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## What's Holding Them Back? the Different Voices of the Adolescent Treble Singer

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WHAT'S HOLDING THEM BACK?  
THE DIFFERENT VOICES OF THE ADOLESCENT TREBLE SINGER

by

Genevieve Michels

A Thesis Submitted in  
Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Music

at

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August 2022

## ABSTRACT

### WHAT'S HOLDING THEM BACK? THE DIFFERENT VOICES OF THE ADOLESCENT TREBLE SINGER

by

Genevieve Michels

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2022  
Under the Supervision of Dr. Sheila J. Feay-Shaw

Adolescent treble singers in choir programs are often overlooked due to their higher numbers compared to non-treble voices. While physically present, treble voiced students at the high school of study, consistently demonstrated lower volume and lighter tone production compared to their non-treble voiced counterparts. This mixed methods research was based on the question: what causes the treble singer to hold back their volume/tone during a choral rehearsal? Literature revealed four areas to consider: singing confidence, voice change, self-confidence, and social influences, which became the basis for a quantitative survey given to sixty-three students across age and grades. Students who "agreed" or "strongly agreed" to 75% of the negatively worded statements within an area were selected (N=16) for qualitative interviews. Interview answers were coded and four influential themes emerged: 1) Comparison to peers; 2) Fear of judgment by peers/teacher; 3) A need to build relationships with peers/teacher; and 4) Low self-perception and high self-criticism. Adolescent treble voiced students may benefit mentally and emotionally by learning about the qualities of individual treble voices. Using positive modeling, providing constructive feedback and encouragement, teaching positive self-talk, and building relationships within our choirs, will encourage students to perform at their fullest level both in choir and in all facets of their lives.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction

As a choir teacher at a suburban high school, I value the structure of the program within which I teach, and believe it encourages vocal growth and creates opportunities for each student. However, repeated scenarios within my classroom lead me to believe that I am missing a crucial way to help a particular sector of my students' progress.

I am a co-teacher with a male colleague in a high school choral program of approximately two hundred students. We split our roles with each of the ensembles to identify one lead teacher and one support teacher. All choir students start in entry-level ensembles organized by voice type. Students enter the high school choral program in either the treble (soprano/alto) or bass (tenor/baritone/bass) ensemble. I am the lead teacher for the entry-level treble choir and my male counterpart is the lead teacher for the entry-level bass choir, allowing each of us to provide vocal modeling for the applicable voice part. During a student's time in either the treble or bass ensemble, the focus is on vocal growth and addressing issues of the voice type more specifically. Depending on the individual, many of these students experience a portion of the adolescent voice change during their time in this ensemble.

The next choir in the program is an intermediate auditioned treble choir for which I am also the lead teacher. This treble choir also focuses on vocal growth specific to the voice type, but at a more advanced level. A smaller number of students in this ensemble also exhibit elements of the adolescent voice change. After a year in the auditioned treble choir, treble voiced students may audition for the mixed choir, which my colleague leads. The most common track for a treble singer in our choir program is to spend time

in all three ensembles (non-auditioned treble, auditioned treble, and auditioned mixed choirs), though some are in the auditioned treble choir their senior year. Having taught in this program for eight years, I started to notice trends with the treble singers across the ensembles which motivated my inquiry focused on their specific experiences.

### **Descriptions of the Specific Student Experiences**

The trends of treble singer experiences are described in three vignettes below:

Vignette 1: Each year, my colleague and I find that we spend significantly more time getting the treble singers to use full tone and audible volume compared to bass singers. This is most prominent in the non-auditioned treble choir but has also happened for shorter periods of time in the auditioned mixed choir. Though I get the treble singers to a comparable endpoint to those in bass clef choir, bass clef singers tend to accomplish a full and projected sound approximately six months earlier in the school year. Knowing that both groups utilize kinesthetic movement, a variety of warm-ups and vocal exercises, as well as songs that fit accessible ranges and span multiple genres, it appears something that has not yet been addressed is causing the clear difference in the timeline for success.

Vignette 2: Following the voicing process at the beginning of the school year, I often hear different rehearsal outcomes than what I expected based on the volume/tone of individual voices. To place the singers into their seating chart for the first rehearsal cycle, I ask students to sing “My Country ‘Tis of Thee” in trios. Students' familiarity with this song varies from moderate familiarity to not at all familiar. We sing through the song several times as a class to try to build familiarity for everyone. When the students begin this process, they only know that I am listening to them sing in trios. They do not know



that I will be assessing their tone and volume on a three-point scale and placing them into seating assignments based on it.

As the students are singing in trios, I evaluate each student's tone and volume on a scale of 1-3, with 1 being light/quiet and 3 being full/loud. Once I have heard everyone, I arrange the rehearsal seating chart for the entire class based on integrating the 3's, 2's, and 1's throughout the group. My hope is that spreading out the stronger voices will lead to quicker musical success and therefore more growth from everyone. I have consistently found that though students sang at a 3 (full tone and loud volume) in the voicing process, many of them rehearsed at a 1 (light tone and quiet volume). Even in a genre where they may be more comfortable such as musical theatre or pop, I find that there are students who do not use the same volume demonstrated during the initial voicing process when we are rehearsing.

Vignette 3: Each year at the fall auditions for the musical production, treble students of all ages use substantially greater volume and tone than what I hear in choir rehearsal. I also hear this occasionally with solo auditions for songs in class. When this happens, I have a conversation with the student and encourage them to use more of the voice they auditioned with in rehearsal. Sometimes, I have asked the student if they use the same voice as a soloist as in rehearsal and they often answer "no". This shows that there is a level of conscious decision-making happening in the amount of volume and level of tone used during rehearsals. Even as students progress and advance into the auditioned ensembles, some still use a different level of voicing during rehearsals.

The three yearly scenarios led to the professional question: what causes the treble singer to hold back their volume/tone during a choral rehearsal? The literature

review will discuss studies that have already focused on self-confidence in adolescence as well as elements that specifically impact treble singers.

## **Literature Review**

To determine what possible influences could be causing treble singers to hold back their voices, the literature review encompassed known factors that have already been suggested as influences on adolescent singers through previous studies. Factors include: the impact of adolescence on self-perception and confidence; confidence in music performance during adolescence; the vocal changes experienced in the adolescent treble voice and its impact on confidence; group dynamics; social comparison, and social fear.

### ***Self-Perception/Confidence in Adolescence: Boys vs. Girls***

Bridget Sweet (2016b) stated that the term “adolescence” encompasses the time during middle school, high school, and a person’s early 20’s. It is considered a transition period between childhood and adulthood and can be an extremely challenging time where one feels out of control of many aspects of life. Di Blasi et al. (2018) and Sweet (2016b) found that adolescents try to form their identity during this period and crave validation and a sense of belonging. On top of this already tumultuous time, adolescents feel like they are “on stage” and everyone is evaluating their transition through puberty (Woofolk, 2019).

A vast number of studies have focused on the differences experienced between boys and girls during adolescence and how this plays a role in their self-perception and self-confidence. A common finding is that girls display a lower level of self-esteem which leads to lower self-confidence than boys as was clearly outlined in the results in

Lancaster (2018) and Ruiz-Montero et al. (2020). Ruiz-Montero et al. (2020) also found that girls were more critical of themselves than boys due to social pressure and an obsession with perfection.

The 1994 American Association of University Women's (AAUW) nationwide poll titled *Shortchanging Girls, Shortchanging America*, found that adolescence in girls is distinctly marked by a loss of confidence in self and ability, high levels of self-criticism, and a sense of personal inadequacy (Greenberg-Lake, 1994). This leads to patterns of low self-image, self-doubt, and self-censorship (Orenstein, 2000; Vancil, 1985). The AAUW study also found that the main gaps between boys and girls were in confidence rather than ability. In fact, it was consistently noted that a drop in confidence preceded a drop in actual achievement in the subject areas of math and science. When asked about competence, boys were twice as likely to name skills and talents as things they like about themselves, whereas girls were more likely to list physical aspects. Vancil (1985) cited an inability to feel powerful and a tendency to see oneself as less talented and less able than one really is, as a trend seen in girls.

Both Orenstein (2000) and Cohen-Sandler (2005) found that the trend of low self-esteem and self-confidence in adolescent girls led to a trend of being less assertive and less likely to participate in school. Cohen-Sandler (2005) attributed some of this to the fact that girls can be hypersensitive to potential ridicule. To avoid drawing attention to themselves and risking exposure, "they play it safe [and]...fade into the background" (p. 146). Studies on adolescent behavior found that boys do not have these concerns, at least to the same degree or with the same impact on performance. They will speak out in class more readily and without the fear of being wrong (Cohen-Sandler, 2005; Gren-

Landell et al., 2009; Orenstein, 2000). This difference connects with the findings that girls' self-esteem and self-confidence during adolescence drops significantly compared to boys and leads to less confidence in their abilities.

### ***Self-Confidence in Musical Skills in Adolescence***

Previous studies have found that adolescence is the period where success and failure are established (Orenstein, 2000; Schumann, 2014). In the study, *Singer Identity in Adolescence*, Schumann (2014) found that many students who labeled themselves as "non-singers" identified the period of adolescence as when they formed their belief about their singing ability. Low self-concept negatively impacted the students' attitude toward musical ability (Schumann, 2014). A 1998 study by Legette found that students placed more importance on ability rather than effort regarding their belief about success and failures in music.

Common themes from Schumann's (2014) interviews with adolescent choir singers included: hypercritical of self, need for validation from others, lack of self-confidence, and fear. Even adolescents who liked their voice would not label themselves a "singer" and recalled times where they lip synced in choir performances due to lack of confidence and fear. Another finding from these interviews was that students compared themselves to peers including those who had voice lessons, and this discouraged them and may have influenced their self-perception. A clear conclusion from this study was that these adolescent students were forming opinions about their singing ability with very limited information and therefore may be doing so inaccurately.

Some studies that have focused specifically on treble choirs have yielded positive impacts on self-confidence during adolescence. Bartolome's 2013 study of the

Seattle Girls' Choir, Prime Voci, an auditioned community group, saw incredibly positive results from the singers including several themes: choir as a special place, choir as an emotional outlet, and choir as a place of belonging. Bartolome (2013) attributed these positive responses to "experiencing success within a self-identified area of importance" and stated this "can contribute positively to high levels of self-esteem" (p. 404).

Parker (2018) also found that adolescent singers can experience social approval, belonging, and acceptance through the group participation that choir naturally provides. In Parker's study of high school women choir singers, participants consistently and overwhelmingly expressed that singing in women's choir fortified their personal development and helped to "open up their voice and themselves" (p. 444). Many singers connected their participation in women's choir to a significant shift in their high school experience where they felt more comfortable with themselves. Parker's study also found that the more time students spent in the group, the more they became comfortable with one another, which led to more individual personality traits being exhibited. Their self-confidence was strengthened by the length of their participation and the "recognition from important others" (p. 453). An additional significant finding from this study was that early adolescents, ages 14 to 16, were more focused on and sensitive to feedback and were more likely to engage in social comparison. Their relationships weighed heavily on their view of themselves, whereas late adolescence was slightly to the contrary.

### ***Adolescent Treble Voice Change***

According to Gackle (1991), the physical aspects of the treble voice change include: insecurity of pitch, development of noticeable register breaks, increased huskiness in the voice, decreased and inconsistent range capabilities, voice cracking,

hoarseness, generally uncomfortable singing or difficulty in phonation. Huff-Gackle (1985) described the phenomenon of the mutational chink– the triangular gap between the arytenoids which represents a weakness of the interarytenoid muscles and causes the breathy quality typical of the young girl's voice– which occurs in early adolescence. This natural occurrence in adolescent girls, in which the front part of the glottis vibrates cleanly, while the posterior ends of the vocal cords do not close at all often occurs between the ages of 11 and 14 and is classified as the pre-menarcheal phase. At this time, a treble singer's range can be limited to seven notes of comfortable singing. Most high school singers would be past this stage in either Phase 2B (post-menarcheal) or Phase 3 (young adult) of the voice change process (Spurgeon, 2012), but it is important to recognize the difficult stage through which they have just progressed.

In Phase 2B, the soprano II range is the most comfortable voice part, but alto may also be performed. Gackle highly recommends avoiding labeling students as a “soprano” or “alto” at this phase and instead rotating parts to maximize flexibility and growth (Spurgeon, 2012). Confidence can be gained through careful selection of repertoire particularly repertoire with an appropriate range. Phase 3 sees a tremendous increase in range, clarity, consistency in tone, and flexibility (Spurgeon, 2012). These singers can likely perform all parts within the choir but need guidance on proper technique and breath-management to do so in a healthy and natural way.

### ***The Impact of the Treble Voice Change on Singing Confidence***

The vocal change in treble singers has been found to cause fear, anxiety, and embarrassment (Sweet, 2016a). Gackle (2011) found the impact of the vocal change so extreme that she drew connections between the adolescent female singer and the

character Ophelia from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, who "loses herself" as a result of adolescence, implying that, without proper guidance, our treble singers will do the same.

In a 2015 study, Bridget Sweet addressed the research questions: How do adolescent female choir students experience voice change? What is the essence of the experience of voice change for middle school and high school females in choir? After conducting interviews of treble singers grades 6-12, three themes emerged: (a) Phonation Experiences, including complete lack of phonation in certain areas of vocal range, excessive breathiness in tone, vocal unpredictability, lack of strength or endurance when singing, limited vocal range, and difficulties transitioning; (b) Emotional Experiences, which ranged from fearful and humiliated to confident and proud; and (c) Contexts of Singing, which discussed students willingness to sing out when at home or in a non-choir environment.

In 2018, Sweet completed another study, this time focusing on the influence of the adolescent voice change on female singers since age 11. Again, three themes emerged: vocal development, teacher influence, and emotion. Since age 11, most of the seventeen females interviewed described vocal challenges, fear, and insecurity. These participants also described a fear of hurting the larger choir, so they remained passive and did not self-advocate, which resulted in continuous challenges with self-confidence and singer identity well into adulthood. A positive finding was that once treble singers learned to master their new voice, they were able to sing with more power and confidence (Sweet, 2016a).

Sweet's 2015 study of 6-12th grade students revealed that most of these students who were labeled as breathy or with limited range were actually going through one of the stages of voice change. The students' "vulnerability and fear of embarrassment determined use of...singing voices, resulting in risk assessment for each singing situation and setting" (p. 61). Their negative experience of being mislabeled impacted their willingness to sing out.

According to Brizendine (2006) there are more neurons in the hippocampus of the female brain, which plays a major role in learning and memory, compared to the male brain. The level of neurons combined with hormonal surges in females impacts communication and emotions, and leads to a higher concern with the emotion of others compared to males. This is what causes girls to empathize more with others and to remember more details of emotion-laden events than their male counterparts (Patton, 2008). The smallest setback or negative experience can seem like the end of the world and have a long impact on a girls' psyche.

Brunssen (2010) described the need to embrace the breathy or wispy tone at the pre-menarcheal stage of the voice change rather than attempt to eliminate it in order to "allow the vocal folds to naturally strengthen with the new surge of hormones and resulting changes to the length and thickness of the vocal folds" (p. 58). Siple (1994) saw a significant change in treble singers' attitudes toward their singing voices through teaching them specifically about their vocal development and using exercises to help in the process. A lack of awareness from the vocal teacher and the singer can have an incredibly negative impact on a vocalists' self-perception, and in girls, this impact can be



life-long. These studies show the importance of teaching treble singers about their voices and the changes they are experiencing throughout adolescence.

### ***Peer Relationships & Group Dynamics***

In the difficult transition from middle school to high school, studies have shown that students tend to lean on known friendships. Spaulding and Bolin (1950) found that girls utilized existing friendship cliques as devices for adjustment to high school. In the summary of their findings, out of 26 students interviewed, 19 said that friends keep school from becoming a lonely place; they make girls feel comfortable and school a happy place.

Other studies of adolescent females have also found that they tend to socialize with one or two “best friends” at an early age and not voluntarily fraternize in groups, at least not to the same extent as boys (Vancil, 1985). Girls are more likely to be strongly attached to their peers and perceive them as more supportive (Betts, 2017). When joining a new group, girls tend to stand and watch before trying to fit in with the activity, whereas boys seem to jump right in (Parker, 2014).

Watson (2005) found that as early as the first year of secondary school, students seemed to divide themselves into social categories. These roles allow students the opportunity to construct their ultimate identities (Arthur, 2011). However, studies have found that girls may suppress their true self in favor of meeting stereotypes or as a priority to fit in with others (Parker, 2018). A need to fit the traits exhibited by the social group was also suggested in the 1976 study by Newman & Newman that stated, “cohesiveness and unity of the group can be strengthened when group members convince each other to conform to certain norms” (p. 35). This heavy influence of

cliques and fitting into norms can negatively impact school engagement and performance, especially if the group devalues school (Betts, 2017; Mayeux & Cillessen, 2007). Cohen-Sandler (2005) also found that girls will grapple with whether it is “cool to be smart” and whether peers will find their strengths attractive. Girls continually weigh their desire to do well academically with their social aspirations.

Two studies by Parker (2014, 2018) had social cliques emerge as a theme from sets of interviews with members of both women’s choirs and mixed ensembles. Many participants had a connection of friendships within the ensemble. However, there was also a negative perception that social cliques and egos got in the way of positive experiences. Even with this theme, students identified a team unity felt in choir. Similarly to changes in self-confidence, the social dynamic can change throughout the year as students are around each other more. Participants cited becoming more comfortable with themselves and being able to express their personalities more, as well as having a stronger sense of contributing to the group as the year progressed.

### ***Social Comparison & Social Phobia***

Social comparison directly impacts how an individual perceives a situation and their ability to control, change, or influence the situation (Lancaster, 2018). This comparison between oneself and others greatly influences the individual’s actions and behaviors. In Parker’s 2018 study of adolescent high school women, she found that early adolescents, ages 14 to 16, were more often engaged in social comparison than the upper-class women who would be considered later adolescents. This same age group was also more impacted by feedback regarding their competencies and viewed their relationships, both positive and negative, as “larger reflections of their view of

themselves” (p. 32). Festinger’s (1954) study found that self-uncertainty heightened the drive to compare oneself with others. If early adolescents are struggling with self-confidence, this could explain the increase in social comparison.

Social phobia, also known as social anxiety, is the fear of being watched and judged by others. In the past decade, reports on mental health have shown an increase in anxiety and depression in all age-groups and genders, with the highest prevalence among adolescent girls (Gren-Landell et al., 2009). This same study saw the most excess in females reporting psychological distress between the ages of 11 to 15, and a higher prevalence of social phobia in girls than boys. The peak of social phobia was seen between the ages of 14 and 15. The authors concluded that the higher prevalence of social phobia in adolescence means that adolescents become “more aware of others’ attention and the social evaluation” (Gren-Landell et al., 2009, p. 2). The evaluation by peers may lead to an increase in stress.

Social phobia has been directly connected to impairment in school performance, which leads to lower participation levels and achievement. In the Gren-Landell et al. (2009) study, 91.4% of participants in the social phobia group and 17.2% of all respondents reported impairment in their participation at school due to social phobia. This was another aspect that showed a difference based on gender as significantly more girls than boys reported impairment of their performance in the school setting.

Social comparison and social phobia seemed to play a role in the results from Orton and Pitts (2019), where they identified a level of vocal control from girls which included both “holding back to avoid taking risks or singing out and trying harder” (p. 46). The girls were more focused on evaluating themselves than the boys. Some girls

also showed lower self-efficacy in singing in social situations due to their perceived judgment by others. One subject in this study described how she has many types of singing voices but would not use her 'real' one in school.

### **Summary**

Previous studies suggest themes of low self-confidence and self-perception in the adolescent female, as well as a possible negative impact on self-confidence in singing following stages of the voice change. Studies have also shown a heavy influence from social factors on an adolescent female's confidence and perception. This study will focus on these possible influences and which ones are impacting the treble singers' decision to hold back their full singing voice.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Methodology**

Everyday practice as a choral music educator working with treble voiced students led to the research question: what causes the treble singer to hold back their volume/tone during a choral rehearsal? As in action research focused on aspects of everyday practice, this question guided the approach to this study to understand the concept which will help to frame possible changes to rehearsal and teaching choices (Phillips, 2008).

