the musical success of the ensemble; and (c) respect for fellow men's chorus members and Mr. Dover.

**Mentoring system.** Both informal and formal mentoring systems are in place within the structure of the Cedar High Men's Choir. Mr. Dover mentors certain students like Miles and

Max who have strong piano skills and an interest in pursuing music education by providing them with formal opportunities to lead the choir in warm-ups, manage sectional rehearsals or even conduct a song on a concert. Other singers in the ensemble may not lead so officially, but are mentored by Mr. Dover informally and encouraged to assume leadership roles within their sections.

Another example of formal mentoring in the system is Mr. Dover's "big brother-little brother" pairings—whereby older students are assigned to younger students as mentors based upon the students' voice parts, musical ability and personality. Mr. Dover is strategic in choosing these pairs, taking into account musical mentorship as well as behavioral mentorship. The origins of big and little brothers began in 2005, when Mr. Dover was preparing the choir for their performance at the national convention of the American Choral Directors Association.

Mr. Dover: . . . That began when we went to Los Angeles and I really wanted to build a lot of camaraderie with the boys, a lot of connection, and so for the boys it was also about leadership—assigning some of the older boys to the younger boys to help really get them into the flow quickly and accept them and to have the young boys feel accepted. So we assigned big brothers to little brothers and that idea began to grow more and more . . .

Participants shared without hesitation about how effective this kind of student-led mentoring was for each of them. Max articulated his experiences as first year as a member of the men's choir during our individual interview.

. . . The older members of the group really took charge and really invited you in. They did a good job of encouraging you to sing and to share about yourself, and I felt like the older members took an honest interest in who I was. They wanted to know *me* and they wanted to share their music with me and it was just a very nice feeling to know that these

guys who I've never met before want to know about *me* and they want me to be with them in this choir.

Levi, a junior currently at Cedar High, shared similar experiences and elaborated upon how his role and function in the choir has differed from year to year.

Levi: I remember that freshman year I was very overwhelmed with the amount of *crazy* good singers I had around me. I mean, I had Chris Jacobs, Norm Smith, and Max Marshall *all* within ten feet of me, and they really helped me not be afraid to try to hold my part. They really helped me with reading music so I didn't get overwhelmed. And then last year was kind of my preparation year for this year and next year, because you know, Mr. Dover told me that he would need me to lead. He said that last year, Norm was the big gun and I was kind of the one on deck, so I was really trying to prepare for that. [This year] the workload has definitely gotten a little harder and I have to sing out a little bit more, but I don't mind it. I have a great time, and I like to lead.

Andrea: So, you consider yourself a leader this year?

Levi: I do. I mean, I try to keep as humble as possible, but a lot of people do look up to me or look to me if they have any questions. I've always wanted to lead. I've always loved helping everybody around me and trying to pick people up when they're down.

Al, though one year younger, also shared about the difference in responsibilities between his first and second year, and his emerging role as an informal leader in the choir.

Al: The first year seemed a lot more *glamorous* to me. (laughs) Like—

Andrea: (laughs) The honeymoon is over now?

Al: Yeah, the honeymoon's over . . . a lot of the seniors that I idolized have gone on and it's more a leadership role, it's more of a burden so it's a lot harder than last year, I would say.

Rule #9 of the Cedar High Men's Choir Rules officially articulates the importance of young singers learning from older singers:

Returning guys—Be encouraging, be positive, be QUIET! Lead by example! There's nothing worse than a hypocrite. New guys—be sure you want to be here. Be aggressive in your music learning. Be aware of the leaders around you who will show you by example how you should behave. (Cedar High School Men's Choir Rules)

Musical mentoring, however, is only one facet of the mentoring system in place.

Behavioral mentoring is also part of the system. Max shared about experiencing this kind of behavioral leadership during his freshman and sophomore years in the choir.

I think the best couple of years when I was at Cedar were my freshman and sophomore years. That was when we had Brad Markham, Bill Ritz, and Terry. We had all these big leaders, very *strong* leaders in the group and they always helped to keep rehearsals on focus. And so to have a good rehearsal environment, I think you need to have leaders within the group . . . strong leaders—someone that the younger members are going to look up to because that really does help keep the focus where it needs to be.

This issue also came up in our focus group interview:

Levi: We're responsible for keeping each other in check also, and no one takes it personally, so I think that's a good thing. Everyone understands that we're not trying to be a jerk when we say, "Hey, you know, you need to be quiet and put that away." They

understand that you're saving their butt from getting chewed out, you know?" (laughter from all)

Andrea: Does that usually come from more experienced members talking to younger members?

Steve, Levi: Yep. Yeah.

Andrea: Do any of you recall a time when you were on the opposite end of that?

Al: Definitely (laughter)

Jan: Oh yeah.

Andrea: Does anyone have a story to share?

Eli: Usually, it's not like someone is yelling at you. They just kind of nudge you, like, "Hey, you need to focus."

Al: Like, "Dude, look out!"

Levi: (whispered voice) Like, "Hey, put your phone away, he's coming, you know . . . walking over here!" (laughter)

**Accountability and responsibility.** The Cedar High School Men's Choir rules consist of only ten items, but they provide a framework of accountability and responsibility for the young men to one another and to Mr. Dover. The rules are worded in concise, no-frills language such as: "Rule #5c: No folder = solo in front of group at the end of rehearsal" or "Rule #1: We go one full hour from the last guy to walk in and sit." In my observations of rehearsals, I noted more than one occasion when a young man would sheepishly enter the choir room 10–15 minutes late and take a seat to the groaning and bemoaning of his classmates. Mr. Dover often would grin and remark on how he appreciated the extra rehearsal time. I asked the men about

these rules in our online forum. All ten of the men indicated that they appreciated the rules and structure and many were eager to share their opinions and experiences.

Eli: I feel the first rule about [rehearsal] going 1 hour after the last guy that shows up is good because it keeps us responsible and teaches us a little lesson about showing up on time and getting all of our buddies to get there on time.

Miles: When people show up to rehearsal without their folder, their punishment is to sing a solo in front of the whole group. I like this rule because it creates a sense of accountability and responsibility within each member. I know a lot of kids don't like singing solos (I know I don't) and that it is very difficult for them to get up in front of their peers and sing an unprepared solo. I think the thought of this motivates them to be responsible for their folder and to be accountable for it, and in that unfortunate instance that they do forget their folder, they fess up to it and sing their solo. It takes great courage to do so, and I admire those who get up and sing.

When I asked Mr. Dover about the requirement of singing a solo for forgetting a music folder, he shared with me immediately that his goal was to find an artistic way to hold them accountable, and that singing a solo seemed to be somewhat intimidating and effective, while also being musical. However, he was quick to stress the importance of making sure the environment for solo singing was a safe one:

If it's an older boy [who has forgotten his folder] generally at that point, they have enough confidence that they'll just get up and do it. If it's a younger boy, it's an unwritten thing that their big brother will jump up and sing with them—or some older member of the group so that they're not out there alone. We'll *never* hang a kid out to dry, but there is that intimidation factor there—not in a *bad* way, because again, whether



they're terrible or whether they're wonderful, the boys are gonna applaud for them and say "You did well."

Simon and Harry indicated in their written responses that they had each experienced forgetting their folders and having to sing solo in front of the group at the conclusion of rehearsal.

Simon: When I was a freshman, I left my folder in my locker, which was in a locked part of school [in the evening]. I went to men's with extreme panic, worried about my solo. When I went to sing it, one of the seniors came and sang with me to help me out, and I soon learned that these solos are necessary to maintain order.

Harry: Having to sing a solo in front of the guys really helps you to remember to bring your folder. Last year, I forgot my folder at home and had to sing a solo in front of everyone. An upperclassman volunteered to sing it with me, and I was terrified, but long story short, I never forgot my folder again!

**Respect.** Respect also is important to the singers in the Cedar High Men's Choir and an integral part of their brotherhood. Many of the men spoke of respecting each other as people and musicians. The following excerpt from our focus group interview addresses this mutual respect that the men share and also conveys the overlap of respect and accountability within this theme of support.

Al: We respect each other, and I mean, the friendships we've developed by singing together and going places together and just doing things as a group together really helps us and strengthens our friendship and our brotherhood.

Levi: And I think we also respect each other's musical abilities as well, because if you *know* someone's struggling one day—they just can't project [their voice] or whatever,

then we can say “Look, this person’s struggling today—let’s help ‘em out.” So that way there’s that constant need to stay close and stay on each other’s backs—good or bad.

## **Pride**

The men of Cedar High Men’s Choir are proud of the musical excellence they achieve and also proud of the recognition and reputation their singing has within the school and surrounding community. They appreciate being part of a legacy and relish the opportunity to impress audiences (and young women) with their musical ability. Several participants indicated a belief that membership in the choir was a privilege or an honor. To this end, many men indicated that they feel a boost of confidence or “swagger” (as Levi described it) when they don their choir tuxedo.

**Pride in musical excellence.** For many, these feelings of pride were tied to performing experiences. During the focus group interview, Eli shared about a community performance that was particularly meaningful for him. Levi, Jan and Al all agreed with Eli, but seemed to struggle to put their emotions from that performance into words.

Eli: . . . Something that really affected me was last year we had two kinds of concerts that were kind of like gigs and one was at a local church and one was at a little club or something, and I don’t even know what the group was about, but I think the most they’ve ever had was like, fifteen people, but they just wanted us to come and sing at Christmastime, so we came and sang and they were just so *happy* to hear us and have all those people there, and just seeing all those people so happy and making them happy was kind of—I mean, it’s *contagious*, and the same thing with that other church that we went to where we got the standing ovation from the other choir—they were just so happy after we sang for them.

Jan: It was awesome.

Eli: Yeah, and just, I don't know how to *describe* it.

Jan: No, you're hitting it.

Levi: It's very hard to *describe* . . .

Jan: We all know it, but we just don't know how to say it . . .

Al: Basically, it's just *awesome*.

Later in the focus group interview, the men shared about another meaningful performance. This one occurred spontaneously in a restaurant. After participating in a choral clinic at a nearby university, the men went to a brewpub restaurant owned by Simon's father for something to eat.

Steve: Was it sophomore year when we went to the Littleton Brewpub after that clinic?

Jan: Yeah. Fried cookies!

Steve: Deep-fried Oreos, yep! And we walked in [to the restaurant] with everybody in most of a tux, and everybody [in the restaurant] was like, "Oh, where are you guys from? What are you doing here in tuxes?" And we were like (switching into an announcer-type voice) "We're the Cedar Men's Choir, we'll *show* you what we do!" (laughter) And we went up—'cause the brewpub had a little upper section where we all sat, and we sang "Vive L'Amour" [traditional glee club tune] in a small brick room and it sounded *amazing*.

Jan: From the top of the balcony! Everyone was looking up to us!

Steve: Everyone was looking up to us . . . (laughs)

Levi: And one of the guys in the group, his dad owned the place . . .

Steve: Yeah, and we just—we sounded great, and everybody was just so *happy*, and we *looked* great, we *felt* great, we *sounded* great. It was just a great time.

In this excerpt, Steve describes a common thread among the men—the joy of making great music and the thrill of being acknowledged for this within a larger community. According to Eli, this is the best part of men’s choir.

The best thing about men’s is the music we make . . . nothing beats the feeling of hearing men’s just sound great and having people in the community tell you that you sound good, or people from other schools when they tell you men’s was just so good and they loved us.

Several men shared in both email correspondences and interviews about one specific performance for a music conference that stood out in their memories. Miles wrote that the music “gelled” and they “rocked the house,” receiving a standing ovation. Levi shared, “Everybody in that audience just flipped over us. I mean we were *crazy*. *Easily* tore down the house.” The men’s pride in their musical excellence seemed tied to recognition for their music making—particularly from members of the opposite sex. This can be seen in the excerpt below from our focus interview.

Jan: The ladies like it [when men’s choir sings.]

Levi: That’s probably one of the sales pitches Mr. Dover gave to us!

Eli: Actually it was. And then when I got into my first year, I just realized how *awesome* the men’s choir was, and how we were known around. It was really sweet, I thought.

Levi: It was funny, ‘cause Mr. Dover told me, he said, “Man, you won’t get another opportunity to be part of something this special again in your life, I guarantee you.” And

then he told me—he said, “Plus, you’re a tenor, and all the tenors get all the ladies, so . . .” (laughter from all)

Eli: That sounds very familiar.

Jan: Oh, I’ve used it. I picked up some girls in Littleton [neighboring town]. (reactions, laughter)

Jan: Yeah, (gestures as if holding a guitar) I bust out the guitar and I’m singing while I do it, like, “Oh hey, how *you* doin’? Wanna sit here?”

Levi: (pretending to be Jan, mockingly) “Hi, my name’s Janice [Jan’s original pseudonym choice]

Al: (laughs, joins in on the joke) I’m a tenor!

Jan: (in exaggeratedly low voice) My name’s Janice . . . I’m a *bass*!

(outbursts of laughter and unintelligible conversation from all)

The previous portion of the interview also functions as a glimpse into the humorous nature of relationships the men have with one another.

Impressing female concert attendees with a strong performance has been part of the Cedar High School Men’s Choir since Dan was a member. He shared with me that the men often looked forward to performing, in part, because of the female attention they received: “So there is a sense, I think, of doing it to impress the girls somewhat . . . and when you’re up there on stage, it’s like *that’s* what you listen for [the screams of female audience members].” While all the men acknowledged enjoying the attention they received from audience members, they understood that this recognition came from making quality music and they shared a genuine passion for musical excellence.

Steve: We like to work to make our music better because it's so gratifying to do it well.

When we were at that invitational in November, October, whenever it was—when we got a standing ovation from four other men's choirs like *that* . . .

Levi: That's what you *live* for. (agreement from all) It is an amazing feeling when we all click for a performance and we blow everyone out of the water.

The men also shared that the reward for their hard work is not solely found in the performance.

Levi: It's not just in performance, it's in practicing it too...

Al: When you finally get it—

Jan: And it clicks . . .

Eli: Yeah, 'cause there's a lot of work to go in there, and sometimes, like, even a week before the concert we feel like "Oh, we're not gonna get this" and then all the sudden, that rehearsal—the next one, it just clicks and we get it . . .

Dan and Max also shared about the importance of the musical excellence they were creating. In our interview, Max told me, "For me, it was always about the music *itself*—the notes we were singing, the *sounds* we were making, that was always what got me." Similarly, Dan conveyed to me his love for the beauty of the men's choir sound, and his keen awareness of just how exceptional the music making was during his time at Cedar High School.

From a musical standpoint, I think the sounds that a men's choir can create are just unbelievably beautiful—like—the whole spectrum of *color*. In high school—the men's choir—we knew that we were doing something that was *special*—that people weren't doing this anywhere else in this state, and very few even in the *nation*. And we knew at the concerts, we would finish and everyone would go ballistic because we sounded really great.

**Pride in the privilege of membership.** The men of the Cedar High School Men's Choir also take great pride in being a member of the choir, viewing membership as a privilege or honor. Eli wrote, "It's fun to be part of such a great choir. You get the right to say, "I'm in Cedar Men's." In a different written response, Miles echoed the notion of privilege, but also tied this to the quality of music the men create: "For me, singing in men's is an incredible honor and privilege because I am able to make music with my peers who want to make the same quality of music that I do." Several of the men shared more about the privilege of being part of such an excellent and longstanding ensemble in our focus group interview.

Al: I think it helps that we have such a long tradition of men's choir success that the entire *community* knows about us. Even before we're in high school, we know about men's and we listen to men's and everyone that is in men's wants to be there, and it's not something that you should be ashamed of being in. I think it helps us succeed more that we all know it's such a cool thing in the first place.

Jan: Yeah, exactly.

Eli: And like, our school—we have such a great men's program. No one from our school is like, "Oh, you're in choir? Well, that's for losers." Everyone—all the guys—we *want* to be here. It's like a *privilege* almost. (agreement from the group)

Andrea: Do you all feel that way? That it is a privilege to be part of this group?  
(nodding and agreement from all)

Steve: Even people from different schools, like . . . we always get a lot of people to listen to us at festival.

It is even a point of pride for the young men to be seen in their men's choir tuxedos, as Levi pointed out in our focus group interview.

Levi: I think for us, when we sing together, we carry this—we have this suave . . .

Jan: (interrupting) Debonair . . .

Levi: Okay, *swagger*, I guess you could say. Being in that tux with all those other guys, you carry yourself differently when you're walking in for the performances. You feel a little more, you know (switches into a character voice and confidently raises one eyebrow) "Hey, how *you* doin'?"

Another component of pride for the men is being part of and contributing to the continuation of a legacy. In the words of Oscar from a written response: "Men's choir is a legacy and being able to carry on the legacy is great." The men also enjoy exploring the legacy of those who have gone before them—particularly through musical recordings. Dan shared in our interview that he and his classmates often enjoyed exploring the legacy of those who had gone before them through their musical recordings. A member of the choir from 2002-2005, Dan admitted he had recordings from the Cedar Men's Choirs on his iPod dating back to the mid-1990s. Sometimes Dan and his fellow choir members would even sit around with Mr. Dover before or after rehearsal listening to the recordings of Cedar Men's Choirs admiring certain songs or talking about certain soloists. He said in our interview, "Men's choir has a legendary status. We looked at the other guys [in men's choir] as legends. We heard them and we idolized them."

The thought of Cedar High School Men's Choir as a legacy was particularly meaningful for Max who relayed a poignant story in our interview.

Max: One of our member's fathers—he was a well-known doctor. He was very influential in research regarding the effects of cigarette smoking and stuff like that. I can't remember his name, but I remember his father was very sick with cancer, and we



went out on a Saturday night and we went out to his house and we sang to him, which was great, 'cause I mean, he—

Andrea: You sang to the father who was sick with cancer?

Max: Sang to the father. He was at home resting. He was in a medical bed.

Andrea: Did Mr. Dover initiate this or was this the men's idea?

Max: The guys came up with this. We approached him about it and he said, "Yeah, we can do that, that's fine." And I mean—that family, they were very strong supporters of the program and we went out and this guy was on his deathbed. He was very, very weak—very, very skinny, and very sick looking and we went out and we sang to him. And he told us, you know (pausing to remember). What did he say? It was something to the effect of, "The legacy of this group carries on within *you*—like, you create and continue the legacy and always do that. Remember what's actually important in what you're doing and know that it's going to affect you down the road. You're gonna look back and remember this and it'll be something profound for you." I remember that. The Monday that we came to our rehearsal, we found out that actually that was his last night living.

Andrea: Unbelievable.

Max: He passed away that next day. That was a very *emotional* experience for all of us.

## **Camaraderie**

According to Oscar, the best thing about men's choir is "the camaraderie that everybody takes away from the experience of being in the group. Everyone becomes so close and it is amazing." The subtheme of camaraderie includes the closeness of which Oscar speaks—those bonds, connections, and friendships present within the brotherhood. There also are traditions

among the men that serve to build and facilitate their camaraderie. As is often the case with a group of brothers, rowdiness, crude humor, and shenanigans are also part of this camaraderie. All of these items will be explored within the next sections of this chapter.

**Connections, bonds, and friendships.** In private email correspondences with all ten participants who are current members of the choir, I asked the question, “What is the best thing about Cedar High School Men’s Choir?” Unbeknownst to each other, seven of the ten referenced camaraderie of some sort in their responses, using words like: friendships, bonds, connections, brothers, closeness, togetherness, and brotherhood. Four of those seven responses are shared here. Al wrote, “The best part of men’s choir is definitely the friendships that come out of it. When I sing with these guys, I feel like I belong there and there is no activity I’d rather be part of.” Levi responded, “The best thing in men’s for me would be that I get to build friendships that will last a lifetime and make some amazing music doing it.” Eli shared, “Singing in men’s choir is just special. There is a certain thing when a group of men get together and make music. We have a special bond.” Miles likened that bond to the same connection felt by a family, “We become a family throughout the course of the year, bonding through the trips and activities we participate in and through the music that we perform.”

The nature of the Cedar High School Men’s Choir is inclusive. The brotherhood is comprised of young men with varied interests and backgrounds and this is something in which the members take pride.

Jan: One of the reasons I like men’s is that there’s no biases or any class boundaries, you know. If you are a sports jockey or if you’re a band nerd or anything like that (hesitates and laughs) you know, those are just *examples*, but there’s no boundaries. None of that comes between you. There’s no—

Al: Because we're all choir boys. (laughter from all)

Jan: Yeah, exactly.

The men go to great lengths to ensure all members feel valued and important within the group, but when Steve asserted in the focus group interview that they all get along well with one another, I had to question the idyllic nature of his statement.

Steve: We all get along.

Andrea: Really? *All* the time?

(overlapping responses from the men)

Levi: Ehh . . . I mean sometimes . . .

Steve: Most all the time

Al: Ninety percent—

Eli: And when we don't get along, it's not like we make it really public and all this stuff. If we have a problem with someone, which we usually *don't*—people will just take it off to the side and just talk to them about it so they don't make a scene or make anything of it, so it's just their problem and they don't have to *infect* the whole group with it.

Levi: Part of what defines us is that we include everyone in everything we do. We don't, like—when we went to the waterpark, when we started to sing, we all made sure *everyone* was there. We weren't gonna have—I mean, yes, some of the freshman didn't know some of the songs, but they were still there with us. They weren't off doing the slides, you know, or whatever. We made sure everyone was there and *then* we started singing.

Al: It wasn't like some people were hanging out with the edge of the group not really into it—we were all, like—

Eli: We were all packed in there . . .

Steve: Yeah, even the freshman that didn't know the songs—after it started to repeat, then they were like, “Oh, I know this part!”

Jan: (laughs) I was on the lazy river and all the sudden I hear it and it's echoing around. I hear 'em start singing and I start paddling, and go running over to join in and start singing and stuff—

In trying to make sense of the unique connections within the brotherhood, I wondered if the men spent time together as friends outside of rehearsals, so I brought this up in our focus group interview.

Andrea: Do you guys hang out together outside of men's choir?

Levi: Yeah, sometimes.

Jan: Not as much as I'd like to . . . (laughter)

Andrea: If we look at the group as a whole, I mean, there are probably guys in the choir that you don't hang out with on a regular basis, yes? Do you still sense this brotherhood thing with them even though you aren't friends?

Eli: Yeah, you look at someone even in the hallways. I know this year I didn't know some of the freshman coming up and I saw them in men's the first day they came, and I thought, “Okay, these are the new faces in men's.” And we introduced them and then I'd see them in the hallway and be like, “Oh, this guy's in men's.” And I'd say “hi” to him, you know, like we have a connection—we're connected through this brotherhood thing.

Andrea: Eli just spoke of connections, and others of you have also mentioned connections or bonds with fellow singers in men's choir through your emails. Is this the same as friendships, or is this something different?

Jan: I almost think it's a little stronger than friendships, because . . . (searches for words, and struggles emotionally) Hold on. I'm sorry. (pauses) There's something *else* that brings us together. Like, I don't know if it's because we all come together and we all work as hard as we can together to put together this music or if we all just appreciate being with one another, but there's more bonding time I think and time to get through whatever we're going through to get to the clear. I don't know . . . it's—

Al: (helping out) Yeah, the brotherhood.

The stronger-than-friendship bonds of which Jan spoke and the unspoken connection with fellow men's choir members in the school hallways are both aspects of camaraderie present within the men's choir. These are important aspects of the brotherhood that the men believe strengthen their music making experiences in the choir.

**Rowdiness.** The tender expressions of admiration, respect and togetherness that were explored in the previous section are certainly part of the brotherhood, but the camaraderie of this choir also includes rowdiness, shenanigans and crude humor. The men revel in laughing together, joking with one another, and toeing the line regarding what is and is not appropriate for their given environment. In addition to their verbal banter, the participants display physical rowdiness in rehearsal as well. Mr. Dover describes the active bustle of the men's choir with phrases such as “all over the place” and “bouncing off the walls.” During our focus interview, Steve gave credit to Mr. Dover for tackling what he believed to be a challenging task—wrangling the men's choir into a place of attention and focus.

Steve: He [Mr. Dover] keeps us in line, which is really hard, because I feel like it would be very similar to herding cats.

(laughter)

Al: (confused) What?! Explain that. I don't understand the analogy.

Steve: I mean we're all over the place all the time, and it's almost all up to him to keep us focused and making great music.

In my observations, I too noticed the men being "all over the place." Consider this excerpt from my October field notes:

*In between songs, movement is a constant—the men are shoving each other, touching each other, jostling one another. While singing, they are focused, though not always looking at Mr. Dover. Mr. Dover does not insist on their gaze at first and then he calls one student out, "Hey, Tyson—buddy, you're all over the place. You gotta look here!" In response to this action, the rest of the men shift their gazes toward Mr. Dover.*

I observed all kinds of movement, usually in the spaces before, after, or between the singing. There was frequent rowdiness (though harmless) to be witnessed prior to rehearsal as we waited for Mr. Dover to arrive and unlock the door. On one such occasion, I saw one choir member wrestle another choir member to the ground. Somewhat taken aback by the drama of the moment, it must have shown in my eyes as I made eye contact with the other young men as if to ask without words, "Should I do something?" One of them smiled at me and said nonchalantly, "It's normal."

The "bouncing off the walls" spoken of by Mr. Dover was not wholly figurative. During one evening rehearsal a young man vaulted over the riser railing, racing to the back door to let another boy in who was arriving late to rehearsal. Many boys would often hang onto or lean against the riser railings. Sometimes their physical rowdiness and activities were tied to the repertoire they were singing. I watched as the men spontaneously pumped their fists into the air at the end of Rollo Dilworth's song "Jonah" while shouting loudly the word "Jonah!" In another

instance, the men were singing “Pirate Song” by Tim Y. Jones, and Mr. Dover was trying to reframe the character of the pirate by saying, “This pirate’s not a snob. He can still get his groove on.” In response to this, one of the choir members named Christopher began to swivel his hips, dancing in an Elvis-like fashion and eliciting laughter from the men around him. Mr. Dover responded, “Thanks Christopher. I’m not sure that’s an image I really wanted to see.” The men laughed again and returned to their music.

From my vantage point, most of the boys seemed to be enjoying themselves in these rowdier moments. However, at least one participant indicated he did not always enjoy the rowdiness. In a private email correspondence, Miles shared with me the following response to the question “What is the most challenging thing about being in men’s choir?”

For me, a challenge can easily present itself during rehearsal. In many classes, kids have a tendency to horse around, and in classes that I don’t have much passion for, it can be easy for me to overlook it and I rarely join in on the horsing around. But in men’s choir, when the other guys horse around and don’t take rehearsal seriously (they don’t always do this, but when they do) I have a difficult time sitting through rehearsal because the horsing around can prevent us from succeeding to the best of our abilities.

**Shenanigans.** In some instances, the rowdiness of the men evolved into even greater shenanigans. Dan shared a wealth of stories about shenanigans occurring in his time from 2002–2005 with the men’s choir. When I asked about the experience of traveling to Los Angeles with the choir to perform for the national convention of the American Choral Directors Association, he offered the following:

That was crazy, because as a senior, you know, these guys you’ve been with for four years, there’s such camaraderie, and even the younger guys, it’s like—they’re under your

wing and Los Angeles was a giant *party*. We sang and we took it really seriously but some of the things we did on that trip were just outrageous. Good decisions, bad decisions, the whole nine yards.

Later in the same interview, Dan revisited the Los Angeles shenanigans in a bit more detail and shared how he and his friends from Cedar High Men's Choir still reminisce about those experiences.

