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Preferences of and Attitudes Toward Treble Choral Ensembles

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Abstract

In choral ensembles, a pursuit where females far outnumber males, concern exists that females are being devalued. Attitudes of female choral singers may be negatively affected by the gender imbalance that exists in mixed choirs and by the placement of the mixed choir as the most select ensemble in a program. The purpose of this research was to determine student and choral educator perceptions of and attitudes toward treble clef choral ensembles.

Results support the existence of a stigma toward treble clef choirs as second-place ensembles. A majority of students who were surveyed and interviewed chose the mixed choir as their preferred ensemble in which to sing. Auditioned choir members saw the treble clef choir as being even less prestigious than did the non-auditioned choir members. Though almost all girls agreed that the competition for females to be members of mixed ensembles is far greater, well over half saw their male counterparts as musical equals. Choral educators and both male and female students agreed that a lack of focus and effort from males exists in the choral rehearsal. Still, no female subjects mentioned feeling ignored or taken for granted. No subjects felt as though choral educators placed higher expectations for behavior and performance on females.

Introduction

The abundance of females in choral programs in the U.S. has gained much attention at choral workshops and symposia with the focus typically being on how to achieve a balance between vocal parts by recruiting and retaining males rather than the effect of this imbalance on the many female singers. The large number of females compared to males has led to the need for the formation of treble clef ensembles—all female vocal groups—the status of which is often seen as second place to the mixed ensemble. According to O'Toole (1998), factors leading to this viewpoint include a more diverse historically based literature, greater numbers of tours/competitions for mixed choirs, and the tendency of conductors to highlight the mixed ensemble by having them perform last on a concert.

A traditional view of treble clef choirs focuses on the ensemble as a preparation for SATB singing with high school treble clef choirs consisting of the “leftover” girls who were not selected for a mixed ensemble (Carp, 2004). A stigma as a second-tier ensemble may be attached to this choir, negatively affecting the attitudes of its members (Gauthier, 2005). Participation may be endured only until females are able to move on to mixed choir; the treble clef choir experience exists as nothing more than an opportunity to prove themselves worthy to sing in the mixed choir next year.

In the mixed choir rehearsal, as boys' and girls' voices mature at different times, choral directors may have to address the needs of the less experienced male singers during rehearsal, meanwhile neglecting the needs of female singers (O'Toole, 1998). Just as girls begin to mature vocally, boys are faced with new challenges that can make them appear less capable than their female counterparts. In some cases, to retain and encourage male singers, choral educators ignore their inappropriate behavior. There is also concern that these behaviors play a role in monopolizing the choral educator's time and focus; therefore, females may not be receiving the education they

deserve. Placing trained, musically experienced girls in an ensemble with less trained boys may give the impression that female singers are less valuable.

In the mixed choral ensemble, choral educators' desire to obtain near even numbers between the sexes might result in many girls who are trained and interested being cast aside or assigned to treble clef choirs in order to compensate for the low numbers of males. Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 states that no one person, on the basis of sex, can be excluded from participation in or be denied the benefits of any education program receiving federal financial assistance (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010). Though meant to protect, in this case female singers are instead limited in their opportunities to participate in mixed choirs precisely because of the efforts toward gender equity. Rather than merely looking for strategies that will motivate students to continue in choir, choral educators need to begin with the exploration of, and education regarding society's perpetuation of gender stereotypes in order to suppress proliferation these views (Koza, 1993).

Review of Literature

The problem of imbalance of genders in choral music has existed since the 1920s (Gates, 1989), but only recently has the question of how this affects females become a focus in music education research. Several journals including the *Philosophy of Music Education Review* (1994), *British Journal of Music Education* (1993), and *The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning* (1993) all devoted issues to the topic of gender research in music education. An organization called GRIME (Gender Research in Music Education) was established in 1991 and began publishing a peer-reviewed journal, G.E.M.S. (Gender, Education, Music and Society), in 2002. According to many of today's most prolific music education researchers on the topic, music has long been considered a feminine pursuit (Gould, 1992; Green, 1997; Koza, 1993/94; Lamb, 1994; O'Toole, 1998). According to Hanley (1998), girls more readily participate in choir because they do not feel their gender role is being challenged as may be the case with boys.