This action research study (Phillips, 2008) utilized a mixed-methods design using Creswell & Clark's (2011) embedded approach that included a quantitative survey (N=63) and qualitative interview format (N=16) to deepen understanding of the survey results (West, 2014). The survey results provided information on the current state of thinking related to the survey questions, however, further structured questions related to why participants felt certain ways were needed to ascertain strategies for change.

### **Participants**

The students that participated were treble singers in the choral program of a Midwestern, suburban 9-12 high school where I teach as one of two choral directors in the program. This direct connection to the students brings a level of bias and risk to both reliability and validity in this study. Steps have been taken to minimize these risks within this action research study.

Treble singers at this school can participate in three choirs: non-auditioned treble choir, auditioned intermediate treble choir, and auditioned mixed choir. In the 2021-2022 school year, the non-auditioned choir was approximately fifty students and consisted of

thirty-eight freshmen, ten sophomores, three juniors and one senior. The auditioned treble choir had twenty-four sophomores, eighteen juniors, and sixteen seniors, totaling fifty-eight students. The auditioned mixed choir had thirty-seven junior and senior treble singers combined with thirty-two sophomore, junior, and senior tenors and basses, totaling 69 students. The study was presented to all high school choral treble singers (N= 140), and 64 completed the consent/assent form for Human Subjects research to participate. Of these 64 students, 22 were from the non-auditioned treble, 27 from the auditioned treble, and 15 from the auditioned mixed choirs.

### **Quantitative Survey**

Based on the literature review, four categories were identified that are common areas of concern for adolescent treble singers: singing confidence, voice change, self-confidence, and social influences. The survey questions were designed to help determine the participant's current thinking in those areas. The goal of the survey was to assist with interview participant selection by identifying individuals whose responses were marked "agreed" or "strongly agreed" to 75% of the negatively worded statements in one of the four focus areas. An individual whose responses were marked in this way was determined to exhibit an important perspective on that focus area.

In order to protect individual identity and eliminate researcher bias, the survey did not collect student names, only an identifying code that was used to select subgroups for the interviews. The district registrar was enlisted to ensure that the coding process would retain anonymity for participants. The identifying code used was the last four digits of the seven-digit student identification number provided through the school district. Without the first three digits a student cannot be identified, except by the district

registrar, so the data remained anonymous. The survey provided statements worded both positively and negatively regarding aspects of the four focus areas (see Appendix A). Positive statements were included to verify the negative statements as a reliability check. Students selected a response based on a four-point Likert scale design. Response options were: strongly disagree, disagree, agree, or strongly agree. A four-point Likert scale was specifically chosen so that a neutral rating was not an option for respondents.

### ***Procedure***

The survey was administered in the choir room during the class period that each choir met on a single day in December. Students took the survey on their school issued Chromebooks. The survey was administered through Qualtrics and was titled “Influences on the Treble Singer”. A vague title was used in order to increase reliability and validity of the information provided. Students were encouraged to spread out in the room to feel comfortable answering honestly. They were given a brief verbal introduction to the survey and reminded that they did not need to answer all the questions if they were not comfortable. I stood at the front of the room where students could see me, but I could not see any of the students’ computer screens intending that they would not feel influenced by my presence. Students who were in the choir but not taking the survey were asked to work silently on homework. The survey took students between ten and twenty minutes to complete. Out of the 64 students who completed the consent/assent form, 63 completed the survey.

Once the survey was completed, responses that fell in “agreed” or “strongly agreed” to negatively worded statements were marked. For each of the four focus

areas, an individual whose responses were marked in this way to 75% of the negative statements was determined to exhibit an important perspective on that focus area. The student codes represented by such indicators were then sent to the district registrar who matched the codes to individual respondents to assist with participant selection for the interview portion of the study.

### **Qualitative Interviews**

Students were selected for interviews based on the identification of overall trends in their survey answers. Surveys were analyzed to identify those who answered “strongly agree” or “agree” to 75% of the negatively worded statements in one or more of the four categories: singing confidence, voice change, self-confidence, and social influences. Once these survey responses were identified with a coded participant, the list of codes were sent to the district registrar who decoded them for each focus area and sent the names of the students in random order. This list was checked to eliminate those participants who did not provide consent/assent for the interview portion of the study. The number of students who provided consent/assent for the survey but not the interview portion of the study was three from the non-auditioned treble choir, one from the auditioned treble choir, and two from the auditioned mixed choir. Subgroups of participants based on the four focus areas were purposely balanced to represent the three choirs that a treble singer can participate in at this school as well as a cross section of year in high school. If a student’s responses identified more than one specific category as highly problematic for them, they were interviewed for the category that would support a balanced selection. Contact was made with each student to request further participation and determine a time and location to complete the in-person



interview. The overall process resulted in subgroups of four students for each of the four categories to be interviewed (N=16).

The analysis of the literature review, plus my own experiences in the classroom provided information used to design the structured interview questions (see Appendix B). The Bonshor (2014) study, which focused on confidence in the choral singer, provided additional questions for the interview in the singing confidence category. Students from each subgroup were asked different questions in order to provide a high level of insight to that specific category regarding what makes it problematic for an adolescent treble singer.

### ***Procedure***

Structured interviews were administered according to techniques by Fontana and Frey (1994) to sixteen treble singers selected from the original survey respondents. All sixteen interviews took place in a sound-proof practice room in the choir room at the high school either during the student's study hall or choir period. A pseudonym was either created by the student or suggested by the teacher to retain anonymity for the students in the written study. The interviews ranged from 10 minutes to 30 minutes in length and were recorded on an iPad using Voice Record Pro before being transcribed to assist with coding. Open coding based on the techniques of Saldaña (2016) were used to create marginal notes which led to identification of themes within the subgroup interviews. Further cycles of focused coding across the subgroups revealed dominant themes. Data analysis and interpretation was based on the techniques of Huberman & Miles (1994) through data triangulation from all sources (Janesick, 1994).

## **Conclusion**

Information from the surveys and interviews constituted the data for this mixed methods research study centered in the choral classroom. The following chapters will provide analysis of the data from the quantitative survey and the qualitative interviews.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Quantitative Survey Results and Analysis**

The quantitative data for this embedded, mixed methods study was collected using a sequential process through a survey administered on Qualtrics (Creswell & Clark, 2011). The survey was titled “Influences on the Treble Singer”, keeping the title vague to increase reliability and validity of the information provided. Questions for the survey were designed and divided into the four focus areas for the study: singing confidence, voice change, self-confidence, and social influences. Sixty-three out of the sixty-four students that completed the assent/consent form completed the survey.

Once the survey was completed, responses that fell in “agreed” or “strongly agreed” to negatively worded statements were marked. For each of the four categories, an individual whose responses were marked in this way to 75% of the negative statements were determined to exhibit an important perspective on that focus area. These student codes were reidentified to the individual students by the district registrar to assist with participant selection for the interview portion of the study. While the overall data from the survey answers served primarily for this task, there were some inferential indicators revealed when the paired (positively and negatively worded) statement results were compared that are worth highlighting. A full listing of these paired statements can be found in Appendix C.

### **Results**

The results for the paired statements of the survey were aligned to highlight the relationship between responses that were “strongly agree” to negatively worded statements and “strongly disagree” to the comparative positively worded statement of

each idea. The use of both positively and negatively stated items were included to support reliability of answers. Resulting percentages of the top tier and bottom tier responses which indicated the extremes for each question showed some variation in percentages indicating that the paired statements may not have been a true opposite reflection of thinking in all cases. Some of these results also provided inferential comments about the importance of particular ideas to these young singers.

### ***Singing Confidence***

Six students out of the sixty-three survey respondents answered “agree” or “strongly agree” to 75% or more of the negative statements regarding their singing confidence. When the identity of these respondents was decoded, it was noted that these six treble singers were all in either the non-auditioned or the auditioned treble choirs. In order to balance the selection of interview participants with representation from all three choirs, expansion of the criteria to allow results for anyone who answered 67% (8 out of 12) of the statements according to the criteria were needed, which added six additional respondents, including some from the auditioned mixed choir.

Students who are younger in age and have less singing experience had more of a negative response within this category than older students in the auditioned mixed choir, which is a trend confirmed by the literature (Parker, 2018). Some of the students who met criteria in this focus area use a smaller amount of oral space when they sing, producing less singing volume in rehearsal. Other students who met criteria in this category are perceived by the researcher as vocally proficient and not lacking in singing confidence.

The statement “I wish my singing range was bigger” had nearly one-third (31.75%) of the respondents reply “strongly agree”. The comparative positive statement “I have a good singing range” saw a much smaller number “strongly disagree” at 3.17%. This suggests that while students may think of their current singing range positively, a large number of them still seek growth in this particular part of their voice. This focus on growing range fits with a pillar of the choir program in this study. Treble singers are encouraged to continue to sing through their low, middle, and upper range, even if they are labeled as a particular voice part, which only happens in an auditioned choir. Such a strong emphasis on an expansive range might explain why students feel more inclined to desire growth. This also fits with what is observed from treble students who sing only within their middle range and drop out for notes in the upper or lower ranges. These students may have been the smaller percentage who selected “strongly disagree” to the statement “I have a good singing range”.

Paired statements regarding negative feedback also saw a difference in responses to the negative versus positive statements. Some students (14.52%) strongly disagreed to the statement “Negative feedback motivates me to do better” while a smaller percentage (4.84%) strongly agreed to the comparative statement “Negative feedback makes me give up”. The higher response to the negatively worded statement seems to indicate that treble students are not motivated by negativity. Even if it does not make them give up entirely, as the results for the positive statement indicate, it will not increase their efforts, so it is not an approach to use with adolescent treble students.

The paired statements “I sing the same way around others as I do when I am alone” and “I sing much differently by myself than around others” were much more

closely aligned in percentage of responses (22.22% strongly disagree and 25.40% strongly agree). Almost a quarter of respondents strongly agreed to altering their singing voice in a group and admitted that they were aware of doing it. The concept of singing louder by themselves than around others affirms the research question behind this project and was seen in Orton and Pitts (2019). It confirms that treble singers are indeed holding back their full voices in choir.

### ***Voice Change***

Only three students out of the sixty-three that took the survey met criteria on 75% or more of the negative statements in this category. Two students were from the non-auditioned treble choir, and one was from the auditioned treble choir. In order to meet the minimum number planned for the interview subgroups, the standard for responses was again modified to 67% (6 out of 9) of the statements, which added an additional seven students. Out of the seven added, two were from the non-auditioned treble, three from the auditioned treble, and two from the auditioned mixed choirs. Grades for these students spanned ninth through twelfth grade. Based on the literature (Gackle, 1991; Spurgeon, 2012; Sweet, 2016a) as well as what has been seen and heard from treble singers in each of the ensembles, it was expected that problems associated with voice change would be more prevalent in the survey results. In rehearsal, there are frequently students who display a limited range, singing only to a C-5 or down to a B-4 with a light tone. Singers in rehearsal also display a sense of high fear over voice cracks, which may be happening more frequently than they are heard during the rehearsal process.

A statement in this category that received “strongly disagree” for nearly one-fifth (19.05%) of responses was “I feel the same way about my voice now as when I was

younger". The comparative positive statement "I liked my voice when I was younger, but now I don't" had fewer answers on the extreme with only 4.76% of respondents strongly agreeing. The high response to the first statement may indicate that many treble singers have a different emotional response to their singing voice during adolescence compared to when they were younger. The low percentages of responses to the second statement may indicate that the emotional response is actually more positive currently than when they were younger. Since there is a trend of overall self-confidence decreasing in adolescence, it is surprising to see that for some students the self-perception of their singing voice can become more positive at this time. This is an important possibility to keep in mind when teaching adolescent treble students.

Though self-perception about their voice may be more positive now compared to when they were younger, some students (15.87%) selected "strongly agree" to the statement "I do not want my voice to stand out in choir", indicating low singing confidence in a group setting. The comparative positive statement "I am okay if my voice stands out in choir" had 9.52% strongly disagree. The smaller discrepancy between these answers could be based on the emotional response implied by the phrasing of each statement. Some students would still be "okay" as the positive statement indicates, although they do not desire to have their voice stand out. The nearly 10% who strongly disagreed seem to be indicating that they would have an emotional shift, or not feel "okay", if their voice stood out in the group. A fear behind the risk associated with their voice standing out in choir was also seen in Sweet (2015).

The survey results for statements regarding tone, range, and voice cracks were not nearly as high in extreme responses as had been assumed based on common

occurrences in daily treble choir rehearsals. Two possible explanations for this discrepancy are students being unaware of their own individual voice or vocal qualities and an element of inherent bias. If students do not fully comprehend vocal qualities or regularly sing by themselves, it may be more difficult for them to evaluate their individual qualities. Students could also be less emotionally affected by their individual vocal qualities compared to the emotions that statements about other subjects elicited, leading them to select the less extreme responses to the statements (agree or disagree). Another possible explanation is an element of bias whereby students did not want to risk acknowledging qualities of their voice out of fear of self-acknowledgement or teacher acknowledgement which would change the perception of them as a singer. Although teacher acknowledgement was not possible due to anonymity, the anxiety could have influenced the way in which some of them responded to statements in this category.

### ***Self-Confidence***

The category of self-confidence saw the highest number of respondents at thirteen out of sixty-three selecting “agree” or “strongly agree” to 75% or more of the negatively worded statements. Five of these students were freshmen, four were sophomores, two were juniors, and two were seniors. The thirteen respondents spanned the three choirs. Three students' answers in this category were “agree” or “strongly agree” to 91% or more of the negative statements. Students who appear to the researcher as confident, well-liked, and socially accepted identified answers that placed them into this subgroup.



This category also had the highest number of responses to which participants indicated answers at the extremes (strongly agree or strongly disagree). Three single statements and two paired statements had over a quarter of respondents reply in the extreme. The statement “I worry people will be angry with me” had 28.13% strongly agree and “I frequently feel nervous” had 31.25% strongly agree. The statement “I don’t worry about saying the wrong thing” had over one-third (37.50%) strongly disagree. The responses to these three statements appear to indicate anxiety and low self-confidence.

The paired statements that saw a significant percentage of extreme respondents to both statements were based on class participation and assertiveness. The statement “I don’t argue with my teachers when I think I’m right” had 32.81% strongly agree and the paired statement “I argue with my teachers when I think I’m right” had nearly half (46.88%) of respondents strongly disagree. Both levels of response indicate that adolescent treble students are not comfortable asserting themselves to their teachers. The statement “I would be embarrassed if I gave a wrong answer in class” had 29.69% strongly agree, while the statement “It wouldn’t embarrass me if I gave a wrong answer in class” had 26.56% strongly disagree. These statements indicate an emotional response from adolescent treble students that may impact class participation.

The results showed a prevalence of anxiety and fear regarding saying the wrong thing, which confirms the patterns of low self-image, self-doubt, and self-censorship found in Orenstein (2000) and Vancil (1985). Additional literature found a trend of adolescent girls being less assertive and less likely to participate in school (Cohen-Sandler, 2005; Orenstein, 2000), which fits with the statements regarding arguing with teachers and feelings of embarrassment in class participation.

## ***Social Influence***

Social influence was the category with the lowest number of “agree” or “strongly agree” responses to negative statements. Only one student (a freshman in the non-auditioned treble choir) out of sixty-three fit the 75% ratio criteria for inclusion. In order to meet the minimum number for the interview subgroup, the results were expanded to 63% (12 out of 19) of the statements, which added five respondents. The six students who qualified based on the survey results ranged in grade level and choir experience. Five out of the six students would be considered soft spoken, however the sixth student appeared very sociable, at least in the choral setting.

Some paired statements in this category received 0% on the extremes for both the positive and negative statements indicating a lower level of problematic experiences for treble singers compared to the other three areas of focus. The positive statement “I like meeting new people” had 0% strongly disagree, however the negative comparative statement “Meeting new people scares me” had 14.29% strongly agree. This could again reflect the emotion behind one statement versus the other. Though adolescent treble singers may enjoy meeting new people, many of them admit to an inherent fear perhaps driven by self-uncertainty (Lancaster, 2018).

Another paired statement with 0% of respondents strongly disagreeing was, “When someone compliments me, I feel good about myself”. The negative comparative statement “When someone compliments me, they probably don’t mean it” showed a difference at 9.52% strongly agreeing. This may imply that while adolescent treble singers are saying that it feels good to be complimented, they feel like people are being

inauthentic when they do it. This indicates a negative self-view and self-criticism that may prevent a positive reception to compliments.

Two sets of paired statements regarding comparisons saw the most significant percentage of responses in this category. The statement “I sing really well compared to others” had 14.52% strongly disagree, and the comparative statement “Other people sing a lot better than me” had nearly a quarter (24.19%) of respondents strongly agree. Continuing the focus on comparison, the statement “I don’t think about other people’s singing compared to mine” had over a third (38.71%) of respondents strongly disagree and “I often compare my singing to those around me” had a quarter (25.81%) of respondents strongly agree.

Though most adolescent treble students did not respond to the statements in a way that indicated social influence to be a highly problematic category, a high percentage said that they compare their singing to others and their self-view is lower because of that comparison. The literature found that self-uncertainty heightens the drive to compare oneself with others (Lancaster, 2018). The high level of comparison could be related to struggles with self-confidence, which was a category with a much higher response rate.

## **Conclusion**

Three out of the four survey focus areas had negatively worded statements to which over a quarter of respondents across grade levels and choirs selected “agree” or “strongly agree”. The category with the highest number of statements to which students selected “agree” or “strongly agree” was self-confidence. The category with the lowest was social influence. Students who agreed to negative statements in singing confidence

were younger with less singing experience, and although aspects of voice change are recognized during rehearsals, this category also saw a smaller number of respondents meeting the 75% benchmark.

Reidentification of students according to the four focus area responses revealed surprises based on interactions in choir rehearsals. Identified students included those who appeared confident, happy, and easy-going, at least in the setting of the choral classroom. Students whose answers placed them as a potential interview candidate for the qualitative phase of this research were approached for additional consent/assent for the interviews. Groups were balanced for grade level and choir representation. Students who met criteria in more than one focus area were only interviewed for one area based on balance criteria. The interviews that follow provided an important opportunity to gain more insight into these focus areas and the problems faced by adolescent treble singers. The next four chapters will detail the qualitative interviews for each of the four focus areas from the survey.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Qualitative Interview Analysis**

After analyzing the results of the survey, I identified students whose selection of “agree” or “strongly agree” to negatively worded statements categorized them as dominant responders in one of the four focus areas. Those students were asked if they would participate in the interview portion of this research study to find out more about their specific area of concern. Four students were identified and interviewed from each of the four thematic areas: singing confidence, voice change, self-confidence, and social influence. Participants were interviewed to gain further understanding of their perspectives in that area.

#### **Singing Confidence**

Previous studies found that during adolescence treble singers may experience low self-concept which leads to a negative, though often incorrect, self-perception of their musical ability (Legette, 1998; Orenstein, 2000; Schumann, 2014). Parker (2018) also found connections between early adolescence, a heightened sensitivity to feedback and an increase in comparison to peers in choir, which prevented students from opening up their individual sound. Four students whose survey answers indicated low singing confidence were asked structured questions relating to their perception of their musical ability, response to types of feedback, and view of their own voice compared to others.

#### **Participants**

Megan is a freshman who sings in the non-auditioned treble choir. This is her first year in choir, but she was in band throughout middle school. She brings this musical

knowledge to choir rehearsals and frequently answers technical questions about the music accurately. Megan wears a mask during choir (as a precaution for COVID transmission), so it is hard to evaluate her confidence visually. When she was seated in the front row of the choir, I did not clearly hear her sing out. The non-auditioned choir changes part assignments (soprano 1, soprano 2, or alto) for each song in the concert cycle, so Megan is not on an assigned part.

Kylie is also a freshman in the non-auditioned treble choir. She has been in choir since middle school and participated in extracurricular ensembles like Chamber Choir. Kylie is sociable and humorous during the choral rehearsal. She usually sings with a smaller vowel shape and needs reminders to open up for more sound. Kylie's level of vocal strength varies depending on who is seated next to her. When she was seated by a stronger voice, I heard her use more of her full sound. When she was seated by a quieter voice, I saw and heard her hold back. When Kylie is in a section that does not sing out, she tends to laugh about it, signaling uncomfortable feelings.