Dan: When we get together in the summer and go camping, we all still—*every year*—talk about going to L.A. or “men's this” or “Dover getting mad about that” or, I mean, we had a kid who got a concussion that wasn't even in men's. We were playing football in the snow [during our] senior year before [the] L.A. [trip] and the kid wasn't in men's choir, but we were all playing football in the snow a month before a convention, you know, (imitating Mr. Dover) “What are you thinking?!” (laughs) So we still get together and we laugh about it. Stuff like that . . . We were in this hotel and it was not the best part of L.A. There was a hobo that would routinely be outside our hotel and night and one night we connected like six belts trying to lower food to this guy down in the street. Other guys were in the pool and naturally, fruit and other food got chucked off other balconies at other guys in the pool and hot tub, so lots of shenanigans. And then, I personally, pointed a laser pointer out the bus [window] at a bum in LA and he [the bum] chased the bus and we still laugh about that.

Andrea: Did Mr. Dover know about these shenanigans?

Dan: Yeah, he knows.

Andrea: But he didn't know at the time?



Dan: He knew *at* the time. I got called out in front of *everybody* for being an idiot in that way. So, (embarrassed sarcasm) senior leader, yeah . . .

Andrea: (laughs)

Dan: And now as a teacher, when I have my seniors act like that, it's the things that most annoy me, right? When you've got someone who's 18 and should know better and they still act like an idiot, but you know, that's that.

The current Cedar High School Men's Choir also engages in shenanigans. During my observations, the men had entered into an official "prank war" with the women of the Cedar High School Advanced Women's Ensemble. Mr. Dover had required both groups to spell out guidelines so that nothing went too far, and the groups honored his request. Mr. Dover shared with me another shenanigan carried out by the men on an evening I was unable to attend rehearsal. In this rehearsal, Mr. Dover was sitting with the baritones and singing to help them along while his student teacher was rehearsing the choir. While the student teacher was teaching, a boy near Mr. Dover asked Mr. Dover a question. Mr. Dover answered the student. Upon doing so, two other boys seated nearby jokingly reprimanded Mr. Dover for talking in rehearsal, (imitating Mr. Dover) and saying "Hey! hey!" and pointing to the sign posted in the front of the room that read "What am I doing? What am I supposed to do?" Mr. Dover responded without missing a beat and said, "Oh no, fellas, there's a *caveat*." He grinned at the men, "You know what it is?" The men replied "No," and Mr. Dover whispered to them "The director can do whatever he effing wants to do." Mr. Dover didn't curse, and seemed concerned about reassuring me of this fact, but he said the men thought that was the funniest thing ever. The story continues in Mr. Dover's own words below.

So then, rehearsal goes on. It's done and over. I made them chuckle and then we're back on task and we get to the end of rehearsal and some of the guys are milling around like we are now, but they start going out the door and they're glancing around suspiciously. They keep looking at me, and I'm like, "What? What?!" And they say, "Nothing! Nothing!" and they *leave* and I'm like, "Oh no . . . there's something going on. *Something*. And I am looking all over the room (searches the room with his eyes) wondering what is going on? And I come out and I look at *this*.

At this point in telling the story, Mr. Dover leaves the room in a hurry to find something in his office. He swiftly returns with a small sign made from the same neon poster board as the actual rule sign but this one displays an asterisk with the phrase "The director can do whatever the F he wants."

And the men had put that caveat [that I said] right up there [on the wall]! (He holds the small neon sign the men made up next to the original rule sign.) It was pointless! But what I loved about it was that they weren't ever going to be profane with it—they didn't carry it too far. I thought to myself—that so clearly defines it exactly [the more informal nature of men's choir rehearsals]. They would never cross the line to actually use the profanity, but they would go this far. They would throw it right back [at me] and have a ball with it. One of the boys was very concerned though and he said to me, "Mr. Dover, it's *out* there. You gotta go find it out there." And I was looking all through my office and everywhere, but he said this because they all knew that it [the sign] *had* to come down before school the next day, you know?

**Crude Humor.** As seen in the last shenanigan, crude humor also seems to be an important part of the Cedar High School Men's Choir camaraderie. The humor in men's chorus

is often more crude than what is allowed in their curricular choir classes during the school day. The men seem to understand there are boundaries for what is appropriate from one setting to the other and in this excerpt from our focus group interview, I asked the men about Mr. Dover's teaching and how it was different or similar from one choir environment to another.

Levi: It's funny because in men's the line between being appropriate and going way out there and being—

Jan: disgusting.

Levi: It seems to be pushed back a little bit in men's (snickering from men). It's never pushed back too far. Mr. Dover is always very professional, but it's enough that it really gets you going. (laughter) Because in our mixed choir, if someone says something that *could* be taken maybe a little bit dirty, Mr. Dover will be like, "Okay, that's not appropriate for this environment . . ." And alright, alright . . . so we know when to bring those jokes out . . .

Al: But mostly it's him [Mr. Dover] saying things that could be taken inappropriately and he catches it before we do.

Jan: Yeah. (laughter, agreement from all)

Al: And then points it out!

Jan: And you're like, "I didn't even see that *dirty*!" and then you're like . . . "Ohhh . . . yeah, I see that."

I observed this very situation in one of my December visits when Mr. Dover made a comment that was an unintentional double entendre. He quickly caught it and said to the men, "Hey, don't make that dirty!" The men protested immediately and one of them shouted, "We

never make it dirty until you say that.” Mr. Dover argued with them, laughter ensued and the music making resumed shortly thereafter.

Mr. Dover seemed to enjoy participating in this type of humor with the men, but also expressed concern over ensuring that the men understand the boundaries and behave appropriately. In our third interview, he shared the following:

I get embarrassed sometimes that I let them have this great freedom and that freedom sometimes involves my having to remind them where the line is, and sometimes—and not horribly inappropriately, but sometimes I test that line too because it’s funny. I let my sense of humor steer me sometimes. I never let it get overtly gross, but I there’s a toeing of the line that’s always an issue.

Mr. Dover explained these boundaries even more clearly in our first interview. He spoke of how the men understand the difference between extracurricular men’s choir and curricular mixed choir or curricular varsity men’s choir during the school day. He also shared about how he also loosens up somewhat during men’s choir rehearsals in the evening.

Mr. Dover: I’ve heard them say before—I’ll hear varsity boys say, “That’s a men’s joke. We can’t tell that in here. This is during the school day. This is more formal.”

Andrea: So they know—

Mr. Dover: Yeah, and a lot of the times, I will say to them, “Was that joke appropriate for *this* environment?” ‘Cause a lot of times—I’m sorry—I can’t hide my feelings. When it’s funny, I’ll laugh, right? But I’ll say, “That wasn’t appropriate for this environment.” And also—they never—there’s never ever a joke at anybody else’s expense.

Somebody’s race, religion—*never*. And they know that. That’s just a given. I mean, no.

And . . . we have a “no mothers/no sisters” [rule]. You cannot tell a joke about somebody’s mother or sister—totally not appropriate. So there are those lines . . .

Andrea: So how about you as a teacher? When you teach the men versus a mixed group or a women’s group, do you find that you teach or behave differently?

Mr. Dover: I definitely behave differently later at night with the boys. I do—sometimes on *purpose*. I’m not gonna lie. I’m tired at that time—especially now that I am old. I am *tired* at that point. I am struggling! I am trying to work up to match the energy level that they need and sometime just letting go of things and laughing with them is what *I* need. (pauses) I always temper what I say when there’s a young woman in the room. And I think I temper what I say with the boys too. In general, our jokes are double entendre. I don’t wanna hear somebody’s really *dirty* joke or anything like that.

Though the men seem to know they can push the envelope a bit more in men’s choir, when it comes to instigating crude humor on their own, they often do so with subtle and creative approaches. Consider the following interaction recorded in my December field notes when a student teacher was working with the men’s chorus during one evening rehearsal. In this particular excerpt a student is questioning the student teacher regarding the poetry of the text.

*Choir member: How would you like us to say “bah-sahm?”*

*Student teacher: Bosom.*

*Mr. Dover: (laughs) Did you do that just to hear him say “bosom?!”*

*(laughter from the men and the student teacher)*

A similarly subtle moment like this appeared in our focus group interview as well. The excerpt below occurred after I followed up on something Levi shared about feeling more “manly” after a certain performance.

Andrea: Okay, so you all chimed in with agreement when Levi said, “I felt more *manly*.”

(laughter from the men) and I read this from some of you in your written responses as well, so tell me about that—

Jan: (in mockingly seductive tone, low-pitched voice) Being manly?

Andrea: No . . . (laughs)

Jan: (speaking as if narrating a documentary) Well, when a boy is 12 years old . . .

(all the men laugh)

Andrea: (laughs) No, no, no . . . I mean, maybe you have another way to put it into words? There are some people—I happen to disagree with these people, but there are some people who wouldn’t perceive singing as the most manly of activities. Again, I don’t agree with them, but I wanted to—(stops, distracted by Jan)

(Everyone pauses to laugh because Jan, in an attempt to take off his sweatshirt has almost taken all his shirts off, revealing most of his bare chest to the entire room)

Jan: (realizing everyone is staring at him) Sorry!

(more laughter)

Al: Janice, keep your shirt on!

Andrea: Okay, so this transcript is going to be—

Jan: (humorous voice) Soooooo—anyways . . .

Eli: I think I was trying to put this in words earlier, but our community is so understanding and this is one of the things we’re *known* for like, around Cedar—and when we’re recruited, we don’t think—(stops, distracted by Steve)

(more laughter as we all pause to look at Steve who is now standing and removing his sweatpants—wearing athletic shorts underneath)

Jan: (jokingly) What?! Everything's coming off!

Al: People are stripping now!

Levi: In the middle of an interview! I'm sorry! This is not professional!

Steve: (laughing) Transcript, I apologize! I was trying to be really quiet!

Another example of this subtle humor instigated by the men is evident in the pseudonym the men chose for Mr. Dover for this study. The decision process was described in chapter three, but the final decision for Mr. Dover's pseudonym was between two names suggested by the men: "Ben Dover" and "I.P. Freely." In our interview, Mr. Dover wrestled with this.

Mr. Dover: Anybody who reads this dissertation and puts together "Ben Dover" is going to say, "Oh my gosh, how could he *allow* those boys? That's so disrespectful!" And yet, the boys *never* disrespect me.

Andrea: No, don't worry. It's all going to be spelled out in the study.

Mr. Dover: I'm not worried about *that* [what other people may think]. It's not an issue for me other than that question of, "Why is it that the boys would come up with such wildly inappropriate names for me and yet it's not disrespectful?" Where is that line—that for them it's funny, and I don't feel disrespected and they weren't meaning to be disrespectful, but what *is* that? Where is *that* piece in all this, because I could see some people saying (mock gossiping voice) "How could you ever let them do that?" but they [the men] loved it.

Data from observations and interviews aligned completely with what Mr. Dover expressed in the previous excerpt. The men seem to have a profound respect for him, yet they love joking with him and teasing him.

**Traditions.** There are many traditions within the Cedar High School Men’s Choir, some of which are longstanding and some of which are more recent. These traditions include trips, games, rituals, clothing, theme nights, and other activities. This will be the final subtheme of camaraderie to be explored.

***The waterpark trip.*** A relatively new tradition, the annual visit to an indoor waterpark has occurred each fall for the past two years. Miles described this trip as special because the men have a chance to “get away from the stress of school and everything else and have fun with the other guys and build the strength of the brotherhood.” I asked the men about Cedar High School Men’s Choir traditions in our online forum and two of the men chose to share about the waterpark trip

Simon: Men’s [choir] has gone to waterparks the past two years. Although it is a pretty new occurrence, I have noticed that each time we visit a waterpark as a group, we all get together and sing our choir songs as loud as we can. Everyone that watches us can see that we are all part of a brotherhood of friends and that we are all having fun. That’s probably the reason that singing at waterparks is my favorite men’s tradition: because we are just having fun.

Steve: The waterpark is such a great time. I’m glad we started that tradition.

***The “circle.”*** In a written response, Jan shared, “A unique quality I like is when we do our circle before judged performances. It brings us together and pumps us up to perform at our max without being too nervous.” Like Jan, many other men commented on the Cedar Men’s Choir tradition known as the “circle” and attempted to explain it. In hopes of better understanding, I asked Mr. Dover and the men to demonstrate it for me at the end of one evening rehearsal. It did not disappoint! A short, energetic ritual—it is usually performed by the men



prior to adjudicated or high profile performances. Unlike the more recent waterpark tradition, the “circle” has been in existence for so long that no one seems to remember how it began, including Mr. Dover. It is nonsensical and fun, yet uniquely beloved by the men. Miles described the circle in our online forum.

There are many traditions that men’s [choir] participates in. One of them is the “circle.”

This is where before a performance, we all gather in one big circle and [collectively] take a step to the right [in rhythm.] With each step, we grunt and [continue to step] and the circle shrinks [and moves faster] until one of us screams and the circle collapses. I think that this is a fun and short way for us to bond together as a brotherhood.

I asked Max about the circle as well during our interview. His description matched what Miles shared and what I viewed in rehearsal, but his perspective was unique.

. . . You get in a circle and you put your hands on your shoulder and you just kind of skip to the right and you all come into the center and you jump and scream and yell. And oh, that was *not* for me! The first time I saw them do that I was like, “No way, Jose!”

(laughs) I’m not doing *that* again! I was just like, “What are you *doing*?” Like, “I am a refined *artist*. I do not need to get hyped up like that. I’m able to do it *internally*.”

(laughs) So, I never wanted to do it at first, and then toward the end, Mr. Dover was like, “Get in there and just *do* it!” And then eventually I said, “Okay, this is kinda *our* thing.” and I don’t think any other groups would ever do that. We would literally go and find a space somewhere around and then we would just make a circle and do it.

***Theme nights and menswear.*** Theme nights are an official tradition of the men’s choir—even designated on the calendar (see Appendix H). Much like “spirit days” in the weeks leading up to high school sporting events, theme nights usually involve the men dressing up in some

particularly themed way. Themes are suggested at the choir council retreat and approved by Mr. Dover before being placed on the calendar. In the three months I observed rehearsals at Cedar High School, I witnessed four theme nights: College night, ‘Merica night, Menswear night, and Ugly Sweater Night. Each night was vibrant in a specific way.

For college night, the men arrived wearing their favorite university apparel. As they arrived, there was spirited banter regarding the universities with which they had chosen to affiliate themselves. Even Mr. Dover started rehearsal by doting on the fans of a nearby university where he received his degree—drawing both cheers and jeers from the choir. After some debate, a theme night winner was selected who was sporting a University of Madrid shirt, which had arrived as a gift from a former member and alum of the Cedar Men’s Choir who was then living in Spain.

In November, ‘Merica night encouraged the men to come to rehearsal in patriotic attire. The men’s clothing ranged from the most sincere to outright kitschy. Christopher (who amused us earlier in this chapter with his Elvis-like pirate dance) arrived shirtless, wearing an American flag as a cape, and star-spangled shorts. Jan was wearing full military fatigues. Even Mr. Dover had resourcefully crafted a last-minute crown using only a stapler and stars-and-stripes bulletin-board border material from his office. In a more tender moment, Mrs. Freeman, the collaborative pianist for the choir, came dressed in her father’s actual Navy uniform and shared how her father watched the Normandy invasion of World War II from his boat.

The third theme night I observed was “Menswear night.” Menswear in itself is a tradition at Cedar High School. The men can purchase screen-printed apparel (t-shirts, hooded sweatshirts, bandannas, sweatpants, and athletic shorts) adorned with the Cedar High School Men’s Choir brand. Menswear usually features the school name and short cute slogans created

by the men (with Mr. Dover's approval), such as "Making Women Swoon Since 1994," or this year's catch phrase, "You're gonna like the way we sound. We guarantee it." Al shared,

I think it's nice when we all buy the menswear. It creates some uniformity and shows the connections between the guys who might otherwise have nothing in common. It's also fun to wear them at solo and ensemble and state because the other groups can see that we're a tightly knit bunch of friends.

Ugly Sweater Night, my final theme night experience with the Cedar High School Men's Choir occurred on the final rehearsal before the winter concert. Below is an excerpt from my field notes for that evening.

*The men enter wearing Santa hats, and various sweaters with reindeer as well as fuzzy kittens, snowflakes and ornamental baubles. There is a good energy in the room as they all know this is the final rehearsal before the concert. Mr. Dover asks the men to suggest their candidates for ugliest sweater, noting that he sees a nice sweater on Nathan. He says, "Nathan, discuss." Nathan dramatically shares the features of his sweater, ending with, "and it looks very sexy on me." The boys all laugh. Another boy points out that his own sweater is reversible and has added appeal because it looks like a Bill Cosby sweater. More than one young man credits his mother's closet for where he found his sweater. Trent's sweater has cats on it, and Mr. Dover plays "Memory" (from the Andrew Lloyd Webber musical Cats) as mood music while Trent discusses the features of his sweater. A handful of boys chuckle as they recognize the tune and understand the joke. Trent talks about his sweater and gestures to each feature as he describes it: "It's got some pretty ornaments, some pretty bows, and a soft cat." Another boy in competition shouts out, "Did you bedazzle that yourself?" The men all laugh. Mr. Dover*

*counts to three and has the men shout the name of the person they think should win.*

*Trent wins best sweater (and a gift card to a local restaurant) and the choir begins to warm up.*

According to Mr. Dover, theme nights are a way to get rid of the “winter blahs” and to give the men something fun to look forward to at rehearsal.

***The campout.*** Another recent tradition among the men is the campout, which like the waterpark, has only been in existence for two years but still holds great meaning for the men. Several years of discussion and planning preceded the first actual campout. Mr. Dover shared with me about the origins of this tradition in our third interview.

Mr. Dover: The idea [of a campout] had been batted around for years and years. They wanted to do something funny to me, but they didn’t want to be disrespectful, which I love. And I just had an exceptional group of senior leaders last year . . . and very early on through the choir council endeavor, they approached me and said, “Mr. Dover, if at some point this fall, you were to wake up and there were tents in your yard, how would you feel about that?” (laughs) You know, here’s their sweet respectful way of saying, “Is this okay with you?” And I said, “That would be just lovely, but here are the parameters. It’s not fair to my neighbors, so you would have to be quiet as little mice. *And* you have to be very organized. I mean, I could just envision a freshman parent saying, ‘Wait. What?!’ and being very leery so you would have to be very clear about spelling out what it is, *not* making it a requirement and so forth,” which they did. They had a sheet all typed up that said “Here’s what we’re doing” and unbeknownst to me other than the initial “Are they gonna do it or not?”

Andrea: So you didn't know then? Did you notice them in the night or was it a complete surprise in the morning?

Mr. Dover: Well . . . I ended up going downstairs around 2:30 in the morning and they had just started [setting up] so I went back upstairs and told my wife . . . “We’ve got campers!” and then I fell back asleep and then when I looked out [in the morning], they were all huddled on the deck ‘cause it had been a cold night. And I opened the door and I said . . . “Are you cold? Do you want to come in?” And they said, “Yes!” and they had brought everything. They brought a griddle. They brought the bacon. They brought everything.

The men shared freely in our online forum about the campout as one of their more meaningful traditions and another way of building camaraderie and brotherhood.

Miles: The campout is a relatively new tradition. It started last year, and we all meet up at Trent’s house (which is down the street), have a bonfire, watch a movie, and then, unbeknownst to Mr. Dover, we camp out in his front yard one weekend a year. This is always a great experience because we get to hang out with the other guys, do a lot of fun stuff, surprise Mr. Dover, and continue to build the brotherhood in the process.

The men described the campout as a fun expression of what being together means to them. The actual process of the campout is fairly involved. The evening begins at Trent’s house as Jan shared:

My favorite part is when we set up the tents in the turn-around out in front of Trent’s house (which involves great teamwork between those staying in whomever’s tent) and then we carry the tents down the street like a caravan all the way there.

According to Levi, there is much strategizing involved: “We all put so much thought into it and think about strategies on how to be ghosts ultimately.”

The men had humorous anecdotes to share regarding their tents. Steve divulged that he, Levi and Nathan always share a small tent, but that they fill it with cushions and blankets, so it’s by far the most comfortable tent, even if it is a little cramped. Levi agreed with Steve, referring to their tent as “pretty much a palace” compared to the other tents. On this year’s campout, Eli brought two tents, and thought he could fit three boys in one of the tents. He was mistaken and hadn’t checked to be sure of the tent’s size. Once the tent was pitched, Eli (and the rest of the men) realized just how small the tent was—having only enough room comfortably for maybe one guy. In his own words, he describes with pleasant surprise what happened next,

Without hesitation, the three boys dove into the tent and squeezed in! All three of them slept in that tent all night. I don’t know what else speaks to the brotherhood of men’s [choir] than three boys willing to spoon all night in one of the smallest tents I’ve ever seen. If that doesn’t speak to our brotherhood, then I don’t know what else does.

The campout seems to embody the special camaraderie of the Cedar High School Men’s Choir: in the ridiculous nature of nearly 40 young men stealthily carrying fully-assembled tents down the road to their choir teacher’s yard, in the effort of setting up tents, and planning to make breakfast for their teacher the next morning. Their camaraderie also seen in the deep connections they share with one another—those stronger-than-friendship bonds described by Jan, and the care and concern that led Max and the rest of those young men to travel to a fellow brother’s house and sing for a supporter of the choir who was on his deathbed. Perhaps Levi said it best in one of his written responses: “Men’s is a brotherhood. I wouldn’t want to be with another group of guys.”

## Summary

The findings shared in this chapter included the large, overarching theme of “brotherhood” and the subthemes of support, pride, and camaraderie. Within the subtheme of support, evidence was presented of a mentoring system within the Cedar High Men’s Choir complete with big brothers and little brothers, and informal and formal mentoring and leadership opportunities. The mentoring system primarily seemed to function as a means of making new members feel welcome within the brotherhood and helping them progress musically. Also present within the subtheme of support were the ideas of responsibility, accountability and respect. Through rules that keep the men accountable to Mr. Dover and one another, singers understand they must be responsible and respectful in order to participate in the Cedar High School Men’s Choir.

The second subtheme of brotherhood discussed in this chapter was pride—pride in musical excellence and also pride in the privilege of membership in the Cedar High School Men’s Choir. The men shared their enthusiasm in performing and impressing crowds, and the attention they enjoyed from members of the opposite sex as a result of their music making. The joy of working hard to make excellent music, the privilege of being a member, and the awareness of being part of a continuing legacy were also aspects of pride shared by the men.

The final subtheme of brotherhood explored in this chapter was camaraderie. Ranging from deep meaningful bonds and connections shared with their brothers to crude humor, rowdiness, and shenanigans, the brotherhood of the men’s choir at Cedar High School is strengthened and shaped by the camaraderie these men share. Inclusive in nature, the men make an effort to make all members feel welcome and to celebrate their diverse backgrounds and

interests. Traditions such as the “circle,” the campout, and theme nights are also an important part of the camaraderie shared by these men.

The emergent theme of brotherhood and its accompanying subthemes of support, pride, and camaraderie are only a portion of the findings from the collected data. Additional themes emerged from the interviews, field notes, observations, email correspondences and written responses. These remaining findings have been organized and will be explored methodically in the chapters to follow.



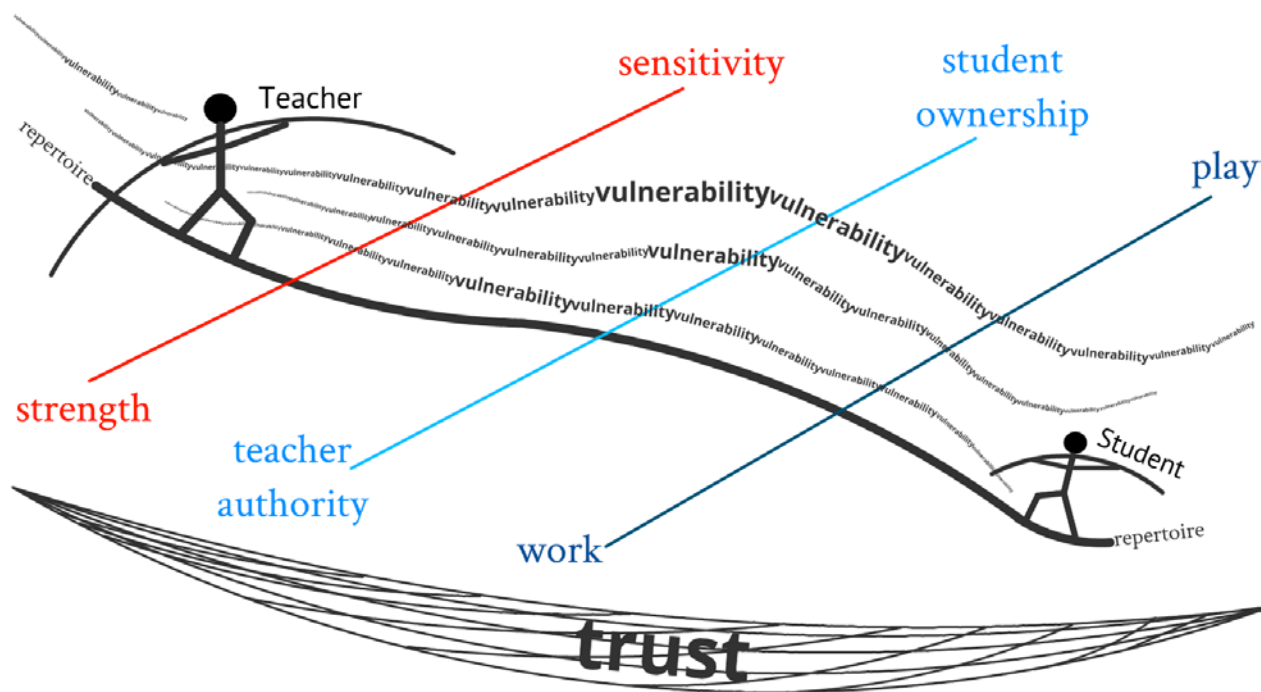
## **CHAPTER 6**

### **Phenomenological Instrumental Case Study Findings: The “Tightrope” Model**

#### **Introduction**

In addition to the themes and subthemes of brotherhood explored in chapter five, several other themes emerged from the data. A model has been constructed to illustrate nine of these themes and their specific interactions (see Figure 2). The first six themes are uniquely juxtaposed and have been grouped according to their paired interactions: (a) strength and sensitivity, (b) teacher authority and student ownership, and (c) work and play. Separate from these pairs are two other themes: (d) trust and (e) vulnerability. Trust and vulnerability interacted with other themes in the model, but also shared a specific codependency in their relationship with one another. For example, when the men of Cedar High School Men’s Choir trust one another, they seem more willing to be vulnerable. Similarly, as they become more vulnerable with one another, they experience a greater sense of trust. The final theme to be discussed in this chapter is (f) repertoire. Threaded through all themes as a central strand or “tightrope” in this model, the theme of repertoire interacts with all other themes. These intricate relationships among the themes are clarified through the model shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. The Tightrope Model. For the reader's clarity in viewing, "vulnerability" is depicted as wind, while "trust" is depicted as the safety net below the tightrope of "repertoire," traveled by both the teacher and student.



In this model, vulnerability is depicted as wind, while trust is portrayed as the net below the tightrope. These images were chosen deliberately: wind (vulnerability), being somewhat unsettling to those traveling the tightrope, while a net (trust) provides the teacher and student with a sense of safety, encouraging further risk-taking. The teacher and students navigate the three paired themes of: (a) strength and sensitivity, (b) teacher authority and student ownership, and (c) work and play, while traveling the tightrope of “repertoire.” The theme of repertoire serves as a central strand that: (a) passes through all paired themes, (b) connects the student and the teacher in music making and learning, (c) serves as a vehicle by which the student and teacher navigate the paired themes, and (d) interacts with vulnerability and trust.

The tightrope image in this model emerged directly from Mr. Dover’s own words in our final interview. In the excerpt to follow, I asked Mr. Dover if the single-sex teaching

environment impacted his level of comfort in the classroom. I was surprised and honored by how openly he shared with me.