Gender in Education and Music Education Research

Males and females are prepared to assume different roles in our society with boys and girls being rewarded for different behaviors starting early in life. Koza (1994) reports that girls are often taught to be "sweet, passive, nice and meek" while males are sometimes socialized to use disruptive behavior in order to get attention (p. 75). Additionally, girls are conditioned to "get along better, have more self-control, and be neater and more helpful than boys" (Bank, 2007, p. 544). Males are expected to be powerful, strong, aggressive and logical while females are expected to be nurturing, cooperative and emotional (Herndon and Ziegler, 1990).

The way that teachers adapt to deal with this behavior impacts classroom practice by creating a teaching approach that favors the male population. Eder and Parker (1987) suggest that teachers often unconsciously promote gender segregation by assuming boys will be "creative and independent" while girls are expected to be "well behaved and helpful" (p. 200). Trollinger (1993) suggests that teachers are more interactive with boys than girls, and Sadker and Sadker

(1994) indicate that females receive even less attention as they get older. Teachers, likely without even knowing, tend to ask more complex questions of and give more detailed responses to males. Ashley (2009) and Green (1997) suggest that girls exceed boys in the areas of ability to focus, reliability, motivation and determination.

Reviewing articles related to sex/gender research in music education published between 1968 and 1992, Trollinger (1993) suggests that children begin to become aware of gender identification at a young age and may associate being a boy with the inability to sing well. A lack of role models may be part of the problem as female elementary music teachers far outnumber their male counterparts. Even though girls possessed more positive attitudes toward music class, they were less likely to be rewarded for their achievements.

O'Toole (1998) suggests that girls are treated unfairly in choral ensembles through biased teacher interaction, male-centered repertoire choices, choral policies that sort students inequitably, and competitions for which boys may not need to compete at all. Recalling one such event for which 112 sopranos, 65 altos, 23 basses and 15 tenors auditioned with only 10 being selected for each voice part, O'Toole illustrates the national average for girls to boys auditioning for honor choirs is 4:1 (1998). Expressing concern that girls may be led to doubt their self-worth O'Toole suggests that the situation is doubly difficult with males not only getting to sing in top ensembles regardless of their ability, but because they receive strong encouragement to do so.

Lack of Male Participation in Choir

Peer pressure and the stereotype of choir as an effeminate activity are often to blame for the low numbers of males participating in choral programs. Demorest (2000) suggests that boys who stop singing in their school choirs often do so when their voices change. Just as girls begin to rapidly demonstrate vocal growth, boys are faced with new challenges that may make them appear less capable than their female counterparts.

Choir simply does not hold the same prestige as other high school activities (Demorest, 2000), and in today's culture, male singing in school and church choirs no longer holds the same popularity it did in colonial America when public singing was dominated by men (Gates, 1989). Sports have gained acceptance as a more socially acceptable choice, especially for young men (Harrison, 2003), and therefore, male students take a risk by joining choir at a time of their lives when insecurities may already be overwhelming. In their eyes, singing in a choir may merely provide an alternative for those who are not athletic.

Green (1997) points out that boys, more often than girls, choose to avoid school music activities. She gave four reasons for this tendency: 1) preference toward sports over music, 2) heavy peer pressure, 3) emphasis on what is musically "fashionable" (which does not necessarily describe school music), and 4) viewing certain musical activities as "sissy" and "un-macho" (p. 168).