Prasad is a sophomore in her first year of the intermediate auditioned treble choir. She was in the non-auditioned treble ensemble as a freshman. Prasad has been singing since middle school and auditioned into the musical this year. She is also in band and has played in it since middle school. Prasad auditions frequently for solos and other choir opportunities. She was featured in a small group at the final choir concert of the year. Prasad uses open space when she sings and is highly attentive during rehearsal. She has grown vocally over the past year and has a fuller sound which is a significant change from the way she sang her freshman year. Students in the auditioned

treble choir are assigned a voice part with mid-year check-ins to evaluate any vocal changes. Prasad sings in the alto 2 section and has been there the entire year.

Tiana is a senior in her first year of the advanced mixed choir. She was in the auditioned treble ensemble for her sophomore and junior year and the non-auditioned treble ensemble her freshman year. Tiana has been singing all through high school and sang in middle school. She was in the musical for several years but did not participate this year. Tiana uses open space for singing but sometimes needs reminders to do so. Her level of focus in rehearsal varies and sometimes she is disciplined for being on her phone. Students in the auditioned mixed choir are also assigned voice parts, and Tiana sings Alto 2. She sang Alto 1 in the past but has been an Alto 2 all this year.

### ***Megan***

As a first-year choir student, Megan described negative self-evaluation, comparing herself to others, and being influenced by how those around her are singing. When asked what she likes about her singing voice, Megan said:

I don't know. I feel like if you already aren't fond of your own speaking voice, I feel like it sort of affects how you feel if you're singing. Especially like if you aren't super comfortable with just singing. If you've been doing it your whole life, then maybe you'd be like this is my singing voice and I know what it is like. But then especially if your voice starts changing or you're just now starting choir (I did band for all of middle school) if you're not used to 1) the choir space/environment or 2) singing for a choral sound, it's different than singing along in the car.

Megan had difficulty describing a part of her singing voice that she likes and related this to being less familiar with the "choral sound". She also described not liking her speaking voice and the impact this has on her view of her singing voice. When asked what she does not like about her voice, she said:

Sort of just like overall if you don't think you sound good the majority of the time then it will feel like I don't like my singing voice. And if somebody asks why you'll just say it's bad. You can't really say exactly why.

Megan described the negative part of her voice as an overall impression rather than naming specific aspects. When asked what the best part of her range is, she said:

I don't really call myself soprano or alto or anything. I haven't put that much thought in it. What's the point in making that decision if I'm given the opportunity to try them all anyways. The part I am most comfortable with is middle to highish. I also feel like a weaker part of my voice is going low.

In the non-auditioned treble ensemble, students are not assigned a specific voice part. They switch voice parts for each song in the concert cycle. Perhaps because of this, Megan does not think of herself in a soprano or alto box.

Megan was in band for all of middle school and has a high level of musical knowledge. This was shown in her response to the question "how does someone improve their sight-reading skills?":

The main thing in sight-readers is you need to know the basis of rhythm because otherwise everyone's going to get confused like with a half note vs. quarter note. I feel like it's good to do rhythm readers and sight-readers. Another thing is how you have us practice with the skips so you have those in your mind. Really it's sort of about multi-tasking but that and also sort of just being able to have the basic things like rhythm be muscle memory so you can focus on pitches.

She compared this to playing a sport saying, "If you're playing a sport, you can't not know how to dribble the ball because otherwise you're not going to be able to shoot well if you're constantly focused on how to dribble". Megan's comparison of rhythm as a basic concept for sight reading to dribbling as a fundamental for shooting in basketball shows her musical knowledge which she uses to identify rhythm as a weak point for many people in the sight-reading exercises.



With strong opinions about her singing voice, it was no surprise that Megan said she does evaluate her own performances. She extended this beyond performances in choir:

Sometimes you don't particularly feel good about anything like the day has gone bad. I sucked at that, singing went bad, I messed up in the rhythm reader. It's less about reflective qualities and more I'm going to beat myself down because no one else is going to do it.

Megan self-evaluates her daily performances in all areas of life. She responds to negative evaluations by beating herself down with negative thoughts.

Several of Megan's answers reflected the influence of those around her. When Megan was asked "why do you sing louder by yourself than in choir?", she emphasized the need to truly be completely alone to feel comfortable:

Because you automatically feel more comfortable because even if I'm at home but there's people in the house, I'm probably not going to be like belting out notes. But if I'm home alone, it really does not matter at all, unless the walls are so thin the neighbors are like 'shut up'. It's different because sure everybody makes mistakes sometimes but when you're in a group and then you make that mistake and you know everybody heard it and they chose to a) ignore it or b) stare at you, it's still very frightening. So, it's just that security of not having anyone notice you except yourself.

Megan feels more comfortable without the pressure of other people hearing her and potentially hearing a mistake. She expressed similar feelings when asked if she would be more comfortable singing in choir if she stood by her closest friends:

Generally that might be a 'no' actually because I feel like if you're with your friends all the time and sure maybe it's different if you have friends you sing around or in musical together so you already know what your singing voice sounds like, but if you usually don't sing in front of your friends and they just happen to be in choir it's kind of more scary to be like 'this is what my voice sounds like, now you have to sit right next to me and listen to it'. I feel like it's better to be next to someone who will just sort of sing and then you sing and then it's over.

Megan's level of comfort singing in front of people is not helped by her relationship with them. In fact, she feels less comfortable singing next to someone who she considers a close friend. Megan extended the question regarding where she stands in choir to address her seat in all classes:

I don't like sitting in the front of any class because it just feels so much more open and everybody behind you is just staring at you. I like the middle side, that's where I like to sit no matter what class it is. Then you're right next to the edge so no one is really staring at you.

Megan's level of comfort in the classroom changes based on the location of her seat. She believes certain seats will draw more attention to her, which she does not want.

When asked if the size of the group affects how confident she feels in rehearsal, Megan said:

Ya if it's bigger it's a lot more comfortable. It's just more voices and more sounds so it feels more like one group instead of being able to pick out 1-2-3 that's who is singing. If it's just sopranos and we're singing it might be quieter but then when the whole choir sings as long as you have the notes in your mind you might sing louder because then nobody is really listening to you. It's not just you and everybody is sitting down.

Megan relates the various stages of rehearsal to varying levels of confidence. When her section is standing and singing, and the rest of the choir is seated and listening, she feels less confident. She feels more confidence when she knows that everyone else in the choir is also singing. Megan also said that she sings louder later in the rehearsal cycle than at the beginning when the music is new. This could also be influenced by others feeling the same way, holding back their voices, and making one voice easier to identify.

Megan had similar thoughts about wanting voices to blend together and not be identified individually when asked how the confidence level of the person standing next to her impacts her own confidence in singing:

If they're singing and you're singing and you're both loud, it's still not quite distinguishable who's singing louder because you're both contributing. If someone next to you isn't really singing that's terrible because then you can tell exactly who is singing then the whole sound gets breathy because everybody is scared and it's terrible.

Megan believes the fear that she feels over being identified individually as a singer is shared with those around her as she describes no one being willing to sing out. She finds comfort in both people (standing next to each other) singing in a way that doesn't allow for individual voices to be identified.

This need for not being individually identified causes Megan to sing with the section even if she knows they are singing something wrong just to avoid being singled out. When asked how the opinion of other people impacts her singing, Megan said:

If you are singing next to someone and you're like 'is that the right note or am I on the right note', I'll probably just end up singing their note anyway because I don't care enough to try to actually make myself heard and sing that note even if it's the right note. I am not bringing attention to myself. I will follow someone to a different note. People's opinions are more important.

When asked if she wishes her voice was different compared to other singers, Megan said yes, "I feel like comparisons are where insecurities come from because if it was just you, how would you even know what yours was like compared to anybody else, so you'd be like 'this is just the normal'". Megan sees comparisons and insecurity as relatable. She also talked about how comparisons impact her singing confidence: "It's easy to doubt yourself if you make any mistake because it seems like everybody else already knows not to make those mistakes". She also said, "obviously I've been like 'Oh

they have a really nice voice. I wish mine sounded like that'. Most people do that whether it's with singing or anything like I don't know, hair". Megan thinks comparisons are a part of many facets of life for most people. She feels like mistakes feel worse because other people somehow know not to make them. Megan also described students comparing themselves and how negatively they speak about one another:

If they're confident in this class but then leave the choir room and then just suddenly start saying 'that was so bad' 'this person did bad' that's not helpful. Even if they act nice and are like 'you did so good' but then it's suddenly like the minute they leave the choir they are negative.

Megan has seen students act positively and encouraging in the choir room but then criticize and insult people when they leave the room.

### **Summary.**

Although Megan has a high level of musical knowledge, she does not describe positive aspects of her singing voice. The relationship with those around her does not help her confidence level. She is only comfortable singing when others are singing loud enough that individual voices cannot be identified. She evaluates herself in all aspects of her life and compares herself to others in many settings.

### ***Kylie***

Kylie is also a singer in the non-auditioned treble ensemble but has aspects of her voice that she likes and is not as heavily influenced by those singing around her. She has a similar opinion to Megan of not wanting to be heard and identified individually. When asked what she likes about her voice, Kylie described her wide range:

I like that I have such a big range. I like that I can sing super low and super high, so it doesn't really bother me. I don't like that middle/low. Alto 1 was horrible for me. I like all the other parts. It doesn't fit my voice as much.

Kylie enjoys the upper and lower extremes of her voice and is currently not as comfortable singing in the middle of her range. She described the negative part of her voice before being asked that specific question. When she was asked what the best part of her range is, she again said, “the extremes: really, really low and really high soprano 1”.

Though Kylie likes parts of her range, she struggles with sight-reading. Her response when asked how someone improves their sight-reading skills was: “I don’t know because I need to improve my sight-reading skills...It’s different every day. It’s not something you practice, and it’s the same”. Kylie described struggling with sight-reading because the daily exercises change. Though they tend to include the same intervals for each unit, they do change keys, which for a student who is only comfortable in certain parts of their range could increase difficulty. Kylie did not provide specific ways that these struggles could be alleviated.

When asked about self-evaluating, Kylie’s first response was like Megan’s in that evaluating happens frequently: “always, even just in class. I’m like ‘this is what I did well today’ or ‘I didn’t like that. I wish I could re-do that’”. Kylie feels differently than Megan about the impact of others’ opinions compared to her own: “Anyone can say ‘you did that wrong’ but if you know what you’re doing you can say ‘nope’ or vice versa”. Unlike Megan, Kylie feels that her own opinion is valid even if others say something different. She is able to reject their opinion.

The impact of others on Kylie’s confidence in singing was not as clear cut as Megan’s. Like Megan, Kylie said it is more comfortable to sing without other people being able to hear it:

I'm just not good with other people hearing it. When I'm in a group (I like singing in a group) but if everyone else around me is quiet, I'm also probably going to be quiet. I don't like singing solo.

Kylie also does not want her individual voice to be identified within the larger group. On the other hand, Kylie went on to say that: "It doesn't matter who I sit by. I'm always singing no matter who I'm by". Kylie is willing to sing no matter who she stands next to, a close friend or a stranger, but her volume likely still varies depending on if she can be heard individually.

Kylie had similar thoughts when asked if the size of the group affects how confident she feels in rehearsal:

Not like super if it's me and one other person when you can point out whose voice is whose. In a section of 11 it depends on who is singing. If you hear some people more than others or your group is quiet that affects it.

Again, Kylie's confidence in singing is not affected by the relationship with the people in the section but is affected by the volume each person is using. If they are quiet, she is going to be quiet as well.

Kylie also said other singers affect her confidence in general: "It's a little bit embarrassing if someone else is super awful and you're standing by her and you're like 'I don't sound like that do I?'". The performance of the people next to her has an impact on her confidence if their singing is viewed negatively because she is concerned that she sounds like them. Kylie was asked what happens if she stands next to someone who is less confident than her. She said, "it depends on how loud they're singing. I don't want to overpower anyone". Kylie is again echoing the idea from Megan that she does not want to sing in a way that makes her easy to identify. Kylie, however, did not describe singing incorrect notes because of this fear. When asked how her confidence

is affected by singers with higher confidence, she said, “being by a better singer like Martha, I loved standing by her. I loved her voice. I could sing by her super well. Our voices felt good together”. Kylie feels like she can sing confidently when next to someone else who has a higher level of confidence.

When asked if she sings quieter at the start of the rehearsal process rather than the end, Kylie said: “No. Depends on the part. Sometimes when you play it, I can sing that but sometimes when you play it, I’m like ‘ew what is that’”. Like her thoughts regarding the impact of others, Kylie described both sides. She said there are certain scenarios where she does sing quieter compared to later in the rehearsal cycle when the music is more familiar.

When asked if she wishes her voice was different compared to other singers, Kylie focused on a higher confidence level: “Not really my voice, but my confidence when I’m singing. I wish I had the confidence that other people do”. This connects to her response about standing by someone with a higher level of confidence. Since this allows her to sing with more confidence, she wishes that she had this ability all the time.

### **Summary.**

Kylie likes some parts of her voice and does not allow other people’s opinions to change her self-evaluation. She shares similar fears of not wanting to be heard individually and wishes she had a higher level of confidence in her singing.

### ***Prasad***

Prasad is in her second year of high school choir and her first year in the intermediate auditioned treble ensemble. She has a rich low voice which placed her in the alto 2 section. Prasad describes a negative self-view of her low voice and low

confidence in her skills. She is not as influenced by the opinions or confidence levels of others as Megan and Kylie, but she does still compare herself to others, particularly sopranos.

When asked what she likes/doesn't like about her singing voice, Prasad said:

I am very self-conscious. Most things (about my voice) I don't like. I like how I can hit some pretty low notes that most people can't. Sometimes I can be a soprano and reach some high notes. In the middle there's some "into the unknown".

While Prasad initially describes not liking her voice overall, she does acknowledge having a nice low range. She includes the times that she can sing in the higher range as times when she likes her voice. Like Kylie, she is currently struggling with the middle part of her range. Prasad considers a full range as a major factor in someone's ability to lead in choir. When asked to describe a strong choir singer or leader, she shared: "A person who has a full range with the lowest notes and the highest notes". Prasad values singing low and high notes not only in her view of self but also her evaluation of other singers.

This opinion of other singers extended to the voices of pop artists she enjoys.

When asked to describe her favorite artist's voice, she said:

Ariana Grande—her voice is that typical soprano. My favorite alto singer is Sia, but she is also a soprano in some ways. They're both two distinct singers, hard to compare them. I like Ariana Grande's fluidity in her voice and how she can switch between registers and riffs/runs. Sia has that fluidity but not as present as Ariana Grande.

Again, Prasad described a positive singer as a "typical soprano". She also described the ability to switch between registers, which is something with which Prasad said she currently struggles.



Like Kylie, Prasad feels like she needs to improve her sight-reading skills. Her view of her skills is extremely negative: “I am very self-conscious about my pitches, and I am terrible with my sight-reading”. When asked how someone could improve their sight-reading skills, she focused on technical elements: “Practice doing scales and being able to be more comfortable reading music (face, ledger lines)”. Since Prasad has been in both band and choir since middle school, she likely is already comfortable with these skills. Therefore, there must be a non-fundamental element that is affecting her sight-reading.

Prasad’s response about self-evaluation focused only on choir:

For each concert, after we’re done for this song, I think, ‘we messed up here, we messed up there. Hey, we hit this note good job, and we need to work on certain things’. Self-evaluations happen in my head during concerts. As soon as the applause starts.

Prasad’s evaluations seem to focus more on the choir as a whole, rather than individual thoughts. She does not allow time to enjoy the moment but instead goes right from performing to evaluating. Like Kylie, Prasad said that other people’s opinions do not change her opinion of the performance: “I don’t want anyone’s opinion to dim the moment down. I want to block out everything. I am happy in the moment. If I’m content, what’s the reason?”. Prasad has no reason to listen to other people’s opinions so long as she feels positive about her singing. She wants to be able to remain happy and content in that moment.

Prasad remained more influenced by her own opinion than that of others in the next series of questions. When asked why she sings louder by herself than in choir she answered:

There isn't the fear of other people trying to hear me. I am a scaredy cat because of others judging my singing voice. I'm already self-conscious about it. I have the low deep voice, not high soprano. There's nobody to judge me.

Prasad finds comfort in singing on her own compared to singing with others because she does not feel confident in the qualities of her voice and has a fear of judgment.

Who Prasad sits next to in the choir classroom does not impact her confidence level: "I'm okay with singing with anyone really. I can be a showoff sometimes, but it's okay". The main impact on her confidence regarding seating was based on sections: "I don't want to be near someone singing soprano 1 while I'm on alto 2. There's a disconnect". For Prasad, confidence is not related to the volume that others are using or her relationship with them. She is affected by hearing the opposite voice part right next to her and finds this difficult.

Prasad answered the opposite of both Megan and Kylie when it came to the size of the group and confidence levels of those around her. She feels no difference in her confidence based on the size of the singing group and says the confidence level of those around her does not affect her opinion of her own singing. If she is next to someone who is more confident than her, she says she will be "more confident because I can learn from them, reach out, ask questions. They are obviously more talented than me. It's always okay to reach out". She did agree with Megan and said she does sing quieter at the start of the rehearsal cycle rather than toward the end.

A focus on the soprano range was again prevalent when asked if she wished her voice was different compared to other singers: "I wish I had that typical soprano voice: pretty, soft, and bright sounding. My voice is dark. I don't appreciate that much. I always compare myself to sopranos singing high notes". Prasad also talked about her

experiences in the high school musical, which is a co-curricular opportunity. She compared her voice to others saying: “In musical, there are really talented beltters. It was embarrassing. I have a little quarter [a small portion of music] that we’re supposed to belt, and I automatically go into head voice. It’s embarrassing”. Prasad felt embarrassed that she could not achieve a belt sound when it was needed, rather she found herself using her head voice instead.

### **Summary.**

Prasad described her voice, though strong and full, as negative because it is not a soprano voice. She feels self-conscious about her pitches which negatively affects her sight-reading. She is not affected by others in the same way that Megan and Kylie described, but she does still compare herself to others and wishes her voice was different.

### ***Tiana***

Tiana is the oldest student interviewed for this focus section. She is a senior and is also in the top auditioned mixed choir. Tiana has both negative and positive views of her voice, compares herself to others both in and out of choir, and describes a high level of fear associated with being in the top choir.

Tiana described negative aspects of the timbre of her voice, but spoke positively about her range:

I feel like it has this weird sound to it. I don’t know. I hate the way I sound when I sing. It sounds like I’m singing with my nose. I hate how it sounds...I really like how low I can go. I love being an Alto 2. I love having the low notes. The melody is fun, but I love being super low and strong.

The range of the pieces she is rehearsing can influence how confident Tiana feels in her singing: “In the Masterwork (Haydn’s *Lord Nelson Mass*) I’m not singing that

loud at all because it's high. A song like "True Colors", which was in the alto range, I'm going to sing louder". Tiana had similar thoughts when asked to describe her favorite artist's singing voice: "One Direction—boy band pop singers that sing low". Unlike Prasad, Tiana appreciates and enjoys her low notes, even to the point of preferring music in and out of choir based on the range.

Like Kylie and Prasad, Tiana also described struggling with sight-reading: "This is hard. I need to process it". In the auditioned mixed choir, we set up the key for the sight-reader then jump in to singing it, rather than analyzing it or writing anything into the music. She finds this difficult and needs processing time. When asked what someone could do to improve, she said, "Practice sight-reading. Do it by yourself". Like Prasad it seemed like Tiana either was not sure of a better strategy for sight-reading or was being affected by a non-technical musical element.

Tiana is highly affected by her self-evaluations of performances and considers other people's opinions extremely important: "After individual stuff, I'll watch the video and usually beat myself up about it for a month, like with Solo and Ensemble". Tiana has performed in the Wisconsin School Music Association's solo and ensemble festivals for at least three years of high school and negatively criticizes her performances. Like Megan, Tiana thinks other people's opinions are more important than her own. She described a particular fear of being in the top choir:

High school is brutal but especially now we live in a world where everyone talks. I would absolutely hate to hear that "I overheard this person who stands in front of you talking about how bad of a singer you are". How you don't know what you're doing or "how is she in Chorale?" I don't want to be bad. I don't want people to think "why is she in Chorale?".