Andrea: I am wondering how different environments impact personal comfort in rehearsal. For example, many of the men said they felt more comfortable in men's choir or that they could be themselves more in men's choir, and I just wondered if you had any similar experiences as a teacher? Do you feel more comfortable in the men's environment than you do during the day with your mixed choir?

Mr. Dover: Isn't that interesting? No, I'm going to tell you—and maybe it's just built-in—but I am afraid every day before men's [choir]. Before I walk in to men's every day, I am afraid. There's a part of me that says, 'Don't brick it because you don't want to lose them. Don't ruin this. Stay on top of this. Keep them engaged. Give them what they need. Get them working.' . . . It's *such* a tightrope.

Mr. Dover's use of the word tightrope resonated with what I had observed in rehearsals and discovered in the written data. Balance seemed to be a key component to the success of this men's chorus: balance between strength and sensitivity; balance between work and play; and balance between how much the teacher maintained authority and how much ownership the students were allowed in rehearsal.

In this model, the teacher and the students do not always achieve perfect balance. They may teeter more toward "work" than "play" as a concert or festival performance is approaching, or lean more toward sensitivity than strength depending upon the selected repertoire in a given semester. However, the model does articulate the dynamics of relationships observed in rehearsals and collected from the data in this study.

In the remainder of this chapter each pair of themes will be investigated fully: (a) Strength and sensitivity, (b) teacher authority and student ownership, and (c) work and play. Following the exploration of the paired themes, I will then address the remaining themes within the model of (d) trust and vulnerability, and (e) repertoire. It should be mentioned that Mr. Dover also emerged as a facilitator and navigator of these themes. His role as such may be mentioned in this chapter, but will not be wholly explored until chapter eight.

### **Strength and Sensitivity**

Participants shared that they experienced both strength and sensitivity as a part of the Cedar High School Men's Choir. Words such as "power," "manliness," and "empowerment" were attached to feelings of strength rooted in the men's individual and collective performances and rehearsals. These words were also attached to encounters with certain repertoire, and their membership in the choir. Similarly, the men also attached the words "tender," "expression," "gentle-manly" and "beautiful" to their encounters of musical and personal sensitivity as a member of the choir. The words "emotion" and "passion" also appeared in the data and were attached to ideas of strength *and* sensitivity.

While sharing about an exceptional conference performance, Levi wrote, "I was so jacked from that performance just because it—like, I felt more *manly* from that performance."

Trent elaborated upon these "manly" feelings in a private email correspondence:

A good performance in men's choir makes you feel powerful, passionate, and manly.

These powerful and manly feelings occur in rehearsal sometimes too. I'm not sure when exactly, but it could be when everyone is focused. Also, I think the feelings are rooted to self-empowerment *of* singing with a group of men. There is pride in a performance knowing that the audience is admiring you, and the group as a whole. Because a choir is

made up of everyone and not just a few people, I feel like I am contributing during a performance. When the audience applauds, I feel accomplished in myself as well as the group.

Al, too, indicated feeling “manly” and empowered while singing with the men’s choir:

It’s almost like we portray our brotherhood and that just makes you feel really manly.

Like, you’re around all these guys that you’re really close to and you make this music with them and you just feel so empowered because the people love what you’re doing.

In the examples to follow, other participants indicated feelings of empowerment while singing with the men’s choir, though they did not use the word “empowerment.” Harry wrote, “When we sing, confidence flows through my veins. I feel like my singing range expands past my limits.” Dan said, “You feel really manly, and that sense of brotherhood is so strengthened, you know? You go out and just *conquer the world* together.” In our focus group interview, Eli marveled at the sounds the men were able to create on their own, without the help of female voices.

It’s like, we can make this beautiful—and have these huge ranges—and like, the same thing when you hear a really low bass—it’s like—there’s this *person* making that noise. It’s not recorded or anything and it’s just these huge ranges and it’s just awesome! All these ranges in between—we can make this music with just *men*. Like, (exuberantly) we don’t need—we don’t need *women*!

The men also used the word “powerful” to describe their sound and experiences within the men’s choir, as seen in the following interaction from our focus group interview:

Andrea: So, I've sung with women's choruses, and I've sung with mixed choruses, but obviously, I've never sung as part of a men's chorus. What's it like in the middle of all that sound?

Levi: Well, it's very *powerful*.

Steve: It is. Men's is so much more powerful, because all the sound is lower. I love it when we can be loud and take total command of everyone's attention.

Levi: And when you're singing a song that's got a really powerful part, or it really nails the audience—that really draws them in, you know? That's really *cool*.

In my individual interview with Al, I pried a bit more in hopes of better understanding what caused these feelings of strength and power.

Andrea: So, when you're in men's choir, do you feel more strong/manly/powerful on certain songs than you do on other songs?

Al: Yes. (pauses, thinks) Well, there's a *spectrum*. 'Cause there's "Betelehemu" [Nigerian Christmas Song by Via Olatunji arranged by Wendell Whalum] and there's this one song "Nothing's Gonna Stumble my Feet" [by John Parker and Greg Gilpin] and they were spiritual, and there were the drums and all these low tones, and lots of forte, and that's *one* kind of manly feel where you just feel *powerful*. And then, there's another kind of manly that you feel when you sing a song like "Mary Anne" [by Neil Ginsburg] and it's just a sweeter, more beautiful sound, and *that* sound also makes you feel just so manly, but it's just a different *side* of the manliness, so there's different *ranges*—

Andrea: Maybe a type of *gentle*-manliness? (laughs)

Al: (excitedly) Yeah! The *gentle*-manliness! Yeah, I mean, on the strong forte songs you feel like a superhero more, and then on the other [gentlemanly] side, you feel more sweet

and genuine and—(pauses, searching for the word) *beautiful*. Well, in a *handsome*, beautiful way . . .

Al also divulged that he felt males, in general, struggled to “feel” the music and be expressive.

Al: . . . Sometimes males aren’t as outgoing with their singing and they don’t *feel* the music as much. They’re not as—uh—(searching for words)

Andrea: Expressive?

Al: Expressive! That’s the word, yes. And Mr. Dover does a really great job of bringing that out I would say . . . and I think that’s really what makes a great men’s choir—is after you get the technique and the tones and the singing down, being *expressive* and having a good conductor who can bring that out is really important.

According to Levi, Mr. Dover creates a safe space for the men that helps them to be more sensitive and expressive: “I think Mr. Dover, he sets it up—and pretty much says without saying, ‘It’s okay to be sensitive and say what you *feel* and all. Just because we’re guys doesn’t mean we have to be these macho men all the time and be like (extra-deep speaking voice) ‘Oh yeah, *football!*’”

Spending time with the men in rehearsals, I enjoyed watching as these moments of sensitivity unfolded. I vividly remember one evening’s rehearsal in which Mr. Dover stopped the men and asked them to listen as Mrs. Freeman played about eight measures of fluid, expressive accompaniment to a portion of their song, “And Draw Her Home With Music” by Nancy Hill Cobb. After listening, Mr. Dover invited the men to share what the music made them think about or feel. The men hesitated, and Mr. Dover quickly added, “There are no wrong answers.” At this point seven or eight hands went up and the men began to share incredibly sensitive imagery, almost poetically—one after another. “It’s nighttime,” said one student, “and

there's a full moon and a couple walking hand in hand." Another singer chimed in, "When I hear it, I feel like I'm lying in a field and watching the clouds float by and change shapes." Another student offered, "I see a woman waiting by a window pane and the rain is coming down outside."

The depth of the men's reflections and sensitivity within the safe space Mr. Dover had created was remarkable, and Dan indicated in our interview that these moments were beloved by the men in the choir as something they did not encounter elsewhere.

There was just that comfort that we can open up and pour our hearts out and nobody's gonna think, 'Oh, that *wuss*!' and it's just an environment that Mr. Dover creates and it's this safe place where we can just be ourselves and talk about manly things like girls or whatever, or farts, like we've said, but *also* talk about the sides of our souls that men a lot of times *don't* discuss and that's something really cool about men's choir. And I think, deep down, we all knew that that was one thing we really loved about it—was that we got to talk about deep poetry and be vulnerable. And as a high school guy, that's not something I think we found anywhere else—that vulnerability and that ability to talk openly about emotion.

The participants in this study enjoyed exploring the strength and power of singing with other men as well as the sensitive and more expressive side of their experience. The men did not seem to express any hesitancy about exploring strength and power in their music making, but did acknowledge the importance of the safe environment Mr. Dover established within the Cedar High School Men's Choir as a catalyst for exploring the more sensitive and expressive aspects of their music making.



## Teacher Authority and Student Ownership

When Mr. Dover teaches, he is respectful of students and their voices, yet maintains authority. He has expectations for responsibility and accountability, but also invites student input and encourages intelligent and respectful discourse. In my observations, Mr. Dover regularly employed questioning in his instruction, as seen in this excerpt from my field notes:

*“Who has the melody?” Mr. Dover asks the men. He grins wryly as they guess at every voice part before he finally laughs and says, “No! The piano has the melody!” Some of the men chuckle while others boo and complain to Mr. Dover for asking what seemed to be a trick question. He then asks the men to listen once more as Mrs. Freeman plays. He says to them, “I think this is a very important section, and a very important lesson. You have to listen and realize how your part fits with everything. It’s not always what you’re doing. It’s how your part fits with everything else.”*

Mr. Dover often engages the students in this way. In a rehearsal of “Loveliest of Trees” by Richard Nance, the men discussed the second stanza of song’s text—a poem from “A Shropshire Lad” by A.E. Housman (1859-1936). The text of the stanza is, “Now, of my threescore years and ten, / Twenty will not come again, / And take from seventy springs a score, / It only leaves me fifty more.”

In this particular rehearsal, Mr. Dover asks the men, “Why do you think the composer chose to set the words ‘Twenty will not come again’ *twice*, and with more emphasis the second time?” The men considered this, and a thought-provoking discussion was the result, as they began to place themselves in the mindset of a composer, pondering why a segment of text might be repeated.

In another rehearsal on this same work, Mr. Dover asked the men, “Can you give me three things we need to work on?” Right away, Christopher said they needed to work on diction. Brad answered that they need to work on balance. David offered that they were too tentative in a certain few measures, and Mr. Dover agreed with him. Several other men gave ideas and suggestions and Mr. Dover heard each one, affirmed each student, and informed the men that in tomorrow’s rehearsal they would be working on all the things that *they* just said needed improvement. He ended the rehearsal with,

Fellas, you’ve done a great job of sharing. You’ve done a great job. You don’t need Mrs. Freeman and I [*sic*], you need *yourselves* to solve these problems. Tomorrow when you come to rehearsal, would you be prepared to solve your problems like this? Because you are *amazing*—you just said everything we need to get done.

As seen in the previous example, Mr. Dover encouraged students to think critically and to own their musicianship. On occasions when repertoire proved extra challenging, the men were asked to work in section huddles. A cacophony engulfed the room, as each section worked through their individual part in free tempo, independently of the other huddles. I watched, as the men would stop to correct errors or high five one another when they succeeded. Mr. Dover wandered from huddle to huddle—checking on each group’s progress and providing encouragement, support, or feedback. This is another example of how Mr. Dover attempted to navigate the balance between teacher authority and student ownership.

Levi relayed one instance where Mr. Dover (after encountering apathy from the men for several frustrating rehearsals) became exasperated and placed the mantle of musical responsibility squarely on the backs of the students. In reaction to this, the students took ownership and made the necessary improvements that had previously eluded them for weeks.

Levi: . . . There was a time where we were doing “Nothing’s Gonna Stumble My Feet” and it got to the point where we were just *not* getting it, to where Mr. Dover—he was fed up one night and said, “Look, I’m done. Get it together.” And so, he really put it on *us*, and so I think we all got together—actually on Facebook, and called each other out in areas that we needed to do so and really got everybody on the same page. Egos were left at the door.

Andrea: And you did this through a Facebook group?

Levi: Yeah. On Facebook, we have a men’s choral group . . . and we made sure that everyone was on. And like Adam and Mark, they called some guys out. They didn’t single any names, but just said, “Look, there a group of guys and you know who you are and you need to figure it out because that song is so cool and we really need to get it [right] for him.” So before our big performance—it was the last rehearsal and it came out of nowhere. Mr. Dover said, “Alright you guys, well let’s just try it. Let’s just see where you are.” And [we] got up and (snaps fingers) boom. Nailed it. Perfectly. And he [Mr. Dover] literally sat back and said, (confused voice) “Did you guys work on this?” And [we said,] “Well, *yeah*.” And he said, “Alright, well let’s do it again.” And I’m pretty sure we went like a half hour over our normal rehearsal just doing that song and it was *awesome*. And so we finally got to the performance and I think all the energy and momentum from just working through that crazy ridiculous song and doing a lot of it on our *own* because *he* put it on us to see if we could do it. I think *that* was what really made it click—that feeling of *victory*, I guess.

Andrea: Kind of like you *owned* it?

Levi: Yeah, we conquered that challenge.

Mr. Dover has provided the singers in Cedar High School Men's Choir with administrative opportunities for ownership as well. They have made organizational decisions regarding their theme nights, menswear logos, and other activities. He also encourages students to own their classroom management during rehearsals as seen in the field notes excerpt below:

*The student teacher has begun rehearsing the men. The men begin the piece focused and respectful but as they move further into the piece, they begin to disengage. A few glazed eyes. Slouchy posture. When the student teacher has them stand to sing, they become squirrely and disinterested, and some begin to talk and one or two students shush the others. Mr. Dover says, "I hear a lot of people shushing each other. Ownership, guys, ownership." This was a beautiful way of correcting an unwanted behavior by commending the men who were helping to correct it. The men immediately responded, and quieted themselves.*

As the tightrope is a balancing act, there are times where Mr. Dover has shifted the balance away from student ownership to teach in a more authoritative manner. In my observations, these moments were more likely to occur when the men were either (a) off task or (b) not meeting desired musical expectations. In these instances, Mr. Dover would provide direct and firm instructions. Sometimes these were musical directives such as "Basses, this note needs a bit more bite. Can you place the sound more forward?" and other times, they were focused on behavior: "No discussions right now, Brad. The only person you need to pay attention to is me."

Occasionally, Mr. Dover seemed to struggle internally with this balance between teacher authority and student ownership. This was exhibited in the final December rehearsal when he asked the men, "Do you want to use music on these two pieces tomorrow?" Before the men

could even debate the issue, Mr. Dover quickly said, “Okay, let’s use music tomorrow. I just decided and I’m the dictator (implied sarcasm).” In many of these instances where Mr. Dover took a more direct and authoritative path, he often employed self-deprecating humor. See the following excerpt from my field notes:

*“A little more falsetto in the mix, men.” Mr. Dover is insistent with them. He keeps insisting that the sound be lighter. He says to them again, “One more time! Half as loud. Oh my God, I’m such a jerk!” His comment is partly sarcastic, but I almost believe that Mr. Dover believes this about himself in this instance. This kind of micro-rehearsing is not his usual style. He is particularly insistent with them on this point, and surprisingly the men respond with more attentiveness and are not frustrated. They lean into the challenge.*

Mr. Dover’s awareness of this struggle to balance teacher authority with student ownership is keen. He even addressed it in our final interview where he referenced the tightrope once more:

There’s this—it’s the tightrope with them, as it is with all kids, but there’s that tightrope of “How much do you let them define the rehearsal or define what they’re going to bring to it to give it their identity and *own* it versus how much *you’re* going to steer them [as the teacher]?”

The alumni participants in this study also noted the balancing act between teacher authority and student ownership.

Andrea: So, the leadership component in men’s choir—how much of that is student-directed and how much of that is Mr. Dover?

Dan: I think it's both. Mr. Dover encourages leadership, however, at the same time, you've gotta have people sitting in the seats who are leading both vocally and mentally and when people *aren't* doing their jobs, I think Mr. Dover puts pressure on, but it's also student led.

Max also shared briefly about this in our interview, admiring the balance he saw Mr. Dover achieve with the choir.

He is able to connect with the guys. Yeah, they have to do what Mr. Dover wants to get done in class, but he also lets them be *guys* and do what they want. I don't know *how*. I mean, I've thought about, "How does he *do* that?!" and I still can't really explain how he does.

### **Work and Play**

"There's time for work, and there's time for play," remarked Al during our individual interview. His chosen cliché encapsulates the balance Mr. Dover and the Cedar High School Men's Choir strive for on a daily basis. In some instances, the pace of the class might be rapid fire, with constant distractions, laughter, joking, and side conversations. At other times, the room could be stone silent as the men explored the meaning of a song's poetic text. I watched Mr. Dover navigate the men's rowdier moments—working with the restless energy, as if it were some sort of ocean current. He did not resist, but instead, seemed to paddle with the current—turning and rolling perhaps—but generally keeping the men moving in a forward direction.

In interviews and written responses the men acknowledged this, and valued having both work *and* play present in the rehearsal environment. Al and I had a particularly rich discussion about this:

Andrea: So, are there any things you think choir teachers should keep in mind when working with a large group of male singers?

Al: Well, I think it's really hard to keep our attention, because I mean, a lot of the times we're just horsing around or trying to make jokes with one another and Mr. Dover does a really great job of having times where he allows the rowdiness and the joking, but then he changes his teaching style. It goes from being laid back—but then you can tell when he gets serious and it's time to work.

Andrea: What do you think would happen if you didn't have those moments to be rowdy or crack jokes with each other?

Al: I think that whenever the director would try to make us do anything, we wouldn't work . . . and maybe we wouldn't respect him as much, because right now [Mr. Dover] he's like a friend of ours, so we want to respect him and do the things he needs because we like him and we *genuinely* like him, but if he was always strict and pushing us just so hard, we might not really care what he thinks about us . . . I mean, I really think it [rowdiness, lighter moments] gets more participation in the choir itself. Even when you're in the choir already, there's more participation when you need to do work. By slacking off, you get work done. It's kind of a paradox.

Andrea: That's almost counterintuitive.

Al: Yes.

Andrea: So you feel like the times of productivity are greater because you have a little bit of down time?

Al: Mm-hm (nods affirmatively) It's kind of paradoxical.

In my observations, I did not note any rehearsals with lengthy chunks of down time, but I did observe “breathing room”—small breaks or changes in direction, or an opportunity for the men to laugh or tell a joke. The men in the focus group interview seemed to view this as almost a necessity for success.

Eli: We have to be rowdy. Well, maybe not rowdy, but we have to have our down times.

Honestly, like before festival or something when it’s an hour straight of music with no rowdiness, it just gets intense and some of us, like—

Jan: check out—

Eli: Yeah, and then we have those times where he gives us like five minutes to—

Jan: tell a joke

Eli: Yeah, tell a joke or something weird like that and then it just kind of gets us back and we’re good to go for the rest of the time. It really helps us.

Steve: Yeah, the fact that we take time to like, mix it up with the entertainment and bonding—like the actual work we have to do—it makes it easier to focus when we have to.

Eli: So he tries to find a kind of balance.

Al: Yeah . . . he mixes the bonding with the keeping on track and doing the work that we need to do. We know when he’s serious because we see how often he is playful with us and bonds with us, so we know when he’s serious that it’s time to get down to work.

Work seemed more productive for the men when it functioned in tandem with play.

Many of the men viewed play as a means of strengthening their brotherhood and bonds. They also believed play to be a key component for any male chorus’s success. Through private email correspondences, I asked the other student participants the question I asked Al in our focus group



interview, “Are there any things you think choir teachers should keep in mind when working with a large group of male singers? What advice would you give them?” Concern for work-play balance threaded through almost every response I received. Steve encouraged teachers to remember that “men *will* get distracted and that whoever the director is needs to know this and understand how to handle it, not freak out and get mad, but have some way to constantly keep us focused.” Harry viewed play in rehearsal as a means by which singers can feel more comfortable:

My advice to directors that conduct a large group of male singers is, from time to time, do not be afraid to tell a joke or pun. Yes, that might not be ‘professional’ but it will help relax the choir and make a more comfortable atmosphere, therefore helping the singers focus on more important matters like making great music.

Miles suggested that play is important both inside and *outside* the rehearsal setting—advocating that an ensemble that plays together outside of its normal rehearsal time could be more cohesive personally and musically.

Keep your rehearsals serious, but let us go off on a tangent for a minute or two during it to give us a break. That will help the director get more work accomplished in the rehearsal and he/she won’t have to yell at us constantly. Take us on educational trips and then go on an excursion to a waterpark or some place like that afterwards. Encourage us to have fun. This will help build a bond between the members of the group, creating cohesion, and the group will improve tenfold.

Like Miles, Oscar wrote that he believed bonding occurred between the men during these “goof off times” and that play helped the men get to know one another on a “completely new level.”

Trent also shared about the work-play balance in his email by offering the following bits of

advice for teachers: (a) “make sure to keep the choir focused when working,” and (b) “the teacher should crack jokes once in awhile [*sic*] to lighten the mood and have fun.” Finally, Eli offered a friendly word of caution to teachers: “when a group of guys get together things can get rowdy and sometimes you need to be stern to keep things in order.” As seen by these men’s words, both work and play are valued aspects of the men’s choir culture. Rather than an either/or scenario, they view work and play as intertwined—a means by which they can rehearse more effectively, get to know one another, feel more comfortable in their environment, relate with Mr. Dover, bond with one another, and build their brotherhood.

### **Trust and Vulnerability**

The themes of trust and vulnerability are uniquely interrelated in this study. (See Figure 2.) Trust provides the men of the Cedar High School Men’s Choir with a safe foundation from which to be vulnerable. Increased vulnerability, in turn, seems to generate greater trust among the men. The very act of singing requires a certain amount of vulnerability, as Levi described:

When you *sing*, you’re in a very vulnerable spot because—when you’re playing an instrument, you’re using something to create the sound. When you’re playing a sport, you’re using your body, you know? You mess up, okay, whatever—but when you’re *singing*, that’s *all you have*. That’s *very* personal. That’s very close to you. And when you can build that trust to sing in front of anybody in that men’s choir, that’s way stronger than any other kind of friendship, I would say because (1) that builds a friendship, but (2) you’re pretty much telling them I trust you with one of the most personal things I have.

Levi shared the above quote in our focus group interview with the other four participants nodding and agreeing as he spoke. Later, in our individual interview, he returned to the idea of vulnerability once more:

I see singing as—when you get in front of people, you have one shot. You either nail the song and everyone loves you or you butcher the song and everyone goes, “Well, he *tried*.” So that, in itself is nerve wracking, but also, singing can make someone sad, can make someone cry, can make someone feel really happy, can make someone mad, get inspired—there’s just so many things that music and singing can do to someone. To be able to sing—it’s just like there’s this automatic pressure: “Well, I need to *convey* what this song is to the audience perfectly for them to get it.” And when you finally get *that*—when you finally nail that performance after all that hard work you’ve been doing, that’s really when you know, “*This* is what I love to do.” I mean, I think it is a very *vulnerable* thing. *Especially* for guys, because you know there’s always been this stereotype that guys are these macho men, I mean, you see TV commercials and there’s always—(using a character voice) “Beer, and chips, and football,” you know? And all that other stuff, and you never see those guys *singing*. No, singing, I think is a very personal thing. So for a *man* to do that—I feel that’s really stepping out on the edge, saying, “Well, here goes nothing.” It’s a very make it or break it thing.

Levi shared in this excerpt how singing—and even more specifically, being a man who sings—can require tremendous risk-taking and vulnerability. Even from his secure position as a leader in his school’s choral program, varsity basketball player, and lead in the high school musical, Levi still views singing as an act of tremendous vulnerability.

In Al's first year as a member of the Cedar High School Men's Choir, he auditioned for a solo. Al described his fearfulness as he took such a personal leap into vulnerability. As a new member of the choir, he was still forming bonds of trust with the other men.

I mean, in my choirs in middle school I was always one of the more strong singers and I was always confident in how I sang and what I sounded like, but the first semester, [in men's choir] I did feel a little bit on edge because I tried to audition for a solo for the song "Betelehemu" and when I auditioned for that it was terrifying and I lost all the blood in my face and I just went pale and people were actually asking me if I was okay. And at first, it's just *terrifying* and you feel extremely vulnerable and you're with all these older guys and you don't know what they're thinking . . . but they were all welcoming and accepting and they congratulated me and I ended up getting the solo . . .

Al associated his feelings of vulnerability with feelings of being terrified. Similarly, Dan expressed fear of vulnerability in our interview.

Dan: . . . In high school, well, at least for me, being *vulnerable* was one of my biggest fears. You don't want to be *vulnerable*. You don't want to show it in the hallway, like—that's the *last* thing you want, but then when you have a place [like men's choir] where you feel *safe* and *comfortable* and you realize that everyone's in the same boat and everyone has a lot of the same fears, and it's okay to wear your emotions on your sleeves and let things out and share with friends and know that it's going to be a respectful community and at the end of the day they'll support you through it.

Andrea: And what does that do for you as a high school student—having that?

Dan: It's the reason you come to school—knowing that night you've got men's choir. The school day's gonna be brutal. Getting up at six or whatever, it's gonna suck—but

*tonight* we've got men's choir and that's gonna be *awesome*. Health-wise, I had some really big health issues in high school—(pauses to gather thoughts, sighs) some tough times—but men's choir was always the thing that just kept me moving forward.

The comfort and safety the men's choir provided for Dan is something Max experienced as well.

I was the only *openly* gay man in the choir, which in itself was a struggle at first, but it was a comfortable setting and so I was very *comfortable* being myself there. I did have to filter things—being in the group—because it was a bunch of heterosexual young men, and they have ideas and generalizations about homosexuality, so I picked up on this and realized I had to be careful about what I did, but I always felt open in the group.

Max also expressed that he felt Mr. Dover did a good job of working to ensure he felt safe within rehearsals. He also enjoyed that Mr. Dover challenged the men of the choir when it came to stereotypical gender roles.

I thought he [Mr. Dover] did a really good job of challenging the guys with those stereotypical gender roles, and he didn't *directly* say, "Well, guys don't always have to do this, and blah, blah, blah" but he did it with the repertoire he would pick. And a lot of times, the guys would end up making it something like a *gay* joke in there . . . and at first I was worried what would happen if it went there, like, "Oh no, the guys are gonna say something derogatory or negative" but they would always kind of be, "Well, that's okay." And Mr. Dover would always say, "You know, there's nothing wrong with that [being homosexual]." And I mean, I was always very *comfortable*, but when it took that path, it made me have more respect for the group because I realized this *is* a place where I *can* be safe.

As Max grew more trusting of his fellow choir members, he made himself even more vulnerable with them. For Max, vulnerability surfaced in a slightly different way than many of his heterosexual classmates. I asked Max in our interview about any especially profound moments he had experienced with the men's choir, and he shared with me two particular songs that were meaningful for him. The first song he discussed was Frank Ticheli's "There Will Be Rest," which created a deeply emotional moment for Max each time the men sang the work. The second song that held great meaning for Max was "Next to Lovin' I Like Fightin' Best" from the musical "Shenandoah." The men's choir had staged and choreographed this performance for the Cedar High School spring cabaret concert. The story is best when heard through Max's own voice:

It [the song] was very much like, these kind of masculine, male gender roles, but it was kind of fun because it was where I realized I can have fun with these guys, and maybe it's not necessarily *my* identity, but I liked pretending to fight on stage and being rowdy. It was kind of a window for me to realize that it was okay to go there with them. I had always filtered myself and wouldn't let myself get rowdy, and when we did that, I thought, "You know, this is *fun*, and I get a lot more out of the relationships when I open myself up more." And so that piece kind of affected me.

## **Repertoire**

As seen in Figure 2, the theme of repertoire threads as a tightrope and intersects all other themes within the study. For students and the teacher, repertoire is a means of "meeting in the middle." As students sing and teachers envision and shape the artistry with students, repertoire is their connection. Repertoire is the vehicle for exploration of musical ideas and drives the curriculum within the choral classroom. To this end, Mr. Dover works to select varied,

meaningful, and educational repertoire. In this section of the chapter, I will explore the intersection of repertoire with all other uniquely paired themes.

