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# Painting with words: portraits of adult singers' perceptions on meaningfulness in two community choruses

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS

Dissertation

**PAINTING WITH WORDS:  
PORTRAITS OF ADULT SINGERS' PERCEPTIONS  
ON MEANINGFULNESS IN TWO COMMUNITY CHORUSES**

by

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requirements for the degree of  
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**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to investigate what adult singers find meaningful about their participation in a volunteer community chorus and to consider the implication of the choral place on participant sense of meaningfulness. The researcher collected data from four adult singers, their family members, and two conductors. Bridging the gap between science and art, the researcher used a qualitative research method called portraiture, wherein narrative portraits are developed and written by a researcher in a descriptive manner providing voice to understanding the phenomenon of interest, to create portraits of four adult singers. Portraiture researchers seek to discover resonant stories within the complicated framework of daily life. Semi-structured interviews with each participant provided data. In addition, adult singers kept personal journals for the researcher, and the researcher observed participant behaviors before, during, and after rehearsals. The researcher implemented axial, focused, and theoretical analysis during data analysis and interpretation to construct a narrative portrait of each participating singer reflecting the emergent patterns and themes. The two emergent themes were connectedness and achievement. Overall, connections with other people and achieving surmountable

challenges were highly valued aspects of this study. Further analysis for the impact of sense of place on meaningfulness noted the impact of the choral place and the choral process on participants' perceptions of meaningfulness.

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Table 1: Results from preliminary axial coding

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## Chapter One: Selecting the Subject Matter

Frantic and frazzled, Emily (a fictional character) scrubs the final traces of cheese sauce from her daughter's dinner tray. She returns the sponge to the sink, wipes her hands, and gathers her music folder, pencil, and water bottle before running to kiss her family goodbye for the night. As she flies through the garage door she bellows a reminder to her husband about starting the dishwasher. Once in her car, Emily begins her vocal warm up routine as she zips to rehearsal. No matter how busy her Monday evenings, she would never give up the opportunity to reignite her love of ensemble singing. A liberal arts school undergraduate twenty years ago, Emily remembers the time when ensemble singing was simply an enjoyable credit requirement. Now, it is different. She cherishes every Monday evening rehearsal and practices hard during the week amid the chaos of her children's soccer league and ballet lessons. No longer a student, but a wife and mother who sometimes fears that she is disappearing, Emily, now in her forties, knows that somehow her involvement in choral music is different now, more meaningful than before, and she will let nothing keep her from this special opportunity.

Across town, Alfred (a fictional character) recently turned 60, stands patiently, slightly hunched, by the foot of the piano with an overflowing manila folder in his hand. He waits for the right moment to pounce upon the conductor and share his own agenda before the evening is over. Finally, about ten minutes after rehearsal has concluded, Alfred gets his moment to shine. He shares a program from the National Symphony's concert of Verdi's *Requiem* and another program from a unique concert by a local, private high school featuring the works of Jim Papoulis. In his folder he also holds

critical reviews of these concerts for the conductor to peruse. Near retirement, Alfred works part-time at the Kennedy Center, where he ushers and enjoys many free concerts. He is happy and eager to share all of his experiences. Singing was and still is a vital part of Alfred's life. He drives an hour and a half to sing with his choir on Monday evenings. On Tuesday and Wednesday evenings, he sings with other choral ensembles. For him, singing is akin to breathing; he would not and could not live without it.

What keeps Emily rushing through dinner with her family? What induces Alfred to drive more than an hour each way to sing? Clearly there is more at play than just singing. Both are, indeed, compelled to sing with this choral ensemble. The observation by Kruse (2007) that there is "something deeper and more honest about members' reasons for participating in a given community ensemble" (p. 3) is confirmed. But what is this "something" that Kruse puts forward? What is this "something" that provides such compelling meaningfulness to adult choral singers? The answer is most important to conductors and community ensemble organizers who, if they understand the what and how of meaningfulness, can create successful platforms to deliver satisfying experiences that attract and retain talented and committed singers.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Almost fifty years ago, Aliapoulios (1969) stated that community choruses are an integral part of the social fabric of a geographic region and an "institutionalized cultural medium which has maintained a historical continuity, undergone a sociological change, gained an educational status, and contributed greatly to the aesthetic needs of society" (p. 4). In the 21st century, Bell (2004) noted that writing and sharing stories from

community chorus members is essential to the continued tradition of community choral performance. “The opportunity is ripe to examine ... how we as choral conductors can continue to address the musical needs of adult amateur singers in community choirs” (p. 50).