Tiana is fearful that her status as someone in the top choir will lead to negative opinions by others. She is afraid that her membership in the group will be second guessed by her peers.

This fear of how others in the top choir will view her was also brought up when she was asked about singing louder by herself than in choir. Tiana referenced her own judgment along with others: "I know personally if the person standing next to or behind me and they're not the best singer I will be like 'why is this terrible singer pulling the choir down'. I don't want to be that person". Tiana is both acknowledging her own judgment of others as well as her fear that others will judge her in choir.

Like Megan, Tiana feels a change in her confidence based on where she sits. She currently sits by her closest friend in choir, and she said that this does impact her confidence in singing in a positive way. Tiana prefers being in one of the front rows of the choir: "Being in the back row is scarier because people in front of you can hear you. I hate that". Tiana is not scared of being in the front where the teacher can hear her, or people can easily see her. She is much more fearful of being in the back where more of the choir can hear her sing. This slightly differs from Megan who prefers to not be in the front of class because she is in everyone's view.

Like Prasad, Tiana does not feel a difference in confidence based on the size of the group. She pointed out, "If it is just the alto 1's versus the entire choir, it makes no difference". This is the opposite feeling of Megan who did not feel confident when just her section was singing. When asked if she sings quieter at the start of the rehearsal process rather than the end, Tiana said, "Yes, yes definitely. I feel like I'll sing quieter as I learn it and memorize it. I don't want to be the one doing it wrong. At the beginning I'll

let everyone else do it. By concert I am doing it". Tiana is again describing fear of making a mistake, which leads her to sing quietly until she feels fully confident in her accuracy in the music.

Tiana also described the impact of specific individuals on her confidence. When asked how standing next to someone more confident impacts her confidence, she said, "It makes me sing louder/better. When Sally is right there singing in my ear, I'm going to sing everything right". Tiana's confidence is increased when she knows she will not make a mistake because the person next to her is strong. The confidence level of others, however, also affects her opinion of her singing: "I stand right in front of Lucy, and I think 'you're so good what the heck'". If another singer is confident in what they are doing, Tiana feels negatively about her voice by comparison.

Tiana continued to describe comparing herself to others in the choir: "I am in a section surrounded by people considerably better than me". Tiana hears voices that she perceives as better than hers each day in choir and views her own voice more negatively because of it. When asked if she wishes she sounded different compared to other singers, she said, "Yes I definitely wish that I could actually sing".

### **Summary.**

Tiana enjoys the low range of her voice but does not like the timbre of it. She is fearful of being judged or identified negatively because she is in the top large choir at the school. She is not affected by the size of the group rehearsing, but her own singing confidence is affected by the confidence level of singers around her.

## **Conclusion**

Megan, Kylie, Prasad and Tiana represent different grade levels and years of experience in choir. They also represent the three different choirs that a high school treble singer can participate in at the school in this study. Megan and Prasad mostly described their voices in negative lights, while Kylie and Tiana described their ranges positively. All four students described self-evaluating, some both in and out of choir, and Prasad and Kylie found this more important than the opinions of others. Megan and Tiana viewed other opinions as more important than their self-evaluations. All four students compared themselves to other singers and some described being affected by those that sing around them while others did not. The next chapter will detail interviews from the focus area of voice change.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **Voice Change**

Research on the adolescent treble voice change reveals that it is both a physical and emotional experience. Students may experience physical changes including insecurity of pitch, development of noticeable register breaks, increased huskiness in the voice, decreased and inconsistent range capabilities, voice cracking, hoarseness, generally uncomfortable singing or difficulty in phonation (Gackle, 1991). Emotional experiences include fear, anxiety, and embarrassment (Sweet, 2016a). Four students whose survey answers expressed negative impact in these areas were asked structured questions relating to their voice. Though these students would mostly be categorized in the post-menarcheal or young adult stage of their voices, they were able to share insight into their earlier experiences with the pre-menarcheal stage of the voice change through questions that addressed both their physical and emotional experiences.

#### **Participants**

Kiara is a freshman in the non-auditioned treble choir who has been in choir since middle school. She did not audition for solos this year, but she did prepare and perform a solo for the Wisconsin School Music Association's (WSMA) Solo and Ensemble festival. Students are not assigned a specific voice part in the non-auditioned treble ensemble as they rotate parts for each song in the cycle. However, I have noticed that Kiara is comfortable singing in the soprano 1 range as well as the soprano 2. Kiara is not one of the loudest voices in her section, but she does have a good foundation to her vocal skills.



Alyssa is a sophomore in the intermediate auditioned treble choir. Last year, she was in the non-auditioned treble choir. Alyssa has also been in choir since middle school. She auditioned for a solo this year, but she has not participated in WSMA Solo and Ensemble festival. Students in the auditioned treble choir are assigned voice parts with a mid-year check-in for changes. Alyssa was identified as a strong middle voice in her initial choir audition, which meant she could sing soprano 2 or alto 1. To balance the sections, she was assigned Alto 1; she remained there for the school year. Like Kiara, Alyssa is not the strongest voice in her section, but she does contribute well and has a good foundation of vocal skills.

Charlie is a junior in her second year in the intermediate auditioned treble choir. As a freshman, she was in the non-auditioned treble choir. She has been in choir since middle school where she also participated in the extracurricular Chamber Choir. Charlie has auditioned for multiple solos in high school and was featured in a trio at the final concert of the year. Charlie has also participated in WSMA Solo and Ensemble festivals during high school. This year, Charlie was assigned to soprano 1 in choir where last year she sang soprano 2. Charlie is one of the strong voices in her section and a leader. Sometimes she struggles with rhythmic accuracy, but she is comfortable advocating for herself by asking questions during class.

Natalia is a senior in her first year in the top mixed choir. Natalia took two choir classes this year, so she is also in the auditioned treble choir for her second year. She was in the non-auditioned treble choir her freshman and sophomore year and also sang in choir throughout middle school. She has auditioned for solos and participated in WSMA Solo and Ensemble every year of high school. Natalia was assigned to soprano

2 in both choirs for this year. She struggled with intonation and pitch accuracy as a freshman but has grown immensely during her time in high school. Natalia is one of the strong voices in her section in the auditioned treble choir but has less volume compared to the rest of her section in the auditioned mixed choir. She is a very vocal student who enjoys participating in class discussions. She sometimes needs extra repetition on particularly difficult vocal parts, most often for the music in the audition mixed choir.

### ***Kiara***

Kiara is in her first year of high school choir but sang in choir during all of her middle school years. When asked what she likes about her voice, Kiara said, “My ability to go really high”, referring to her range. When asked what her biggest goal is for growing her voice, she identified the other part of her range: “My goal is to try to get better with my lower voice and more technique-wise type of things”. She did not give specific techniques to improve upon, but some of the main techniques that we focus on are connection to breath, resonance, and open relaxed space in the vocal tract. Kiara was also asked what she wished her choir teachers knew about her voice and she said:

One thing I struggle with is switching between octaves. I can sing better in the lower octave, but I can also sing a lot higher with head voice rather than chest voice. I feel like the chest voice is a lot stronger, but I find it difficult to switch between octaves [chest/head voice].

Kiara is describing difficulty switching between registers, which is one of the elements of the treble voice change. While she is comfortable in her head voice and chest voice, she struggles to bridge the two.

Kiara did not have distinct memories of singing from elementary or middle school, but she was able to describe changes in her voice compared to those times:

I can't remember that much, but I can remember it wasn't as good. My voice was raspy and there were no tall vowels. I didn't know as much about that. It didn't sound good. In elementary school, I didn't know much about singing and had no technique.

Kiara feels like her voice has substantially improved since her younger singing experiences. She also described changes in her voice during late middle school: "A time I experienced a change in my voice just singing at home once. I hadn't sung in a long time since Covid [pandemic] happened. My voice had changed a lot since I sang in school". Kiara noticed a distinct change in her voice following the shut-down of schools in spring of 2020. When she sang in the summer or fall of 2020, she felt like her voice had changed. Kiara identified a change in confidence in the transition from middle school to high school: "I've gotten more confident in my singing voice compared to 8th grade about a year ago. Also, my range has gotten a little bit higher recently. I think I'm able to hit higher notes than I have before".

Kiara discussed voice change when asked what it means if someone's voice is breathy or raspy: "It means their voice is developing physically, but it could also be if they've been working on their voice, it could be changes". Kiara may have prior knowledge about the stages of voice change since she connected a breathy sound to developing physically. She also said it could be a sign of a general change. Since voice cracking can be a common part of the treble voice change, Kiara was asked how she thinks her peers respond when her voice cracks: "I feel like our choir specifically is really respectful, so if my voice did crack, I'm sure a few people would chuckle. Nothing rude or mean, no one would really point it out". Although she feels the natural reaction from her peers may be to laugh, she does not consider this a rude or mean reaction, but rather an understanding of the vocal change which affects everyone differently.

When asked to describe her daily singing experiences and how they make her feel, Kiara said: “Every day in choir it’s a little bit difficult to hear myself so it’s kind of a struggle to know how I actually sound. Am I being too loud/quiet, singing the right pitch/tone? Is my voice cracking?”. Though in the previous answer, Kiara said her peers do not respond in a rude or mean way to her voice cracking, she is still concerned that it may be happening without her realizing it. She is also concerned that she is being too loud even though she says it is difficult to hear herself.

### **Summary.**

As a freshman choir singer, Kiara described the best part of her voice as her upper range and the biggest area for improvement as her lower. She feels like her voice and confidence in her voice have both improved since she was younger. Kiara currently struggles with switching registers and is fearful that her voice is cracking, her volume is too loud or quiet, or she is singing the wrong note because she cannot clearly hear her own voice during rehearsal.

### **Alyssa**

Alyssa is a sophomore in her first year of the auditioned treble choir where she sings Alto 1. Alyssa identified the opposite part of her range compared to Kiara when asked for the best part of her voice: “When we sing the grandma’s song [Lineage by Andrea Ramsey] and we have those really low notes, I really enjoyed those and thought I could hit those well”. The song “Lineage” requires the altos to sing an F-3, so it shows off the extreme low notes of the alto range. Since Alyssa was comfortable with these notes, she enjoyed being able to sing them out and took pride in doing so. Alyssa identified the upper part of her range as her biggest goal for growing her voice:

“Probably work on higher notes so that I can eventually work my way up to those higher notes”. As an Alto 1, there are still times where Alyssa is asked to sing in the upper part of her range, especially in unison lines. She feels like she can grow this part of her range with focus and intent. Alyssa recounted these same aspects of her voice, when asked what she wished her choir teachers knew about her voice: “I am more comfortable singing lower notes than higher notes”.

Alyssa’s memories of singing in elementary/middle school are of the choir as a whole, rather than an individual memory like Kiara’s:

I remember in 7th grade choir we sang [an arrangement of Leonard Cohen’s] ‘Hallelujah’ and when we sang that, we all thought it sounded so good. I remember Mr. Deboth [the middle school choir teacher] thought we sounded really good, and we were really proud of ourselves. We sang it in 8th grade too.

Alyssa has a positive memory and recalls feeling proud of her singing within the choir in early adolescence. Like Kiara, Alyssa feels like her voice has grown compared to middle school and early high school:

Things definitely changed as I went from middle school to high school choir. It’s a lot different. I have more range in my voice now and sing notes that I wouldn’t normally sing in middle school. I just feel like overall my voice has grown and gotten stronger. I think it’s gotten a lot better even from freshman year because in Sorelle [auditioned treble choir], we do a lot more challenging music that helps you grow.

In the auditioned treble ensemble, students perform music at a higher level of difficulty than the non-auditioned treble ensemble. Alyssa believes this increase in difficulty level has led to growth in her individual voice. Alyssa also recognized that her range has expanded since middle school; a limited range is a part of the earlier stages of the treble voice change.

When asked what it means if someone's voice is breathy or raspy, Alyssa said, "I think it just means you need to work on breath control and how long you can hold a note for and when you need to breathe so it doesn't get that way. It also has to do with the placement of your voice too". Alyssa knows that connection to air is an important part of a full tone. When she talks about placement, she is referring to singing with resonance. Contrary to Kiara, Alyssa believes a breathy or raspy voice is something within someone's control that can be alleviated by using more air or placing it in a way that adds more resonance. When asked how others react to her voice cracking, Alyssa said:

It depends on who I am sitting by. Right now, I'm by (Nina) and if one of our voices crack, we laugh about it. We're not embarrassed because we're friends. If it was someone I didn't know, I would be more embarrassed. They would judge me or think I didn't know what I was doing.

Alyssa has more concern over how others will react to her voice cracking than Kiara.

For Alyssa, it depends on her relationship with the people by whom she stands.

Alyssa was positive when asked to talk about her daily singing experience:

"During warm-ups in the higher or lower parts, it's fun to experience how high my voice can go. It's fun to realize I can hit those notes but the low notes too". The warm-ups seem to provide a way for Alyssa to enjoy the variety in her voice across her range while still being aware of her desire to improve her higher range.

### **Summary.**

Alyssa takes pride in her ability to sing low and enjoys singing high notes though she feels she can improve this part of her range. She has positive memories of choir from middle school but also feels like her voice has improved since middle school and her freshman year. She believes a breathy or raspy voice can be altered with more connection to air as well as altered placement for more resonance. Her feelings about

how others respond to her voice cracking are dependent on her relationship to them as she is fearful of judgment.

### **Charlie**

Charlie is a junior in her second year of the auditioned treble choir. When asked about the best part of her voice, Charlie described individual aspects as well as aspects from the whole choir:

I am enjoying being soprano 1 and really like the high notes. I also really like the full loud moments like in “Now I Become Myself” [by Gwyneth Walker] and the range of dynamics that we’ve been working on. It’s really cool and even in the Labarr [the song “Where the Light Begins”] when I couldn’t do it, it still sounded cool.

Charlie explained what she was talking about with the Labarr piece when asked what she wishes her choir teachers knew about her voice:

I go through phases where, all of a sudden, my voice dies, or I can’t sing. I have a pretty good range, but when I sing lower, my throat hurts really bad. Not that I can’t hit the notes, it’s just not a sustainable thing. I also really struggled with being really loud to being really soft like in the Labarr and ran out of breath. I couldn’t always get those sounds out because I was trying to breathe.

Charlie may be describing one of the elements of the voice change identified by Gackle (1991): generally uncomfortable singing or difficulty in phonation. Charlie also struggles with large dynamic shifts and inconsistencies with her usage of air. She also described feeling physically uncomfortable singing when asked about her daily singing experiences:

An annoying thing about my voice is that I constantly have to clear my throat. I always feel like my throat is going in and out of being able to make sound or sound good. Maybe it’s just lunch, but even when we do concerts, I always do that. It’s super frustrating. Why am I clearing my voice all the time?

Charlie’s choir meets immediately after lunch, so she is wondering if eating is affecting her voice. However, since she also experiences throat clearing at evening concerts, this

is likely not the reason. Charlie's biggest goal for growing her voice is not a specific part of her range as Kiara and Alyssa described:

It's more so just confidence. I would like to get a solo maybe at some point, but I feel like that is going to be difficult because of the amount of people in choir. I feel like a lot more people are auditioning for stuff now so there's more competition. I don't know how that will work. I want to get into Chorale [top auditioned mixed choir], but the idea scares me.

Charlie is hopeful to get a solo in the future but feels like she needs to gain confidence in order to be able to compete with her peers. She is hopeful to audition into the top mixed choir but expressed fear of being in it. This fear may be connected to not feeling as confident in her voice as she would like.

Charlie has distinct memories of her singing from a very early age as well as during middle school:

There was this really weird thing when I was really little where I figured out a way to sing that sounded amazing. I was like 4. Randomly a month or so later, I don't remember how to sing like that. Now I just sound, I don't even know, just off-pitch all the time. I'll never be a good singer because I lost my one way of singing well.

Charlie has held the image in her mind of her best singing voice from four years old, but she struggles to define what made this voice the best. Having lost that sound to her voice now, she feels like she has never been able to regain the same quality, which continues to taint her view of her singing.

Charlie enjoyed extra opportunities in middle school choir to try out her voice but had a distinct negative memory of trying to sing in a smaller group for a competition:

In middle school, since I got into Chamber Choir, got solos, and Mr. Deboth [middle school choir teacher] was nice, I thought "Oh I'm actually pretty decent. Look at me go". I wanted to try to be singer of the month. In order to do this, you had to sing in front of class to see if you won. I was singing with a group, and they were messing up, so I started singing by myself. They kept messing up and finally I thought "this was embarrassing enough, so let's go". Everyone failed.



Like Alyssa and Kiara, Charlie's clearest memory of a time when her voice changed was from middle to high school:

In middle school I was always soprano 1, which was fun and easier. You always have melody and are higher so you can hear the other people in your voice group. When I switched to soprano 2 last year, I was struggling. It's the middle note, and I could never hear it. I was always jumping between soprano 1 and alto.

While it is possible that Charlie could be describing the element of voice change from Gackle (1991) known as insecurity of pitch, it could also have to do with the auditory challenge of singing the middle note for soprano 2 rather than soprano 1. Although Charlie said she still wants to grow her vocal confidence, she also described development in her self-confidence over the past year:

Over the past year I've really started to think, "my voice actually sounds good". I think that's just a thing I've been going through throughout my whole life like "you're actually an okay person. Good for you". I always thought my voice was good, but when I got around other people, I didn't feel good. Other people are good too, but that doesn't mean I am not also good.

Charlie feels like her opinion of her singing used to be affected by other singers' levels of confidence and skill, but now she can separate the two. Her evaluation of her own voice is no longer changed by what she hears from others.

Charlie shared similar feelings to Alyssa regarding a breathy or raspy quality to someone's voice in that she thought it was something they could control:

I think it's just different, like there's a lot of artists that sing breathy like Billie Eilish. I think it's just a different way of singing. I like Billie Eilish. I think she sounds really good but isn't a choral-y sound. I think it's just a difference in types of music and what people like to hear and different stuff. Not everybody likes the type of music we sing in choir; I prefer the breathier stuff, so that's how I'm going to sing it.

While Charlie connected breathy or raspy tone quality to specific genres of music including the pop example she gave, she feels it is a stylistic choice rather than a potential physiological state of vocal development.

When asked about experiences with voice cracking, Charlie again referenced differences between middle and high school:

You [her choir teacher] always laugh when your voice cracks, so it's less of "you're stupid; you did this". It's more a "that was a funny sound". People don't listen or acknowledge it. It's not as much of a negative thing anymore like it was in middle school. People know that I'm a human.

The fact that her teacher as well as some high school students are more willing to accept human flaws and not being perfect seems to make Charlie feel more positive about what happens with her voice.

### **Summary.**

Charlie enjoys singing high notes and being a soprano 1 in choir. Her answers to some questions reflected elements of the treble voice change including generally uncomfortable singing or difficulty in phonation and insecurity of pitch. Like Alyssa, Charlie believes a raspy or breathy tone is within someone's control to change or choose. Charlie is not concerned when her voice cracks in choir because she does not need to be perfect, and it is an experience that connects her to others. Charlie's biggest goal is to grow her vocal confidence so that she can be selected for solos and audition into the top mixed choir despite what she believes is a high level of competition.

### ***Natalia***

Natalia is a senior in both auditioned choirs (treble and mixed). When asked what the best part of her voice is, she did not describe a specific range like the other three students: "Note accuracy, knowing where the notes are and hearing what sounds good

and what doesn't". Her answer for the biggest area to grow her voice was quite similar: "I want to get rid of trying not to be sharp/flat. I want to raise my soft palate to hit the note dead on. I want to hit it spot on". When trying to bridge these two responses, it seems that Natalia feels like she knows where the note is and can describe its quality, but she lacks the ability to sing it in tune immediately and independently. Like Charlie, this echoes elements of Gackle's (1991) study on voice change: insecurity of pitch and/or inconsistent range capabilities. When asked what she wishes her choir teachers knew about her voice, Natalia discussed how much we already know from teaching her for four years:

I feel like you know a lot about my voice because of the last 4 years. I really trust you guys with how my voice is placed. You try to push me in soprano range but leave alto range alone because you know I don't have it. In the end, you guys know I'm in the right spot.