Koza (1993) suggests that, stereotypically, a connection is made between male homosexuality and femininity and that students and adults alike view participation in music as a feminine activity. Because femininity and homosexuality are often viewed as synonymous, males who

participate in music may become branded as homosexual. Homophobia has less to do with actual intolerance of homosexuality than it does with expressing disapproval of anyone who does not conform to “traditional” roles (Harrison, 2003, p. 52). Sports provide one way for males to set a distinction for themselves by highlighting the qualities opposite of those they consider to be feminine.

Attitudes Toward the Treble Ensemble

Gauthier (2005), director of the women’s chorus at Western Michigan University, surveyed members of the University’s choral ensembles in a quest for data concerning the image of women’s choirs, and of the 221 women that responded, 90% preferred to sing in a mixed choir. Subjects’ explanations included the preference to be with males, appreciation of the depth in the choral sound with males singing, as wider variety of music from which to draw, and a generally more challenging experience.

Respondents viewed the mixed ensemble in higher regard, believing it received more respect than the women’s choir. Seventy-nine percent of females and 89% of males viewed mixed choirs as having the tradition of being the most prestigious group. In contrast, 25% of the 48 males that responded chose singing in an all-male ensemble as the top of their list citing a “lack of emotional baggage” as a draw. Several women who were members of the women’s choir mentioned the treble clef ensemble as a place where they were comfortable and felt like they were part of a cohesive community.

While there is concern that females in mixed choirs suffer from instructional neglect (Koza, 1994; O’Toole, 1998), this paper focuses on perceptions and attitudes of choral singers and educators. I sought to uncover whether there was a bias against treble choirs, as suggested by Carp (2004), and, if so, what was influencing this point of view.

Research Design

This qualitative study employed interviews with high school students and their choral directors as a form of inquiry. A purposive sample of four schools served as sites for interviews. Sites were chosen based on the existence of both a mixed and women’s choir as well as being within close proximity to the researcher. Three were 4A schools (over 600 students in grades 9 – 11 as classified by the Iowa High School Music Association [IHSMA]) and the fourth was a 3A school (275 – 599 students in grades 9 – 11). Each school had a multi-tiered choral program with auditioned mixed ensembles, non-auditioned mixed ensembles and at least one treble clef choir. Three provided particular interest as they had recently changed the structure of their programs in order to make the treble clef ensemble the second most select ensemble.

Five students were interviewed one time at each of the four sites, with the exception of one school at which time constraints made it impossible to interview a male mixed choir member ($n = 4$ boys, $n = 15$ girls). The sample included freshman through senior singers with a wide range of choral experience and ability. A maximum variation group was chosen based on

recommendations of the conductor and scheduling availability. In order to secure the most information-rich cases and a wide range of viewpoints, one student was selected at each site to fill the following descriptions: 1) a treble clef choir member, 2) a female auditioned mixed choir member, 3) a female non-auditioned mixed choir member, 4) a male mixed choir member, and 5) a former women's choir member who is now singing in a mixed choir. Each participant completed a student assent form, and those under the age of 18 also submitted parental consent forms prior to their interview. By talking with five students with differing experiences regarding choral participation, the negative and positive attributes of treble clef choir were gauged from a variety of perspectives (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Student Interview Protocol

1) Tell me about your participation in choir.
2) In what choral ensemble do you currently participate? Formerly participated?
3) What type of choir would be your first choice?
4) Why do you think there are so few boys in choir?
5) What do you see as the pros and cons of having more males in choir?
6) Do you believe the repertoire for the women's choir and mixed choir are equally challenging? Or equal quality?
7) Do you believe the treble clef choir and mixed choir hold the same amount of prestige?
8) Do you believe males and females in the mixed choir demonstrate equal levels of choral skills?
9) Do you believe the competition to be a member of the mixed choir is the same for males and females?
10) Do you believe that your conductor treats males and females equitably?

The choral educator(s) of each program ($n = 7$) participated in a semi-structured interview concerning their treatment of and attitudes toward the treble clef choir. This type of dialogue allowed me to begin with basic questions that led to follow up questions allowing the choral educator to further explain a theme or concept. The protocol included basic questions, which led to follow up questions that allowed each educator to further explain a theme or concept. Member checks were accomplished by sending transcripts of interviews to choral directors via email for their review.