**Strength and sensitivity.** The men’s choir at Cedar High School performs repertoire that allows its members to experience both strength and sensitivity. The men acknowledged both as valuable and enjoyable. Several of the participants shared that a Nigerian Christmas Song, “Betelehemu,” [written by Via Olatunji and arranged by Wendell Whalum] allowed them to express strength and power. Oscar wrote,

A song that really stands out and is by far my favorite is a song called ‘Betelehemu.’ I really enjoyed this piece because of how strong the sound of it is. Since most people enjoy it and are passionate about it, that passion shines through the music.

Eli described “Betelehemu” as “powerful and great,” adding that it was a special song for all the men. Levi also described “Betelehemu” as “powerful,” saying that it “commanded attention.” “Betelehemu” was one of three songs Levi named that he believed truly defined the men’s choir at Cedar High School. Another song Levi listed was “Tell My Father” [by Frank Wildhorn, arranged by Andrea Ramsey] of which he wrote the following: “‘Tell My Father’ was one that really showed the softer, more genuine side of men’s.” Miles shared that Dr. David Brunner’s work, “I Am In Need of Music” also opened a realm of sensitivity for him. Miles wrote in depth about his appreciation of the composition from architectural and aesthetic perspectives.

There were some slower songs that we sang that I loved and that have left a profound impact on me. One of those was “I Am in Need of Music” by Dr. David L. Brunner. I loved that song because of the many things that he used in his music and where he placed them throughout the text: the use of sustained chords, major seventh chords and their inversions, and Lydian mode. Where he placed those items and the specific ways he used

them tugged on my heartstrings and made me weep inside. (I'm getting a little choked up as I think about it now, actually,) and that song will forever have a special place in my heart.

As a new choral music teacher, Dan spoke with me about his efforts to locate meaningful male chorus repertoire for his own students. He indicated Mr. Dover always did an excellent job selecting repertoire for the Cedar High School Men's Choir and that this was something he aspired to as well. Proudly, he shared with me about his own male chorus's experiences with the piece "I Will Be Earth" by Gwyneth Walker.

We just did "I Will Be Earth" with my men and I tried to take a very similar route with it [as Mr. Dover would with us at Cedar High School.] A lot of times in men's choruses you end up singing about sea songs and sailors and silly things, but then to have a poem that we all thought was really deep and had a lot of different levels, like, to *us* that was really cool. Like, "Oh my gosh, this makes sense if you think about it!" and it's really deep and profound and yet now we're going to sing this incredible song and we're going to be really tender at first and then be bombastically loud and then be really tender again. So it was just the sense of us doing something like—it's *deep*—on so many levels, and that sense of "Now we get to sing something that's not light and fluffy like the sea songs and the sailor songs . . ."

**Teacher authority and student ownership.** Levi expressed pride in the ownership the students took of the piece "Nothing's Gonna Stumble My Feet" by John Parker and Greg Gilpin, saying, "We were going to stop doing it because we just couldn't get it, and tension got high, but instead of running, we pushed through and made it one of our best songs of last year." Mr. Dover facilitated this ownership by passing the responsibility to the students. Mr. Dover also



does this regularly in rehearsal by having the men examine the repertoire with a critical eye: (a) for ways to improve their performance, (b) for making connections to the text, or (c) for better understanding the expressive devices employed by the composer.

In one rehearsal, the men were exploring the Shakespearean text of Nancy Hill Cobb's composition, "And Draw Her Home with Music." Mr. Dover engaged the men in a discussion of the phrase "There's not a smallest orb which thou beholdest," and asked the men, "What does that mean?" The men offered varied ideas. Even with an approaching concert the same week, Mr. Dover made time for the students in this way and provided opportunities for them to own and connect with the music they were creating. The discussion of the orbs continued. Levi offered that maybe the orb was symbolic of a vice. Other men chimed in with additional suggestions. "Are *we* the orbs?" one student asked. Mr. Dover praised him for asking a great question and threw it back to the rest of the men, "Does anyone want to answer that? I'm going to let you think on that."

**Work and play.** Work and play themes occurred within the framework of rehearsals, but in some instances the men viewed certain repertoire selections as comic relief or lighter "play" repertoire, and others as more profound and "work-like" in nature. Harry wrote of this in an email response:

The song "Chickens in the Garden" [English toasting song arranged by Stephen Hatfield] was my favorite song from last year. The song was similar to "Pirate Song" [by Tim Y. Jones] in the less serious/funny type of way, and just like the "Pirate Song," it was that comical relief that we always needed after working with more complicated pieces. Dan also spoke about certain repertoire selections he viewed as "play."

We would know when we were doing something cheesy and just to cheese it up and ham it up and . . . we always knew how *dumb* they were (laughs) but at the same time, it's like, "Let's go out and have fun with it!" Those were the moments when we got to show onstage the dumb and silly side of men's choir, which we all loved. Like, at our concerts, I think the audience always knew we would do something really profound or really epic . . . and right after it, do a fluffy one. And we all knew, and I think the audience kind of knew, you know?

Mr. Dover embraced this variety within the repertoire, but also had work a bit harder on occasion to help the men effectively transition between the work and play mindsets. In one rehearsal, Mr. Dover had the men sit down and spoke specifically with them about making a mental and musical transition. He said, "Fellas, you have to go from being completely serious [in "And Draw Her Home With Music" by Nancy Hill Cobb with text by William Shakespeare] to being the "biggest smartass you can be [for "Pirate Song" by Tim Y. Jones]."

**Trust and vulnerability.** Trust and vulnerability intersected with repertoire most frequently in two ways: (a) through the vulnerability of performance—the physical act of singing repertoire, and (b) the vulnerability the men shared as they trusted one another enough to deeply discuss texts and musical elements within the repertoire. Often in moments requiring vulnerability, Mr. Dover would ask the men to put on their "artist thinking caps." Consider this example from my field notes:

*Mr. Dover says, "When you use your good, smart thinking caps, your sensitive thinking caps, your artist thinking caps . . . what does the text mean to you? 'About the woodlands I will go to see the cherry hung with snow.' What does that mean to you?"*

*He asks the men again, and Chad shares his thoughts on winter being symbolic of the end*

*of life. Chad sees the cherry as something beautiful (youth) to which the poet is still clinging. Mr. Dover thanks Chad and says to the men, "You are not far in age from this man. This guy was about 21. You guys are much closer to that than I am. Will you feel that way when you are 21? Will you appreciate life?" The men reflect thoughtfully upon this and sing the work with renewed energy.*

Steve and Al both shared about exploring a text in such a vulnerable way.

Steve: The sharing—the dissecting a song and talking about what it means to you—it really helps us to understand the text so you can sing it more passionately. Like with, “And Draw Her Home With Music,” [by Nancy Hill Cobb, text by William Shakespeare] when we talked about the “Sit, Jessica” part where you have to be intense, but it’s not *angry* intense, it’s *passionate* intense . . . you have to tone yourself just right for that to give it the right sound . . .

Al: Yeah, and I think that—two things that go into us being so willing to share our thoughts about the texts and interpretations is that, first of all, we all sing together and we all trust each other so much because of our singing that we’re more willing to put out something else that’s *also* personal, like our thoughts and the meaning of a text. Also, on top of us *trusting* each other, the seniors lead by example. The freshmen and sophomores can see them contributing and they have more confidence that they’re not going to be laughed at, and they’re going to be able to trust these people [when they share their thoughts].

Dan spoke of two particular repertoire selections that allowed him to share and trust in this way, “A Hymn to God the Father” by John Ness Beck, and “Si Iniquitates Observaveris” by Samuel Wesley.

Dan: I mean, “A Hymn to God the Father”—that was a piece that really felt that on—that we could *show* that emotion, that as a high school guy, you just don’t show your emotions like that very often. And “Si Iniquitates”—I remember that being in my freshman year—it was a really profound moment when we talked about “forgive my iniquities.” I remember the text for that, and I just remember that rehearsal being a really deep one. It’s funny—eight years later—I’m 25 now, and I was probably 14 [then] . . . (reacts) Jesus—that was a long time ago, but I still remember that one specific rehearsal and how deep we went in that piece talking about “Lord, forgive my iniquities” and the different layers of that.

Andrea: Do you still remember your part?

Dan: Yeah. (begins to sing) *Si iniquitates observaveris* . . .

## Summary

In the tightrope model, Mr. Dover and his students navigate the paired themes of (a) strength and sensitivity, (b) teacher authority and student ownership, and (c) work and play through rehearsing, performing, interacting with one another, discussing ideas as a group, and thinking introspectively. Repertoire serves as a vehicle for much of this, bisecting all paired themes and providing a place for teacher and student to “meet in the middle.” The vulnerability theme identified by the men in the study swirls through multiple themes, while the theme of trust provides the safety needed for the men to be vulnerable with one another.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **Phenomenological Instrumental Case Study Findings: Identity and the High School Male**

#### **Chorus**

##### **Introduction**

This chapter will explore three of the research questions that helped to guide this study:

- How are the participants' experiences and behavior while participating in a high school men's chorus different or similar from their experiences and behavior in a high school mixed chorus?
- How are the participants' experiences and behavior while participating in a high school men's chorus different or similar from other nonmusical, all-male activities, such as sports?
- What bearing, if any, does participation in a men's chorus have on the identities of these young men?

Each question will be explored in detail as a separate section within this chapter.

##### **Men's Chorus as Compared to Mixed Chorus**

All twelve student or alumni participants in this study indicated they were currently participating in a mixed choir or had participated in a mixed choir during their time at Cedar High School. Participants indicated that both mixed and men's choirs were positive music making experiences, but several wrote that they felt closer or sensed stronger bonds with their male chorus classmates as compared to their mixed chorus classmates. Other men shared that they felt more comfortable, more safe, or more able to "be themselves" in the male chorus environment. Some tied these feelings of comfort and authenticity to the absence of females in rehearsal, which removed the need for keeping up appearances in front of the opposite sex.

Some also touted the male chorus environment as more relaxed or “laid back” and that the all-male composition of the class freed them to joke more crudely or be rowdy without having to worry about offending their female classmates.

**Closer and stronger bonds.** Several of the men wrote or shared in interviews that they felt closer to their male chorus classmates than their mixed chorus classmates. Consider Oscar’s email response below:

While singing and making great music in a mixed choir is fun and all, it absolutely does not compare to singing with a group of talented guys, in my opinion. When one joins the legacy of men’s choir, they join a brotherhood. The pure camaraderie of men’s is enough to make the experience more enjoyable. By the end of the year, everyone is friends with and knows everyone else in men’s. That just doesn’t happen in your average mixed choir.

Steve wrote that the singers in men’s choir were “often a lot closer” than they were with students in their normal curricular mixed choir. As Al shares, there was a “substantially big difference” between mixed and male choruses “in terms of bonding.” Men’s choirs “. . . seem to be more tightly knit than mixed choruses,” he said. Jan expressed that he was “comfortable” in both choirs and loved the sound of both choirs, but also wrote, “I naturally feel closer to the men’s choir. I don’t know whether it’s because I’ve been in the men’s choir longer or because the brotherhood is closer and easier to bond with, but I feel that in men’s choir I can be myself more than I can in mixed choir.”

**More comfortable and more authentic.** Several men shared remarks similar to Jan’s—that they felt they could “be themselves” more in a men’s choir than in a mixed choir. Take Harry, for instance:

The atmosphere in men's choir, I think, is more relaxed than in a mixed choir. The reason why it is more relaxed is because everyone in the choir gets along with one another, and since we are all guys that have things in common, that wall that we 'teens' put up in front of other people can melt away, which lets us be who we want to be.

Oscar echoed this when he wrote, "I feel like it is easier to be yourself when being around a group of guys." Mr. Dover even expressed that he noticed a difference between the young men who participated in both male and mixed choruses—specifically that the men seemed to be more willing to share in the men's choir than in the mixed choir.

Now we all have those kids that are, you know—those perpetual hands-up-with-ideas kind of kids," he said, "but there are more [men] that are willing [to share] in men's choir than they would in the mixed group. Some just will. I find that there are boys that will definitely share more within the men's group.

Dan explains:

It might sound odd, but especially as a high schooler, I felt much more safe in just a male chorus. *Now* I might not say that as much, but as a high schooler, I felt there was no *pressure*. If my voice cracks, we'll all just laugh about it in the men's choir, but in the mixed choir, I guess you felt that urge to impress, you know? Or to act a certain way around the ladies. And in the men's choir, it's like, "Hey, you can relax. Be yourself."

**The opposite sex.** The presence of the opposite sex in mixed choir rehearsals seemed to create more posturing among some of the men and greater concern about appearances. Al wrote, "Although many of us have close female friends [in mixed choir], the environment [in men's choir] is more relaxed and easygoing when there's no one to impress." Simon articulated this thought in even greater detail:

I feel that singing in a mixed choir is similar to singing in an all-men's choir, but there are a few distinct differences. For example, in both types of choir, everyone is singing for the same purpose—to make great music. But when singing involves maintaining an appearance in front of the opposite gender, it makes it more difficult to make music that comes directly from the heart. In an all men's choir, it is much easier not to focus on how one appears, but rather to focus on making music.

I asked Max about his experiences in both men's choir and mixed choir. He, too, noticed a difference in the men's behavior from one environment to the other.

Max: In the *mixed* choir, they [the men] were a lot more on task. They filtered their dialogue. They filtered their behaviors because there were young ladies in the room and they wanted to keep it appropriate and sometimes there would be a line Mr. Dover would draw and he would say, "Okay guys, there are young ladies in the room. Let's not go there." (laughs) —whereas in men's choir, it would *go* there, and it would—it was very *rambunctious*. Not out of control—the classroom was always in control, but the discussions we would have and kind of the thinking was always kind of rambunctious and very (searching for words) very *burly*, I guess? I don't know how to put it—whereas in the mixed choir it was much more of a feminine environment, and the men's chorus was much more of a masculine environment. I don't know if that helps—

Andrea: I think so. So when you say masculine environment—

Max: The guys goofed off. They horsed around with each other—

Andrea: Right. But less of that—

Max: Less of that in the mixed choir. They were much more on task. There were also less of them, so they didn't have all that to play off of—



Max shared that the men seemed more on task in the mixed environment, and this differs from Simon's perspective of having increased focus in the men's chorus environment without the distraction of female singers. However, Max's observation about the men "filtering their behaviors" in the presence of the opposite sex seems to resonate with responses from other participants. In our focus group interview, Levi even chose the exact word Max used ("burly") to describe the men's choir environment.

Levi: I don't know—when you're with the ladies, you feel a little bit more of a *gentleman*, I guess. And in men's [choir] you feel like that burly—

Jan: caveman

Levi: Like, (grunts) Ah—

Al: (interjects in low-pitched voice) *Football!*

(laughter, grunts, and joking)

Levi: (also in low-pitched voice) Gatorade, 'cause we can't drink *beer!*

(more laughter)

As seen in the exchange above, humor is a big part of the men's choir environment at Cedar High School. The men acknowledge that their humor is slightly bawdier in men's choir than in mixed choir.

**Filtering behavior and self censoring.** Levi relayed that there is a "little more freedom in conversations and jokes" in men's choir, but that those things "need to be toned down" for mixed choir. Mr. Dover shared with me that the men understand these differences in boundaries between their curricular mixed choir and their extracurricular men's choir. "They define that for each other," he said, "So sometimes somebody will say something in the curricular choir and

they [other men] will say, “Um—that’s a *men’s* thing. We don’t do that *here*. This is during the school day. There are ladies in the room.” Eli wrote,

When we have mixed choir, all the men collectively try to be respectful to the women in our choir and try to keep our more vulgar jokes to ourselves, but when we get into an all men’s choir, we don’t usually hold back, and we make our jokes and laugh about it.

Miles shared,

In men’s choir we get to just be ourselves and that’s what builds the brotherhood. In mixed choir, we’re more reserved because we are in front of a lot of girls and we want mixed choir to be a warm, welcoming environment as opposed to a crude, raucous one.

This kind of “self censoring” while in the presence of females seemed to be an understood yet unwritten rule among the men at Cedar High School. Steve wrote that the men were “a lot more crude” in men’s choir because usually there was only Mrs. Freeman to disapprove of their antics. In hearing Steve express that Mrs. Freeman—usually the only woman present in the men’s choir rehearsals—might not approve of their antics, my curiosity was piqued and I asked the men how they felt it might impact their men’s choir if their teacher was a woman. The following dialogue captures this discussion:

Andrea: Do you think—and this may sound like a trick question, because I’m female but don’t let that bother you. Do you think that you could have this same sort of men’s choir if your teacher was female? Do you think that Mr. Dover being male has an impact here? Or *how* does it impact? Maybe that is the better question.

Al: I don’t think we would be as successful.

Steve: (agreeing with Al) No.

Jan: I agree.

Eli: I mean, you kind of want to say, “No, it doesn’t matter,” ‘cause that’s what we’re taught, but I think like—just the way we *are*, and just like, our *personalities*—I feel like we’d have to try to keep that in, and we’d be like, okay, well this is a female teacher and we have to corral our—(searching for words)

Andrea: (jokingly) Male vulgarity? (laughter from the men)

Steve: (referencing earlier interview comment) Herd our cats!

Eli: I don’t know if it would be the same. We might be as successful, but I don’t know if it would be—

Jan: (nods in agreement) The *brotherhood*.

Levi: I feel like we would be successful, but in different areas. Because everywhere we’ve gone we’ve seen men’s choirs that have been conducted by women and they’re great—they’re really good—but I think it’s easier for a male teacher because he can relate better (agreement from the men) and because he knows how the male voice works better than a female because *he’s* a male. And so he understands what we can do to reach that high, tall [vocal] place or—

Jan: Or super low.

Levi: Yeah, he can just relate a lot better than a female teacher might.

Al: I think him being able to teach specifically to our voices helps our success, and on the social aspect of it too—the way that he—his being male—the vulgarity, like we can take breaks from the work and do things that maybe we wouldn’t be able to do with a female teacher.

**Male-specific vocal instruction.** In the dialogue above, the men indicated a belief that Mr. Dover possesses a teaching advantage when working with the men’s choir because he is

male. Al shared more pointedly about this in a private email correspondence where he spoke of enjoying the opportunity to learn more about his voice in an all-male environment.

The learning environment [in men's choir] is more specific to the male voice rather than a blend of voices, and Mr. Dover has more time to teach us techniques that are unique for men. This helps us to learn more in depth about our voices and to perfect things such as tone, placement and vowel shapes—things that make us better singers.

Other participants expressed similar sentiment in interviews and written responses.

**Preferred sound and preferred environment.** In comparing men's and mixed choirs, I asked the participants in our focus group interview whether they preferred the sound of one choir to the other.

Andrea: So, I'm curious. Do you prefer one choir's sound to the other?

Steve: I like men's . . . there's *something* about a group of men singing—

Eli: I think the men sound better, and like, a lot of the audience does too, but I feel like there are a lot of mixed choirs, you know? There's usually three on every concert, but even when there's advanced women's ensemble, it's just kind of new—like all women or all men—it's just kind of something new for the audience and I like the all men singing instead of the mixed [choir] but it's still good either way.

Jan: Yeah, there are things I appreciate in both, but I still like men's. That's where I'm at home.

Levi: I'd say for me, it's very hard to compare the two because there's nothing better when you get that soprano that hits that high note that just sounds like an angel—

(excited) Whew! Man! But men's is definitely, you know—there's definitely a big part for men's in my heart, I mean—there's nothing better than men's.

Al: Yeah, I like how the mixed choirs sound, but something about how—like, I personally just prefer the male voice over the female voice. I just like that more unified sound, so that's why I kind of prefer men's over mixed chorus—it's just, like, the overall sound is more unique, and I just prefer men's.

Andrea: So am I hearing this right? Three of you prefer men's and two of you think it is a toss-up between the two?

Levi: (shaking his head) I would prefer men's.

Jan: I prefer men's, but I was—

Andrea: Oh, so *all* of you prefer the men's sound but you were just being diplomatic—

Jan: Yes.

Levi: Yeah.

(laughter and agreement from the other men)

While the men were uniform in their preference for the sound of the male chorus to the sound of the mixed chorus, they were not unanimous about which rehearsal environment they preferred.

Andrea: So if I took music out of the equation, and I just said, “You’ve got to be in a rehearsal with women or a rehearsal with all men, what then?

Jan: Men's

Eli: Men's

Al: Not all the time, though—

Levi: I'd say mixed choir—

Steve: Men's

**Summary.** Participants from the Cedar High School Men's Choir perceived differences and similarities between the men's chorus and mixed chorus environments and sounds. Similarities between men's and mixed environments included enjoyable music-making experiences, good work ethics in both choirs, and positive rapport in both choirs. Differences described by the men included (a) some perceiving a closer and stronger bond with fellow men's choir members than mixed choir members, and (b) some feeling more comfortable and safe in the men's chorus environment. Several men also indicated that the male chorus environment provided (c) freedom from having to maintain appearances in front of members of the opposite sex, (d) a feeling of being able to be more authentic or more "themselves", and (e) the ability to engage in crude humor and rowdiness without having to filter behavior or speech.

There were some issues upon which the men disagreed. Some participants felt it was easier to focus on the music making in the men's choir environment without the distraction of women. Others felt the women's presence was a moderating influence on the men's rowdiness and resulted in mixed choir rehearsals that were more focused and on-task than men's chorus rehearsals. Though the men were split in opinion about which rehearsal environment they preferred, most of the participants indicated they preferred the overall sound of the men's choir to the sound of the mixed choir.

### **Men's Chorus as Compared with Other All-Male, Nonmusical Activities**

Of the twelve student and alumni participants in the study, ten indicated they had also participated in all-male, nonmusical activities—more specifically, an athletic sport of some variety. Two participants had not participated in an all-male, nonmusical activity: (a) Steve had only participated in coed sports activities (bowling, surfing), and (b) Max had never participated in a sport or other all-male, nonmusical activity.

Among the men who had participated in sports, the comparison of men's choir to athletic experiences drew a vast array of similarities and differences. Trent was the only participant to indicate he felt men's choir and his sport were exactly the same apart from their differing activities. A lacrosse player for Cedar High School, Trent wrote: "Singing in men's choir is the same as participating in other all-male activities. I am on the lacrosse team and I feel that both groups are full of guys who have a similar goal: to be good at what they do. Though completely different activities, the groups both practice hard to perform well." Levi also described similarities between men's choir and the Cedar High School varsity basketball team. In basketball, as in men's choir, Levi assumed a leadership role, as he shared in our individual interview,

My coach wanted me to be a leader this year, so I'm leading with everything I can. We struggled to start off, but we finally got it last night. We beat Evanston by 17, which was a really big win because they've been doing really good. So, the leadership part is a definite similarity I think.

**Brotherhood in men's choir and sports.** Another similarity Levi perceived between basketball and men's choir was that both had a sense of brotherhood—though each brotherhood had subtle differences.

In sports, there is definitely a brotherhood that cannot be broken, just like in men's choir, but in the sports world you have to be a little more thick-skinned in my opinion. The music world has its fair share of jerks, but in sports you seem to find it more often. In choir, there aren't distinctions based on grade. We wouldn't treat a freshman differently than a senior, [in men's choir] but in sports that occurs a lot.

Harry, Jan, Eli, and Al did not share Levi's viewpoint, suggesting instead that the brotherhood they had experienced in men's choir was unique and unlike their sports activities. Harry acknowledged that in sports and men's choir the members both shared a "dependence on one another" but wrote, "Men's has the brotherhood that only a few teams of any kind have. This brotherhood brings us together to be more of a family than just friends." Eli, a varsity golf player at Cedar High School, also believed the brotherhood to be specific to men's choir.

With an all men's choir there is a brotherhood among all the men in the choir. When we see each other in the halls or something and you see someone who is in men's as well—even if you might not be the best of friends with them—there is an untold connection with them, like, "Hey, that kid is in men's just like me," and that's a weird experience that I don't feel with any other team.

Jan compared his experiences on the high school swim team to his experiences as a member of men's choir:

I participated on the [all-male] swim team last year. They are similar in the way that they do demand a lot of work and commitment; however, I didn't feel the same brotherhood [on the swim team] as I do in men's choir. It's more serious on the swim team, and the only time we came together was the pep talk before a swim meet and when we won the invitational. [In swim,] I was only close to maybe two or three of the guys on the team, compared to men's where I feel I am really close to a lot of the guys (including Mr. Dover) and that I would give my life for them.

Harry, Jan, and Eli each spoke of unique connections within the men's choir that they did not feel with the men on their sports teams. Al agreed with this perspective in his email response, even theorizing about why this might be the case.



In other all-male activities (such as sports), the friendships made and the nature of our bonding is much less significant than in all-men choirs. There really is something about singing that creates special connections between people that wouldn't normally occur. This is probably because we are all putting ourselves out there, and are open for embarrassment. Men's choir is a supportive group . . . and we all share a mutual respect for each other, which doesn't always happen in other all-male activities.

**Vulnerability in men's choir.** Al's use of phrases such as "putting ourselves out there" and "open for embarrassment" reiterate the vulnerability of singing that was described by the men in previous chapters. He shared more specifically about this in our focus group interview.

In men's choir [as compared to sports], it seems like the environment is more of a helping and caring environment and since we're all vulnerable, we all know how it is to get something wrong. So nobody's going to point fingers and laugh because it could be *us* the next day, because singing isn't always easy and it's not really easy to be consistent because you're singing all these different pieces and you're always learning new things, so I think *that's* probably what it is, because when you're *always* learning new things and you're not always sure of exactly what to do, then you're *always* vulnerable, and people always make mistakes, so *everyone* is messing up. So when everyone is messing up, people support each other more and feel more compassion toward each other when we make mistakes, whereas in some sports, it's the same thing over and over, so you might get angry if you make the same mistake over and over, but it's not—you know, you don't always feel vulnerable if you're already good at it.

While Al spoke of singing and making mistakes as sources of vulnerability in men's choir, Simon tied vulnerability to the expressive and personal components of singing. He wrote,

“I also feel that men’s choirs have something that separate [*sic*] them from other activities. Singing, in my opinion is a deep expression of the singer’s personality. It is difficult to see that sort of poignant behavior in other men’s groups [like sports.]”

**Competition.** The topic of competition surfaced in my interview with Dan. A former hockey player at Cedar High School, Dan shared about the differences he observed between his hockey and men’s choir experiences during his high school years.

Dan: In a sport, you’re competing. Not only against the other team, but you’re also competing against the other players on *your* team—for playing time, for ice time, and for—whatever the sport is—they all vary a little bit, but you’re competing against other people, and I have rarely been on a sports team where I felt like everyone was pulling in the same direction. And the competition or the attitudes of others [on sports teams] are often really not helpful toward the team aspect of it. With men’s choir, a lot of times you’d feel the opposite, you know? Everybody *is* going in the same direction, you know? Attitude is unified in knowing that we will only be our best if we are all working together, so you don’t have that sense of “elbow this guy out of the way so I can achieve more.” Instead, it’s “help each *other* along so that we can *all* be better.”

Andrea: In my interviews with the current members of the men’s choir, they talked about how everyone just gets along—

Dan: (enthusiastically) Yes! And that’s another thing that’s different from a sports team! I’ve never been on a sports team where people always got along. There are always jerks that you have to deal with, and sometimes the most talented players are the bullies, and in men’s choir, people just support each other. People work things out and I think Mr. Dover facilitates a *lot* of that.

Al drew some of the same contrasts between men's choir and sports as Dan did, describing men's choir as a group that generally got along better with one another and worked more toward a unified purpose.

It seems like whenever I'm on a sports team, like, when I'm playing baseball or basketball—I even did football for two years, it seems a lot less *trusting*. Like, there's people who make fun of each other, and it's not exactly the warm, friendly environment that the men's choir is, and for some reason—I don't know *why* that is, but it just seems like that's how it is. There's friction between people in sports teams and such, but in men's choir, it's just smooth going and we're all contributing to some higher thing we need, like the quality of our performances.