In both auditioned choirs, Natalia sings soprano 2, so she is only required to sing low when unison lines sit in the lower register.

Natalia described distinct struggles in her singing voice in both elementary and middle school:

In elementary school my voice was very high pitched and squeaky. Even my parents didn't like it. In middle school a lot of people described me as sharp/flat, so I never hit the note. I also didn't know what notes meant or how to hit them.

Like Kiara, Natalia feels like her voice has improved since elementary school where she did not have strong technique. Natalia became aware of her intonation issues in middle school but described voice change across a broad time span:

When I was little, my singing voice was high and squeaky. It cracked a lot. In middle school, I sang more with the guys and my voice dropped, but in high school it went up again. I think it stayed pretty high.

In addition to changes in tone quality, Natalia's vocal range changed from middle school to high school. Like the other three students, Natalia has felt a positive change in her singing voice over the past year:

I think it's changed tremendously. Last year, when we were socially distanced, it was hard for me to sing on my own. In Chorale [auditioned mixed], I can read a song and sing on my own. As an independent singer I've gotten a lot stronger, and I can lead with my voice.

Even though Natalia described struggles with hitting notes spot on, she still feels like her independence has greatly improved over the last year in high school choir.

Like Alyssa, Natalia believes a breathy or raspy tone quality is the result of negative technique: "I think they're using too much breath and wasting breath pressure right away. They're not maintaining breath. They're trying to use it but not using it in the right way. I've done that before". Natalia's impression is that experiencing breathy and raspy tone is due to technique rather than the possibility of it being part of a vocal change. When asked how she thinks her peers respond to her voice cracking in rehearsal, Natalia said it is different in each of the two choirs she is in:

In Chorale [auditioned mixed], it's very noticeable. They all [other singers] look at me, and I hate it. In Sorelle [auditioned treble], no one cares. They're like "it happens". The girl next to me in Chorale covers her ear when I sing. That makes me self-conscious.

Similar to the experiences of Kiara and Charlie, in the auditioned treble choir Natalia feels like voice cracks are a part of being human. In the auditioned mixed choir, Natalia feels like they are still responded to in a negative way, which leads her to feel self-conscious about her voice.

## **Summary.**

Natalia has sung in choir all four years of high school and feels like she has grown in her independence as a choral singer, especially in the last year. Natalia experienced major struggles with intonation and pitch accuracy when she was younger and still feels like she cannot quite hit pitches “spot on”. Like Alyssa, Natalia feels like a breathy or raspy voice is the result of poor technique. Natalia described both positive social responses to her voice cracking in the auditioned treble choir as well as feelings of judgment and embarrassment when her voice cracks in the auditioned mixed choir.

## **Conclusion**

Kiara, Charlie, and Natalia all described elements of the treble voice change in their interviews. As older students, Charlie and Natalia’s struggles may be from negative vocal technique picked up during an earlier stage of the voice change. Kiara experienced difficulty switching registers; Charlie experienced physical discomfort; and Natalia experienced voice cracking. Both Charlie and Natalia suffered with insecurity of pitch. Kiara, Alyssa, and Natalia described noticeable positive growth in their voices since middle school. Charlie said her growth was in her self-confidence rather than her vocal skills. Kiara, Alyssa, and Charlie all felt like a particular part of their range was the best part of their voice, while Natalia felt like her note accuracy and ability to describe music was the best part of her voice. Kiara, Alyssa, and Natalia all related a breathy or raspy tone to negative technique, whereas Charlie said it was a stylistic decision that can be a positive feature.

Each participant also described a fear related to their singing. Kiara described a fear of singing incorrectly because she cannot hear herself in choir. Alyssa described a

fear of judgment from those around her, especially if they are not people she knows well. Charlie described a high level of competition in the choir program and a fear of making the top choir, and Natalia described feeling self-conscious about her voice because of the way her peers respond in the top auditioned mixed choir. The subjects in this area of focus echoed feelings of low self-confidence, which was similar to the responses from the subjects interviewed for singing confidence. Kiara, Alyssa, and Natalia all described a fear of judgment that was similar to what Megan, Prasad, and Tiana previously described. The next chapter will move toward an overall concept of self-confidence, rather than singing specific thoughts.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **Self-Confidence**

Research with adolescent females has shown that low self-confidence is a common occurrence, and it affects how they behave in school. which could impact their participation in choir (Lancaster, 2018; Orenstein, 2000; Ruiz-Montero et al., 2020; Vancil, 1985). Four of the female participants who identified comments about overall self-confidence negatively on the survey were asked structured questions relating to their general self-confidence, how it has or has not changed compared to when they were younger, how it is impacted by the opinion or reactions of others, and how they respond to certain situations in school. Since some of the survey statements for this category discussed physical attributes, a description of each student's appearance is included in their introduction.

#### **Participants**

Ella is a sophomore in her first year of the auditioned treble choir where she sings Soprano 2. As a freshman, she was in the non-auditioned treble choir. Ella is not one of the leaders in her section but does show strong musical abilities. She frequently answers questions in class and shows proficiency when sight-reading music. If strong singers from her section are absent, Ella's section tends to be quiet. She has not participated in any extra-curricular music opportunities. Ella is social and frequently laughs with friends when walking into choir. She is thin, tall, and blonde and dresses in popular fashion trends as well as jerseys for the sports she plays for the school.

Adelaide is also a sophomore in her first year of the auditioned treble choir where she sings Alto 2. She was in the non-auditioned treble choir as a freshman, the same as

Ella. Adelaide is one of the leaders in her current section, consistently singing with full tone and open space. Adelaide performed in the musical and has performed solo acts at the school's Cabaret. Adelaide has friends in choir but is softer spoken than Ella. Adelaide is tall with an athletic build, and curly brown hair. She also dresses in popular fashion trends as well as jerseys for the sport she plays for the school.

Aria is a junior in her first year of the top auditioned mixed choir. She was only present in school for the first semester of her freshman year as she faced significant mental health struggles which kept her away from school. When she returned for her sophomore year, Aria was in the non-auditioned choir for the first semester but was offered the opportunity to audition for the advanced treble choir at the start of second semester. She was in both choirs for the second semester of her sophomore year and auditioned into the mixed choir for her junior year. Aria sings Alto 2 and is a strong voice within her section. Like Adelaide, she sings with full tone and open space. Aria participated in musicals in middle school and had a lead role. She performed in the high school musical production as a sophomore but did not audition as a junior. She has also performed solo acts at the school's Cabaret. Aria demonstrates a curiosity for the music sung in choir and frequently participates in class discussions about the meaning of the text or the music. She is of average height and build with curly brown hair that usually has portions dyed a bright color. She does not play any school sponsored sports, and she frequently dresses in boho chic clothing with heavy jewelry.

Rachel is a senior in her first year of the top auditioned mixed choir where she sings Alto 1. Rachel sang in the auditioned treble choir as a sophomore and junior, and the non-auditioned treble choir her freshman year. She was a strong leader in her



section as a junior in the auditioned treble choir; however, as a senior in the auditioned mixed choir, she is not a noticeable leader vocally compared to those around her, though she still sings with good vocal technique. Like Aria, Rachel contributes well to class discussions regarding the meaning of the text and music. Like Ella, Rachel has not participated in any extracurricular music activities. Similar to Adelaide, Rachel is softer spoken but has good relationships with her peers. She is tall and blonde with an athletic build. She frequently dresses in t-shirts or other athletic clothing. She also plays a sport for the school.

### ***Ella***

Ella was asked to describe a time that she felt a high level of self-confidence: “When I'm playing sports or weightlifting or when I hit a new level or level of maxing out then I feel the best about myself”. Maxing out is the heaviest amount someone can weight lift with good technique, so Ella was describing increasing her personal best. Athletic activity, therefore, is the time when Ella feels extremely sure of herself.

Ella was asked to consider if her self-confidence has increased or decreased growing up: “Decreased. In elementary school, my confidence was great. Everything was great”. While Ella identified elementary school as a time when she felt good about herself, her confidence in singing had the opposite development as she got older: “I got more confident in my singing. I felt like I was growing into how I actually sing”. Ella’s increase in singing confidence is not reflected in her overall perception of changes in her self-confidence.

When asked what she wishes her teachers knew about the transition from middle to high school and its impact on her self-confidence, Ella said: “Since your classes are

getting a lot harder and there's so much pressure because it's the last step, your confidence goes way down. After any bad [test or assignment] score, it's a bad day; it affects so much". The pressure Ella felt moving into the final stage of public schooling before being considered an adult affected her confidence and heightened her sensitivity to the reactions and approval of others: "I usually need other people's approval. It's pretty specific to high school". She feels a need to have the approval, particularly of her peers, in all realms of her high school experience.

Because of her need for the approval of others, Ella feels like she cannot be her true self at school:

I can act like myself when I'm at home or when I'm with one of my best friends from a different school or with my family. At school, sometimes it depends on what I'm doing. I feel like I have to act like a different person because there's a lot of judgment at school. When I am at my sport or weightlifting, I feel like myself.

The fear of judgment and need for approval leads Ella to act differently in the very public, school setting compared to how she acts in more comfortable environments.

When asked how often she feels nervous about speaking up in school or social situations, Ella said: "A little, it depends on the situation, but I'm usually pretty nervous. It depends on the setting and my peers or teacher. A social situation is fine when I'm with my best friends but any other time I'm nervous". Ella's level of nervousness appears to be directly related to the relationship she has with the peers or teacher in the situation, but she admitted that she is often nervous at school.

Ella has a distinct negative memory of giving a wrong answer during one of her classes:

I was in AP Human Geography, and it was the second day of class. It was a super simple question, and I was so confident on it. Afterwards everybody looked at me like I was dumb. I was embarrassed.

She mentioned this same fear when asked why giving a wrong answer in class was embarrassing: "You feel like people are thinking you're stupid". Ella recognized that her peers feel the same embarrassment and fear of judgment if they give a wrong answer: "I see people's faces turning bright red or they stop talking the rest of class". This recognition that others suffer the same feelings does not appear to change her own nervousness.

### **Summary.**

Ella feels the most confident in herself when she is participating in athletic activities. Her overall self-confidence has decreased since elementary school but her confidence in singing has increased. She is highly affected by the opinions of others and seeks their approval to the point of not acting like her true self at school. She frequently feels nervous unless she is around people with whom she has built a relationship, and she worries that her intelligence will be judged by her peers if she gives a wrong answer in class.

### **Adelaide**

Adelaide is a sophomore in the auditioned treble choir. Although she is an athlete like Ella, athletics are not the time she feels the highest self-confidence:

It [feeling confident] doesn't happen much because of my uncertainty. The most certainty I feel would be for my chemistry exam because I studied for 3 hours. Accelerated chemistry is not my best class, but I got a 93% because I did a whole packet on it. Otherwise, I am not sure of things most of the time.

The closest Adelaide comes to acknowledging high self-confidence is in the academic setting when she experiences success.

Like Ella, Adelaide remembered elementary school as an extremely positive time with higher self-confidence: "In elementary school, my confidence was going crazy, and I had so many friends. Even the person that I hated, the next day we were friends. Stuff doesn't last that long". Adelaide provided some perspective on peer relationships in high school by comparing the elementary experience. Young children seem to let go of things that happen more quickly compared to high school, making friendships easier to build and sustain.

Unlike Ella, Adelaide feels like a small part of her confidence has increased in high school: "Overall it's increased with my personality". However, she has felt lower self-confidence in athletics due to the competitive nature and pressure:

Things like soccer have gone down but gone up [fluctuated]. Freshman year I started on the Varsity team but there was all this pressure put on me with college stuff. I was constantly told everyone's going to pass you if you stop. I want a break, but you can't take a break because it's recruiting time.

As a highly successful athlete, Adelaide still does not feel self-confident because of the pressure to constantly achieve. When asked what she wished her teachers knew about the middle to high school transition and its impact on self-confidence, Adelaide discussed social influences:

Since there's a lot of new people and merging the two middle schools, certain groups expand, and it's hard to transition with friend groups. School gets bigger, so you have no classes with friends. My freshman year was also distanced and masked [COVID-19 pandemic]. I felt out of place in every class. Classes that let you choose your seat the first day are better if you have friends in the class, but if you don't have friends it's the worst feeling because everyone has someone except for you.

As the two middle schools in the community combine to make for a larger total number of students in high school, Adelaide recognized that her group of friends became smaller often due to the way things were structured. Though some of what she

experienced was specific to the COVID-19 pandemic, she also addressed a specific situation and how this affected her confidence.

Adelaide described changes in her singing confidence compared to when she was young, as having similar ups and downs to her experience in athletics:

At the time [when performing] I always think I'm better, but then in videos I think I'm horrible. Looking back, [she thinks] "that wasn't good at all". It [confidence in singing] definitely has gone up a lot [compared to when I was younger]. I have a social media account for singing and sometimes it makes me feel confident. I don't know who is following me as a joke or actually following me. I overthink it.

There are times when Adelaide feels confident in her singing, but she second guesses what others think, especially on social media where it is hard to assess authenticity.

Like Ella, Adelaide is extremely concerned with the opinion of other people and seeks their approval:

I think it's like reading the room or social awareness which is not that easy. If I notice someone who seems bored with what I'm saying, I'll immediately pull back. I don't know what's going on with them. I don't want to be adding to it if they're getting annoyed. I definitely want approval. Sometimes I come off more confident than I am. Even if you don't need it [approval], you definitely want it.

Adelaide uses physical cues to assume what other people are thinking about her and adjusts her behavior hoping to gain their approval. She also admits to coming across more confidently than she feels.

Similarly, to Ella, this impacts Adelaide's ability to act like her true self at school:

I definitely put up a front. With social media that's how it is. At home I'm a lot more free especially with what I look like. At home I don't care at all. At school I feel pressure to actually try. After I get home I can let my guard down, if I'm not by people I feel like I should be impressing. With guys too, I don't want to look bad when I'm by them.

For Adelaide, home is a safe environment where she can be her true self if she is comfortable with the people there. This is similar to Ella's changing comfort level

depending on relationships with others and was further highlighted when Adelaide was asked how often she feels nervous in social situations: "Social situations depend on the people. With my friends group I talk a lot and am very loud, but I avoid meeting new people. I hate that". Adelaide also feels nervous a majority of the time at school:

Some days I'm better than others. I think it depends on how the day is going. Most of the time, unless I have a random surge of confidence, I don't even ask for things. If a teacher didn't hand me a paper, I wouldn't tell them. I get anxious.

Adelaide is sometimes nervous to the point of not asking for basic supplies that she needs to be successful in class. Ella and Adelaide both feel nervous most of the time they are at school and are not able to act like their true selves.

Adelaide differed from Ella in that she only fears judgment about giving a wrong answer in certain classes at school:

In Spanish she always does cards, so we'll have questions, and if she calls your card you have to answer. I answered wrong yesterday. I wasn't wrong but answered the wrong question. I felt embarrassed but, in that class, I don't care because the people in that class aren't super judgy. I will laugh but am so embarrassed on the inside. In Spanish I know a lot of them better, so it's not a bunch of people from popular cliques I cannot stand.

Even though Adelaide does not feel judged by the peers in her Spanish class to the same degree as other classes, she still feels embarrassed after giving a wrong answer, like Ella. A higher level of comfort with peers does not change her emotional response. She also recognized that she responds with laughter even though she does not feel positive. Adelaide described a fear of judgment when asked why it is embarrassing to give a wrong answer in classes: "You're thinking about what other people are thinking. You're going to overthink about them judging you and saying, 'she's stupid'". Adelaide shares the fear of her intellect being judged with Ella. Adelaide also thinks her peers feel the same embarrassment because: "Their faces turned red, and they fidget".

## **Summary.**

Adelaide has low self-confidence, and she is nervous most of the time that she is at school. These feelings extend into other environments depending on the people present. She has ups and downs with her confidence in both athletics and singing, though she has experienced success in both. Adelaide feels embarrassed and is also fearful of others judging her intelligence if she gives an incorrect answer during class.

## ***Aria***

Aria is a junior in the top mixed choir. She experienced major struggles with her mental health as a freshman but had a successful sophomore and junior year. She mentioned music and decision-making when asked about a time that she felt high self-confidence:

I am confident when I know a piece of music. I am also confident with certain decisions to limit myself, like this year, I didn't do the musical. I was unsure when I first made the decision, but as it played out, I don't regret it. My mental health wouldn't have been great. I would have been super stressed about it.

Aria participated in musicals in middle school and was in the high school production as a sophomore but did not audition for the show as a junior to preserve her mental health.

Like Ella and Adelaide, Aria describes low self-confidence in middle school.

Contrary to them, Aria feels like her self-confidence has recently increased:

I feel like when you're younger, you don't really have a concept of that stuff [self-confidence] yet. Late elementary to early middle school, you get the concept. My confidence was very low in 7th and 8th grade through freshman year. Then I began to care less about what people think, which has helped my confidence.

Aria credits less concern over other people's opinions for her higher level of self-confidence:

I used to be bad with criticism. I was stubborn and wanted control. At school, with the way people dress, I feel a little better about my approach. Some days, I'm

going to wake up, wear makeup, and put on a cute outfit. Other days, I don't because I'm just here to get an education. I try to shut things out. I have the choice to let a person affect me. Sometimes it still affects you even if you try to deny it. Little things I am proud of, so if someone bashes it, I will definitely be upset.

Aria is able to overlook other people's opinions and value her own more than Ella and Adelaide. She can control her own level of happiness by not letting other people's opinions impact her self-confidence.

Aria described changes in confidence with her voice which reflect differences from Ella and Adelaide:

Looking back at videos of elementary school, I was actually pretty good. I watched a video from nine years ago last Christmas, and I was like "Dang I was not bad". I know my voice has definitely changed since 8th grade for sure. I watched solos from my lead [in the 8th grade musical], but I kind of like where my voice sits now. I like that I don't have a super choir-y voice. I have my own unique voice but can still fit into a choir. It has changed a lot in the past three years.

Aria described her younger singing voice positively and enjoys the timbre of her voice now, though she hears her timbre as unique. Aria has sung several pop solos at Cabaret with appropriate style and sound, so this may be the timbre that she is referencing.

Like Adelaide, Aria also described the challenge for students entering high school from multiple middle schools:

It is combining two different middle schools, so there are a lot more people thrown into the mix. I already struggled a lot with comparison but not as bad at all as freshman year. It was another new group of girls to compare myself to.

Aria also described the impact that comparisons, particularly for academics, have on her self-confidence:

I do pretty well in school so I was like "Wow I'm kind of good at this" and then in high school, people are super smart and take calculus as freshmen. In middle



school, classes are structured as “you have to take these”. There are not accelerated or advanced placement classes, and here there are tons of options. You see people in classes you aren’t taking and think “I guess I’m not as smart as them”. A lot more options make comparison a lot harder. There’s also the pressure of high school with the ACT and knowing what you want to do.

Aria felt confident in middle school academics but the increase in advanced course options in high school has increased her comparison of herself to others which negatively affects her self-confidence.

Aria also said she is in a better place because of people treating her negatively: “I’ve made progress to who I am now because of people criticizing me. It motivates me to prove them wrong. I’ve found more within myself and people I trust. I definitely say I rely on others, but I’m not codependent”. Like Adelaide and Ella, Aria has people in her life who she trusts and feels best around. Aria relies on her trust in people to bring out her true self at school:

There are different versions of myself. I attend church regularly, and I am different in church or different classes compared to others. I can be more myself if I have friends in them [classes]. If I don’t like people and don’t want to engage with them, I change and am more reserved. It depends on the class and the people in it. It definitely depends on the teacher too. I can let my guard down with my two closest friends, significant other, and dogs.

Like Ella, Aria identifies specific people around whom she is most comfortable including teachers. This also affects how Aria feels about speaking in social situations:

In a new social situation, I struggle a bit, but I open up a lot more when I get to know the people. In Chorale [auditioned mixed choir] the first couple of days, I knew some people but not everyone. When it’s a larger group with people mixed in that I don’t know, I am more uncomfortable. I am extroverted in a group when I know them better.