This study focused on community choruses in the United States, which, according to Bell (2008), maintains a consistent demographic. The majority of singers in community choruses are over 40 and well-educated, and the ratio of women to men is 2:1 (Bell, 2004). Few previous studies addressed race or ethnicity in the community chorus. Researchers who addressed race or ethnicity concluded that minorities were grossly under-represented (Bell, 2004) leading Bell (2008) to conclude that “there is little ethnic diversity in the make-up of American choirs” (p. 232). Nonetheless, choral singing thrives in the adult population of the United States (Chorus America, 2009). For example, 1,400 community choral organizations appear on the American Choral Directors Association’s (2007) “National Registry of Community Choirs.” According to Chorus America (2003), 23.5 million adults sing weekly in community choruses in the United States, and more Americans engage in the public performance of choral singing than in any other art form. In fact, “no other public form of artistic expression even comes close” (Chorus America, 2003, p. 6). Despite the popularity of choral singing among adults, most researchers study the public school population and collegiate age groups (Bell, 2004; Thornton, 2010). Derby (2001) also acknowledged that much of the research in choral music focused on children and singing, mostly at the elementary level. More than ten years after Bell (2004) noted a deficit of research in adult choral singing, Avery (in

press) claimed that adult choral research has more progress to make. Investigations in this area, though developing, still require enhancement.

### **Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to investigate what four adult singers found meaningful as a result of their participation in a community chorus. I considered how place attachment and community place attachment (Mihaylov & Perkins, 2014) impacted the singers' sense of meaningfulness. The following questions framed this study:

1. In what ways do adult singers find participating in community choral ensembles to be meaningful?
2. In what ways does sense of place impact these meaningful experiences?

### **Theoretical Framework**

In preparation for this study, I examined a variety of relevant theoretical frameworks and literature: for example, community music (Higgins, 2008, 2012a, 2012b; Higgins & Bartleet, 2012; Koopman, 2007), cultural capital and habitus (Bourdieu, 1979; Collet, 2009; Nash, 1999; Reay, 2004), and informal music learning (Green, 2002, 2008; Smith, 2002). The three significant theoretical frameworks that emerged from initial readings were social attachment (Becker, 2001; Bicknell, 2007, 2009; Elliott & Silverman, 2012), musical identities (Gee, 2001; Hargreaves, Miell, & MacDonald, 2002; Sfard & Prusak, 2005a, 2005b), and place attachment theory (Lewicka, 2014; Low & Altman, 1992; Scannell & Gifford, 2010, 2014).

**Social attachment.** The musical experience is fundamentally social (Bicknell, 2009). According to Bicknell (2009), music maintains an “elemental social character” (p.

viii) in every culture by aiding, creating, and reinforcing social bonds. Moreover, music exists within the framework of a shared social understanding and context. Citing the language theory of Wittgenstein (1999), who argued that no language exists by a single user, Bicknell (2009) suggested that no musical experience is strictly private. Even a solitary music listening experience is a social phenomenon because the listener connects with others and shares a social understanding of what music is. In other words, “communing with music is a form of communing with human reality, and that is social” (Bicknell, 2009, p. 93).

In addition to music’s fundamental social character, Bicknell (2007, 2009) argued that the meaning of music relies on systems of human agreement. For instance, societies and cultures agree on patterns of musical structure and meaning which evolve through human musical practice. Becker (2001) referred to understanding patterns of musical structure and meaning as the habitus of listening. According to Becker, habitus are the listening habits and expectations that occur within a particular culture. Persons often create habitus in a state of unawareness (Becker, 2001). Even though societies and cultures may be unaware of habitus, Bicknell (2007) suggested that connections between music and social bonding are not accidental. In fact, music’s origin and presence in all cultures is due to its social bonding function (Bicknell, 2007).

Neurobiological foundations of attachment support music’s impact on the ways in which humans connect and attach during musical experiences (Bicknell, 2009). Attachment is a psychological term that refers to “the intense reciprocal relationship and systems of behavior between an infant and caregiver” (Bicknell, 2009, p. 93). The three

forms of social bonding or attachment that promote connections through music making are pair bonds between adults (or romantic interactions), mutual bonds between children and caregivers, and bonds between members of social groups. Music may activate the neurobiology of attachment, thus releasing the neurotransmitter oxytocin (Bicknell, 2007). Bicknell (2007) refers to this phenomenon as the “neurobiology of social bonding” (p. 13), suggesting that “music can serve as ‘biotechnology’ of group formation” (p. 17).