Figure 2. Choral Director Interview Protocol

1) What is the ideal choral curriculum in terms of ensemble membership?
2) What have you observed regarding your students' attitudes toward treble clef choir?
3) What are the pros and cons of the treble clef choir?
4) What are the pros and cons of the mixed choir?

Results

Transcriptions were coded and the following themes were extracted: a preference for mixed choir, awareness of the lack of male singers in high school choral programs, the perceived immaturity of male singers, the perception of greater choral ability of females vs. males, and the unequal amount of competition for males and females in choral music at the high school level.

In addition to the above themes, three additional issues emerged that had not been explicitly addressed by the research questions. First, the notion that “choir is gay” came to the forefront immediately. Second, students and choral educators alike discussed choir as being the opposite of sports. Finally, female students discussed a perceived lack of maturity in their male counterparts repeatedly. These ideas are embedded in the topics that follow. Pseudonyms are used for students, choral educators, ensembles and schools.

Treble Clef or Mixed Choir Preference

Most female students reported that they would prefer to sing in a mixed choir. Those stating a preference for singing in a treble clef ensemble stipulated that it be an auditioned ensemble. Two common responses included their appreciation for a) the sound that only a mixed choir can create and b) the quality and perceived higher level of difficulty of mixed chorus literature. Many expressed a desire to sing with males despite their perceived lower skill level and lesser work ethic.

A strong majority of the students who were interviewed viewed singing in a mixed choir as being more prestigious than singing in a treble clef ensemble. Choral educators both create and reinforce this view by making the mixed ensemble the most select in their programs. No one named treble clef choir as being seen as the most prestigious ensemble. Students saw the treble clef choir as gaining status, but still viewed it as a “stepping stone” to being selected for participation in the mixed choir. Members got upset if they did not “get into” the mixed choir. One conductor explained by saying, “They feel like it’s stepping back, a ‘slap in the face,’ to have to sing in women’s choir again after being in a mixed ensemble.”

Missing Males

When asked why they thought there are so few boys in choir, many students cited singing as a feminine activity and pointed to how singing is viewed by our society. The terms “girly” and “gay” were used often. Peer pressure was frequently cited as a reason not to sing. Kate discussed the “rules we have in society that dictate what men and women are supposed to do. Guys are supposed to be athletic and strong and stuff like that. It [choir] is more of a girls’ thing.” Sam explained, “Singing is seen as effeminate. It has a ‘female vibe.’ I don’t know why. A lot of guys don’t like to sing ‘cause it’s not a manly thing, I guess, or something like that. You know how teenagers are.”

Jaime articulated why she thought there were not more males in her school's choral program. Her answer reflected an ability to think outside the school environment when she replied, "Men are not really raised to pursue the arts. [Singing in a choir] is sort of more not seen as very masculine." She, too, believed that there are societal "rules" that dictate what men and women are supposed to do; participation in sports is an expectation for males. She imitated what she thought of as a stereotypical father saying, "It's like, 'I want my son to be the quarterback/basketball player' not 'I want my son to grow up to sing in the chorus and sound pretty.'"

Aaron, a senior, overcame these influences and started singing in school when he was in seventh grade; he had been participating in choral ensembles ever since. At first, he reported feeling as though he had no idea what he was doing but, as the years progressed, he "became aware of what to do and how to sing." Both his junior high and high school experiences consisted of singing in mixed choirs. Mixed choir is his only option as there is no bass clef choir in Aaron's school program.

For many choral educators, this may not be viewed as a problem. Joe, one of the choral educators interviewed, was happy with the way the choral program at his school was structured. He liked having the freshman girls in a separate group and hoped to someday add a freshman bass clef group as well to help in dealing with voice change issues. Ultimately, he felt that the existing choirs were adequate to provide the best choral music education possible.