Chorale is the biggest choir at the school in this study with 70 members. Aria was intimidated by this at first but felt more confident as she got to know people, which is similar to how Adelaide described social situations.

Aria has grown in her ability to speak up for herself: “I used to be a little more nervous than I am now. Normally it depends if it’s something that’s more harmless like a rude comment but if it happens again or crosses the line then I will say something”. This confidence has supported her in more difficult times in classes as well:

When I purposely raise my hand I’ve gotten the right answer, but in chemistry last year I didn’t pay attention and was zoning out. The teacher called on me and I said, “I have no idea”. I was out of it but also everyone looks at you. As the year went on people were like “this class is hard I get it”. The more time you spend with your peers the less people care. The beginning of the year/semester, it can be really stressful.

Unlike Ella and Adelaide who feel stress and nervousness about incorrect answers all year, Aria feels like this is isolated to the beginning of the year before people in the class get to know one another. This is another example of Aria feeling more confident as she gets to know people. Aria’s opinion on why it is embarrassing to give a wrong answer in class echoed the same concerns over judgment as Ella and Adelaide:

I care what teachers think of me just as much as students. I don’t like being wrong and I like having control over things. I don’t want people to perceive me in that way [lower intelligence]. It’s known that I’m not a good test taker, and I don’t think as well as others. It’s the judgment of other people [that leads to embarrassment].

Aria said her peers are also embarrassed if they give a wrong answer even if they appear confident: “Most people feel the same way. Some people are like ‘I don’t care’ and I’m like ‘you have to care a little bit’”.

### **Summary.**

Aria feels most self-confident when she knows a piece of music well and recently, she has felt confident in her life choices. Her overall self-confidence has grown since middle school and her voice has grown even though she enjoys the sound she had when she was younger. Aria feels a high amount of pressure in high school

because of the options to take accelerated and advanced placement courses. She feels like these increase the feeling of competition amongst her peers and lead to lower self-confidence for those who are not in these higher-level classes. Aria has matured by not placing as much consideration on other people's opinions of her and focusing on being more comfortable around people she knows in both social and academic settings.

### ***Rachel***

Rachel is a senior in the top auditioned mixed choir. Like Aria, Rachel said she feels self-confident "a few times in music when playing piano or anything like that. Other times in math class". She, like Ella, also said it happens during athletics: "Especially in my sport [skiing]. I feel really sure that I know what I'm doing in those times". When asked about changes in her confidence as she's gotten older, Rachel broke the answer down into two categories:

Depends. As for looks, it went up. As for intelligence, it kind of stayed the same. It went up and down. I had a lot of transitions, especially in my body physically going through different periods. I'm happy with where I am now. Sports have helped.

Rachel identified that sports have helped her feel more self-confidence because of physical changes to her body. Assessing her intellectual self-confidence is less clearly defined. Like Ella and Adelaide, Rachel feels like her self-confidence in music has increased:

I've been playing piano since I was young, and honestly, piano has helped me with choir a lot. Choir has also helped me with piano since I learned it so young. My piano teacher didn't go through music fundamentals, so I learned them because of choir. Overall, my musical understanding improved as I kept going with choir because of the little things that you guys teach us.

Rachel knows that an increase in musical understanding increases her confidence in music, which she sees supporting both singing and playing piano.

Rachel brought a new perspective to the transition from middle school to high school because she was enrolled in a learning program called Project i. Project i utilizes project/problem-based learning and asks students to make their own individualized learning plan. Teachers are advisors of the plan and facilitators of the projects. Rachel shared her experience:

It kind of screwed me over for high school. People in normal classes learned a lot that I didn't in Project i. Through middle school, they don't say "your high school teacher is going to be expecting this". Eighth grade is not prep for high school at all. Freshman year, I didn't think it [academics] mattered, but it really did. Kids who came from Project i, other schools, eighth grade, it didn't prepare you for what high school is going to be like.

At first Rachel implied that the learning deficit from middle to high school was specifically felt by students in the Project i program, but she went further to say that she does not think anyone is prepared for the rigor of high school when they enter as a freshman.

Like Aria, Rachel cares about other people, but does not allow their opinions to influence her self-confidence:

I'm a people person. I care about other people a lot. People's judgements of me don't affect me, but if they're feeling something, I also feel it very much. Judgment about me doesn't affect me. I'm pretty happy the way I am. I don't seek approval.

Aria and Rachel have matured past concerning themselves with other people's approval. This affects how Rachel feels about speaking up in class: "I rarely feel nervous about speaking up because I'm very much a person who likes speaking their mind. If I have a problem, I address it. I don't like to hold feelings back or hold grudges". Rachel brought up grudges which is similar to Adelaide's positive memories of elementary school where people let things go.

Like Aria and Adelaide, Rachel's confidence over speaking up in class depends on the peers and teacher:

I haven't felt nervous in the past, but in a higher-level choir, sometimes it feels like I'm the only one with that problem. Other classes depend on the class. In English, I talk all the time, but in Pre-Calculus, I almost never do. It depends on the people that are in it, the teacher, and how comfortable I am with them.

Rachel may be fearful to ask questions during choir (auditioned mixed) because she feels like others will judge her intellect or musical ability, since she thinks she is the only one struggling. Her other classes depend more on her relationships with the people around her, which is also how the other three students felt.

Rachel shares the feelings that Aria described of different versions of herself based on the environment, which leads her to act differently at school:

I definitely act differently than I do at home but because it's me and my dad at home, I don't have a friend at home. When I'm at school hanging out, I might act differently because it's a different environment. I let my guard down at home, especially in my room; that's my relaxing space.

Though Rachel said she is not concerned with other people's opinions or judgment of her, she still said that she can let her guard down at home, suggesting she has her guard up at school and may not act like her true self. Unlike the other three students in this section, Rachel did not have a distinct memory of giving a wrong answer in class.

She described a general time:

In Pre-Calculus this year. It was probably a math answer because in English, you can interpret answers. I never feel that bad because I know I'm not the only one who was thinking that. If it's a little mistake, someone has probably made the same one.

Rachel knows she probably gave incorrect answers during math class but assumes her peers have made the same mistakes. This differs from a previous answer where she

stated that she feels like the only one in choir with a problem. Rachel thinks her peers may fear judgment over a wrong answer even though she does not:

You can feel judgment. This happens especially in Pre-Calculus where I sit next to a girl who is high achieving. She has a very good grade and is younger. I can hear her when someone gives a wrong answer, she laughs. She has an ego. I understand why other people would feel judgment.

The fact that students of different grade levels are in classes together can have a negative effect on the self-confidence of some students.

### **Summary.**

Rachel feels the highest level of self-confidence when she is playing music like Aria, or in her sport like Ella. She feels like her confidence has increased since she was younger regarding her appearance but stayed the same regarding her intelligence. Her self-confidence in singing has increased along with her musical understanding, but she feels less confident speaking up during choir compared to other classes. In the advanced mixed choir, Rachel feels like she is the only one who is unsure about the music. In other classes, Rachel does not feel embarrassed about a wrong answer because she assumes other people have made the same mistake. Though Rachel does not feel lower self-confidence when she gives a wrong answer, all four participants feel like their peers experience the judgment of others impacting them.

### **Conclusion**

Ella and Rachel identified high feelings of confidence during athletic activities. Rachel and Aria felt high confidence while performing music. Adelaide felt nervous and had low self-confidence a majority of the time. Aria and Rachel both described an increase in their self-confidence since they were younger, whereas Ella described a decrease and Adelaide described ups and downs.

Ella and Adelaide were both highly affected by other people's opinions. Ella, Adelaide and Aria feared negative judgment if they gave a wrong answer in class. A fear of judgment was also described by subjects in the previous two areas of focus: singing confidence and voice change. Ella and Adelaide said they compare themselves regularly to their peers, which was also stated by subjects in singing confidence. Aria and Rachel described evolving past these concerns with slight concern over comparison only in specific classes.

All four subjects said they act differently at school compared to other environments. Ella, Adelaide, and Aria described being able to act like themselves around people they know and therefore trust. This was similar to the way Alyssa described her relationships when interviewed in voice change. Low self-confidence has been discussed by subjects in all three areas of focus. The final section of interviews will look at how the social interactions of students influence their self-confidence and performance at school.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Social Influence

Several studies found that adolescent girls may suppress their true selves in favor of fitting in socially, as well as build their identities and engage or perform in school based on this need (Arthur, 2011; Betts, 2017; Cohen-Sandler, 2005; Mayeux & Cillessen, 2007; Newman & Newman, 1976; Parker, 2018). Social comparison and social phobia were also factors in the self-confidence and performance of adolescent girls (Gren-Landell, et al., 2009; Lancaster, 2018; Orton and Pitts, 2019; Parker, 2018). Four students whose survey answers expressed negative impact in these areas were asked structured questions relating to their current friendships, and social comparison to their high school peers, as well as the people in their choir.

#### Participants

Britta is a freshman in the non-auditioned treble choir. Through the lens of the choral rehearsal, Britta appears very quiet with limited interactions with her peers and teacher. Outside of the choral rehearsal, I have seen her interacting one on one with a peer in the hallway. Britta's singing in choir is very quiet, and she utilizes an extremely small space in her mouth when singing. She has not participated in any extracurricular musical activities or auditioned for any solos. Britta does not raise her hand to answer questions and avoids eye contact with the teacher, but if she is called on, she usually knows the correct answer.

Naw is also a freshman in the non-auditioned treble choir. She is usually quiet and focused during rehearsal but interacts with her peers and teacher before and after class. Naw was extremely interactive and vocal during a recent parent teacher



conference for choir with her mom. Naw is not the strongest voice in her section, but her voice can be heard when I walk past her during rehearsal. She utilizes open space while singing. Naw has also not participated in any extracurricular musical activities or auditioned for any solos. She participates in class by raising her hand and usually gives the correct answer. She makes eye contact with the teacher throughout the rehearsal.

Paige is a senior in her second year of the auditioned treble choir. She was in the non-auditioned treble choir her freshman and sophomore year. Though Paige is also soft spoken, she regularly interacts with her peers and the teacher. Paige appears comfortable with the people who stand next to her in the choral rehearsal, as they frequently interact. Like Naw, Paige is not the strongest voice in her section, but she uses excellent technique and contributes well to her section's overall sound. Paige has also not participated in any extracurricular musical activities or auditioned for any solos. Paige participates in class by raising her hand and has shared answers about her own life and personal struggles in front of the class. Paige makes eye contact with the teacher and shares smiles with her while performing.

Britney is a senior in her second year of the top auditioned mixed choir. Britney was in the auditioned treble choir as a sophomore and the non-auditioned treble choir as a freshman. Britney has a clear group of friends in choir with whom she regularly interacts. She usually walks in the classroom already interacting with three or four peers and immediately interacts with the teachers. Britney is extremely focused during rehearsal. She does not regularly interact with those around her in her section, but she does participate in class discussions and volunteers answers to questions. Britney is one of the stronger voices in her section, using excellent technique as well. She has

participated in musicals and auditioned for and gotten solos. If Britney has a question, she does not hesitate to ask it.

### ***Britta***

As a freshman in the non-auditioned treble choir, Britta gave the impression of being shy and withdrawn. She answered each interview question but did not elaborate with most answers. Britta was first asked to describe her core group of friends, say how long they've known each other, and whether they share common interests:

Fun, funny, nice, confident, reliable, helpful. I've known one of them since 7th grade, one of them since 5th grade, one since 6th grade, one from elementary school, and two of them I met this year. We all share different kinds of things. I have some things in common with two of them and other things in common with one of them.

Britta's core group of friends has expanded over the years, keeping some from elementary school and gaining new ones as a freshman in high school. These friends do not all hold one common interest, but instead they represent various interests that portions of the group agree on. Britta says a fear of not having something in common is what she considers the hardest part of making new friends: "I think that we don't have something in common, but once we talk, then we do. There's always something".

When asked if her friends influence the electives that Britta signs up to take at school, she said, "It doesn't matter. We all say them after we're done making the schedules and then somehow some of us end up with the same class, but we don't even know beforehand". Since Britta's group of friends do not all share the exact same core interest, they do not sign up for the same electives but sometimes end up in classes together.

Britta did not have a clear answer regarding the most recent time she compared herself to someone else at school: "Possibly last week, maybe. I think it was something based off of what someone was saying. I remember it was someone in my grade, but otherwise I don't remember who". She more clearly recalled comparing herself to people in choir: "Maybe this weekend. With choir lists coming out". The choir lists for the next school year had just been posted following auditions. Each choir student auditions and a treble singer either stays in the non-auditioned treble choir or is moved into the auditioned treble or auditioned mixed choirs. Britta compared herself to others who were on a different choir list.

Britta was asked questions about the people in her choir. First, she was asked what actions lead her to believe people in the choir are friendly: "They're nice and all that. They're really friendly. I don't think any of them are rude and all so that's good. None of them have been really mean to anyone. I've seen them interact and be good". When asked what behaviors make her think people are not friendly, Britta said "none". When asked how well she knows the people she stands by in choir and how this impacts her, she said: "I feel like sometimes we talk but the other people I stand by sometimes we talk but not every single day. I don't think it's had an influence". Britta's participation in choir is not impacted by her relationship with those around her as the level of social interaction varies.

### **Summary.**

Britta has a solid core group of friends that includes people she has known from elementary school as well as people she met more recently. Though they do not all share the same common interest, they share some things in smaller groups. Britta did

not clearly recall comparing herself to someone else at school but compared herself to other choir singers because of the choir lists recently posted. Britta felt like people in her choir were friendly and though she does not talk to the people around her every day, she did not feel influenced in her participation in choir by the level of interactions with her peers.

### **Naw**

Naw is also a freshman in the non-auditioned treble choir. She described one main friend when asked about her core group of friends and their common interests:

My best friend since 4th grade. Honestly, we're pretty different in some ways but pretty similar in some. Our personalities are similar but other interests are not as much. She tried choir in middle school and didn't like it versus me.

Like Britta, Naw has remained friends with someone since elementary school, and they do not share all the same interests. Naw said their personalities are much more similar than their interests are. She said her friend only affects what electives she takes in certain situations: "Certain interests of ours like criminal justice we're taking the same class. Other things like I'll always take choir even though she never will. So, it kind of depends". Naw's friendship did not affect her willingness to take choir, but it did impact the other classes she signed up for.

When asked what the hardest part about making friends is, Naw said: "I don't like just going up to people and being like 'Hi, nice to meet you'. I am slow opening up at first but then completely open up once I know I can trust someone". Naw withholds her full personality until she feels like she can trust the person.

Contrary to Britta, Naw had very distinct memories of comparing herself to someone else at school: "All the time, especially with test scores in class". Naw

compared herself to others academically and she also recalled recently comparing herself to others in choir: “Today. At this point we know the music well, so it’s more the little stuff of I think I’m not singing this right, or I should breathe there not there”. Naw compared her performance in rehearsal to her peers which led her to second guess her performance.

Naw shared similar feelings to Britta in that people in her choir exhibit friendly behavior: “I’ve always liked choir because you can make a mistake and laugh about it later and no one judges you for it”. Unlike Britta, Naw did feel like there are actions that make her choir peers unfriendly: “Some people act differently in class as I see as disrespectful to the rest of the choir around them. I’ve seen people roll their eyes because they don’t like what’s happening”. Naw acknowledged both friendly and unfriendly behavior regularly happened in her choir. She echoed her sentiments on needing to trust people when asked how well she knows the people she stands by in choir and how this influenced her singing:

Stephanie and I met in 5th grade, and we were pretty good friends but then went to different schools and didn’t stay in touch. This is the class we have together now, so that’s really cool. (Kailey) and I went to Lake Denoon together, and we were pretty good friends for a year. Honestly, other people around me, I don’t know until I’m around. I am more comfortable when I know the people.

Naw knows some people in her choir but does not know others. When the seating chart was changed each quarter, she was able to get to know new people, but she still felt most comfortable with people she already knew.

### **Summary.**

Naw’s main friendship has been the same since elementary school. Like Britta, Naw does not share all the same common interests with her friend, but they do end up

taking some classes together. Naw's best friend is not interested in choir, but this does not affect Naw's decision to take it. Naw only shows her true personality after getting to know someone and feels like she can trust them. Naw compares herself to other students constantly, especially academically, but also in choir, and this negatively affects how she views her own singing. Naw sees both positive and negative behaviors from the other people in her choir but did not describe any influence on her singing from those around her.

### ***Paige***

Paige is a senior in the auditioned treble ensemble. Like Britta and Naw, Paige has kept some friendships since elementary school: "The majority of my friends are not in high school anymore, but we are friends to this day. We've been in the same friend group since elementary". Unlike Naw and Britta, Paige said her core group of friends share common interests: "We all work together and all like most of the arts. I'm more into music and jewelry than them, but one common thing we all like is making jewelry".

Paige shared Naw's perspective on taking certain elective classes; her friends do not take choir, but this does not affect her decision to take it:

I've stuck with choir since I've been doing it since middle school. I still enjoy it as much as I did then even though my friends wanted to do more core classes like other English electives. I decided to stick with more arts.

Though Paige shares common interests with her core group of friends, she did not let this affect the electives for which she registered in high school.

Paige provided insight into what she values from her friendships when asked what the hardest part is about making new friends:

Understanding personal lives and what you've gone through already in life. It's hard for people to understand your coping mechanisms or understand how

different other people's upbringings were. Where people say "I get it. I understand" it's like "what do you mean by that?". Sometimes they compare divorce to not having a parent around period. It's hard to relate financially and emotionally.

Paige's father left her family, and she does not see him regularly. Because of this and other trauma that she has experienced, Paige finds it hard for others to fully empathize with and understand her.

Like Naw, Paige talked about academics when asked how often she compares herself to someone else at school:

I do it often, but it's more in the sense of academic wise not personality. A lot of people in this school and that I surround myself with are highly academic. I meet the standards, but I know I could do better. At certain points in my life, I don't have the opportunity to. It's complicated but I do compare myself to some people.

Paige may be connecting the trauma and financial struggles of her family to the opportunities that other students have allowing them to succeed academically. While some students are able to afford regular preparation classes or tutoring for high stakes assessments such as the ACT, Paige may not have the same opportunities to boost her potential. She also felt like she could do better than she currently is, so she compared herself to those who are achieving more academically.

Paige said she mainly compared herself to other choir singers when there are solo auditions:

Mainly when there's solo parts and I can hear people's really large range where they can go super high and some low. I'm not necessarily jealous, but it's hard to understand how your voice is made the way it is compared to somebody else's. It could take practice to get easier singing higher notes but where I'm at right now, I'm very comfortable with what I sing.

Paige's comparison focused on range. She sings Alto 2, so she may feel like her higher range is more limited than other voices that she hears auditioning. Paige also

recognized that she could improve her range through practice but appreciated where her voice sits.

Paige also spoke about solo auditions when asked for actions that make her think the other people in choir are friendly: “The fact that when somebody auditions, everyone actually listens and doesn’t give nasty looks. When someone’s doing really well, people’s eyes are wide open and mouth the word ‘wow’. It shows more kindness”. Like Britta and Naw, Paige believed the people in her choir exhibit kindness toward one another. When asked what actions make her think people in choir are not friendly, she said:

When we disperse more and talk among ourselves, you realize how divided everyone is and how people perceive you just by looks. They don’t get to know you. When people talk in the middle of class, and you look at them, but they just ignore that. Their conversation is more important than your singing.

Paige was bothered, like Naw, when some students acted disrespectfully toward the rest of the class and teacher, being more concerned with themselves versus the success of the group. Paige also described social cliques within the choir, which are the most apparent when students are not in their assigned seats. She echoed her response regarding the challenges of making friends when she said that students in choir judge her by her looks rather than getting to know her.

Paige described positive relationships with those who sit near her in choir and a positive effect on her singing:

I know the person pretty well on one side of me. The other side [soprano] I don’t know well, but a lot of the alto 2’s I do know and get along with. I am able to relate to many things with them besides singing low. It affects me in a positive way because I know they’re not going to judge me. If my voice cracks, they laugh with me, not at me. When there’s a super high note, they all look at me and wait.