**Summary.** Participants in this study had varied thoughts and opinions about the differences and similarities between men's choir and all-male, nonmusical activities. Ten of the participants had participated in all-male sports activities and compared their men's choir experiences to their experiences on these sports teams. One participant (Trent) believed the two activities to be completely similar apart from their specific pursuits (lacrosse, singing). The other participants cited both differences and similarities between the two activities.

Similarities the men explored included: (a) both activities required work and commitment, (b) both activities required a certain dependence on one another, and (c) both groups have shared goals and want to be good at something. Differences noted among the men included: (a) a difference in the quality or presence of brotherhood, (b) a difference in unity of purpose, (c) less internal competition in men's choir than on sports teams, (d) less friction and conflict among men's choir members than on sports teams, and (e) experiences of greater vulnerability in men's choir than on sports teams.

## Men's Chorus and Identity

“On so many levels, men’s choir shaped me and made me who I am,” said Dan, sharing a viewpoint echoed by other participants—that being a part of the Cedar High School Men’s Choir has had a formative impact on their identities. For Dan, his experiences in men’s choir affected him in more than one way. First, Dan indicated that the men’s choir experience was therapeutic for him as he faced some challenging experiences during his high school years.

Men’s choir really helped me overcome some difficult things in high school. On a personal note, I went through some really tough times my sophomore and junior year where life just kind of sucked, and the reason I came to school was for choir. And specifically, men’s choir was the time when everything else didn’t matter. What mattered was that we were at men’s choir and “Hey, let’s have a good time.” So men’s—therapy was one aspect of it, but a fun therapy.

Second, Dan’s men’s choir experiences at Cedar High influenced him to study music performance and music education at the university level. “[Men’s choir] influenced me to be in the glee club at my university, and I’m not sure I would have been in music had it not been for men’s choir,” said Dan.

It was the most profound choral experience, I think, of my *life*. Well, certainly of my high school time. And maybe the closest I’ve ever felt with a group that size was with men’s choir. I’m not sure I would have gone into music without those experiences and seeing how powerful they were in my life.

Dan wrote that it was his sophomore year of high school when he began to think he might want to go into music.

I loved the education side of men's choir—that influence that you can have on those guys, building leaders and building character. Not just the music stuff, but building from immature freshman boys to seniors going out into the real world—just that huge impact that Mr. Dover had on all of us. I mean, [he was] a second father to so many of us. Men's choir shaped me and made me who I am—got me involved in glee club at my university, got me involved in leadership at my university, and here I am with the leadership stuff now [in my current job.]

Dan was not the only former Cedar High School Men's Choir member to suggest that the experience shaped his leadership skills. Max also shared that he first began to self-identify as a leader during his time in the Cedar High School Men's Choir.

Max: It [men's choir] made me realize I enjoy leading a group, and I kind of enjoy being able to help the kids, and I mean, I'm still reflecting on that experience even now. It definitely did impact a lot of my identity, especially as a leader and it impacted my choice to pursue education. Not even music education, but just education—

Andrea: In general—

Max: I mean, if I graduate, I would be happy teaching whatever I could, as long as I'm in a place where I can help people grow somehow.

Andrea: You learned you were a teacher through that—

Max: I was one of the leaders [in the tenor section] and that kind of was where I started to pick up my leadership abilities, 'cause it was, you know—you had your tenors, and your baritones, and your basses, and I was one of the stronger musicians in the tenor group, so the younger members looked up to *me* for guidance and singing the parts right. And Mr.

Dover would often—when we would do sectional work, I would often play piano for them . . .

The Cedar High Men’s Choir impacted Max’s identity in more ways than leadership. As an openly homosexual high school student in a primarily heterosexual men’s choir, Max was challenged to face stereotypes he had previously held about heterosexual men and how he related with that specific population group.

Max: It [men’s choir] was a group that challenged me to think about my identity and who I *was*. And it kind of—I learned a lot about who I am through that group. I mean—through other facets of my education too, but that group did have a profound impact on my identity as a *man*. I mean, it impacted me with my relationships with other men. I wasn’t *comfortable* (laughs) with straight men.

Andrea: Until that experience?

Max: Until that experience. ‘Cause, you know... it never occurred to me that the [heterosexual] guys [in men’s choir] would be okay with my homosexuality. I always thought they thought it was disgusting and I—being in that group kind of made me open my eyes, and I realized, “No, they’re *okay* with this.” I mean, there were members in the group who didn’t support it, but they were still my friends and they would still be there for me. It kind of gave me more trust in humanity—(laughs) more faith in my fellow man, because I kind of realized that it’s okay. It’s a safe space, and it’s okay to be who you are around these people, especially once I got to know all the members better . . .

Max’s experiences in the men’s choir allowed him to be more open and feel more comfortable around straight males.

Al shared that he believed the choir has helped him be more confident and comfortable with himself and others.

I feel a lot more comfortable with my own actions and my thoughts and what I say based on the comfort of this choir, and what this choir has allowed me to have. I think that has changed my personality trait for—for what is going to be a very long time, or maybe permanently. That’s definitely going to stick with me. Also, the confidence you gain just from singing and being a good singer and being praised for that and being genuinely—oh, what’s the word? (thinking)—from having that talent be enjoyed. It makes you feel better—that you’re being successful and that you’re doing great things, so I guess that feeling of success makes me more confident as well. I will take that with me.

In our individual interview, Al confessed that he did not have this kind of confidence in middle school and credited his experiences in the men’s choir for helping him be more outgoing and confident as a person.

In middle school, I was one of those (using air quotes and making a sour face) “popular guys.” And I just really—I didn’t feel confident when I talked to people and I was always on *edge*, and being in men’s choir and being around all these people who accepted me and liked singing with me and were having fun—it just made me relax a lot more around people and now I feel a lot more like *myself* and if people don’t want to be around me and like me for who I am, for how I act, I mean—that’s *their* problem, so—I don’t know—the environment, the accepting environment that men’s choir has given me has really opened me up and made me a better person—more confident.

Levi and Al shared a brief dialogue about this “accepting environment” during our focus group interview.

Levi: You feel like you've been there forever...that's one thing I think men's [choir] does—it makes you feel like you've been there and you've known everybody forever—

Al: And you *belong* there. You don't fit in—'cause some other places in the school you *fit in*, but you don't *belong*, and men's is one place where you feel like you can *belong*. I feel like I'm a lot more outgoing and like, the trust I developed in men's choir with these guys helped me to be more outgoing—to be myself more outside of men's choir. Like, after I see that my ideas are being accepted and people are taking me seriously and respecting me in this environment . . . it's nice—and I can take that other places in my life and try to be myself more. That's nice.

The safe, accepting space of the Cedar High School Men's Choir also provided the men with an outlet for expression, emotion, and artistry. As Dan was quoted saying in the previous chapter,

I think deep down we all knew that . . . one thing we really loved about it—was that we got to talk about deep poetry and be vulnerable. And as a high school guy, that's not something I think we found anywhere else—that vulnerability and ability to talk openly about emotion.

Levi credits Mr. Dover for helping the men in this regard, “He lets us understand that it's okay to come out and say what you're feeling, you know? That's what a *real* man is—to be able to say what he feels, not what people want to hear.”

**Summary.** Several current and former participants in the Cedar High School Men's Choir indicated that singing in the choir had been formative for them and shaped their identity in some respect. For Max, the men's chorus challenged him to think differently about heterosexual men and allowed him to feel more open and comfortable around them. For Max *and* Dan, the



men's choir shaped their identities as leaders and as current or future music educators. For other participants like Al and Levi, the men's chorus gave them a place to belong, increased their confidence, and made them more outgoing. Finally, the men's chorus environment also served as an emotional outlet and avenue for expressive artistry not often provided elsewhere as a male high school student.

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **Phenomenological Instrumental Case Study Findings: Mr. Dover as a Facilitator and Navigator of Emergent Themes**

#### **Introduction**

Respected by students and acknowledged by his colleagues and peers, Mr. Dover is an exceptional teacher and an integral part of this study. As the themes emerged, Mr. Dover appeared directly tethered to all themes in one of two ways: (a) as a facilitator of themes, or (b) as a navigator of themes. In certain instances, Mr. Dover facilitated the emergence of themes through his teaching (i.e., placing value on certain ideals that the men also took upon themselves). In other cases, Mr. Dover navigated between certain paired themes in the men's rehearsals (i.e., shaping work/play balance).

In this chapter, I will explore the role of Mr. Dover in two parts: (a) Mr. Dover's connection to the theme of brotherhood and its accompanying subthemes of support, pride, and camaraderie, and (b) Mr. Dover's interaction with the singular or paired themes of the tightrope model:

- strength and sensitivity,
- teacher authority and student ownership,
- trust and vulnerability, and
- repertoire.

#### **Mr. Dover as a Facilitator-Navigator of Brotherhood**

When I asked Al about the origin of the word "brotherhood" within the Cedar High School Men's Choir, he credited Mr. Dover for initiating this theme.

Andrea: So this notion of “brotherhood” in men’s choir that has been shared by so many of the men—where do you think that originated?

Al: Mr. Dover talks about it a lot. He actually says the word *brotherhood* a lot too. Like when we go on men’s trips and we camp out in his front lawn or go to a waterpark or do anything like that, he actually says, “This is a great chance to strengthen your brotherhood.” And we all hear him say that, and like, we kind of adopted it within ourselves, and by him saying it aloud—I don’t know, it’s just kind of a tradition that phrase is used and we like it so much that we keep using it, I guess.

I observed exactly what Al described while watching the men in rehearsals as Mr. Dover regularly used the term “brothers” or “brotherhood.” In one rehearsal of “Loveliest of Trees” by Richard Nance, Mr. Dover asked the tenors to be attentive to the sounds the basses were making. “Would you make sure you’re really watching for your brothers over here?” he said. A moving bass line was being covered by a less important sustained tenor part and Mr. Dover was trying to ensure the movement of the bass line was heard. Compelling the tenors to lighten their vocal production and decrease their volume, he said once more to them, “You’ve gotta really make sure you’re watching for your brothers over here!” Mr. Dover also served as a facilitator of the subthemes within the overarching theme of brotherhood: support, pride, and camaraderie. I will now explore Mr. Dover’s interaction with each of these subthemes.

**Support.** Mr. Dover is an encouraging, supportive, and invested teacher. As Levi testified,

He’s not afraid to let us know when we’re messing up, but he’s also the first one there to pat you on your back when you get it right . . . you know you have his support and you

know that he wants you to succeed. He's not just there because it's his job, he's there because he genuinely cares about us.

Jan shared that Mr. Dover had "been there" for him when no one else had. "That man probably saved my life," he said, pausing reflectively. Dan described Mr. Dover as having a "great way of knowing which students needed a little love and affection." He spoke of how Mr. Dover mentored several specific students who came from challenging backgrounds, taking them under his wing and helping them get to college or make better life choices.

I know I had friends who never would have gone to college probably if Mr. Dover hadn't pushed them through. Guys that went to our state university, guys that went to other universities, guys that went on to do music degrees—and without Mr. Dover being that father figure . . . without Mr. Dover being that evening presence in men's choir, you know, you just look at—where would these guys *be*? In drugs and alcohol? Out of school? I mean, you start to wonder.

Mr. Dover "builds you up," Dan said. He spoke eagerly of the encouragement and support he felt Mr. Dover provided to his students.

Dan: He tells you, 'You're a great singer. You need to join this men's choir. You've got a great voice' and he does it in that positive way. He does a great job of building people up in a positive way regardless of whether the kid is really talented or just—

Andrea: So kind of across the board, he's looking to encourage *everyone*?

Dan: He's looking to encourage, and let's be honest—it's not all lollipops and sugar drops. He gets serious at times and says, 'This is not good, and you're not pulling your weight,' but there's a lot of positive charisma that builds people up and draws people in and makes them want to be a part of the program . . .

**Pride.** The subtheme of “pride” emerged in two parts: (a) pride in musical excellence, and (b) pride in privilege of membership. Mr. Dover facilitated both in this study. I watched in rehearsal as the men polished phrases and perfected artistry—singing with remarkable expressivity. I noted as Mr. Dover coached the men and I witnessed firsthand the pride the men and Mr. Dover took in the sounds they were creating together.

***Pride in musical excellence.*** The following excerpt is taken from my field notes during an evening rehearsal:

*Mr. Dover: It is not time to lose focus, gentlemen! This song is so difficult, and it's so exposed and you have to be so perfect. And I hope you can enjoy the experience of being so perfect together. . . If you can come together and really experience the unity of this, it's a great song! And you are getting really good at it, but you know me, I want you perfect on this because I think it's awesome. I think this song rocks.*

Mr. Dover's enthusiasm for musical excellence was motivational to the men, who gushed about his inspired musicianship. Dan called him a “great musician” with “great rehearsal technique.” Levi said,

I mean, if you take a step back and kind of observe him, he is *literally* a genius.

Musically, you know—he always says, “Oh, I'm not good at the piano,” or “I'm not the smartest guy around,” but he is *ridiculously* smart. He knows what works and what doesn't, and he's been successful every year.

***Pride in the privilege of membership.*** In addition to facilitating pride in musical excellence, Mr. Dover also facilitated the men's pride in being part of the choir—the privilege of their membership within this musical fraternity. In small ways, Mr. Dover makes the men aware of the opportunities they are afforded as a result of their excellence. “We have to sing this song

for January 20th,” Mr. Dover tells the men in rehearsal. “You should already have this on your calendar because it’s when we go to Cedar Heights to sing for our state conference.” He whispers dramatically to the men, “It’s a big deal.” The men smile and glance at one another excitedly.

In our final interview, Mr. Dover shared with me how he impresses upon the men the strength of the choral program at Cedar High School—particularly as it compares to the school’s athletic teams. While valuing the importance of a well-rounded education, Mr. Dover likes to play upon the competitive nature some of the more sports-loving choir members. “Here’s my big standard line,” he says. “I will say to the boys, ‘Who are we playing [in football] tonight?’ And they will say Evanston or Littleton or whoever, and I’ll say, ‘Well, remember, win or lose, we kick their ass in choir.’” He laughs and explains to me that he doesn’t really believe this, but that he’s hoping to send a tongue-in-cheek message to the men about the success of the choral program.

Now, I’m not saying I really *believe* that. Because anytime there’s an Evanston choir on stage [at festival], I will say to the kids, ‘Oh my God, did you *love* that?’ and they will usually respond, ‘Yes! They were really good!’ I don’t feel *that* [hyper-competitive], but I’m trying to send the message that our choir program—in terms of success—is a lot more successful than our basketball program or our football program or whatever program. That’s the message I try to send.

Several participants shared in our focus group interview about another way Mr. Dover helped to instill pride in the men. Before concert performances, Mr. Dover often engaged in a small ritual that made the men feel proud to be part of the Cedar High School Men’s Choir.

Steve: Before we walk on stage, or as we walk on stage before concerts in men's choir, Mr. Dover always stands there and either shakes our hand or pats us on the back and says, "Look proud, you're a Cedar man. (agreement from the other men) And that always—

Levi: That always gets you—

Jan: Yeah, you're just like, "*Yes, I am!*" (agreement from others)

**Camaraderie.** Participants in this study experienced and expressed camaraderie in a variety of ways: (a) connections, bonds, and friendships, (b) rowdiness and shenanigans, (c) crude humor, and (d) traditions. Similarly, Mr. Dover emerged as a facilitator of this camaraderie through these various ways. By organizing social events and activities outside of performances and rehearsals (e.g., the waterpark trip the men take after participating in a men's chorus invitational festival, and the men's scheduled "theme" nights) Mr. Dover creates opportunities for the men to interact socially, something the men believed was helpful in strengthening their brotherhood and connections with one another. Max indicated that Mr. Dover paid special attention to facilitating bonds and connections among the men in the first few rehearsals of men's choir, and that this helped Max overcome his initial skepticism about joining the men's choir.

Mr. Dover encouraged me to consider it [joining men's choir] and to maybe come to a couple of rehearsals and see what I thought, and so I did. I went to the first few rehearsals, which were mostly just kind of bonding and getting to know each other in the group . . . and I really, really enjoyed that. I was *so* nervous that first rehearsal . . . but I remember after a while I started to feel okay because it was such a very relaxed environment. Everybody was very welcoming and warm.

Just as Mr. Dover facilitated bonds and connections among his singers, he also works to connect personally with his singers by investing in them and caring about their interests and pursuits, as Dan shared.

He recruited me since I was in seventh grade . . . he saw my best moments, you know. . .

He saw everything. He was with me through everything—the highs, the lows, the whole nine yards. Sometimes he'd just chill with us after men's and we'd all sit there for an hour, and he'd kind of work, and we'd talk . . . about whatever . . . great choral singing or football, you name it.

Levi also noted Mr. Dover's attention to building relationships with his singers.

I mean, he still talks to some of his students from *years* ago, you know? Just wondering how they're doing. He really, really works on building a good relationship, a solid relationship with everybody. And it's not just leaders of the group—it's *everybody*. I mean, he can tell you every kid's name, and he has hundreds of kids that he's taught. I mean, he just *really* cares and I think that's why his choirs are so great—because we don't want to let *him* down because he's never let *us* down at all. Ever. Anytime we've needed him, he's always [been] there.

Mr. Dover's facilitation of connection, either among students or between him and students represents only one facet of the men's camaraderie. Rowdiness, crude humor, shenanigans, and traditions are other facets of camaraderie present in the Cedar High School Men's Choir. While the class was *never* out of control, I did enjoy many boisterous and humorous moments during this study and watching how Mr. Dover navigated each one.

On one occasion, I remember Mr. Dover sending the tenors to a sectional rehearsal in a separate room with a student leader. Upon returning, the men entered quietly, yet in a visually



rambunctious fashion. One student (who had previously been on crutches) returned to the classroom riding on another student's back. A classmate had turned the injured student's crutches upside down, and—standing on the handles of the crutches—walked into the room on the crutches as if they were stilts. A nearby bass commented sarcastically, “Geez. This is like a circus act.” Mr. Dover smiled, but did not reprimand the men and instead commenced having the basses review their part while the tenors seated their “circus.”

In some instances, Mr. Dover would play along with the men when they went to a place of bawdiness—allowing or even facilitating crude humor. In one rehearsal, the men missed a rhythmic entrance and Mr. Dover affectionately exclaimed, “No, you dingleberries!” and when Christopher forgot his choir folder one evening, Mr. Dover called Christopher down to the front to sing his solo at the end of rehearsal. Christopher was joined by two upper classman, and the three young men nervously shuffled their feet and glanced around the room. Mr. Dover said, “Naked solos!” and their classmates all whooped and hollered. A “naked” solo implied an unaccompanied solo. The boys proceeded to sing about twenty unaccompanied measures of a song and all the boys applauded in support afterward.

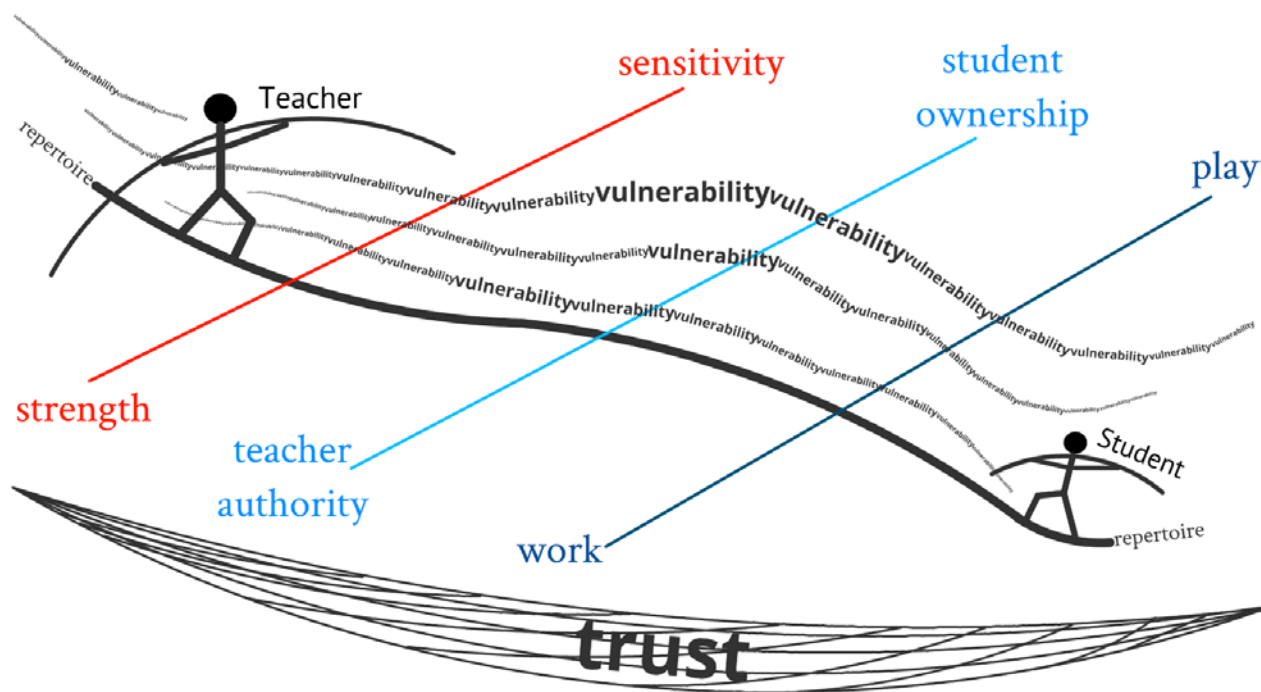
On a different evening, Mr. Dover was searching for his own folder at the beginning of class, and all the men began to yell, “Solo! Solo!” Without a beat, Mr. Dover grinned mischievously and replied, “You want it naked, don’t you?” The men exploded into laughter, whoops, and catcalls. While Mr. Dover did occasionally facilitate crude humor, as seen in the previously described moment, Mr. Dover also navigated and monitored the men’s crude humor by reinforcing boundaries when necessary, and calling the men back into order if things became hurtful, inappropriate, or interfered with their rehearsal goals.

Traditions were another important facet of the Cedar High School Men's Choir camaraderie. Mr. Dover facilitated tradition among the men each time he gathered them to participate in their "circle" ritual before adjudicated performances. He gave meaning to these traditions each time he approved menswear catalogs, or included "theme nights" on the official calendar. Mr. Dover assigned value to these longstanding traditions of the men's choir and also validated the newer men's choir traditions—allowing the men to organize the campout in his lawn, and by scheduling yet another trip to the waterpark in the fall.

### **Mr. Dover as a Facilitator-Navigator of "Tightrope" Themes**

In the tightrope model (see Figure 3), Mr. Dover (teacher) treads the tightrope of "repertoire" and navigates between each paired theme of (a) strength and sensitivity, (b) teacher authority and student ownership, and (c) work and play. In addition to navigating these themes, Mr. Dover also plays a role in facilitating these themes and the other themes in the model: (d) trust, (e) vulnerability, and (f) repertoire. His role in navigating and facilitating these themes will be explored in the remainder of this chapter.

Figure 3. The Tightrope Model. For the reader's clarity in viewing, "vulnerability" is depicted as wind, while "trust" is depicted as the safety net below the tightrope of "repertoire," traveled by both the teacher and student.



**Strength and sensitivity.** Mr. Dover facilitated and navigated strength and sensitivity in Cedar High School Men's Choir performances and rehearsals through (a) selecting repertoire that allowed the men to explore their expressive and sensitive personas as well as their strong and powerful personas, (b) creating a safe space for sensitive expression, and (c) creating empowering experiences for the men that were rooted in musical excellence and personal achievement. In my observations at Cedar High School, I watched as the men sang lilting, expressive works like Richard Nance's "Loveliest of Trees" and livelier tunes such as Tim Y. Jones's "Pirate Song." Mr. Dover's selection of repertoire encompassed both strength and sensitivity and his teaching methods encouraged the men to dive in wholeheartedly. "Are you proud of your pirate?" he asked the men in one rehearsal. "Then show it!" he exclaimed. Soon after, the room exploded with energy as the men's voices rang out in a driving fortissimo: "My

pirate swabs the deck like no one else can swab the deck!” Similarly, Mr. Dover’s motivational words or a poignant discussion led by Mr. Dover would often result in the presence of greater sensitivity in the men’s music making. Poetic texts were discussed and the men shared generously with one another as described in previous chapters.

Mr. Dover also employed a wide range of imagery and analogies in his instruction—both sensitive and strong. Max shared that Mr. Dover would sometimes use strong identities to help the men understand a sound he desired, asking them to imagine themselves as lumberjacks singing into the forest. In one rehearsal, I noted Mr. Dover employing a more sensitive analogy: “Tenors, right now you have an edge to your sound, probably because you are working so hard to place the sound correctly. Can you be more feather-like? Can your sound be like a floating feather that never lands?” In another rehearsal, Mr. Dover had the men alternate between strong “Mufasa” sounds, and lighter, more sensitive “Simba” sounds—referencing two characters from Disney’s animated motion picture, “The Lion King.”

The safe space Mr. Dover created for the men to explore their sensitivity ultimately permeated their music making, as seen in the following excerpt from my December field notes:

*Moving lyrically to the music, there is a constant sense of motion in the group, but this is not tied to rowdiness or restlessness—this is an extension of their artistry. The men are feeling the music. This is expressive singing. I have chills. This is not an easy piece. The tenors soar, and the basses grow rapid deep roots in the opposite direction. The sound is liquid, full of shimmer and rumble, and breathtaking sensitivity.*

Mr. Dover believes in helping students connect with their feelings, emotion, and sensitivity while making music, and has grown in his commitment to this over the years—particularly when it

comes to young men. “In terms of boys,” he shares, “we don’t give boys enough credit for sensitivity, artistry and vulnerability. And if you set it up safely, they *will* come to it.”

Just as he values sensitivity, Mr. Dover also wants his students to have opportunities to feel proud, strong and empowered as young men. In our interview, he spoke of this. “There’s something uniquely special about singing with a group of men,” he said. “So that’s a key ingredient—for them to experience singing with other men.” Mr. Dover shared with me that he felt confident in his ability to provide a sense of empowerment and brotherhood for his male singers, but he lamented that he felt inadequate in empowering his female singers the same way.

This [empowerment of the men] is so important. And maybe it’s because I’m the father of a girl, but it’s equally important for me for the women to feel the empowerment of singing with a sisterhood. I *have* to say that. And it’s a great weakness for me. (tears brimming) Look, and I get choked up, ‘cause it’s so important. I hate that as a man there are some things I can’t bring to them that I want to. It breaks my heart . . . and I don’t feel like that with the boys.

**Teacher authority and student ownership.** As the Cedar High School Men’s Chorus prepared for their first concert performance of the semester, Mr. Dover took time out of their final rehearsal to mentally prepare the men for the experience. “Tomorrow you have your first concert performance, and that is no small undertaking,” he says. Walking the men through the logistics of the concert, Mr. Dover discussed with them their movement on and off the stage, where they should be seated until their time to perform, which uniform they should wear, and other important details.