Male Immaturity

When asked to discuss the positive and negative outcomes of having more males in choir, several females replied with behavior-related comments. One emerging theme was the widespread mention of a perceived "male immaturity." Some expressed concern about the level of motivation if there were to be larger numbers of males in their mixed ensemble, many pointing to a lack of desire on the part of males to put forth their full effort. The word "distracted" was used on many occasions. Anna shared, "I wish I could say that (the guys are more hardworking). I know a lot of guys in band can do it because they know notes. Mainly girls are the know-it-alls." Her choral educator did not disagree. "I think the women learn a lot quicker. It's a developmental thing. They have a keener way of attaching themselves to the idea a lot quicker. The guys tend to be more goofy. It's a maturity thing." Beth agreed that there were too many guys in the mixed choir who "mess around." Many females viewed males as not working up to their potential; they saw the apparent lack of effort as apathy.

One discrepant theme did emerge; there were a few females who disagreed with the majority and believed that the males who chose to sing in choir were there because they really wanted to be. One stated, "If there is a boy in choir, it means he's really good or going to work really hard." These girls did not share the frustration of some of their peers, but lauded their male classmates, believing that if they went against the "norm" to be in choir, they weren't there to "fool around."

Equality of Choral Skills

Most of the female subjects believed females have more advanced choral skills than males and all of the others felt as though females and males demonstrated equal levels of skill. Most subjects discussed not just ability, but desire and work ethic when addressing whether they thought females or males had a higher level of choral proficiency. Several quickly answered that they thought there were far more talented girls than boys, “maybe because more women do it from a young age or have an innate ability.” Amanda added, “In our group the girls learn it a lot quicker.” Several said they believed talent to be non-gender-specific. Still, no participants (including males) mentioned boys being more musically talented than girls. Show choir seems to present another issue for males. Several simply stated, “guys can’t dance.”

Competition for Males vs. Females

Both choral educators and students discussed how it was more difficult for females to be selected for auditioned mixed choirs than it was for males. The girls knew that they were going to have to work harder to be able to sing in a mixed ensemble. There simply were not as many males auditioning for choir. According to one of the conductors, Joe, “The girls know it’s a process and that it’s more ‘cutthroat’ in ladies choirs. The numbers are bigger and you have to work really hard and really stand out to make that transition.”

Carrie discussed whether males and females had an equal chance of being selected for the mixed choir saying, “[It’s] a lot harder for girls. If you’re a guy who can carry a tune, you basically make it.” Both she and her sister Cathy had the experience of auditioning and not being selected the first time. At that point, they sought extra help through private lessons and were successful at the next year’s auditions. From this experience, they learned that “for girls it’s a lot of different stuff—tone, pitch, blend, dynamics. You have to be able to do it all.” According to Kate, “The boys are good in Chamber Choir, but it’s frustrating that girls try for three years and may not get in as seniors.” Amanda agreed that males had a better opportunity in audition situations because there were less of them who were dedicated and, therefore, had the desire to audition.

Brad was one of those boys who were still singing as seniors because they possess a high level of choral skill. He was also an athlete and scholar who saw choral music as something he could enjoy doing for the rest of his life, unlike football. He had been singing in Chamber Choir since his sophomore year and spoke of successes that had encouraged him to keep singing despite the importance placed on sports at his school. Brad explained the recent restructuring of the choral program to make the treble clef show choir more select. He felt that it was a positive change, but admitted that the change had not affected him personally. He believed that males did not have as much competition to sing in mixed ensembles as females, but gave the impression that he never used that information as a reason not to put forth his full effort.

Discussion

While not the answer to every problem, it was interesting to note that choral educators at three of the four schools had recently successfully restructured their programs to create auditioned treble ensembles. These new configurations were reported to have been positive changes by both choral educators and students; the hierarchy of ensembles was explained to me several times. In all three schools, the treble choir was thought to be more prestigious than the junior varsity mixed ensembles, but still second to the varsity mixed ensemble.