Similar to Naw's feelings on gaining comfort from getting to know people, Paige said knowing the people around her in choir frees her from fear of judgment. This affects her singing in a positive way because it alleviates fear of a voice crack or musical mistake. Paige also enjoyed getting to know the singers around her as a whole, rather than just in a way related to choir.

### **Summary.**

Paige has had a core group of friends since elementary school like Britta and Naw. Her core group has some common interests, but she does not allow this to influence the electives that she signs up for in high school. The hardest part about making new friends for Paige is building trust with people who may not understand her personal trauma. Like Naw, Paige compared herself academically to other students, identifying fewer opportunities in her academics compared to other students. Paige made comparisons between her range and other singers in choir when they audition for solos even though she felt like people in her choir are kind because they react positively to solo auditions. In contrast, she felt like there are negative actions like social cliques and disrespect shown through side conversations in rehearsals while others are singing. Overall, Paige felt comfortable with the singers around her, and this positively affected the way she sang in rehearsal.

### ***Britney***

Britney is a senior in her second year in the top auditioned mixed choir. Britney was the only student of this group of four students to say her core friendship group started in high school. She also expressed less certainty when identifying her core group:

It is changing right now, so I don't quite know how to answer. It is a group of six people, and we met freshmen year-ish around November. I also met them through music stuff coincidentally. Yes music [common interest] and people that are kind of wacky and weird but not really. We can function as normal human beings but not all the time.

Britney's core group of friends shared a common interest in music and shared similar personalities. While she felt like her friendships were changing, she still identified six people with whom she had been close for the last four years. Like Naw, Britney said her core group of friends does not affect the electives she takes, but this year they did end up in an elective all together:

I sign up for classes more so based on class structure. I take core classes and then usually language, choir, and study hall. This year actually affected me a little because I knew a couple of friends wanted to do creative writing, so I took that with them.

Like Naw and Paige, Britney knew she was going to take choir, and in her case language and study hall as well, each year, so her friendships did not affect these electives. However, since a student has more elective options as a senior, her friends did impact the English elective that she took.

Britney expressed a fear of other people's opinions when she described the hardest part about making new friends:

Interacting with a lot of people, after the fact I've learned people's opinions from interactions I thought were going great but really didn't. Part of me tries not to worry, but I'll have a conversation and then get in my car to go home, and I'm worried they're going to hold it against me. Why is that still your image of me? It's hard to make myself vulnerable to that stuff.

Britney had negative past experiences where someone perceived an interaction with her differently than she did. She fears it will happen again, which makes her doubt her conversations and interactions with peers. She may be alluding to a previous way that

she acted, perhaps in early high school or middle school, when she said, “why is that still your image of me?”.

When asked about the last time she compared herself to someone else at school, Britney responded quite similarly to Naw and Paige: “Probably freaking today. It happens every day, and I wish it didn’t”. Like Naw, Britney compared herself with others daily. One such comparison centered on the musical production, in which she had a lead role:

Especially with the musical being a thing. There’s a lot of natural comparison with who does what role and that thing. You audition for things and there will be comparisons. People are supposedly selected on talent or merit. There’s also a lot of nervousness with understudies and comparison with female leads: who knows better or who knows their stuff.

This year each lead role had an understudy who got to record one scene and one song from the show. This meant that understudies were given small portions of rehearsal time to rehearse the scene or song with the cast. Britney felt like this increased the level of comparison particularly amongst the female leads.

Like Paige, Britney talked about comparing herself to other choir singers during solo auditions: “My comparison was very simple, not even with malice when we did the solo thing. I just thought, ‘hmm I wonder how she sang it versus I sang it’. It was not negative”. Unlike Paige, Britney did not describe feeling negatively about her voice because of how other people sounded in auditions, but she still compared herself to others.

Britney described actions that made her feel like people in her choir were friendly: “Little gestures, eye contact” with people who were not sitting next to her, “and little murmurs with people around you”. Britney may feel more comfortable interacting

with people who do not sit next to her, as she described her relationships with those who sit around her negatively: “I know people pretty well. I don’t know if there’s a person I couldn’t name, but there’s a difference between knowing and liking someone. People around me have influenced me negatively”. She expanded on this when asked what actions make her feel like people in her choir are not friendly:

People bad talking other people or me to my face. People making racist enabling comments behind me or calling me a f—ing b—, being judgmental. When you can sense people around you doing this [being judgmental]. People’s negative attitude toward choir. More than half the people around me aren’t actively doing it [fully participating] or ready [for rehearsal].

Britney has had extremely negative interactions and abusive comments made toward her during choir. She did not report any of this happening to her choir teachers before this interview. She also described some negative attitudes that are like those which Naw and Paige witnessed. All three, from three different choirs, feel like there are some students in choir who do not fully participate or who have a negative attitude.

### **Summary.**

Britney was the only subject interviewed whose core group of friends started in high school. Her core group of friends shared common interests, but this only affected her elective choices as a senior. Britney’s fear of being misperceived by her peers is the biggest challenge to her making new friends. Like Naw, Britney compared herself to someone else at school every day. She compared herself to other singers both in the extra-curricular musical production and in choir during solo auditions. Britney has experienced extremely negative interactions with the people who sit around her in choir and felt like some people in choir were disrespectful and had negative attitudes.

## **Conclusion**

Britta, Naw, Paige, and Britney brought different perspectives to social interactions in and outside of choir. Britta, Naw, and Paige have all had some core friendships since elementary school, while Britney's core friendships began in high school. They had similar thoughts that their friendships have not influenced their academic electives, except for Naw and Britney who recently signing up for a common class with friends.

Naw, Paige, and Britney all said they compared themselves to other high school students frequently. All four subjects compared themselves to other singers in choir, with some having a negative effect on their self-confidence in singing and some not. The theme of comparison was also described from subjects in earlier areas of focus: singing confidence and overall self-confidence.

All four subjects described positive actions from people in their choir that make them seem friendly. Britta did not identify any actions from people in her choir that made them seem unfriendly, but Naw, Paige, and Britney all identified behaviors that they viewed as disrespectful and negative. Britta felt like she was not affected by how well she knows the people she sits by in choir. Naw felt like she needed to get to know people and build trust to feel comfortable with those who she sits by in choir. Paige is positively influenced by those who sit by her because she feels less fear of judgment. The need to know people to trust them echoes thoughts from subjects in the earlier areas of voice change and general self-confidence. Britney was negatively influenced by those who sat by her but did not describe a negative effect on her singing.

The next chapter will identify common themes across all four subgroups of interviews. Pairing this with information from previous studies as well as results from the quantitative survey, conclusions will be drawn regarding what influences the adolescent treble singer to hold back their voice in the choral rehearsal.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### Analysis

The professional question that guided this study was “what causes the treble singer to hold back their volume/tone during a choral rehearsal?”. The literature review outlined influences that other studies suggest are impactful to adolescent treble singers. From these broader influences, four areas of focus were selected for this study: singing confidence, voice change, self-confidence, and social influence. The quantitative survey results found that self-confidence was a highly problematic area for many students. Singing confidence was also a problematic area of focus but mostly for younger students in the non-auditioned treble or auditioned treble choirs. Voice change and social influence had the fewest responses that indicated them as problematic areas of focus. Although there were differences in the level of severity of problems indicated per focus area, most areas had statements to which 25% or more of survey respondents strongly agreed/disagreed.

Triangulation of the results from the quantitative survey and the qualitative interviews uncovered themes across the four focus areas. Despite the limitations of asking each subgroup a different set of questions, common themes emerged regarding elements that impact their performance in school and choir: 1) Comparison to peers; 2) Fear of judgment by peers/teacher; 3) A need to build relationships with peers/teacher; and 4) Low self-perception and high self-criticism.

#### **Comparison to Peers**

Students interviewed in three out of the four focus areas, totaling eight out of the sixteen students, discussed comparison to others as a common occurrence. This

echoed previous research that found that social comparison is high among adolescents and can be driven by feelings of low self-confidence (Lancaster, 2018; Orton and Pitts, 2019; Parker, 2018; Schumann, 2014). Students discussed both academic comparison and vocal comparison, some saying that these occurred on a daily basis. Some, such as Charlie, described feeling positive about their academic or vocal performance until they compared themselves to others. Students also described a higher amount of academic comparison in high school due to the expansive offerings of advanced courses. Comparing themselves to students in a higher-level course made them feel intellectually inferior.

In the initial survey, statements regarding comparison revealed a high number of overall responses including: “I don’t think about other people’s singing compared to mine” at 38.71% strongly disagree and “I often compare my singing to those around me” at 25.81% strongly agree. In the interviews, students described other singers being better than them because of bigger ranges, different tone, stronger sight-reading skills, and higher confidence. These students represented all grades and all choirs.

Orton and Pitts (2019) and Schumann (2014) found that students compared themselves to others in choir and, for some, this discouraged them or lowered their self-perception of their abilities. Four students openly described other singers as better than themselves and said they wished their voices were more like others. Previous research indicates that this could discourage them and therefore lower their interest in participating (Orton and Pitts, 2019; Schumann, 2014).

The adolescent treble singer is driven to comparisons due to low self-confidence (Lancaster, 2018). Comparing themselves to their peers may make these students feel



inferior intellectually, socially, and/or musically. This feeling can discourage them and lower their perception of their own abilities, which will lower their participation in choir.

### **Fear of Judgment by Peers/Teacher**

Twelve out of the sixteen students interviewed spanning all four categories described a fear of judgment and the intentional decision to perform a certain way based on this fear. Previous research indicated that adolescent girls crave validation as they try to find their identity (Di Blasi et al., 2018; Schumann, 2014; Sweet, 2016b) and feel like they are constantly being evaluated by others (Gren-Landell, et al., 2009; Woolfolk, 2019). Students interviewed for this study described putting up a front or feeling like they needed to act like a different person at school to avoid judgment and be accepted by their peers.

Fear of judgment has a direct impact on the way adolescent girls perform in general academics as well as in the choir classroom. Cohen-Sandler (2005), Gren-Landell et al. (2009), and Orenstein (2000) found correlations between fear of judgment and being less assertive, therefore less likely to participate in school. Two statements regarding participation in school and assertiveness saw high results in the initial survey: “I don’t argue with my teachers when I think I’m right” had 32.81% strongly agree and “I would be embarrassed if I gave a wrong answer in class” had 29.69% strongly agree. The counterstatements confirmed these feelings with “I argue with my teachers when I think I’m right” having 46.88% strongly disagree, and “It wouldn’t embarrass me if I gave a wrong answer in class” having 26.56% strongly disagree.

Interview responses also described extreme levels of embarrassment at giving a wrong answer in class with some students saying it would affect them for the rest of the

day or prevent them from participating in the future. Ella, Adelaide, Aria, and Rachel described a fear of others, including the teacher, judging their level of intelligence if they gave a wrong answer in class. This leads to an emotional response when it happens and likely lowers their participation. Cohen-Sandler (2005) and Parker (2018) found that a priority to fit in and avoid drawing attention to themselves may lower the adolescent treble students' willingness to participate in school. Adelaide described being so fearful of judgment that she would not ask for basic supplies needed to be successful in class. A broader fear of participation was found in the survey statement: "I don't worry about saying the wrong thing", of which 37.50% strongly disagreed. This implies a concern over judgment in any setting, not just an academic one.

In the choral classroom, previous studies found that treble students participated in risk assessment, which may cause them to hold back their voice based on the setting (Orton and Pitts, 2019; Schumann, 2014; Sweet, 2015; Sweet, 2018). The initial survey found a solid response (25.40%) of "strongly agree" to the statement: "I sing much differently by myself than around others". Students across the four subgroups of interviews described only feeling comfortable singing if their individual voice could not be separated from the group. Megan, Kylie and Tiana all described points in rehearsal where they sang more quietly based on the size of the group they were singing in, the volume others were using, or their familiarity with the music. The reason for singing more quietly in all three scenarios was consistently a fear of being identified individually and somehow found lacking.

Some students described a fear of hurting the overall choir, which echoed the research by Sweet (2018) who connected this fear to passivity in the choral rehearsal.

Kylie, Rachel and Tiana described a fear of others judging their musical ability if they were to make a mistake or ask a question in choir. Tiana said she hated being in the back row of the choir because other people could hear her, implying that they would judge her. Megan went so far as to say that she would rather sing an incorrect note to match others, even knowing it is incorrect, than have her voice be heard because she is singing something different from those around her. Prasad called herself a “scaredy cat” out of fear of others judging her voice. She perceived judgment from others because her voice is low and deep, which are qualities in her voice that she does not find positive.

A fear of judgment is prevalent in adolescent treble students and impacts their performance in academics including choir. Students may choose to not participate to a full level out of fear of others judging their intelligence and/or musical ability. They also fear hurting the overall choir and being identified individually for critique.

### **A Need to Build Relationships with Peers/Teacher**

Interviewed students in all four categories described a need to get to know someone to feel comfortable with them, which impacts their ability to act like their true selves and perform in classes. The need to build a relationship applied to both peers and the teacher, and echoed previous research by Betts (2017), Parker (2014, 2018), and Vancil (1985). Seven out of sixteen students, ranging across grades and choirs, had comments that related to this theme.

Naw, Aria, Ella, and Adelaide described being slow to open up to people, which was also found in the literature. Parker (2018) found that the more the students became comfortable with one another, the more they showed their personality. Naw said that she needed to know she could trust someone before she acted like her true self, and

Ella said she could only let her guard down when she was with her best friend or family (known relationships). Both responses imply that these students withhold their true personality until they have built a relationship.

Adelaide and Aria said that their level of nervousness in a social situation is dependent on the people with whom they are gathered. Adelaide said she can be quite loud with her group of friends but does not like meeting new people. Aria said she struggles in new social situations but is an extrovert in a group where she knows people better. Parker (2018) saw a trend of self-confidence being increased with a longer participation in a social group. The interview responses corroborated that self-confidence is higher when the social group is more known, which leads to freer social behavior.

Parker (2014) connected students getting to know each other to higher self-confidence, which made them have a stronger sense of contributing to the group. Rachel described her participation in classes changing based on her familiarity with peers and the teacher. Aria said that she was hesitant to participate in Chorale [auditioned mixed choir] in the first week of school, but once she got to know everyone, she was able to open up. Gaining comfort with the relationships of peers and teachers impacts the adolescent treble student's willingness to participate in classes.

Although this theme emerged in interviews, the survey results regarding this idea were relatively low. Most students agreed that they are comfortable singing with the people around them in choir. Only 4.84% strongly disagreed with the statement "I am comfortable singing with the people around me in choir". Another statement regarding peer relationships was "I have friends in choir" to which only 3.23% strongly disagreed.

One possible reason for a discrepancy in survey results compared to the interviews is the emphasis that we put on building relationships and getting to know one another in our choir program. Through choir retreats, icebreakers, and group builders, we try to get students to talk to one another and build comfort. The survey was given in December after two concert cycles and just prior to the half-way point in the school year. It may have yielded different results if it were given at the start of the school year before intentional group building and the natural cohesion which develops from successful concert performances.

Adolescent treble students gain self-confidence and are able to contribute more strongly to the group as they strengthen relationships with their peers and teacher. They also feel like they can show their true personalities as they gain comfort with these social interactions. The survey results did not show high numbers on the extremes of answer choices, but this could have been attributed to the time of year it was given. Since members of the choir change on a yearly basis, building relationships is an important element to keep in mind at the start of each school year.

### **Low Self-Perception with High Self-Criticism**

Ten out of the sixteen students interviewed expressed a negative view of some aspects of their singing and/or a desire to increase their confidence level. These students represent a range of ages, vocal experience, and musical skill. Even the students in the top auditioned choir expressed a negative view of certain aspects of their voices. Students also said they self-evaluated on a frequent basis. The responses from all ten students implied that they are highly self-critical. Previous studies found that adolescent girls are highly critical of themselves and that this can lead to self-

ensorship and a negative belief in musical ability (Greenberg-Lake, 1994; Orenstein, 2000; Ruiz-Montero et al., 2020; Schumann, 2014; Sweet, 2018; Vancil, 1985).

Social pressure and an obsession with being perfect can lead adolescent girls to be self-critical (Ruiz-Montero et al., 2020). The initial survey results showed this with 17.46% strongly agreeing with the statement: “Sometimes I don’t like myself that much” and 15.63% strongly agreeing with “I want to change a lot about myself”. The results were even higher for the statements: “I worry people will be angry with me” at 28.13% strongly agree and “I frequently feel nervous” at 31.25% strongly agree. These statements echo the findings of the 1994 American Association of University Women’s (AAUW) nationwide poll *Shortchanging Girls, Shortchanging America*, where adolescence in girls was distinctly marked by a loss of confidence in self and ability (Greenberg-Lake, 1994).

Interview responses from students across grade levels and choirs reflected high self-criticism and an effect on confidence in self and ability. Ella and Adelaide talked about needing to act like a different person because of their focus on the approval of others. Adelaide said she can only let her guard down if she is not physically by people she “should be impressing”. Megan described being self-critical as a necessary step in her day. When her day goes poorly, Megan feels like she needs to be self-critical and engage in negative self-talk. This criticism and negative self-talk likely drive a feeling of low ability.

Sweet (2015, 2018) and Schumann (2014) connected high levels of self-criticism with a negative belief in singing ability. This negative belief is often magnified by self-criticism and does not accurately reflect the student’s musical ability. Legette (1998)

found that students placed more importance on ability rather than effort regarding their belief about success and failures in music. The initial survey reiterated this research with 41.27% of students strongly agreeing with the statement: “Some people are naturally more talented than me”. The term “talent” implies ability rather than effort. The statement “Other people sing a lot better than me” had 24.19% strongly agree. This statement implies self-criticizing as students view their own vocal skills as weaker than others. Students also expressed a desire to grow their voice when 31.75% strongly agreed to “I wish my singing range was bigger”. Statements about having a different singing tone as well as “I wish my singing voice was different” saw 11.11% of students strongly agree.

In the interviews, two students in the top auditioned choir spoke about feeling that they had lower musical abilities, even though their choir placement indicated otherwise. Rachel discussed feeling like she was “the only one with that problem”, when she has a question in choir. It prevented her from advocating for help, which reduced her ability to fully participate. Tiana, who is also in the top auditioned choir, described hating her voice and wishing she could “actually sing”. Tiana said she self-evaluates her singing after solo performances at solo and ensemble festivals and is highly self-critical.

Kiara who is a freshman in the non-auditioned treble choir, described an auto-response of self-criticizing when she cannot hear herself in rehearsal. Rather than assuming she is doing well, Kiara questions her musical ability and performance. Two students, Prasad and Paige, who sing alto in choir described being self-critical of their ranges and wanting to be able to sing higher. Prasad described herself as highly self-conscious of her singing and expressed a desire to sound more like a soprano,

while Paige said she appreciates her ability to sing low but wondered why some people's voices can go higher and have a wider range than hers. Prasad's high level of self-criticism may lead to an inaccurate perception of musical ability. She described herself as a terrible sight-reader, yet she is in an auditioned choir, which means she performed the audition sight-reading with proficiency. She also described feeling extremely embarrassed at a rehearsal for the musical where she switched to head voice instead of belting. Though this was a necessary vocal decision for her, she felt this indicated she had less musical ability because she was not able to belt as fully as she perceived those around her were able to do. Though I view both Prasad and Paige as having positive vocal qualities and strong musical ability, their negative view of their voices and self-criticism leads to an inaccurate and lower personal view of their musical ability.

Adelaide described how social media can influence her self-perception of singing and lead to self-criticizing. She has an Instagram account where she uploads videos of herself singing and questions follower's intentions. The lack of face-to-face interaction on social media may heighten her low perception of her singing rather than give her needed validation (Schumann, 2014).

A high level of self-criticizing was seen in the survey responses as well as the interviews. Self-criticism causes adolescent treble singers to have a low self-perception and a lower, often inaccurate, view of their musical ability. This impacts their willingness to participate and their level of performance in choir.