In this particular performance, the men were being featured on the middle school choir concert. The two selections on which they were working were a bit rough around the edges and

aware of this, Mr. Dover tried to put them at ease. “Can someone explain to me what a good performance is?” he asked. “What is the difference between singing and performing?” An older member of the choir spoke up, “Singing is hitting all the notes right, but *performing* is displaying the song to the audience.” Mr. Dover affirms the student, and asks the rest of the men to continue sharing, “What else makes a good performance?” Another singer responded, “We aren’t supposed to act like students, but we’re supposed to act like *singers*. No talking to your neighbors while you’re up there on stage, and no hands in your pockets.” Another young man chimed, “We need to act professional and sound professional and sing professional.” Mr. Dover smiled and gave the men another question: “What was it like when you were in seventh grade and you heard men’s chorus for the first time? What was that like for you?” The question triggered instant murmurs of side conversation and several hands were raised. Multiple singers remarked upon how “cool” or “awesome” that experience was for them. Mr. Dover called on one student who responded, “They [men’s choir] didn’t seem like high schoolers. They seemed like professionals.” Mr. Dover agreed and wrapped up the discussion by saying, “A beautiful performance has solid musicality, but it also *portrays* the music. We’re still working on notes, so the music part might be lacking, but can we still give a solid *portrayal* performance?” The men nodded affirmatively and many audibly said “yes.” “You have such a responsibility,” Mr. Dover said, “Even if the notes are not perfect, you have *such* a responsibility to be something those boys can look up to. This is your charge for tomorrow.” The men were silent and visibly inspired.

The previous account was paraphrased from my field notes as an example of the balance Mr. Dover strives for between his teaching authority and imparting ownership to the students in the Cedar High School Men’s Choir. His frequent use of questioning, his allowing of students to

ponder and weigh the impact of their actions, and the way in which he values student input and opinions: all are means by which Mr. Dover facilitates student ownership within the choir. Similarly, Mr. Dover does not shy from being authoritative when necessary. He provided clear directions about logistics, told the men what uniform to wear, where to sit and how to get on and off the stage. Mr. Dover navigates between the themes of teacher authority and student ownership and facilitates the theme of student ownership by involving his singers in both artistic and administrative decision-making processes.

**Work and play.** Cedar High School Men’s Choir rehearsals usually included dedicated work on musical repertoire infused with brief moments of humor or conversation. In some rehearsals the men seemed to handle transitioning from work to play better than others. During our individual interview, I asked Al about the challenges of switching from “work mode” to “play mode” in rehearsal, and he shared with me about how Mr. Dover navigates this dynamic.

Andrea: Are there times where it’s difficult switching back and forth? Like, okay “This is goof-off mode, and now it’s work mode?”

Al: Usually in the beginning of the year and in the end of the year we stay on task pretty well, but during those winter months sometimes it’s really hard to switch back and forth and we tangent a lot, but see—he’s [Mr. Dover’s] laid back about it because he understands. Like, we might waste a rehearsal because our transitions are bad, but he won’t be mad at us. He’ll just say, “Next time guys, we really need to get some work done because today we kind of had a laid back rehearsal” and he kind of rolls with the punches a little bit. If he can tell that we’re not going to be focused, or it’s an uphill battle, or whatever the phrase is . . .

Andrea: He’s picking his battles?

Al: Yeah, he's picking his battles *well*, so I think he really knows how to get the most work out of us and he knows when we're gonna get things done and when we're not, and like, if he knows already that our transitioning is bad, then it's a better idea for him to let us just do that stuff so we can establish that friendship and the brotherhood and then in our next rehearsal—he can really get that [work] done. So, I think even when it doesn't quite go his way, he *makes* it go his way.

Just as Mr. Dover helped the men navigate between the themes of work and play, he also helped to facilitate these themes through his actions and speech, as seen here in my field notes.

*Mr. Dover talks to the men about their upcoming trip to the men's choir festival and waterpark in late October. He says things to them such as, "I know you will be gentlemen," and "I know you will be professional." The men are talkative and rowdy—excited by the upcoming trip details. At one point, Mr. Dover tells them not to talk. They grow quieter and he continues with the details of the trip. He informs them they will be going to an all-you-can-eat buffet restaurant. Apparently, the restaurant informed them that the dinner will be Halloween themed and the men are encouraged to wear costumes. Mr. Dover flashes a mischievous grin and says that since the men will be arriving to the restaurant after the waterpark, he said they would come dressed as the Australian naked swimming team. A roar of laughter engulfs the room. Mr. Dover continues, "The last time we did this [trip] it really helped strengthen the bond and brotherhood in this group." He encourages the men to go and stay for the water park and meal because he thinks their brotherhood can be even stronger.*

In the previous excerpt, Mr. Dover began with logistics and expectations for behavior concerning an upcoming trip to a men's chorus festival, waterpark, and restaurant. He infused



the administrative “work” of sharing these details with the men by adding a moment of “play” through his joke about the “Australian naked swimming team.” After the men had a laugh, Mr. Dover returned to more serious “work” conversation as he explained the important role this trip played in strengthening the brotherhood among the men.

**Trust and vulnerability.** The themes of trust and vulnerability in the tightrope model interact differently than the other paired themes of: (a) strength and sensitivity, (b) teacher authority and student ownership, and (c) work and play. Trust and vulnerability are not juxtaposed, but rather interdependent. As the men trust one another, they are more willing to be vulnerable. As the men are more vulnerable, they tend to trust one another more. Mr. Dover facilitates both vulnerability and trust in his classroom.

I observed rehearsals regularly where Mr. Dover would invite the men to share their thoughts on the text of a work. These discussions were often poetic and sensitive and I was taken aback by how vulnerable these high school men were willing to be in front of one another. I asked Mr. Dover how he facilitated that kind of intimate sharing and he spoke to the importance of creating a safe environment where the men can trust one another.

Mr. Dover: When I first wanted to incorporate that piece—that connection to the text, that connection to the artistry, I used to have to say things like, “Alright fellas, I want you to put your smart aleck away,” or, “Would you sit down and put your—(hesitates) and I’ll be very honest, put away the *smart ass*, you know? I would say, “I need you to look into the *artistic* part of your brain. I want you to put away that other part that can’t wait to go home and play ‘Halo’ [video game].” (laughs) You know, we [the men and I] talk about the dichotomy of personality that we have as humans. We *define* that. And then I say, okay, leaving that piece away, let’s talk—*really* talk about artistry. And there’s no

wrong answer here *and* we will all support the answers that each of us gives. And so we created the safe environment and we *practiced*. We would define the safe environment and then we practiced appropriate behavior through the safe environment of giving opinion.

Andrea: Did the men have a role in defining the safe environment?

Mr. Dover: Sure, absolutely. That's a key point in this, right?

Andrea: And what were some of the things that they—

Mr. Dover: —it was more about saying, “Alright fellas...when we want somebody to share their opinion, what are the dos and don'ts of that as a listener?” And they would come up with things like: *Don't* laugh at somebody's opinion, even if you disagree with it. *Value* somebody's ideas even if you don't think it's right. It's okay to say, “I see it a different way.” It's *not* okay to say, “You're wrong.” So those were all things that they came up with.

By establishing this safe environment, Mr. Dover facilitated trust among the men, resulting in a comfortable place where the men can be vulnerable with one another.

Mr. Dover is also viewed as personally trustworthy by the singers in the Cedar High School Men's Choir, as seen in Max's comment:

They trust him so much that they would do anything for him. I mean, they have respect for him from the beginning [in middle school]. And in high school, that definitely shows in the rehearsal space. I mean, the guys really have a lot of respect and trust in Mr. Dover and they really care about him as a person and I think that has to do with—because he cares about *them* as people. I mean, you can tell he's honest about who you are, where

you're coming from. I mean, he really does care about you. He wants to *know* about you and he wants to do whatever he can to help, and I think that reflects in his students.

Like Max, I observed that Mr. Dover was trusted among the men, but I also noted that Mr. Dover seemed similarly willing to be vulnerable in front of the men. He readily admitted his mistakes in rehearsal. "I suck!" he exclaimed once to the amusement of the baritones whom he had miscued a few measures earlier. On another occasion, Mr. Dover misspoke the words to the song. He quickly and embarrassedly laughed and said, "I don't know the words!" Generous with the men, open to ideas, and willing to learn—Mr. Dover's personal trustworthiness and personal vulnerability provides a living model for his students of what it means to be trustworthy and vulnerable.

**Repertoire.** Mr. Dover most obviously facilitates the theme of repertoire through his selection of quality choral literature. By programming a variety of interesting literature that challenges the men musically, textually, and emotionally, he creates opportunities for the men to explore the other themes within this study. Mr. Dover is deeply committed to building connections between the singers and the repertoire—something he believes ultimately leads to his singers being more connected with one another and more independent musicians. By programming thoughtfully, he opens the door for the men to be more vulnerable with one another and to grow in their trust.

I look forward to that [expressive] part of the boys, because it's not a part they show enough of. Especially in society right now. I think the overall zone that we've tried to create in this [choir] room is one of *trust* . . . they're able to let down their guard, and this is what I found out the hard way because in my very young teaching it was all, "get at the music, get at the music, get at the music!" but you know what that means—the best

technical choir with absolutely *no* feeling whatsoever in what they're doing. And we've *heard* those choirs before. We've heard those choirs *too often* at conventions. And I guess that in my old age, I'm so much more willing to take the hit as far as, "Okay, maybe they're not going to sing this as technically accurate or as beautiful . . . but if they make a *connection* to the piece, then it will yield a bigger payoff in the long run. They're going to be more connected to the music. They're going to be more connected to the choir. They're going to look more for the text in the next piece we do and be able to go after it *sooner*. I mean, isn't it a bigger payoff?

## **Summary**

In this chapter, I have presented Mr. Dover's roles as both a facilitator and a navigator of the emergent themes within the men's choir brotherhood and tightrope models. Mr. Dover facilitated brotherhood by assigning importance to the idea of brotherhood and encouraging the men to pursue and strengthen that ideal. He also facilitated the subthemes of brotherhood in several ways. By being an example of support for the men, he helped grow a more supportive environment in rehearsals. He instilled pride in the men through their excellent music making and their membership in the choir, and by his dedication to excellence in musical artistry and pride in the men and their work. He aided in the development of camaraderie among the men by helping them build connections with one another and by personally taking the time to build relationships with each of them. Mr. Dover also navigated the additional facets of camaraderie by (a) valuing the men's longstanding traditions and validating their newer traditions, (b) sharing in the crude humor that is part of the men's camaraderie, and (c) allowing for moments of rowdiness within rehearsal.

Within the tightrope model, Mr. Dover facilitated the theme of repertoire through his selection of quality repertoire that encourages the exploration of the other paired themes within the model. Mr. Dover navigates and facilitates the paired theme of strength and sensitivity by allowing the men to explore both qualities in their music making and by assigning each equal value in his teaching. Mr. Dover navigates and facilitates the themes of teacher authority and student ownership through seeking student input, allowing the students to have a voice in the decision-making process, and by making specific and conscious choices about when to apply his teaching authority in order to manage rehearsal or provide structure and information for the singers and when to allow the men more freedom.

Mr. Dover navigated and facilitated work and play themes by balancing sizable segments of “work” in rehearsal with small breaks for “play” in the form of humor, lighter moments, or brief conversation breaks. In facilitating the themes of vulnerability and trust, Mr. Dover has created a classroom atmosphere of safety and trust. He believes this is a prerequisite for young men to allow themselves to be vulnerable and explore their more sensitive side. He facilitates this atmosphere of trust by allowing the men to help him define the safe space, informing *him* of what they need to feel free to share their thoughts and feelings.

## CHAPTER 9

### Interpretations and Implications

#### Introduction

**Purpose.** The purpose of this study was to explore, investigate, and describe the culture of a high school men's chorus. The following research questions guided this investigation:

- How do singers in a men's chorus define their experience?
- How are their experiences and behavior while participating in a high school men's chorus different or similar from their experiences and behavior in a high school mixed chorus?
- How are their experiences and behavior while participating in a high school men's chorus different or similar from other nonmusical, all-male activities, such as sports?
- What bearing, if any, does participation in a men's chorus have on the identities of these young men?

**Methodology.** In this phenomenological instrumental case study, I spent three months observing the Cedar High School Men's Choir, an extracurricular men's chorus that meets twice weekly as part of a larger choral program at Cedar High School. Cedar High School is located in a smaller suburban area in a Midwestern State. Participants in this study included ten current members of the men's choir (Al, Eli, Jan, Harry, Levi, Miles, Oscar, Simon, Steve, and Trent), two alumni of the choir (Dan and Max), and their choral music teacher (Mr. Dover.)

Ethnographic techniques were employed in the collection of data, including individual interviews, focus group interviews, written responses, reflections, observations, and field notes. As phenomenology seeks to illuminate the richness of lived experience—not through matters of general fact, but rather through “essence,” these techniques afforded the researcher the

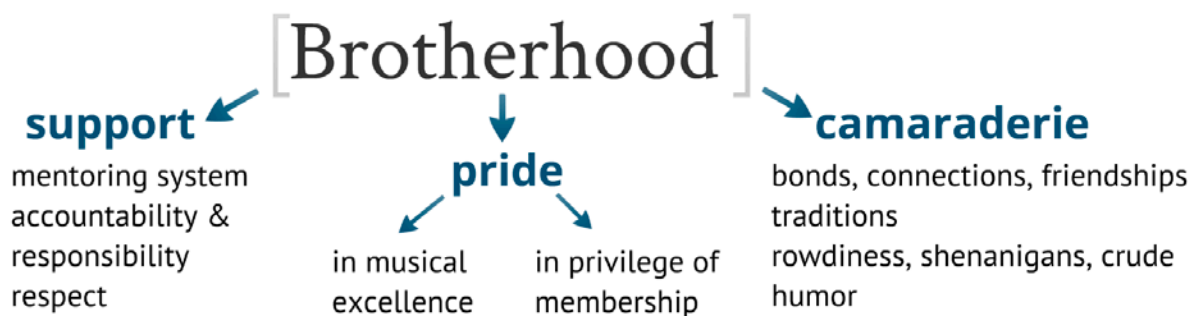
opportunity to explore the high school men's chorus phenomenon in richer detail (Bowman, 1998).

The data in this study were analyzed using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). All data were coded by hand in two cycles using "descriptive coding" for the first cycle and "pattern coding" for the second cycle (Saldaña, 2009). Analysis techniques specific to phenomenological research such as *epoche* and imaginative variation were also employed in the analysis (Merriam, 1997; Moustakas, 1994).

Through the course of this study, I took the following measures recommended by Creswell (2007) to help ensure the trustworthiness of my findings: (a) prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field, (b) data triangulation across multiple sources, (c) peer review to provide an external check of the research process, (e) member checks to preserve the views of the participants, (f) rich, thick descriptions to enable readers to make decisions regarding transferability to their situations, and (g) clarifying researcher bias from the outset of the study.

**Summary.** As themes emerged from the data, they were uniquely interrelated. The researcher organized these themes into two models according to their specific relationships. The first model described the overarching theme of brotherhood and the relationships among subthemes within brotherhood of support, pride, and camaraderie. (See Figure 4.) Each subtheme of the brotherhood was further divided into additional categories of meaning. The subtheme of support included the categories: mentoring system, accountability, responsibility, and respect. The subtheme of pride divided into two categories of meaning: pride in musical excellence, and pride in privilege of membership. The subtheme of camaraderie included bonds, connections, friendships, traditions, rowdiness, shenanigans, and crude humor.

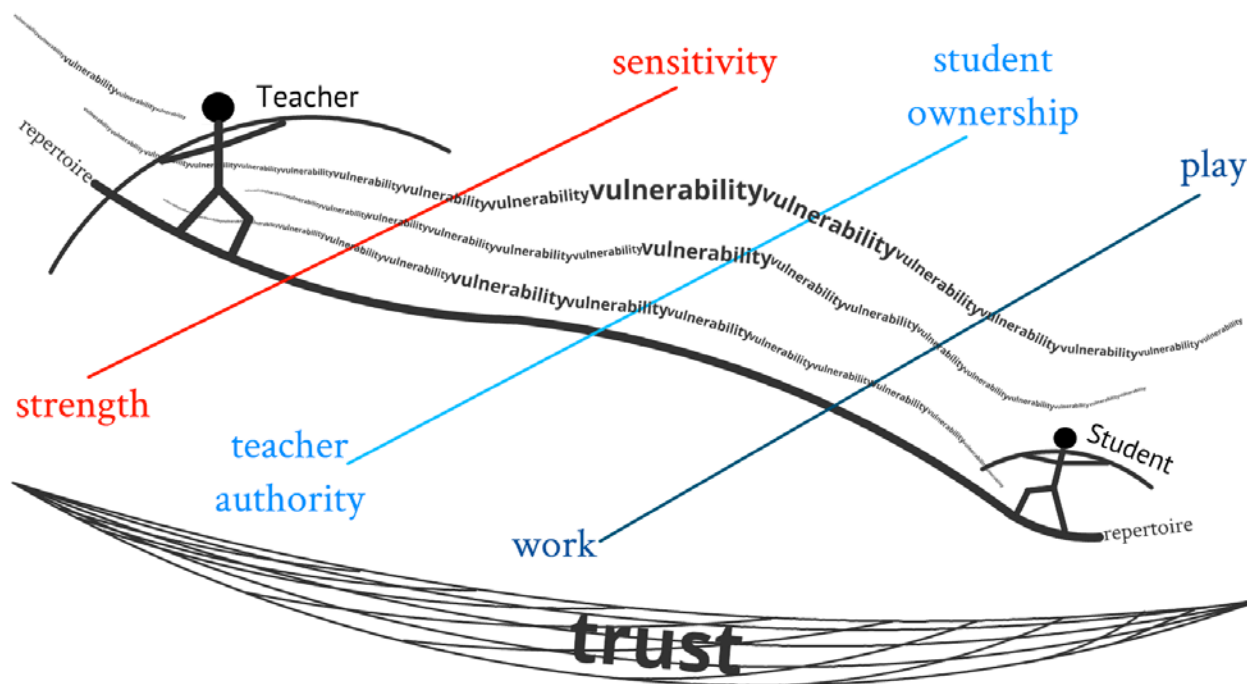
Figure 4. The Brotherhood Model



A second model was created to illustrate the remaining emergent themes and their specific interactions (see Figure 5). Six of these themes were uniquely juxtaposed and grouped into three related pairs: (a) strength and sensitivity, (b) teacher authority and student ownership, and (c) work and play. Two additional themes emerged of (d) trust and (e) vulnerability, sharing a specific codependent relationship. In the “tightrope model” trust is depicted as a net of safety below the tightrope, and vulnerability is illustrated as wind that interacts with the teacher, student, and remaining themes. Finally, (f) repertoire emerged as a theme threaded through all themes as a central strand or “tightrope.” The teacher and student both navigate this tightrope of repertoire, “meeting in the middle.” The teacher in this study, Mr. Dover, also emerged as a facilitator of all themes within brotherhood *and* tightrope models, and as a navigator of many themes (work-play balance in rehearsal, etc.)



Figure 5. The Tightrope Model. For the reader's clarity in viewing, "vulnerability" is depicted as wind, while "trust" is depicted as the safety net below the tightrope of "repertoire," traveled by both the teacher and student.



This study also explored (a) any differences and similarities the men perceived between their participation in men's choirs and mixed choirs, (b) any differences and similarities the men perceived between men's choirs and all-male, nonmusical activities such as sports, and (c) any impact the men's chorus experience may have had on participants' identities. The similarities described by the men regarding men's and mixed choir environments included (a) enjoyable music-making experiences, (b) good work ethics in both choirs, and (c) positive rapport in both choirs. Differences described by the men included (a) some students perceiving a closer and stronger bond with fellow men's choir members than mixed choir members, and (b) some students feeling more comfortable and safe in the men's chorus environment. Several men also indicated that the male chorus environment provided (c) freedom from having to maintain appearances in front of members of the opposite sex, (d) a feeling of being able to be more authentic or more "themselves", and (e) the ability to engage in crude humor and rowdiness

without having to filter behavior or speech. Though the men were split in opinion about which rehearsal environment they preferred, the majority of participants indicated they preferred the sound of the men's choir to the sound of the mixed choir.

Similarities observed by the men between men's choir and all-male, nonmusical activities (sports) included: (a) both activities required work and commitment, (b) both activities required a certain dependence on one another, (c) both teams and choirs have shared goals and want to be good at something. Differences noted among the men included: (a) a difference in the quality or presence of brotherhood, (b) a difference in unity of purpose, (c) less internal competition in men's choir than on sports teams, (d) less friction and conflict among men's choir members than on sports teams, and (e) experiences of greater vulnerability in men's choir than on sports teams.

Participants in this study also indicated that singing in the Cedar High School Men's Choir was a formative experience for them, and had shaped their identity in one or more ways. This impact upon the identity of some participants included: (a) being challenged to think more broadly about male gender roles, (b) developing an identity as a leader and/or music educator, (c) an increased sense of belonging and greater self-confidence, and (d) an emotional outlet and avenue for expressive artistry not often provided elsewhere as a male teenager.

## **Discussion and Interpretations**

This study explored the lived experiences of ten high school students who were current members of the Cedar High School Men's Choir, two alumni of Cedar High School and former members of the choir, and their teacher. To facilitate a richer exploration of the men's experiences, this study employed qualitative methodology. As a result, the findings of this study should not be generalized to other male chorus settings or teachers. However, some of the

interpretations to follow may be transferable to teachers and students in similar high school male chorus settings and/or helpful to choral music educators.

**Social benefits (such as connections, bonds, support, and camaraderie) in tandem with musical excellence can result in a rich male chorus experience for singers.** Participants in this study enjoyed the social aspects of participation in choir alongside the musical elements. Singers valued opportunities to have fun and build their brotherhood with one another. Miles shared his belief that the strong social connections among the singers resulted in improved musical performance. He suggested to teachers: “Take us on educational trips . . . encourage us to have fun. This will help build a bond between the members of the group, creating cohesion, and the group will improve tenfold.” Other participants suggested that the music they made with one another helped to facilitate unique connections and bonds. Eli shared about the unspoken connections he felt with the other members of men’s choir when seeing them in the hallway at school, and Al said, “There really is something about singing that creates special connections between people that wouldn’t normally occur.”

The findings of this study agree with findings by Faulkner and Davidson (2006) who explored male voice choirs in rural Iceland, and discovered that male choral participants there also valued the intertwining of singing and social interaction. Their findings indicated that singing in a men’s chorus fulfilled participants’ needs for vocal collaboration and social connectedness. Hylton (1981) examined high school students and their meanings of the choral experiences, finding that many students valued their relationships with other singers. Adderley, Kennedy, and Berz (2003) also addressed the importance of social benefits among choir members who enjoyed feeling a part of something larger, or having a means by which to spend time with friends or make new friends. In Freer’s qualitative study (2009) “camaraderie” also

emerged as a prevalent theme among the male high school choral students who placed their plans for musical growth within communities of fellow musicians. The findings of these studies reinforce this study's findings that choral singers, and particularly male choral singers, seem to enjoy and benefit from the social interaction provided by choral singing.

**High school men view singing as an act of vulnerability, therefore trust and safety are important. A safe, trusting environment can be established and reinforced by the teacher to encourage expression, shared emotion, and sensitivity among male chorus members.** Several participants in this study viewed singing as an act of great personal vulnerability. Levi said, "When you sing you're in a very vulnerable spot . . . that's *very* personal." He added that when singing with other men he felt he was "pretty much telling them, 'I trust you with one of the most personal things I have.'" Levi further emphasized that being a *male* who sang made him even more vulnerable, noting that television and other media regularly depicted men in stereotypical "beer and chips and football" roles, but that ". . . you never see those guys *singing*." According to Levi, ". . . For a *man* to do that [sing] . . . that's really stepping out on the edge." Dan remarked that he even feared vulnerability, expressing that it was not a desirable personal quality as a teenage male. Other young men alluded to vulnerability as an undesirable public persona, but also seemed to indicate that they privately craved opportunities to be vulnerable and to share safely with one another. Dan elaborated that "deep down" he and his classmates all knew that one thing they really loved about men's choir was that they "got to talk about deep poetry and be vulnerable," adding that as a high school male ". . . that vulnerability and that ability to talk openly about emotion" was not something they found anywhere else.

The participants credited Mr. Dover for creating a space that felt safe enough for the men to trust one another, share so sensitively, and be vulnerable. As seen in this study, the role of the teacher in creating such a safe space is integral to the establishment of a trusting community that facilitates openness and sharing.

Jorgensen addressed “interconnectedness” and “feelingfulness” as aspects of a musical community, and both of these characteristics were exhibited within the Cedar High School Men’s Choir (1995). Jorgensen described interconnectedness as the held belief that one is part of a larger group of persons, but that all individuals have something to offer the group and that the group similarly has something to offer the individual. Within the Cedar High School Men’s Choir, the group provided singers a sense of trust and safety, and in response, the singers willingly offered their vulnerability to the choir. “Feelingfulness,” as described by Jorgensen was exhibited by an emotional and cognitive attachment to the community—an affect experienced by members as they lived within their “place” of community. Participants in the Cedar High School Men’s Choir shared in “feelingfulness” as they bonded through their communal vulnerability and trust of one another.

**A teacher who trusts his or her students and is willing to be vulnerable can create an atmosphere that fosters trust and vulnerability among his or her students.** While observing rehearsals at Cedar High School, I observed young men sharing with great vulnerability in a classroom atmosphere of mutual trust and respect—an atmosphere for which Mr. Dover was greatly responsible. Placing trust in his students, Mr. Dover valued students’ opinions, trusted them in leadership roles, and encouraged their artistic and administrative input. By doing so, he ushered the men into more expressive artistry while conveying a collective trust in the group. This impartment of trust was not lost on the men, but communicated to them an unspoken

understanding that men's choir was a safe place where individual ideas would be respected and men could trust one another. In other words, as Mr. Dover placed his trust in the men, he provided an endorsement-by-example, encouraging the men to also trust each other.

Mr. Dover involved the men in creating a space that was safe. He and the men together created guidelines such as (a) "*Don't* laugh at somebody's opinion, even if you disagree with it." (b) "*Value* somebody's idea even if you don't think it's right." (c) "It's okay to say, 'I see it a different way.' It's *not* okay to say, 'You're wrong.'" Mr. Dover impressed upon the men that speaking and sharing artistically and sensitively was acceptable and welcomed. He reaffirmed the men, saying, ". . . there's no wrong answer here" and reassuring them that all responses in class would be supported. Choral music teachers who impart trust to their students by providing a safe space for respectful discourse may find that their students reciprocate this trust and build increased trust with one another.

Participants in the Cedar High School Men's Choir were also willing to be vulnerable in part because Mr. Dover was personally vulnerable with the men. He freely acknowledged his own mistakes in rehearsal, and opened himself personally. By avoiding pretense and by choosing to share his humanity (complete with flaws), Mr. Dover freed his students to likewise explore, share, be human, and make honest mistakes without the fear of embarrassment, judgment, or ridicule.

**Participation in a men's chorus can impact student identity by creating a sense of belonging, encouraging self-confidence, and providing a comfortable place to "be oneself."**

One of the six factors of meaning to emerge from Hylton's 1981 study of high school singers' choral music experiences was labeled "psychological," and described the students' belief that participation in a choir caused one to reflect upon oneself and one's personal identity. Hylton's

findings resonate with ideas shared by participants in the Cedar High School Men's Choir who also believed their male chorus experiences had impacted their personal identity. Several men indicated they felt a greater sense of personal confidence as a result of participating in the men's choir or that the men's choir provided an opportunity to gain comfort in being oneself. Hylton's study also possessed an integrative dimension that emphasized student relationships and resultant feelings of belonging to a choral ensemble. Participants in this study similarly shared experiences that aligned with Hylton's integrative dimension. Levi wrote, "When I sing with these guys, I feel like I belong . . ." Several of the men shared sentiments similar to Levi, and Miles wrote, "In men's choir, we get to just be ourselves . . ." These senses of belonging, increased self-confidence, and personal authenticity described by participants are manifestations of Jorgensen's concept of "rootedness." "Rootedness," according to Jorgensen, describes a sense of security and personal feeling of identity that can envelop the "place" of a musical community (1995).