At Kennedy High School, the program had been restructured a year earlier to include an auditioned treble show choir. One of the co-directors, Jerry explained the impetus behind the position; “We had very inexperienced gentlemen with girls who could basically dance circles around those guys.” In his eyes, making the change gave upper level girls a group of their own and provided them with the opportunity to perform more challenging choreography and music without the boys’ inexperience hindering them. Jerry offered his view that, “the girls shouldn’t be held back by freshmen guys” and went on to say that he believed singing with “more mature women” helped keep the boys focused. In speaking about the female singers, Jerry remarked, “they’re all so good; they shouldn’t have to be held back by clumsy guys.” He pointed out that, in the curricular choirs at his school, the gentlemen were working with more experienced ladies right away. He also mentioned that he had observed it was usually the girls who were feeling more like a “number.” With the new structure in place, “I feel like the system set up now really is keyed into their development as singers.”

Women’s Chorus, a select treble ensemble, had also been a recent addition to the choral program. Jerry mentioned that the change met resistance at first. Members got upset if they did not “get into” Chamber Choir. Jane believed being in the new treble clef ensemble was a “step up” from Mixed Choir and she thought the recent change had been positive. She believed it would “allow us to take it to the next level.”

The choral program had also recently been restructured at Roosevelt High School in order to create an auditioned ensemble for female singers. Bob, who was the head choral director before Robin was hired as a co-director, considered the needs of his female singers when making his decisions. He stated, “we have so many women; they’re on the outside looking in.” He believed these girls needed a place to be where they did not feel like the “leftovers” and could be challenged without the impediment of less mature males. In Bob’s estimation, the girls were not thriving and getting what they needed in that mixed, “sort of dumbed-down” ensemble. In the past, Bob had begun to notice that the girls were becoming very frustrated with their young male counterparts. According to Robin, “it took a little time, but the girls’ group is surprisingly good and other select girls are encouraging younger girls to be part of it.” Jessie, one of the treble choir members, thought the way the choral educators described it—as the “varsity women’s choir”—made it sound like it was a quality ensemble.

Similar to Kennedy and Roosevelt, Jefferson’s inclusion of an auditioned treble clef choir was a recent change. The choral educator, Bob, recalled that the year prior there had been an abundance of advanced girls and he sought to give them a “different outlet.” The ensemble was in its second year of existence at the time of my visits. Both teachers and students seemed pleased with the change.

Bill remembered the existence of a negative attitude toward the ensemble when it was new, but explained that it quickly changed. In its second year of existence the group doubled in number. He believed that one contributing factor to the ensemble's success was related to the avoidance of considering it the bottom of a "three-tiered system." When *Bella Voce* began to receive recognition from concert audiences, they were no longer "second place," but their own unique type of group. He considered the treble clef choir to be one of his finest ensembles.

Synthesis of Findings

Two points of focus were drawn from my experiences and supported by the literature on the topic. First, a stigma could be attached to the treble choir as a second-place ensemble (Gauthier, 2005; O'Toole, 1998). Second, the gender imbalance in mixed choirs might negatively affect the attitudes of female choral singers (Gates, 1989; O'Toole, 1998). A third theme, that choral educators may neglect female singers as they focus more of their attention on males (Koza, 1993; O'Toole, 1998; Trollinger, 1993), was not corroborated by this study.

Female students participating in student interviews indicated a strong preference toward singing in a mixed choir. In programs where there was more than one choir, the mixed choir was seen as the top ensemble in the choral hierarchy. Students and choral educators alike viewed the competition to be in a mixed choir as more competitive for females, confirming existing reports from Van Camp (1988) and O'Toole, (1998). Females who were not selected for the top mixed choir, and were instead members of a treble clef ensemble, spoke of being seen as second place to the mixed ensemble, but this did not seem to affect their confidence. They continued to sing even though they were not chosen for the most select ensemble.