## **Summary**

Data for this study was collected in a quantitative survey and qualitative interviews. Students who identified one of the four focus areas derived from the literature in the survey as problematic were asked a set of questions in a structured interview. The set of questions varied by subgroups based on the four focus areas. Themes emerged across the four subgroups of interviews that echoed previous research and were also seen in the survey results. These themes answered the professional question “what causes the treble singer to hold back their volume/tone during a choral rehearsal?” with four possibilities: 1) Comparison to peers; 2) Fear of judgment by peers/teacher; 3) A need to build relationships with peers/teacher; and 4) Low self-perception and high self-criticism. The final chapter will detail implications for the choral classroom and recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER NINE

### Implications and Recommendations

In 1994, the American Association of University Women found that adolescence in girls was distinctly marked by a loss of confidence in self and ability, high levels of self-criticizing, and a sense of personal inadequacy (Greenberg-Lake, 1994). Eighteen years later, this mixed methods research study yielded similar results regarding adolescent treble singers. As educators, we have not yet found the solutions to countering the low self-confidence, fear of judgment, or self-criticism in our adolescent female students that negatively affects their performance in academics and choir, or, if we have, we have not successfully implemented them.

Low self-confidence heightens the drive to compare oneself with others (Lancaster, 2018). Simply telling students to stop comparing themselves to others is not enough, but there are strategies that can ease this common occurrence. One strategy would be teaching students more about the individual qualities of the treble singing voice and sharing examples of treble performers. Prasad described constantly comparing her alto voice and feeling inferior to the soprano voice. Hearing examples of excellent alto singers both in choirs and as individual soloists could alleviate these feelings and make her more appreciative of her vocal qualities. Sieck (2017) described the connection between what and how we are taught to what we perceive as aesthetically beautiful:

We are taught what to describe as beautiful, and what to describe as ugly; we are taught what kinds of choral music sound more beautiful and which kinds do not...If we grew up listening to Anonymous 4, Elektra, Vox Femina, and other professional women's choirs, we might have a different take on the relative aesthetic value of a treble ensemble. (p. 60)

While I have used recordings of excellent treble choirs as examples, I have not taken time to share recordings of soloists and the various vocal qualities that they possess. Providing examples of treble singers will open up the student's awareness to the different qualities of each voice type. Teaching students that their voices are individual instruments with individual qualities will hopefully limit comparison, lowering the student's negative self-perception of musical ability and help them feel there is a place for their voice in the ensemble.

Low self-perception and high self-criticism are so highly ingrained in the adolescent treble singer that even the treble singers in our top auditioned ensembles may experience them regularly. Therefore, every student in every choir needs to be regularly encouraged and given constructive ways to improve. The survey statement "negative feedback motivates me to do better" had 14.52% of respondents strongly disagree. Insecure adolescent girls are hypersensitive to potential ridicule (Cohen-Sandler, 2005), so when criticism is given, it must be carefully done to be constructive, and to show empathy and care. Whenever a student auditions for a choir, solo, or musical role, a word of encouragement or one-on-one discussion on how to grow for a future audition may go a long way in trying to counter their habitual self-criticism. Regular positive feedback on successes and growth, no matter how small, will have an impact over time as self-perception becomes more positive and confidence is gained.

Adolescent treble students must also be taught how to engage in positive self-talk. Gren-Landell et al. (2009) found that social phobia and psychological distress began as early as age 11 in girls, so teaching positive self-talk must begin at the middle school level. Education courses should address the psychological distress that female

students face and ways to appropriately guide them through this time. Teachers should also model ways to react to vocal errors, both those in and out of the singer's control, positively rather than negatively to support a growth mindset and encourage positive self-talk. In the treble ensembles that I teach, this comfort can be seen in how students react to voice cracks during rehearsal, which are likely out of their control as they are an element of the adolescent treble voice change. The students interviewed from these ensembles expressed being able to laugh it off with their peers. Some students in the mixed ensemble, which is taught by my male counterpart, expressed a fear of criticism when their voice cracks. Many possible explanations could lead to this difference, but the most important takeaway is that students in all ensembles, no matter the voicing or level of musical skill, need to be taught that vocal errors are allowed and sometimes out of our control. By modeling that perfection is not attainable, teachers may alleviate the concern to be perfect, which is a prominent concern in adolescent girls (Lancaster, 2018).

Building relationships within the choir is imperative to adolescent treble singers participating fully within the ensemble. The research studies by Betts (2017), Parker (2014, 2018), and Vancil (1985) detailed similar findings to the ones in this study. When students gain trust through building a relationship with their teacher and peers, they are more willing to participate to a full level. The start of the year is the most important time for this as choirs tend to change members annually. Taking a small portion of each rehearsal to have students talk with the people around them may yield excellent results in their overall performance. Planning a start of the year retreat, like we have in our program, can also break down walls and increase social interactions. Building

relationships will lower the individual student risk assessment, preventing a student from holding back in their performances.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Though this study provided important insight into the experience of the adolescent treble singer, modifications to the process or structure may have provided a broader picture, which is an opportunity for future research. Replicating this study with a larger number of participants could provide clearer trends, particularly with the questions in each of the four focus areas on the survey. Inclusion of middle school students could also provide further insight into the pre-menarcheal stage of the treble voice change. Another modification would be using the survey to find the interview subgroups, then asking the subgroups the same set of questions, rather than varying the structured interview questions according to each focus area. This may provide a clearer picture of solutions to the known struggles that adolescent treble singers experience. In this scenario, students may identify similar solutions across categories or eliminate possible strategies based on their insight.

Research regarding the impact of social media on the adolescent treble singer would also be beneficial. Some ideas for questions to address include: 1) to what degree is social media increasing self-criticism in adolescent females? 2) how can we as educators counter this? And 3) can social media be used in a positive way for adolescent students?

### **Summary**

The adolescent treble singers in our choirs are negatively affected by low self-confidence, comparison to peers, a fear of judgment, and self-criticism. In addition to

teaching these students music and vocal skills, we have the opportunity to teach them positive self-talk, appreciation for all vocal qualities, and coping mechanisms to understand the normal tendency to make mistakes and not seek perfection. These lifelong skills can transfer into all areas of the lives of young females, positively impacting their self-confidence and self-perception, which will in turn lead to higher levels of participation and assertiveness in all environments including the choir classroom.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Survey Statements**

#### **Self-Confidence**

I am happy the way I am.  
I hesitate to participate in class.  
I like the person that I am. I don't worry about pleasing others.  
I want to change a lot about myself.  
I keep my feelings to myself.  
I feel comfortable at school.  
I am shy.  
I like trying new things.  
I frequently feel nervous.  
I think people are happy with me.  
I am afraid to ask for what I want.  
I don't worry about saying the wrong thing.  
I hide my true feelings.  
I am not afraid to tell others what I think.  
I have trouble talking about my feelings.  
I can be successful.  
I don't raise my hand when I know the answer.  
I am embarrassed / not proud of the work I do.  
If I work hard, I believe I can achieve my goals.  
I wish I were somebody else.  
I like most things about myself.  
I'm not good at a lot of things.  
I argue with my teachers when I think I'm right.  
I raise my hand when I know the answer.  
I would be embarrassed if I gave a wrong answer in class.  
I like the way I look.  
I'm good at a lot of things.  
Sometimes I don't like myself that much.  
Other people might wish to be more like me.  
Even if I work hard, I don't think I can reach my goals.  
I don't argue with my teachers when I think I'm right.  
I am proud of the work I do.  
I don't have what it takes to be successful.  
I am open about my feelings.  
I am afraid to tell people what I think.  
I say what I feel.  
It wouldn't embarrass me if I gave a wrong answer in class.  
I wish I looked different.  
I am afraid I will say the wrong thing.  
If I want something, I'm not afraid to ask for it.  
I worry people will be angry with me.  
I am comfortable in my own skin.

I am afraid to try new things.  
I am outgoing.  
I feel nervous at school.  
I tell people how I feel.  
I will do anything for people to like me.  
I like participating in class.

### **Singing Confidence**

I have a good singing voice.  
I sing the same way around others as I do when I am alone.  
I wish my singing voice was different.  
Sometimes I hold back my full singing voice in choir.  
I don't have a good singing voice.  
I enjoy getting feedback on my singing voice.  
My singing voice has nice tone.  
When someone compliments my singing, I am embarrassed.  
Choir has allowed me to open up my voice.  
I can improve my sight reading skills.  
I wish my singing range was bigger.  
Negative feedback motivates me to do better.  
I wish the tone of my singing voice was different.  
My voice won't get better even with work.  
When someone compliments my singing, I am happy.  
I like my singing voice the way it is.  
Choir has not allowed me to open up my voice.  
I am not a leader in choir.  
Negative feedback makes me give up.  
I have a good singing range.  
I don't like getting feedback on my singing voice.  
I can improve my voice by working on it.  
I will never learn how to sight read.  
I am a leader in choir.  
I sing much differently by myself than around others.  
I use my full singing voice regularly in choir.

### **Voice Change**

I like to sing low and high.  
I liked my voice when I was younger, but now I don't.  
My voice is breathy/raspy.  
My voice is too big to use in choir.  
Other people have an easier time singing than I do.  
I like the volume that I have.  
I do not want my voice to stand out in choir.  
My singing voice is awkward.  
I only like to sing low OR high.  
I am okay if my voice stands out in choir.  
My singing voice is nice.

My volume is quieter than I would like.  
I have nice tone.  
My voice cracks frequently.  
I feel the same way about my voice now as when I was younger.  
I don't experience frequent voice cracks.

### **Social Influences**

I like meeting new people.  
I am comfortable singing with the people around me in choir.  
When someone compliments me, I feel good about myself.  
It is considered embarrassing to sing out in choir.  
I have friends in choir.  
I sing really well compared to others.  
I am liked by most students at school.  
People in my choir are friendly.  
I will never be as good of a singer as other people.  
Students don't like to talk to me.  
I am happy with my friends.  
I don't think about other people's singing compared to mine.  
I try to be encouraging and friendly to people in choir.  
Students make fun of me.  
Other people sing a lot better than me.  
My classmates are mean to me.  
I am talented at singing.  
I am not comfortable singing with the people around me in choir.  
I find it easy to make friends.  
I often compare my singing to those around me.  
I don't have friends in choir.  
I am not liked by most students at school.  
Students like to talk to me.  
People in my choir are not friendly.  
I get along well with other people.  
I do not have many friends.  
Other students treat me fairly.  
I don't try to be encouraging and friendly to people in choir.  
I find it hard to make friends.  
My classmates are good to me.  
Some people are naturally more talented than me.  
I have a great group of friends.  
I don't get along with most people.  
I want more friends at school.  
Meeting new people scares me.  
It is considered cool to sing out in choir.  
When someone compliments me, they probably don't mean it.

## Appendix B

### Interview Questions

#### Self Confidence

Tell me about a time you felt extremely sure of yourself, either in what you were saying, doing, or feeling.

How often do you feel nervous about speaking up? In class? In social situations?

Do you feel like you act like “yourself” at school or put up a front? If yes, when are you able to let your guard down? Can this happen at school or only somewhere else?

Think about a time when you felt extremely confident in your schoolwork. Please describe it in detail.

Do you have any memories of a time when you gave the wrong answer in class? Please describe the scenario and how you felt.

Why is it embarrassing to give a wrong answer in class? Do you think other people feel the same way? Have you witnessed others make mistakes? Does it seem to bother them?

How much do people’s reactions influence you? Do you need others' approval or are you happy the way you are?

What do you wish your teachers knew about the middle to high school transition when it comes to self-confidence?

Did your confidence increase or decrease as you grew up?

Was there any difference in your confidence in yourself as a singer as you became an adolescent? What happened?

#### Singing Confidence

Why do you sing louder by yourself than in choir?

Does the genre or style of the choir music affect how loudly you sing in class?

Describe your favorite musical artists’ singing voice.

Describe what you consider a strong choir singer or a leader.

Does familiarity with a song affect how loudly you sing? Do you sing quieter at the start of the rehearsal process rather than the end?

What do you like about your singing voice?

What do you not like about your singing voice?

Do you wish your voice was different compared to other singers?

Describe the best part of your range. What are you still working on?

Do you think you would feel more confident singing in choir if you sat by your closest friends?

Does the size of the group you are singing with affect how confident you feel in rehearsal? What difference does it make?

Does where you are standing in the choir make any difference to your confidence? How?

How do other singers in your choir, or elsewhere, affect your confidence?

What happens if you stand next to someone less confident than you are? Or if they are more confident?

Does their confidence level have any effect on your opinion of your own singing? What?

What does someone need to do in order to improve their singing? What about their sight-reading skills?

What would prevent someone from being able to improve their sight-reading skills?

Do you ever try to evaluate your own performance? If so, how might you do this?

What aspects of your performance are most important to you?

Is this more or less important to you than the opinion of other people? Why?

### **Voice Change**

Think of a time when you experienced changes in your singing voice and describe it in as much detail as possible:

Please tell me about your daily singing experiences with your voice, and how do these experiences make you feel?

How do you feel, or have you felt, about your singing voice over the past school year?

Describe any memories you have of your singing voice in elementary school / middle school.

What do you think it means when someone's singing voice is breathy/raspy at this age?

How do you believe people around you react when your voice cracks?

What do you wish your choir teacher(s) knew about your voice specifically?

What do you think is the best part of your singing voice right now?

What is your biggest goal for growing your individual voice?

### **Social Influences**

Describe your core group of friends. How long have you all known each other? Do you share common interests?

How much do your friends influence the electives you take?

What behaviors or actions have led you to believe the people in choir are friendly?

What behaviors or actions have led you to believe the people in choir are not friendly?

How well do you know the people you currently stand by in choir? Has this influenced your singing in a positive or negative way?

When was the last time you compared yourself to someone else in this school? Please describe the situation with as much detail as possible.

When was the last time you compared yourself to someone else in choir? Please describe the situation with as much detail as possible.

What is the hardest part about making friends?

## Appendix C

### Paired Survey Statement Results

#### Singing Confidence

Positive Statement	% Strongly disagree	% Strongly agree	Negative Statement
I like my singing voice the way it is.	6.35%	11.11%	I wish my singing voice was different.
I use my full singing voice regularly in choir.	6.35%	7.94%	Sometimes I hold back my full singing voice in choir.
I have a good singing voice.	1.59%	4.76%	I don't have a good singing voice.
I enjoy getting feedback on my singing voice.	3.17%	1.59%	I don't like getting feedback on my singing voice.
My singing voice has nice tone.	3.17%	11.11%	I wish the tone of my singing voice was different.
When someone compliments my singing, I am happy.	0%	6.35%	When someone compliments my singing, I am embarrassed.
Choir has allowed me to open up my voice.	0%	6.35%	Choir has not allowed me to open up my voice.
I can improve my sight reading skills.	0%	3.17%	I will never learn how to sight read.
<b>I have a good singing range.</b>	<b>3.17%</b>	<b>31.75%</b>	<b>I wish my singing range was bigger.</b>
<b>Negative feedback motivates me to do better.</b>	<b>14.52%</b>	<b>4.84%</b>	<b>Negative feedback makes me give up.</b>
I can improve my voice by working on it.	0%	1.61%	My voice won't get better even with work.
I am a leader in choir.	9.52%	11.29%	I am not a leader in choir.
<b>I sing the same way around</b>	<b>22.22%</b>	<b>25.40%</b>	<b>I sing much differently by</b>



others as I do when I am alone.			myself than around others.
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### Voice Change

Positive Statement	% Strongly disagree	% Strongly agree	Negative Statement
I like to sing low and high.	4.76%	4.76%	I only like to sing low OR high.
<b>I feel the same way about my voice now as when I was younger.</b>	<b>19.05%</b>	<b>4.76%</b>	<b>I liked my voice when I was younger, but now I don't.</b>
I have nice tone.	1.59%	4.76%	My voice is breathy/raspy.
<b>I am okay if my voice stands out in choir.</b>	<b>9.52%</b>	<b>15.87%</b>	<b>I do not want my voice to stand out in choir.</b>
I like the volume that I have.	4.76%	3.17%	My volume is quieter than I would like.
		0%	My voice is too big to use in choir.
My singing voice is nice.	4.76%	6.35%	My singing voice is awkward.
I don't experience frequent voice cracks.	7.94%	3.17%	My voice cracks frequently.
		11.11%	Other people have an easier time singing than I do.

### Self-Confidence

Positive Statement	% Strongly disagree	% Strongly agree	Negative Statement
I am happy the way I am.	4.69%	15.63%	I want to change a lot about myself.
I like participating in class.	6.25%	3.13%	I hesitate to participate in class.

I like the person that I am. I don't worry about pleasing others.	10.94%	1.56%	I will do anything for people to like me.
I feel comfortable at school.	3.13%	20.31%	I feel nervous at school.
I like trying new things.	0%	1.56%	I am afraid to try new things.
I think people are happy with me.	6.25%	<b>28.13%</b>	<b>I worry people will be angry with me.</b>
If I want something, I'm not afraid to ask for it.	6.25%	15.63%	I am afraid to ask for what I want.
<b>I don't worry about saying the wrong thing.</b>	<b>37.50%</b>	17.19%	I am afraid I will say the wrong thing.
I am not afraid to tell others what I think.	4.69%	7.81%	I am afraid to tell people what I think.
I am open about my feelings.	10.94%	20.31%	I have trouble talking about my feelings.
I can be successful.	0%	1.56%	I don't have what it takes to be successful.
I raise my hand when I know the answer.	7.81%	12.50%	I don't raise my hand when I know the answer.
I am proud of the work I do.	3.13%	3.13%	I am embarrassed / not proud of the work I do.
If I work hard, I believe I can achieve my goals.	0%	1.56%	Even if I work hard, I don't think I can reach my goals.
Other people might wish to be more like me.	23.44%	6.25%	I wish I were somebody else.
<b>I argue with my teachers when I think I'm right.</b>	<b>46.88%</b>	<b>32.81%</b>	<b>I don't argue with my teachers when I think I'm right.</b>
I like the way I look.	9.38%	9.38%	I wish I looked different.

I'm good at a lot of things.	3.17%	6.25%	I'm not good at a lot of things.
I like most things about myself.	1.56%	17.46%	Sometimes I don't like myself that much.
I say what I feel.	4.69%	10.94%	I hide my true feelings.
<b>It wouldn't embarrass me if I gave a wrong answer in class.</b>	<b>26.56%</b>	<b>29.69%</b>	<b>I would be embarrassed if I gave a wrong answer in class.</b>
I am comfortable in my own skin.	7.81%	<b>31.25%</b>	<b>I frequently feel nervous.</b>
I am outgoing.	6.25%	7.94%	I am shy.
I tell people how I feel.	9.52%	17.46%	I keep my feelings to myself.

### Social Influence

Positive Statement	% Strongly disagree	% Strongly agree	Negative Statement
<b>I like meeting new people.</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>14.29%</b>	<b>Meeting new people scares me.</b>
I am comfortable singing with the people around me in choir.	4.84%	1.61%	I am not comfortable singing with the people around me in choir.
<b>When someone compliments me, I feel good about myself.</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>9.52%</b>	<b>When someone compliments me, they probably don't mean it.</b>
It is considered cool to sing out in choir.	4.84%	3.23%	It is considered embarrassing to sing out in choir.
I have friends in choir.	3.23%	3.23%	I don't have friends in choir.
<b>I sing really well compared to others.</b>	<b>14.52%</b>	<b>24.19%</b>	<b>Other people sing a lot better than me.</b>
I am liked by most students at school.	8.06%	4.92%	I am not liked by most students at school.

People in my choir are friendly.	0%	0%	People in my choir are not friendly.
Students like to talk to me.	3.28%	3.23%	Students don't like to talk to me.
I am happy with my friends.	4.84%	16.13%	I want more friends at school.
<b>I don't think about other people's singing compared to mine.</b>	<b>38.71%</b>	<b>25.81%</b>	<b>I often compare my singing to those around me.</b>
I try to be encouraging and friendly to people in choir.	0%	0%	I don't try to be encouraging and friendly to people in choir.
Other students treat me fairly.	1.59%	0%	Students make fun of me.
My classmates are good to me.	0%	0%	My classmates are mean to me.
I am talented at singing.	6.45%	41.27%	Some people are naturally more talented than me.
		12.9%	I will never be as good of a singer as other people.
I find it easy to make friends.	8.06%	7.94%	I find it hard to make friends.
I get along well with other people.	0%	0%	I don't get along with most people.
I have a great group of friends.	3.17%	7.94%	I do not have many friends.