**Singers of quality repertoire in male choruses are motivated to make exceptional music as well as use their voices to impress others.** Several participants spoke of the meaning they found through making great music and sharing it with others. Eli wrote, "The best thing about men's is the music we make . . ." Miles noted that men's choir allowed him to make music with peers who wanted to create the "same quality of music" that he did. Dan and Max praised the beauty of the men's choir sound and spoke of the pride they took in performing with the group. Additional participants shared that achieving such high performance level required intense effort on their part, but was an enjoyable challenge. Steve wrote, "We like to work to make our music better because it's so gratifying to do it well." Levi even used the word "victory" to describe the feeling he and his classmates experienced when they mastered a

challenging piece of repertoire. The men's feelings are similar to those expressed by students in Hylton's 1981 study, who placed value on musical accomplishment, success, and pride in their effort.

Participants also described a sense of empowerment that resulted from impressing others with their music. "That's what you *live* for," said Levi, as he described the feeling of giving a solid performance and receiving a standing ovation. Dan shared that he and his fellow choir members felt like they could "go out and conquer the world together," adding, "we knew that we were doing something that was special . . . and everyone would go ballistic [at concerts] because we sounded really great." Singers within the Cedar High School Men's Choir reveled in the attention they received from others as they excelled in creating something of importance and magnitude. The men were enlivened by accomplishing more collectively than one could accomplish alone, and these feelings of shared connections with other members of the chorus, and the security of knowing one belongs to a community of music makers are all characteristics of empowerment as described by Jorgensen (1995). Furthermore, the experiences of participants in the Cedar High School Men's Choir were found to be similar to those experiences of undergraduate and graduate students in Kokotsaki and Hallam's 2007 study. The university students in Kokotsaki and Hallam's study also felt empowered through their musical experiences, believing their contributions to be meaningful, and taking pride in their group's success.

**Students who sing in a men's choir may be more open and have a broader view of male gender roles—learning to think outside of heterosexual and homosexual male stereotypes.** Gender is a complex combination of separate but interconnected issues. Acknowledging that gender is a fluid entity with factors defined by situation, culture, and



environment, the male chorus can be an opportunity for young men to gain a broader understanding of themselves in the face of societal stereotypes and pressures regarding what it means to be a “man” (Harrison, 2007).

In the course of our interactions, participants in the Cedar High School men’s choir discussed heterosexual masculine stereotypes on more than one occasion. Al expressed a belief that men naturally had more difficulty being musically expressive. Levi spoke of images in the media that depicted males as being more about “beer, chips, and football” than singing. Jan said, “. . . stereotypically, guys . . . don’t *have* feelings,” adding that they keep them “locked up.”

While these men acknowledged masculine stereotypes and images in the media that were not inclusive of singing and sensitive males, they also expressed enjoyment in being able to break these stereotypes and move outside of societal molds. Jan shared, “. . . when we get to do some of those songs where we let it [feelings] out or whatever and just be ourselves, it’s beautiful . . .” Similarly, Levi credited Mr. Dover with helping the men “understand that it’s okay to come out and say what you’re feeling.” With defiant confidence, Levi said, “. . . that’s what a *real* man is,” a person who is “able to say what he feels, not what people want to hear.” He added, “Just because we’re guys doesn’t mean we have to be these macho men all the time . . .”

Harrison (2008) found that “almost all the existing literature . . . indicated that a gender stereotypical bias exists in music.” According to Harrison, “participation in activities that are soft, gentle, small, and high-pitched is not considered the domain of males” (p. 224).

Participants in this study, however, seemed comfortable with making music that was soft, gentle, expressive, and wide-ranging, yet acknowledged by their words that stereotypical ideas of heterosexual masculinity did not always embrace the singing and sensitivity they knew to be part

of their own identity. Participation in the Cedar High School Men's Choir allowed these singers to step outside stereotypical male gender roles, and they seemed to relish the opportunity. The positive view of choral singing shared by participants of the Cedar High School Men's Choir stands in contrast to a number of studies examining "missing males" in choral singing and suggesting that middle school and high school age males often associate choral singing with being effeminate or participating in an undesirable activity (Freer, 2010; Harrison, 2007; Young, 2012).

As a homosexual man, Max shared that his experiences in the Cedar High School Men's Choir challenged him to confront his own stereotypes about heterosexual men. Max was initially hesitant to join the men's choir at his school. The majority of his friends were female, and prior to his experiences in the Cedar High School Men's Choir, Max said he wasn't "comfortable" around straight men. Having seen examples in movies and other media where straight men "picked on the gay guy," Max feared that the other members of the choir would not be accepting of his homosexuality. As a committed musician, Max also worried that the men in the choir would not be serious about musical artistry. He shared his early prejudices with me in our interview: "They're guys," he said, "They don't know art. They don't appreciate music." As Max attended rehearsals, he soon realized that the men *did* appreciate music and were capable of great artistry, and he acknowledged to me that he hadn't given the men enough credit. He was also pleasantly surprised when the men were supportive, welcoming, and accepting of him.

Max credited Mr. Dover for shaping a rehearsal environment that was supportive and safe, while Mr. Dover expressed admiration for Max's courage to be openly homosexual as a high school student. The support Mr. Dover provided for Max is shown by research to be critical. Harrison (2008) noted that verbal bullying in the form of homophobic name-calling

when paired with complacency on the part of a music teacher is not only damaging to homosexual and heterosexual students but can also reinforce fears young men may have about singing in choirs.

While in the Cedar High School Men's Choir, Max also enjoyed exploring male gender roles outside his comfort zone and personal gender identity. He came to embrace the rowdier tradition of the men's choir "circle" which initially made him uncomfortable. He also reveled in the opportunity to engage in choreographed stage fighting while singing "Next to Lovin' I Like Fightin' Best" from the musical "Shenandoah," naming this as one of his most profound experiences with the choir. In moments such as these, Max shared that while these gender roles may not have been his own identity, he enjoyed having fun with his classmates and realized it was "okay to go there" with them. By opening himself up to these new experiences, Max believed he gained more from his relationships with his fellow choir members. Max also felt he grew in his understanding of and ability to relate to heterosexual men.

### **Implications for Music Education**

The findings of this phenomenological instrumental case study are specific to the participants within this study. They should not be generalized to larger populations. However, teachers in similar situations may discover they are able to transfer portions of these findings to their specific teaching environments. It is also possible that the information contained herein could prove helpful or informative for teachers who work with male choruses and hope to better understand the male chorus phenomenon. With these thoughts in mind, I offer the following implications for music education.

**Male choral students may be more participatory, open, and willing to be vulnerable within a male chorus environment, as they are not concerned with maintaining appearances in front of the opposite sex.** The teacher in this study (Mr. Dover) noted that some students were more willing to share in the all-male class environment. The male chorus setting can provide a forum for greater openness and vulnerability, encouraging hesitant students to take risks and share with their classmates. Jorgensen and Pfeiler (2008) suggested that single sex choral settings could be less intimidating for male students as they are void of the posturing, flirtation, and attention seeking that often occurs within mixed chorus settings. Choral music educators should embrace the male chorus as an opportunity for encouraging greater participation among male singers without the distractions of the opposite sex. Educators may look for opportunities to provide singers with opportunities to participate in male-only ensembles as they design their course offerings.

**Men's choir rehearsals may be more active and noisier than mixed choir environments and may include more rowdiness, crude humor, and movement.** Emerging brain research and literature regarding single sex education supports the louder and rowdier climate of the Cedar High School Men's Choir rehearsals. The male brain tends to have a larger amygdala and a larger cerebellum. These differences may result in males being more aggressive and possessing less impulse control. Furthermore, the male brain stem tends to be at rest more frequently, creating a greater likelihood for males to respond physically when they feel emotionally charged (Gurian, 2011). Males also tend to have a much higher tolerance for noise than do females (Freer, 2010; Harrison, 2007, 2012).

In all-male classrooms, these neurological differences may appear magnified, resulting in a lively and active learning atmosphere. Research suggests that adolescent males tend to enjoy

active learning environments and may move more while learning than females. There are even indications that some males may learn better while standing than sitting (Bradford & Noble, 2000; James, 2007; Sax, 2006). Choral music teachers may wish to consider these differences as they cultivate their male chorus environments. Teachers can help to keep male singers engaged by incorporating physical movement and activity-based learning (Freer, 2009b). Teachers may also consider infusing their times of learning and rehearsing with brief bursts of humor or lighter moments.

**Quality choral repertoire can provide a context for empowerment, exploration of self and one's emotions, forging connections with others, and character development alongside music making.** Participants in the Cedar Creek High School Men's Choir seemed to form rich emotional connections with certain performance repertoire. The men spoke of connecting with certain songs, and experiencing profound moments while rehearsing and performing choral repertoire with their "brothers." Choral music educators should take great care as they program repertoire for male singers. Teachers determine the greater part of their choral curriculum by the repertoire they choose. With this in mind, it is important for educators to consider what musical and personal avenues can be opened by each piece of music. Quality musical selections will encourage students' musical growth, but also help to facilitate personal growth as well-rounded human beings. It is also vital that teachers of male choruses are cognizant of repertoire that perpetuates male gender stereotypes. Sea chanteys and work songs, while longstanding components of standard male chorus repertoire, are not the only options for men who sing. Consider the male choruses in rural Iceland, who shared that their peak experiences were found while singing sensitive, sustained songs at slow tempi rather than works associated with hegemonic masculinity (Faulkner, 2003). Teachers can facilitate greater artistry

among male singers and broaden singers' personal horizons through exploring a full range of musical genres, styles, and sensitivities.

**Teachers of male choruses may have greater success when they are able to efficiently navigate between paired themes of: (a) strength and sensitivity, (b) teacher authority and student ownership, and (c) work and play.** As discussed in the previous paragraph, choral music educators should choose to program varied and interesting repertoire for their male singers. Similarly, singers will benefit from opportunities to perform repertoire that possesses elements of both strength and sensitivity. Providing opportunities for men to express boldness *and* tenderness in their music making may facilitate a broader perspective of male gender roles, a greater breadth of musical experiences, and allow for exploration of contrasting and varied poetic themes within choral texts.

Each teacher must also navigate the realms of teacher authority and student ownership, making decisions for his or her classroom and preferred learning environment. In this study, Mr. Dover expertly navigated between exercising his authority as a teacher and empowering students to own their musical experiences. Mr. Dover challenged his singers to share their musical ideas, and affirmed their contributions to the ensemble. By opening opportunities for artistic and administrative ownership among his students, Mr. Dover seemed to consequently strengthen the singers' commitment to the ensemble and one another. Research also suggests that student ownership can result in a sense of empowerment (Abrahams, 2012). Teachers of male choruses may wish to balance their teaching authority with opportunities for student ownership. Providing male students a literal *and* metaphorical voice within the choir may yield greater rewards in the long term as students begin to own their musicianship and are more connected and invested in the ensemble.

Teachers may also benefit from balancing work and play in the male chorus classroom. Dewey (1944) wrote that work and play are not so antithetical to one another as is often assumed. In fact, Dewey suggested that both of these instincts (work and play) are valuable in education, as they engage the whole pupil and reduce the artificial gap between life in school and life out of school. According to Dewey, “Work which remains permeated with the play attitude is art . . .” (p. 206). The musical and social successes of the Cedar High School Men’s Choir provide a living example of how work and play, in tandem, are beneficial in the male chorus rehearsal—just as they are in everyday life. Teachers who are attuned to their singers’ needs empathize and understand when breaks or shifts in direction are needed. Brief activities that engage singers’ playful nature may be musical or extra-musical and can enhance moments of more serious music making. Teachers may find that singers' focus and commitment is heightened when the rehearsal space is opened to this manner of playful productivity.

**Being instructed by a teacher who is supportive, genuinely invested, and who believes in students is important to male chorus members.** The relationship between male students and their teacher is of critical importance. Mr. Dover works to build relationships with students, to encourage them, and to learn their interests and personalities. The strong positive relationship Mr. Dover has built with his singers is instrumental to their success and individual willingness to work and learn in rehearsals. James (2007) suggested that boys do not work for teachers they believe do not like them and Freer (2009) found that male choral singers most enjoyed having a teacher who was interested in their individual musical needs and provided helpful feedback. Teachers who take the time to invest in their students and care for them individually may find greater success in the male chorus classroom.

**High school male chorus students respond positively to clear structure and expectations as a prerequisite for maintaining order and achieving musical success.**

Participants within the Cedar High School Men's Choir seemed to all support the men's choir rules that held them accountable to one another—even when it meant singing a solo for a forgotten folder, or having to rehearse longer because a classmate arrived late to rehearsal. The men viewed this structure as necessary for maintaining order in the choir and for helping them to be better prepared, which would ultimately result in greater musical success. Male singers may benefit when a strong structure and implicit expectations are in place to encourage order and accountability. Young men may also respond better to clear learning objectives and sharp finite lesson plans (Noble, 2000). Teachers may also find that their male chorus classrooms run more efficiently and productively when these kinds of structures and expectations are in place.

**Teachers of high school male choruses can establish a teaching environment that actively and effectively supports peer mentoring.** The Cedar High School Men's Choir employed a system of mentoring to help new members assimilate more quickly to the demands of the choir and to allow older members of the choir to gain leadership experience. Younger singers not only learned musical skills from the older members, but also admired them as leaders and role models. Employing these kinds of effective peer role models has been found as to be a worthwhile strategy in motivating young men to sing in secondary schools (Harrison, 2001). Such a mentoring system may be formal (e.g., teacher-assigned “big brothers,” mentors, or section leaders) or informal (e.g., as when Mr. Dover spoke privately with some of his singers, encouraging them to be leaders in their section). Peer mentors provide the advantage of being older and experienced enough to provide guidance, but are still part of the student culture and are not so distanced as the teacher. Choral music educators who work with male singers may find



that their students benefit from such a mentoring system, which allows older male students to gain leadership experience while helping younger male students feel welcome and learn more quickly.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

The present study addressed questions of meaning and identity for high school male chorus members with the intent of better understanding the unique phenomenon of the Cedar High School Men's Choir and the essence of the participants' lived experiences. This section will offer suggestions for future research related to this study.

As indicated in chapter three, there were limitations to this study. These limitations could be attended to in future research. Time constraints required that this study's data collection period be limited to three months. A future study might examine the male chorus phenomenon over a longer duration for an even richer perspective of the ensemble and development of brotherhood within the ensemble. Furthermore, as a female researcher, it is possible the participants may have shared less openly with me in interviews than they might have shared had the study been conducted by a male researcher. This too, could be explored in future research.

The present study examined an exceptional high school male chorus and their male choral music teacher, Mr. Dover. Another consideration for future research would be to replicate this study with an exceptional high school male chorus and a *female* choral music teacher. What differences in themes might emerge? Are themes such as "brotherhood" fostered in part by the leadership of a male choral music teacher? Would elements of camaraderie such as rowdiness, crude humor, and shenanigans manifest fully in a male chorus instructed by a female teacher? In an earlier study, upon which this dissertation was modeled, I investigated a high school women's chorus and their female choral music teacher (Ramsey, 2011). Future research might

also seek to explore an exceptional high school women's chorus instructed by a *male* teacher and examine how this difference in the sex of the teacher and the sex of the choir impacts or does not impact the rehearsal environment and emergent themes.

Previous studies have examined the benefits high school students have received from the broader choral experience (Hylton, 1981) and the reasons for high school students' participation in music (Adderley et al., 2003), but these studies examined students within coeducational, settings. Another study examined the benefits of the choral experience, not with high school students, but with coeducational undergraduate and graduate students at a university (Kokotsaki & Hallam, 2007). A worthwhile study for the future might be to examine the benefits students perceive from participating in single sex choirs at the high school level.

The experiences shared by Max in this study, as homosexual male participating in a primary heterosexual high school men's chorus, provided for rich data and experiences filtered through a unique lens. Another suggestion for future research would be to further explore the powerful perspectives and experiences of gay and lesbian singers in primarily heterosexual single sex choruses. Studies also might examine the experiences of heterosexual and homosexual singers who participate in primarily gay and lesbian choruses.

Finally, as indicated in my personal teaching reflections in chapter one, the lived experience of teaching an all-male chorus is filled with joys, challenges, and unique experiences. Males may learn differently, as suggested by research shared in chapter two, and teachers (male and female alike) might benefit from further training regarding the needs and challenges of teaching adolescent and high school males. Future research might examine teacher perceptions of instructing all-male choruses and teachers' feelings of preparedness to meet the needs of an all-male student population.

## **APPENDICES**

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Exploring High School Men's Chorus Culture Student Assent Form**

## **Exploring High School Men's Chorus Culture Student Assent Form**

You are being asked to participate in a research project titled, "Exploring High School Men's Chorus Culture" conducted by Andrea Ramsey, Ph.D. candidate at Michigan State University. Researchers are required to provide an assent form to inform you about the study, to convey that participation is voluntary, to explain risks and benefits of participation, and to empower you to make an informed decision. You should feel free to ask the researcher any questions you may have.

**1. Purpose of Research:** You are being asked to participate in a research study about the unique culture of high school men's chorus, how you define your experience in the high school men's chorus and how singing in a high school men's chorus has impacted you.

**2. What You Will Do:** As part of this research, you may be asked to participate by responding in writing to written surveys with open-ended questions. The surveys should take no longer than 10-20 minutes to complete. You may also be selected to participate in individual or focus group interviews with 5-7 other students from this men's chorus. Furthermore, you may be asked to participate in "think aloud" sessions where individuals or members of the group watch video footage of Men's Choir rehearsals and discuss. Interviews and "think-aloud" sessions may last 30-60 minutes.

**3. Potential Benefits and Risks:** Participation may be beneficial to you as it offers an opportunity to reflect on your experiences in this men's chorus and potentially contribute to the body of research on this subject. A potential risk is that you might be nervous to participate in interviews, "think-aloud" sessions or respond in writing, but hopefully this risk will be very small.

**4. Privacy and Confidentiality:** Your confidentiality will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. All interviews will be recorded on a digital voice recorder and will be strictly confidential. Audio recordings, video recordings, collected data and any identifying information will be stored under secure conditions in Rm 205 of the Music Practice Building at Michigan State University. Only myself, Dr. Sandra Snow and the MSU Institutional Review Board will have access to the data. In transcriptions of the interviews, you will be identified by a pseudonym. The results of this study, including audio recordings, may be presented or published, but no identifying information will be shared. No video recordings of rehearsals will ever be shared publicly.

**5. Your Rights to Participate, Say No, or Withdraw:** Participation in this research project is completely voluntary. You have the right to say no. You may change your mind at any time and withdraw from the study without penalty. You may choose not to answer specific questions or to stop participating at any time.

**6. Contact Information for Questions and Concerns:** If you have concerns or questions about this study, how to do any part of it, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury (i.e. physical, psychological, social, financial, or otherwise), please contact the primary investigator, Dr. Sandra Snow, or the secondary investigator, Andrea Ramsey, at the contact info

below. If you have any questions about your role and rights as a research participant, you may also contact, anonymously if you wish, Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, fax: 517-432-4503, or e-mail [\(Harrison, 2007\)](#) or regular mail at 408 W. Circle Drive, 207 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824

Dr. Sandra Snow  
205 Music Practice Bldg.  
East Lansing, MI 48824  
email: slsnow@msu.edu  
phone: 517-353-9118

Andrea Ramsey  
1636 Bliss Street  
Haslett, MI  
email: andreamseymusic@me.com  
phone: 479-531-2086

**7. Documentation of Informed Consent:** By signing and dating below, you consent to participation in this study; collection of data through audio-tape, video-tape, and written responses; and the sharing of results from this study at future presentations and publications.

Name (printed) \_\_\_\_\_ Name (signed) \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Exploring High School Men's Chorus Culture Parent Consent Form**

## **Exploring High School Men's Chorus Culture Parent Consent Form**

Your son is being asked to participate in a research project titled, "Exploring High School Men's Chorus Culture" conducted by Andrea Ramsey, Ph.D. candidate at Michigan State University. Researchers are required to provide an consent form to inform you about the study, to convey that participation is voluntary, to explain risks and benefits of participation, and to empower you to make an informed decision about your son's participation. You should feel free to ask the researcher any questions you may have.

**1. Purpose of Research:** Your son is being asked to participate in a research study about the unique culture of high school men's chorus, how he defines his experience in the high school men's chorus and how singing in a high school men's chorus has impacted him.

**2. What You Will Do:** As part of this research, your son may be asked to participate by responding in writing to written surveys with open-ended questions. The surveys should take no longer than 10-20 minutes to complete. Your son may also be selected to participate in individual or focus group interviews with 5-7 other students from this men's chorus. Furthermore, your son may be asked to participate in "think aloud" sessions where individuals or members of the group watch video footage of Men's Choir rehearsals and discuss. Interviews and "think-aloud" sessions may last 30-60 minutes.

**3. Potential Benefits and Risks:** Participation may be beneficial to your son as it offers an opportunity to reflect on his experiences in this men's chorus and the information he provides could contribute to the body of research on this subject. A potential risk is that your son might be nervous to participate in interviews, "think-aloud" sessions or respond in writing, but hopefully this risk will be very small.

**4. Privacy and Confidentiality:** Your son's confidentiality will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. All interviews will be recorded on a digital voice recorder and will be strictly confidential. Audio recordings, video recordings, collected data and any identifying information will be stored under secure conditions in Rm 205 of the Music Practice Building at Michigan State University. Only myself, Dr. Sandra Snow and the MSU Institutional Review Board will have access to the data. In transcriptions of the interviews, your son will be identified by a pseudonym. The results of this study, including audio recordings, may be presented or published, but no identifying information will be shared. No video recordings of rehearsals will ever be shared publicly.

**5. Your Rights to Participate, Say No, or Withdraw:** Participation in this research project is completely voluntary. Your son has the right to say no, or may change his mind at any time and withdraw from the study without penalty. He may choose not to answer specific questions or to stop participating at any time.

**6. Contact Information for Questions and Concerns:** If you have concerns or questions about this study, how to do any part of it, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury (i.e. physical, psychological, social, financial, or otherwise), please contact the primary investigator, Dr. Sandra Snow, or the secondary investigator, Andrea Ramsey, at the contact info



below. If you have any questions about your role and rights as a research participant, you may also contact, anonymously if you wish, Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, fax: 517-432-4503, or e-mail [irb@msu.edu](mailto:irb@msu.edu) or regular mail at 408 W. Circle Drive, 207 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824

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phone: 479-531-2086

**7. Documentation of Informed Consent:** By signing and dating below, you give your consent to your son's participation in this study; collection of data through audio-tape, video-tape, and written responses; and the sharing of results from this study at future presentations and publications.

Name (printed) \_\_\_\_\_ Name (signed) \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX C**

### **Exploring High School Men's Chorus Culture Teacher Consent Form**

## **Exploring High School Men's Chorus Culture Teacher Consent Form**

You are being asked to participate in a research project titled, "Exploring High School Men's Chorus Culture" conducted by Andrea Ramsey, Ph.D. candidate at Michigan State University. Researchers are required to provide an consent form to inform you about the study, to convey that participation is voluntary, to explain risks and benefits of participation, and to empower you to make an informed decision about your participation. You should feel free to ask the researcher any questions you may have.

**1. Purpose of Research:** This study is designed to explore the unique culture of high school men's chorus, how young men defines their experiences in the high school men's chorus and how singing in a high school men's chorus has impacted them. As the teacher, you are an integral part of this experience.

**2. What You Will Do:** As part of this research, you may be asked to participate by responding in writing to interview questions provided by the researcher. You will also be asked to participate in individual interviews. Interviews may last 30-60 minutes. . Furthermore, you may also be asked to participate in "think aloud" sessions where you and the researcher watch video footage of Men's Choir rehearsals and discuss.

**3. Potential Benefits and Risks:** Participation may be beneficial to you as it offers an opportunity for you to reflect on your teaching experiences with the men's chorus and the information you provide could contribute to the body of research on this subject. A potential risk is that you might be nervous to participate in interviews, "think-aloud" sessions or respond in writing, but hopefully this risk will be very small.

**4. Privacy and Confidentiality:** Your confidentiality will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. All interviews will be recorded on a digital voice recorder and will be strictly confidential. Audio recordings, video recordings, collected data and any identifying information will be stored under secure conditions in Rm 205 of the Music Practice Building at Michigan State University. Only myself, Dr. Sandra Snow and the MSU Institutional Review Board will have access to the data. In transcriptions of the interviews, you will be identified by a pseudonym. The results of this study, including audio recordings, may be presented or published, but no identifying information will be shared. No video recordings of rehearsals will ever be shared publicly.

**5. Your Rights to Participate, Say No, or Withdraw:** Participation in this research project is completely voluntary. You have the right to say no, and you may change your mind at any time and withdraw from the study without penalty. You may choose not to answer specific questions or to stop participating at any time.

**6. Contact Information for Questions and Concerns:** If you have concerns or questions about this study, how to do any part of it, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury (i.e. physical, psychological, social, financial, or otherwise), please contact the primary investigator, Dr. Sandra Snow, or the secondary investigator, Andrea Ramsey, at the contact info below. If you have any questions about your role and rights as a research participant, you may

also contact, anonymously if you wish, Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, fax: 517-432-4503, or e-mail [irb@msu.edu](mailto:irb@msu.edu) or regular mail at 408 W. Circle Drive, 207 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824

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**7. Documentation of Informed Consent:** By signing and dating below, you give your consent participation in this study; collection of data through audio-tape, video-tape, and written responses; and the sharing of results from this study at future presentations and publications.

Name (printed) \_\_\_\_\_ Name (signed) \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX D**

### **Principal Permission**

Michigan State University Institutional Review Board  
207 Olds Hall  
East Lansing, MI 48824

To Whom it May Concern,

I have carefully read the proposal and procedures for Andrea Ramsey's research study titled "Exploring High School Men's Chorus Culture" I give my permission for her to conduct this study in the school building in which I am Principal.

I understand that this study will examine the men's chorus experience through the eyes of the singers and I give permission for [REDACTED] his students to participate in this study.

It is my understanding that teacher and student participation is voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time during the study. All data and audio or video recordings will be confidential and will be destroyed five years after collection. At no time will anyone be referred to by name on a recording, during data analysis, or in the report of the study results.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Principal

[REDACTED] High School

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

## **APPENDIX E**

### **Initial Written Response**

## Exploring Men's Chorus Culture

### Initial Written Response

**Please provide the following information:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

This is my *(circle one)* **first**      **second**      **third**      **fourth** year in Men's Choir.

1) Tell me about yourself. What is your personality like? What are your interests, activities, etc?

2) Describe what it is like to sing in men's choir? Are there any unique qualities to the experience?

3) If you had to explain to a middle school student what it was like to be in a high school men's chorus, what would you say to them?



## **APPENDIX F**

### **Email and Edmodo Questions**

**11/6/12, Email:**

Good morning men, (Big 10!)

Thank you so much for agreeing to be part of this men's chorus study! The thoughts and words you share in this study will have a life far beyond the next two months--in a published dissertation and possibly in articles for choral music teachers. This requires time and effort on your part--so thank you in advance for your generosity and willingness. There will be two main ways in which I communicate with the ten of you in the next two months: (1) direct email questions and (2) Edmodo questions.

In order to respond to Edmodo questions, you will need to join our online community. It's very easy to do!

- Visit this link: [www.edmodo.com](http://www.edmodo.com)
- Click "I'm a Student"
- Enter the information requested. Group code is: XXXXXXXXXX
- Go ahead and enter your email even though it's optional. Doing so will ensure you receive alerts when a new question/comment is posted

I have already posted this week's question to Edmodo. Once you sign up, you'll have access to it and be able to respond. Edmodo questions are designed to generate discussion--much like a comment thread on youtube or facebook. You are able to see each other's responses and interact. Feel free to respond more than once or to piggy-back off someone else's response.

Direct email questions (I'll send you one of those next week) will require a bit more depth of thought and your response will only be seen by me, not shared with the group.