The girls I interviewed were smart, confident regarding their choral skills, quick to ask questions, and willing to offer suggestions. If they were initially upset at being placed in a treble clef ensemble, they took it as a challenge to prove themselves as choral musicians. No female students reported feeling unsuccessful, but I should point out that the females who were interviewed were those still participating in choral ensembles.

Both students and choral educators pointed to singing being seen as an "effeminate" undertaking to explain the lack of males singing in choral programs. Their responses provide support to Gates's (1989), Mizener's (1993), Green's (1997) and Hanley's (1998) discussions of choir as a feminine endeavor. Some students used the term "gay" to describe the view of males in choir. Koza (1993) explained that a connection is often made between male homosexuality and femininity. Harrison (2003) too, agreed and added that homophobia has less to do with actual intolerance of homosexuality, and more to do with expressing disapproval of anyone who does not conform to "traditional" roles.

Students and choral educators also discussed the perceived belief that males possess lesser choral skills than females as well as the tendency for males to behave inappropriately in

rehearsal. Female students questioned whether males took it as seriously because they did not have to work as hard to be members of the top mixed ensemble.

Data collected for this study closely paralleled those of Gauthier's (2005) survey, as did the explanations for subjects' answers. In both cases, a high percentage of female singers chose the mixed choir as their preferred ensemble. Students did not necessarily believe the mixed choir to be a more challenging experience, but mixed choir was viewed as the most select choir in each program. The traditional view of treble and bass clef ensembles as preparation for SATB singing presumes that girls sing in treble choir and move on to mixed choir when the opportunity arises. This became apparent in my study through interviews in which the girls' work ethic was described as a drive to "prove themselves" so they could be selected for the mixed ensemble the next year. At Jefferson in particular, I recognized in the Bella Voce members a sense of pride and desire to bond together to be impressive. Still, two of the girls responded emotionally when expressing their desire to be in the top mixed choir. Perhaps the preference can be attributed to the tradition of the mixed chorus as the most celebrated ensemble.

While results of this study cannot be generalized to a larger population due to sampling techniques, I must cast some doubt on the idea that placing more mature, experienced female singers in a mixed ensemble with younger males makes the girls feel undervalued. Singers who participated in the survey and interviews seemed to be so eager to sing with males that they were willing to overlook any negatives. Surprisingly, while almost all female participants agreed that the competition for females in choral music is far greater, well over half saw their male counterparts as musical equals. No females mentioned feeling ignored or taken for granted.

Suggestions for Further Research

Further research is needed to better determine the implications for music education. Successful treble choir programs should be examined and educators should be directed to scrutinize their current practices. This study was limited to a relatively small sample of Midwest high schools and, therefore, cannot be generalized to the population as a whole. It may be valuable to replicate the study in another part of the country, as students in more metropolitan areas may be less conservative in their views regarding homosexuality.

While several expected threads presented themselves, it seems as though the issue is not generally seen as a problem among choral directors of female singers. It is simply accepted that girls will have to work harder to "get into" mixed ensembles, honor choirs, show choirs, musicals, etc. Perhaps education about this phenomenon will lessen discouragement for females placed in treble ensembles due to a lack of male singers.

More research is needed to determine whether structuring the program to make treble ensembles more select makes a difference. Self-esteem and choral identity is tied to ensemble placement. Success in performance seems to play a role in bolstering female singers' pride and confidence in the ensemble. Offering our treble choirs the same opportunities for performance and travel may make all the difference. Perhaps offering AP credit for treble clef choir would

elevate the status of the ensemble. Our girls deserve to feel as though they are talented and worthy musicians. I hope this study will illuminate an area of concern that may go unnoticed by choral educators who have traditionally focused on keeping males in their choral ensembles. Educators must always consider what is educationally most beneficial for their students and not just rely on tradition or accepted practices. What some may consider a question of having the appropriate “instrumentation” for a choral ensemble may truly be an issue with gender discrimination at its root. Choral educators must strive to provide equal opportunities for all students.

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