Social attachment is one of ten processes contributing to musical–emotional experiences (Elliott & Silverman, 2012). Communication with fellow music makers and listeners creates relationships in music that lead to the creation of *social–musical bodies* (Elliott & Silverman, 2012). Elliott and Silverman’s view of social attachment as only one part of the multidimensional bodily self, a phenomenon created by social beings who engage in the practice of music, ultimately lead me to look beyond social attachment as a theoretical framework. Conducting data analysis with social attachment would only address the social aspects of choral singing and offer no interpretation of the broader choral context. Moreover, Bicknell’s (2007, 2009) concept of social attachment was a tenuous framework lacking well-defined concepts required during data analysis and interpretation of a research study.

**Musical identities.** Elliott and Silverman’s (2012) concept of the multidimensional bodily self also included the *cultured musical body*. The cultured musical body interacts with a community of other music makers and listeners and is composed of musical abilities, motivations, and identities. According to Hargreaves et al.

(2002), music is a vehicle for the formulation and expression of individual identities. According to Hargreaves et al., music is an important factor in the lives of persons; it impacts behaviors, moods, and how persons present themselves to one another. Therefore, music plays a role in identity formation. More specifically, Brewer and Garnett (2012) claimed that musical activities in the choral setting influence formation of both individual and ensemble identities. The study of musical identities allows researchers to consider musical behavior from the inside, or the musician's perspective, making this theoretical framework plausible for this study.

Hargreaves et al. (2002) presented two categories of musical identities: *identities in music* and *music in identities*. Identities in music refer to a person's identification in musical genres, styles, and broad categories of music. For instance, a guitar player may identify with classic rock, or someone from New Orleans may enjoy jazz. Music in identities refers to the influence of music on nonmusical aspects of identity. The concept of musical identities draws from social and developmental psychology research in music (Hargreaves et al., 2002).

Identity is an important theoretical framework in other research fields. Gee (2001) proposed identity as a lens for analysis in educational research. According to Gee, identity is a tool which allows us to understand schools and society. The recognition of a type of person in a particular setting is identity (Gee, 2001). Gee proposed that each person has multiple identities related to his or her performance in society and offered four dimensions of identities: identities due to nature, societal positions, personal accomplishments and recognitions, and personal experiences with specific groups in

society.

Identities are collectively shaped and human-made (Sfard & Prusak, 2005a). According to Sfard and Prusak (2005b), the three dimensions for conceptualizing identity are actual identities, designed identities, and telling identities. Actual identities exist in the present tense, involving the real circumstances that evolve in a person's life. Contrarily, designed identities are potential circumstances that exist in the future. Telling identities exist in the past and present tense and combine stories that include families and communities (Sfard & Prusak, 2005b). Sfard and Prusak (2005b) claimed that circumstances in the present and future combine to create a person's identity, or more specifically, his or her telling identity.

The review of literature on general identities and music identities uncovered a solid framework with well-defined concepts. However, one defining tenet of the identities framework led me to continue searching for more appropriate theoretical support: According to social constructionist theories, identities are always evolving (Gee, 2001; Hargreaves et al., 2002; Sfard & Prusak, 2005a, 2005b), and musical identities are constantly shifting and evolving (Hargreaves et al., 2002). Identities can change from moment to moment or place to place (Gee, 2001). The concept of consistently changing identities distracts from the purpose of this research. Considering what adults find meaningful through the lens of identities may imply changes from moment to moment or from one choral piece to another, making it difficult to create a final portrait displaying meaningfulness. These constantly shifting musical identities may provide a lens for how or why adult singers find participation in a community chorus meaningful, but their

continually shifting nature would convolute the data regarding why adults find participation meaningful. I sought a framework that would acknowledge a specific time and place, a framework that supported the realization of “complex and imaginative musical action in a specific and multifaceted setting” (Finnegan, 2007, p. xiv). Place attachment theory fulfilled this function and served as the theoretical framework for this investigation. In previous studies, place played an important role in the formation of meaningfulness (Britt, Adler, & Bartone, 2001; Cape, 2012; Harrison, 2008; Morse, 2011).