If for any reason you do not want to be considered for the focus group interview, please let me know at this time. I will be selecting five of you to participate in two group interviews.

Also, if you have any questions, or have any difficulties signing up for Edmodo, don't hesitate to contact me. I'm happy to help however I can.

Thanks again guys,

Andrea Ramsey

**11/6/12, Edmodo:**

Welcome, Big 10! For the first question, I thought I'd ask about men's choir traditions. Are there any traditions/rituals associated with men's choir? I would love to hear your thoughts on these. What makes them unique/special? How did they get started (if you know)? And if any of you were part of the group that camped on Mr. Dover's yard, please talk to me about that experience.

**11/14/12, Email:**

Good afternoon Big 10!

I know many of you are in full swing with the musical right now so feel free to take the week to respond to this next question and break a leg on opening night! :) Just get me your reply by next Wednesday, Nov. 21 if you can.

For this week, please reply individually to this email (do not 'reply all').

There are two questions below. You may need to answer both, just one question, or no questions depending on your personal activities & interests. If neither applies to you, please reply and let me know and I will ask you a different question for this week.

Please answer question 1 if you've sung in a mixed chorus (with males & females) before:

(1) Is the experience of singing in men's choir different or similar to the experience of singing in a mixed choir? If so, how? Do you feel or act differently in one choir than in the other? If so, describe.

Please answer question 2 if you've participated in other nonmusical, all-male activities (scouts, sports teams, etc) before:

(2) How is the experience of participating in men's choir different or similar to the experience of participating in other all-male activities? Do you feel or act differently in one than in the other? If so, describe.

Again, thanks to each of you for your time. I loved reading last week's responses!! Keep it up!

Andrea Ramsey

**11/25/12, Edmodo:**

Hello again! I hope you all had a great Thanksgiving break! Today, I'd like to ask you about repertoire. You perform a wide variety of music in men's choir from songs like "And Draw Her Home With Music" to "Pirate Song." I am sure there are many others from previous years as well. Have there been any songs that you really loved or felt were especially powerful? What made them that way? Was it personal or do you feel the other guys in the chorus felt the same way you did?

**12/5/12, Email:**

Good evening, Big 10!

This week's question is a simple one, but in two parts.

For you personally, what is the best thing about Men's Choir and also, what is the most challenging thing about Men's Choir?

(If you are like me and have trouble picking just one, feel free to address more than one "best" or more than one "challenge")

Please respond individually by email to this address. (do not reply all)

Thank you so much,

Andrea Ramsey

**12/11/12, Edmodo:**

Hi guys! Thank you so much for continuing to answer so thoughtfully. For this week, I'd like to talk about a couple of the men's rules. I wondered how you felt about these two: Rule #1) We go one full hour from the last guy to walk in and sit; and Rule #5c) No folder= Solo in front of group at end of rehearsal. Again, no wrong answers here...just looking forward to your assorted opinions and thoughts.

**12/17/12, Email:**

Hello Big 10!

This is our last question of the study. Hard to believe!

Also, if you can stick around briefly after Tuesday's rehearsal I have a small token of appreciation for each of you. I'm so grateful for your help in this project.

So, the final question is:

Are there any things you think choir directors should keep in mind when working with a large group of male singers? What advice would you give them?

I look forward to hearing your thoughts!

Thanks so much,

Andrea Ramsey

## **APPENDIX G**

### **Semistructured Interview Protocols**

### **10/3/12, First Teacher Interview**

- 1) Can you explain to me the history of the Cedar Men's Choir? When it began, and how it has evolved?
- 2) You've taught many years of Cedar Men's Choir with great success. Student and group dynamics often shift from year to year. How would you describe this current choir in light of past men's choirs you've taught?
- 3) What are your hopes for these these young men? When you teach them, what do you want them to come away from this experience with?
- 4) In last night's rehearsal, I saw Ian, the treasurer make an announcement about menswear. Was he referring to tuxedo orders? uniforms? something else?
- 5) What can you tell me about your officer structure for the group?
- 6) One of the young men was wearing a sweatshirt I thought might be for the men's choir... something about "Making Women Swoon since 1994?" Can you help me clarify this in my notes and/or provide the background on this shirt?
- 7) Talk with me about big brothers and little brothers.
- 8) You indicated the men sing solos instead of doing push-ups. Can you share with me about this policy?
- 9) Can you share with me the titles/composers of the repertoire the men are currently rehearsing?
- 10) I was moved last night by how openly poetic the men were when you had them share their thoughts on the imagery of the accompaniment. Have you taken steps to cultivate this sort of environment? It's clear they are willing to be vulnerable, and that's not always an easy task with adolescent males!



- 11) Think about those students in men's choir who are also in your mixed choruses. Have you noticed that any of them behave differently while they are in men's chorus than when they are in mixed chorus? If so, how?

### **11/2/12, Second Teacher Interview**

1. So tell me about you, your family, who you are as a person, and where you are from?
2. Was there a defining moment that sparked you and led you to think about teaching choir?
3. How many choirs and students participate in the program at Cedar High? Can you tell me about the history of the choral program here?
4. What are some honorable performances and accolades this program has received?
5. What do you see take place in these young men over the years, mentoring many of them from middle school? Are there surprises?
5. Tell me about choir camp.
6. What have been some of the greatest challenges with teaching men's choir and then what have been some of the greatest rewards of teaching men's choir?
7. Humor seems to be a constant in your rehearsals. I just wondered how you see the role of humor in your rehearsals? Do you feel it furthers some specific purpose in your group?
8. I also noticed that there's sort of an informality with the men's chorus. You know, they come in in their sweatpants, and Connor is shirtless with his flag for
9. Merica night, you know—those kinds of guy things that take place in that space. Why do you think this takes place?
10. When you teach the men vs. a mixed group or a women's group, do you find that you teach differently or that you behave differently?

11. They're really physical in rehearsal. I noticed this. There was one rehearsal where you would tell them to stand up and all the boys would just jump up. They would leap up! I wanted to give you a chance to speak to that.
12. I admire how you take the time to talk about expressive things, the text, etc. I think that's really powerful. I wonder if you might speak to how you find that balance between getting at the expressive marrow of the music while also feeling prepared for your performance.
13. What do you believe the role of competition is with your choirs? What's your philosophy?

### **11/26/12, Focus Group Interview**

1. Do you feel it matters in rehearsal that Mr. Dover is a male teacher? If so, how exactly? How do you think MC might be similar or different with a female teacher?
2. Does Mr. Dover play a role in cultivating the climate for success in MC? What can you tell me about how his leadership style influences rehearsal and performances?
3. What conditions do you believe are necessary for a group of men to do their best work musically and personally?
4. How do others from school, peers, family, audience members, etc. respond to men's choir performances and more specifically, your participation in the group?
5. You perform a wide variety of music in men's from "And Draw Her Home With Music" to "Pirate Song." Talk to me about that. Are there any pieces that you just loved or felt were especially powerful? What made them that way?
6. Singing in MC requires a great deal of time and hard work. What's the trade off? What keeps you coming back every week? What do you gain from this experience and from your effort with the group?
7. Who chooses the design for men's wear? Talk to me about men's wear.

8. Theme nights-- do you have any favorites? If all theme nights from here forward were cancelled, would you be upset? Why?
9. Do you feel being in MC has impacted your life or your identity in any way? How so?
10. Rowdiness and joking seem to be an important aspect of the MC rehearsal atmosphere, yet you still make exceptional music and accomplish so much. Can you talk about that balance?
11. What's it like being in the middle of all that sound? How would you describe it?
12. Many of you (and the rest of the big 10) have frequently used the terms "brotherhood" or "family" when talking about MC. Why (or why not) is this a brotherhood? How do you know it is a brotherhood? What makes it that way?
13. Have you experienced any particularly important or profound moments while singing with MC? Why do you believe you were affected that way?
14. We touched on traditions in the written responses, but I'd like to hear a bit more in person about these. Particularly the "circle", water park trip, and the campout.
15. Let's talk about how MC is different than mixed chorus or all-male sports. Variety of responses on that one, and I'd like to speak further with you about it.
16. Many of you spoke of feeling as if you have a connection or bond with the fellow singers in MC. Tell me about this.
17. Is there anything else you think I should know about MC?

**11/27/12, Individual Interview (Max)**

1. When and for how many years did you sing in Cedar Men's Choir? What about the idea of singing in a male chorus was appealing to you?
2. What is it like to sing in a men's chorus? How would you describe the experience to an outsider?

3. How was the experience of singing in men's choir different or similar to the experience of singing in a mixed choir? Did you feel or act differently in one choir compared to the other? If so, describe.
4. (If applicable) How was the experience of singing in men's choir different or similar to the experience of participating in other all-male, nonmusical activities (sports, scouts, etc)? Did you feel or act differently in one activity compared to the other? If so, describe.
5. Can you describe an important or profound moment from your experiences in men's choir? Why do you believe it affected you in a memorable way?
6. What conditions do you believe are necessary for a group of men to do their best work musically and personally?
7. Is there a song you performed in your time with men's choir that holds special meaning for you? If so, could you tell me about this?
8. Do you believe singing in this men's chorus has impacted your life or identity in some way or had any bearing on your decision to study music? If so, can you talk with me about this?
9. Did Mr. Dover play a role in cultivating the climate for success in Cedar Men's Choir? What can you tell me about his leadership style/impact on the culture of men's choir at Cedar HS?
10. Is there anything else about your men's chorus experience you'd like to share with me?

**12/10/12, Individual Interview (AI)**

1. Since I already know your grade and a bit about your activities and interests, tell me a bit about your family. How do they see your involvement in MC?
2. You're a bit of an all-star student from what I can tell—involved in lots of activities, taking AP classes, and so forth. Have you ever been tempted to quit MC so you'd have extra time for studies or other things? Why or why not?

3. Did you always see yourself as a singer or musician? If not, when/how did you come into this identity?
4. What other music do you enjoy-- beyond musicals and your experiences in MC?
5. So you're a sophomore and this is your second year in MC? Were there any differences between your first and second years?
6. You've spoken and written briefly about how you feel MC has helped you gain confidence and become more outgoing. Would you be willing to share some specific examples of this? Or any other ways you feel men's has benefited you?
7. In our interview you said: *"and men's is one place where you feel like you can belong. ...the trust I developed in men's with these guys helped me to be more outgoing—to be myself more outside of men's, so like—after I see that my ideas are being accepted and people are taking me seriously and respecting me in this environment where I can kind of let loose a little bit, it's nice—and I can take that other places in my life and try to be myself more. That's nice."* I'd like to explore two ideas in this quote: 1) the idea of *belonging* in MC—what that really means? and 2) the idea of *being yourself more* in MC. Would you be willing to speak to these ideas a bit?
8. The notion of a "brotherhood" in MC—where does that originate? Mr. Dover ? Tradition? Somewhere else?
9. Are you especially close friends with any of the other guys in the Big 10?
10. In our last interview, you and Levi spoke about trusting the other men in the chorus. How do you think this kind of trust forms?
11. I'm also interested in the idea of feeling empowered, powerful or "manly" while singing. Do you have this same experience when you perform as a soloist or in the musical? Or is this

experience *specific* to singing with men's choir? Do you feel more empowered/powerful/manly while singing certain songs than others?

12. Do you participate in any other all-male activities? (football, basketball, soccer, etc?) We talked a bit about this in the written responses, but I'd like to explore in further detail the differences between men's choir and other all men activities.
13. Have you ever sung in a men's chorus with a male conductor other than Mr. Dover? If so, describe that experience and any differences or similarities you observed.
14. Are there any things you think choir directors should keep in mind when working with a large group of male singers? Any advice?
15. Some schools won't permit choir directors to have choirs separated by gender (male chorus, female chorus). Do you think this is a good idea? Why or why not? What have you gained (if anything) from singing in a male chorus that you could not gain from singing in a mixed chorus?
16. What role do you think choral music will have in your life beyond graduation?
17. Also, what impact do you think MC will have on your life beyond graduation?

#### **12/12/12, Individual Interview (Levi)**

1. Since I already know your grade and a bit about your activities and interests, tell me a bit about your family. How do they see your involvement in MC?
2. You're a bit of an all-star student from what I can tell—well-rounded, involved in sports, musicals, and so forth. Have you ever been tempted to quit MC so you'd have extra time for sports, studying, or other things? Why or why not?
3. Did you always see yourself as a singer or musician? If not, when/how did you come into this identity?

4. What other music do you enjoy-- beyond musicals and your experiences in MC?
5. So you're a junior and this is your 3rd year in MC? How does the experience change from year to year? Is it different now than it was in your first year? Do you see yourself as more of a leader now?
6. In our group interview, you spoke about a dynamic performance at Youth Arts: *"And then, we sang another, but those two songs, like, it was ridiculous how much we clicked. It's like, all of us were just together and especially once we got all the stomping and clapping going [in Betelehemu] and everybody, when you feel the crowd is engaged and they're with you, and like, they just wanna get up and start singing it with you—that's it's just (sighs)—that sound that's just all around you it's like (searching for words)... ridiculous.* What do you think made this performance so powerful?
7. I thought this quote of yours was also particularly powerful: *And you know, when you sing—when you're singing—you're in a very vulnerable spot because—when you're playing an instrument, you're using something to create the sound. When you're playing a sport, you're using your body, you know—you mess up, okay, whatever...but when you're singing like, that's all you have—that's very personal, that's very close to you. And when you can build that trust to sing in front of anybody in that men's choir—that's way stronger than any other kind of friendship, I would say because (1) that builds a friendship, but (2) you're pretty much telling them I trust you with one of the most personal things I have.* I'd like to talk further about the idea of singing as vulnerability—especially when that seems to be opposite (at least on the surface) from "empowering, powerful and manly"—other words used to describe singing in men's. I just want to hear more about what you have to say on this thought.

8. I'm also interested in discussing further the idea of feeling empowered, powerful or "manly" while singing. Do you have this same experience when you perform as a soloist or in the musical? Is this experience *specific* to singing with MC? Do you feel more empowered/powerful/manly while singing certain songs than others?
9. The notion of a "brotherhood" in MC—where does that originate? Mr. Dover? Tradition? Somewhere else?
10. Are you especially close friends with any of the other guys in the Big 10?
11. In our last interview, you and Alice spoke about trusting the other men in the chorus. How do you think this kind of trust forms?
12. I know you are a basketball player. I'd like to explore in further detail the differences between MC and your experiences on the men's basketball team. Can you speak about that?
13. Have you ever sung in a men's chorus with a male conductor other than Mr. Dover? If so, describe that experience and any differences or similarities you observed.
14. Are there any things you think choir directors should keep in mind when working with a large group of male singers? What advice would you give them?
15. Some schools won't permit choir directors to have choirs separated by gender (male chorus, female chorus). Do you think this is a good idea? Why or why not? What have you gained (if anything) from singing in a male chorus that you could not gain from singing in a mixed chorus?
16. What role do you think choral music will have in your life beyond graduation?
17. Also, what impact do you think MC will have on your life beyond graduation?



### **12/15/12, Individual Interview (Dan)**

1. When and for how many years did you sing in Cedar Men's Choir? What about the idea of singing in a male chorus was appealing to you?
2. What is it like to sing in a men's chorus? How would you describe the experience to an outsider?
3. How was the experience of singing in men's choir different or similar to the experience of singing in a mixed choir? Did you feel or act differently in one choir compared to the other? If so, describe.
4. (If applicable) How was the experience of singing in men's choir different or similar to the experience of participating in other all-male, nonmusical activities (sports, scouts, etc)? Did you feel or act differently in one activity compared to the other? If so, describe.
5. Can you describe an important or profound moment from your experiences in men's choir? Why do you believe it affected you in a memorable way?
6. What conditions do you believe are necessary for a group of men to do their best work musically and personally?
7. Is there a song you performed in your time with men's choir that holds special meaning for you? If so, could you tell me about this?
8. Do you believe singing in this men's chorus has impacted your life or identity in some way or had any bearing on your decision to study music? If so, can you talk with me about this?
9. Did Mr. Dover play a role in cultivating the climate for success in Cedar Men's Choir? What can you tell me about his leadership style/impact on the culture of men's choir at Cedar HS?
10. Is there anything else about your men's chorus experience you'd like to share with me?

## **12/20/12, Final Teacher Interview**

1. Can you talk with me about your facilities? What they were like when you began your teaching time here as compared to now?
2. Tell me about “Little Men’s... I’ve heard the other men share about it.
3. I noticed Miles does warm ups sometimes and I didn’t ask you how those kinds of student leaders were determined and if you mentor him, if you give him direction as to where he should pitch the warm-ups—if you teach any of that or if you let him experiment?
4. I’d like to explore each participant’s background from your perspective—what you observe in rehearsals, and how you would describe their personalities and characteristics. Can you tell me about Al?
5. Tell me about Miles.
6. Tell me about Harry.
7. Tell me about Levi
8. Tell me about Eli.
9. Tell me about Jan.
10. Tell me about Oscar.
11. Tell me about Trent.
12. Tell me about Simon.
13. Tell me about Steve.
14. And for additional perspective, can you share with me about Dan?
15. Can you share with me about Max?
16. Were there any specific challenges or surprises with any of these students you’d like to share? Any other background information you think might be pertinent?

17. Several of the students said they felt more comfortable in men's or that they could be more themselves in men's choir and I just wondered if you had any similar experiences as a teacher? Do you feel more comfortable in that men's environment than you do with your mixed choir?
18. What do you think choir directors who work with large groups of men should keep in mind?
19. What are your priorities in teaching?
20. Is there anything else I haven't asked you about that you want to share with me regarding the students and this program?

## **APPENDIX H**

### **Cedar High School Men's Choir 2012-2013 Calendar**

## September

Wed 5th @ 8:30 - **Returning guys only**  
(Band/Tennis away)

Tues 11th @ 8:00

Wed 12th @ 8:00 - **Bandana Night**

Mon 17th @ 8:30 - (Band guys at 9:00)

Wed 19th @ 7:30 PICTURE NIGHT - Take  
Pic then rehearse

Mon 24th @ 8:00

Wed 26th @ 8:00 - **Blackout/Whiteout  
Night**

## October

Mon 1st @ 8:30 - (Band at 9:00)

Thurs 4th @ 8:00 - (No JVFB - FFB back  
from game in time)

Mon 8th @ 8:00

Wed 10th @ 8:00

Mon 15th @ 8:00

Tues 16th @ 7:30 - **MS Fall Concert**

Wed 17th @ 8:00 - **College Night**

Mon 22nd @ 8:30 (after Intermediate  
Concert)

Wed 24th @ 8:00 - **Advanced Fall Concert**

Mon 29th @ 8:00

## November

Thurs 1st @ 8:30

## (November)

Mon 5th @ 8:00

Wed 7th @ 8:00 - **Men's Wear Night**

Mon 19th @ 8:00

Mon 26th @ 8:00

Wed 28th @ 8:00 - **America Night**

## December

Mon 3rd @ 8:30 - (Meet the team)

Tues 4th @ 8:30 - **Sci-Fi Night** (no VBB)

Mon 10th @ 8:15 (after MS Concert)

Wed 12th @ 8:00

Mon 17th @ 8:00 - **Perf. On Int. Concert,  
rehearse after**

Tues 18th @ 8:30 - **Ugly Sweater Night** (no  
VBB)

Wed 19th @ 8:00 - **Advanced Holiday  
Concert**

## January

Mon 7th @ 8:00

Wed 9th @ 8:00

Mon 14th @ 8:00

Tues 15th @ 8:00 - **Men's Wear Night #2**  
(spts calendar says no VBB?)

Sat 19th @ 1:00 pm - **State Music Conference**

Wed 23rd @ 8:00 - **Finals Dessert Night**

Thurs 24th @ 8:30 - (JVBB arrives late)

Mon 28th @ 8:00

Thurs 31st @ 8:30 - **Little Men's Only** (no JVBB)

## February

Sat 2nd @ TBA - **District Solo and Ensemble**

Mon 4th @ 8:00

Wed 6th @ 8:00 - **Hawaiian Night**

Mon 11th @ 8:00

Wed 13th @ 8:00 - **District Pre-Festival Concert**

Thurs 14th @ 8:00 - (no JVBB)

Tues 19th @ 8:00 - (no VBB)

Wed 20th @ TBA - **District Choral Festival**

Thurs 21st @ TBA - **District Choral Festival**

## (February)

Mon 25th @ 8:00 - (no Band)

Wed 27th @ 8:00

## March

Tues 5th @ 8:00 - (no divers?)

Thurs 7th @ 8:00 - **Pity the Juniors Night**

Mon 11th @ 8:00

Wed 13th @ 8:00 - **Gangsta Night**

Thurs 14th @ TBA - **Honors Night Performance**

Sat 16th @ TBA - **Road Rally**

Mon 18th @ 8:00 (after MS Pre-Fest)

Wed 20th @ 8:00

Mon 25th @ 8:30 - (meet the team)

Wed 27th @ 8:00

## April

Mon 8th @ 8:00

Wed 10th @ 8:30 - **Suit-Up Night**

Mon 15th @ 8:30

Tues 16th @ 8:30

Thurs 18th @ 8:00 - **Little Men's Only**

Fri 19th @ TBA - **State Solo and Ensemble**

Sat 20th @ TBA - **State Solo and Ensemble**

**(April)**

Mon 22nd @ 8:30

Tues 23rd @ 8:00 - **State Pre-Festival Concert**

Wed 24th @ 8:00 - **Pirates vs. Ninjas Night**

Tues 30th @ 8:00

**May**

Wed 1st @ 8:00

Thurs 2nd @ TBA - **State Choral Festival**

Fri 3rd @ TBA - **State Choral Festival**

Mon 6th @ 8:30

**(May)**

Wed 8th @ 8:30 - **Pity AP People Night**

Thurs 9th @ 8:30 - **Little Men's Only** (if needed)

Fri 10th @ TBA – **State Youth Arts Festival**

Mon 13th @ 8:30

Thurs 16th @ 8:00 - **Little Bro Night**

Sun 19th @ 3:00 - **Choir Banquet**

Mon 20th @ 8:30

Thurs 23rd @ 8:30 - **Daisy Duke Night**

Tues 28th @ 6:00 - **Cabaret Dress Rehearsal**

Wed 29th @ 8:00 - **Cabaret**

Thurs 30th @ 8:00 - **Cabaret**

## **APPENDIX I**

### **Cedar High School Men's Choir Rules**



## **Cedar High School Men's Choir Rules**

### ***Cedar High School Men's Choir***

#### ***Everything YOU need to know...***

1. We go one full hour from the last guy to walk in and sit.
2. Homework pile-up is no reason to miss Men's.
3. Unless your game/match/event is over 30 miles away, it is expected that your parents will get you back in time for Men's rehearsal.
4. Missed Rehearsal Penalty (all subject to director discretion)
  - 1 miss excused or unexcused = can't sing on the next concert
  - 2 misses excused or unexcused = kicked out of the group
5. Have your folder and pencil EVERY rehearsal.
  - a. Only leave your folder in the designated area on a men's rehearsal day.
  - b. Have INTEGRITY!!!! DO NOT STEAL/USE other peoples folders when you are irresponsible. Own up to your mistake like a man!
  - c. No folder = Solo in front of group at end of rehearsal
6. Questions about the schedule can be answered on the choir website or through face-book communication.
7. Snow Days = Rehearsals USUALLY still happen. See number 6 above. If the teams practice/play, then we practice.
8. Don't park on the lawn, in the bus loop, over the curb, etc. Drive carefully when coming to and leaving from Men's.
9. Returning guys – Be encouraging, be positive, be QUIET! Lead by example! There's nothing worse than a hypocrite. New Guys– Be sure you want to be here. Be aggressive in

your music learning. Be aware of the leaders around you who will show you by example how you should behave.

10. Enjoy the fun rituals that help define our ensemble and strengthen our brotherhood.

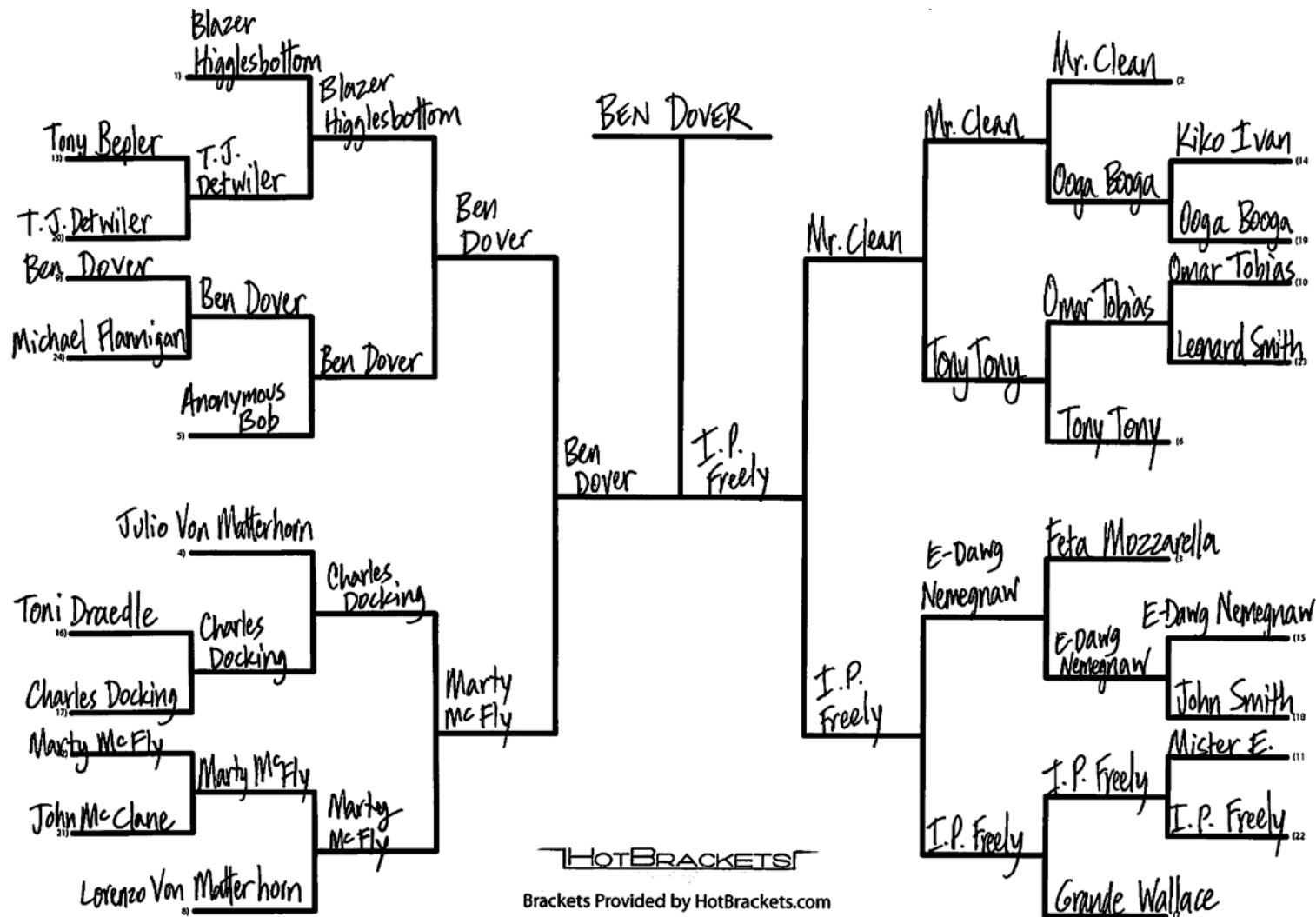
However, there is to be no mistreatment or disrespectful behavior toward another singer in the brotherhood.

***We can be good or we can be the best.....which do you want to be?***

## **APPENDIX J**

### **Tournament Bracket to Select Mr. Dover's Pseudonym**

Figure 6. Tournament Bracket to Select Mr. Dover's Pseudonym



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