**Place attachment.** Place influences the experiences of persons in a particular context in varying ways. For instance, Cape (2012) found that the formation of meaningfulness in music ensembles was multi-dimensional and differed between the varying musical ensembles studied. After considering the importance of context, place attachment theory became a feasible option for this research study. More specifically, because the focus of this research was on the emotional content of subjective experiences and the relationships between humans and places in a particular environment (Relph, 1976), place attachment theory was a viable framework through which to consider the factors that influence meaningfulness in the choral ensemble.

Low and Altman (1992) provided the most common definition of place attachment, suggesting that it explained the affective bond that connects people to places: Human beings naturally desire place attachment. It often forms over time and can occur for multiple people in the same place or for one person in multiple places (Scannell & Gifford, 2014). Anchored emotions, whereby people experience a sense of belonging, a

willingness to stay close, and the desire to return when away, are key components (Lewicka, 2014).

Place attachment is a multidimensional construct that includes the dimensions of process, place, and person (Mihaylov & Perkins, 2014; Scannell & Gifford, 2010).

Process refers to the psychological dimension of place and incorporates the affective, behavioral, and cognitive components of attachment. Process contributes to what places are and what they become (Lewicka, 2011). According to Seamon (2014), the six interconnected processes that define place are place interaction, place identity, place release, place realization, place creation, and place intensification.

*Place interaction* refers to the normal, daily surroundings that unfold in a geographic location. Interaction is the main vehicle through which human beings experience place (Seamon, 2014). *Place identity* refers to how human beings associate with place phenomena and how a sense of place becomes significant to individuals. Place interaction and place identity are reciprocal constructs. Persons engaged in a place often associate personal and group identity with that place. *Place release* describes a situation in which unexpected or unsettling events occur in locations that are meaningful to individuals. Running into an old friend at the grocery store or dating someone who works at the coffee shop are examples of place release. Place release may cause a deep, emotional connection to a specific location as individuals associate meaningful personal experiences in that place. *Place realization* refers to the particular physical condition of place, or the “palpable presence” (Seamon, 2014, p. 17), combined with human activities and meanings associated with that place, which often evokes a specific ambience, or “a

unique phenomenal presence” (p. 17).

The final two of the six processes involve the understanding of place (Seamon, 2014). *Place creation* refers to the active role between persons and place; the role leads to improvement or neglect of particular locations. *Place intensification* refers to the power of design and policy to strengthen or weaken a place. The physical and designed architecture of a space can influence the quality and character of a place (Gieryn, 2002). For instance, poor lighting and city parking may prevent persons from shopping in a particular location, while a newly constructed building with disabled access and a parking garage may provide a more encouraging environment for consumerism.

According to Mihaylov and Perkins (2014) the components of community place attachment that deviate from individual place attachment are location, level, focus, and behavioral response. A location is the local area surrounding a place-based community. The level component of community suggests that some level of agreement exists among community members. In a choir, traditions and discourse exist (O’Toole, 1994) and are the level component in community place attachment. Focus represents the whole place, or the holistic perspective of a particular place-based community. For example, focus might be a natural space in the environment or a particular building that serves as the background for a community. Behavioral response, the last component of community place attachment, was defined by Mihaylov and Perkins as, “complex place and social cognitions, emotions, and behaviors, in response to environmental disruptions or threats, that feed into an interpretive process at both the individual and community level leading to collective, community-level actions, adaptations, or acceptance” (p. 63).

In addition to the four components, Mihaylov and Perkins (2014) identified three dimensions of community place attachment, which were community identity, sense of community, and behavioral activities. Community identity refers to the extent to which places influence group identity. Sense of community is a sense of place interdependence, or a feeling of rootedness in a community and a sense of social bonding within a community (Riger & Lavrakas, 1981). Studies have noted that sense of community promotes feelings of belonging to a group (Nasar & Julian, 1995; Pretty, Chipuer, & Bramston, 2003) and an emotional connection based on shared concerns, interests, or history (Perkins & Long, 2002).

Raymond, Brown, and Weber (2010) identified sense of community as the affective, social attachment that involves neighbors and their trust in each other, otherwise called social bonding. The behavioral dimension of community place attachment includes activities such as participation in community events, community celebrations, and neighboring activities. A neighboring activity is informal assistance provided and received from neighbors in the community (Mihaylov & Perkins, 2014). Under and Wandersman (1985) described the three components of neighboring activities as social support, affective attachment to neighbors and place, and cognitive mapping of the physical environment.

The dimensions of community place attachment described above support the previous research of Cape (2012), which served as a model for this study. Cape investigated the perspectives of meaningfulness of high school instrumental musicians in the ensemble rehearsal with a multiple-case study. The three cases in Cape's study were a

wind ensemble, a guitar class, and a jazz band. Cape acknowledged the substantial role that context played in shaping student perceptions. For instance, students valued the relaxed and sociable environment of guitar class because it gave them choices about how and what they would learn and in what ways they would participate in class, allowing them to develop a sense of belonging (Cape, 2012). The results of Cape's study reinforced the use of place attachment as my theoretical framework for studying meaningfulness in adult choral ensembles. It supports the importance of context and its impact on meaningfulness.

Place attachment theory was the strongest theoretical framework for this study because it addressed the bond between people and places (Low & Altman, 1992) and provided well-defined multidimensional concepts for data analysis and interpretation. The six interconnected processes of place (Seamon, 2014) and social elements of community place attachment (Mihaylov & Perkins, 2014; Raymond et al., 2010) provided many dimensions of analysis for what adults find meaningful in the community choral setting. Cape's (2012) research of meaningfulness in musical ensembles supported the importance of place.

### **Significance**

According to Rutter (2012), "people have gathered together to sing since earliest times, and in doing so they have created sounds which could not be made in any other way" (p. xiii). Finnegan (2007) described community music making as "the most valued pursuits of our culture, the musical practices and experiences of ordinary people in their own locality" (p. xviii). This research study may contribute to the practice of choral

community music making by exploring the factors that influence meaningfulness for adult singers in a community chorus and how a sense of place impacts their meaningfulness. Cape (2012) defined meaningful experiences as the occurrences and “aspects of participation that students value or prize for themselves” (p. 21).

Community music making continues to be a valuable pursuit; as Avery, Hayes, and Bell (2013) wrote, “today, in every part of the United States, an unprecedented number of singers, directors, and the organizations they have joined ensure that community choruses continue to be living musical entities” (p. 255). By exploring the individual experiences of adult choral members, this research may contribute to the continued tradition of community choral singing by provided information which enhances the understanding of meaningful experiences in the adult community chorus. Unique to this study is the collection of data from family members of adult singers. Previous choral studies collected data from singers and choral conductors (Bell, 2000; Kennedy, 2009; Rensink-Hoff, 2009); however, rarely did family members provide their perspective. The present study took into account the perspectives of all three parties, which may contribute to our knowledge of how family members perceive their relatives’ formation of meaningfulness.

The meaningful experiences described by adult choral singers in this study were multidimensional, including more than musical experiences. Previous research identified the musical needs of adult singers, but what of the other needs adult singers in choral programs may have (Bell, 2008)? This study began to answer Bell’s (2008) question regarding nonmusical needs of adults. As Veblen and Olsson (2002) stated, in addition to

musical growth, ensembles support the social and personal growth of participants. Rensink-Hoff (2009) confirmed the significance of this research by writing, “now, more than ever, adults are actively seeking out leisure activities through which their physical, social, psychological and spiritual needs might be met” (p. 11). Findings from this study may contribute to our knowledge of the meaningful nonmusical activities, which occur in the community choral place thus helping us to “understand music’s effect on the whole person” (Coffman, 2002, p. 205). In a time when researchers are taking note of adult musical practices (Coffman, 2007; Dabback, 2006; Douglas, 2011; Griffith, 2006; Jutras, 2006; Kruse, 2007; Thornton, 2010; Tsugawa, 2009), this research could contribute to the ongoing discourse on lifelong music engagement (Mantie & Tucker, 2008) and may impact those providing services for adult singers. More specifically, stories collected from this study may aid conductors, choir managers, and organizations in providing meaningful and valuable experiences in adult choral ensembles. Findings from this study may aid in recruitment efforts by community choral organizations because personal attachments are important motivators for people to spend more time in the places where they feel a sense of place attachment (Mihaylov & Perkins, 2014). Portraits of individual singers may invite readers to consider how community choral places are cultivated and their impact on the meaning and quality of adult singers’ experience, thereby shedding light on the role of community choruses in the lives of adults and, perhaps, challenging our preconceptions.

Widening the lens even further, this study may impact practices in the music classroom. Meaningful musical experiences from the classroom that transfer to adulthood

should be the focus of school music activities (Jellison, 2000; Kratus, 2007; VanWeelden & Walters, 2004), yet significant numbers of school-aged students who participate in secondary music classes do not elect to participate in musical activities during adulthood (Boswell, 1992; Cavitt, 2005). Studying how adults experience meaningfulness from participating in a community chorus may impact classroom school music activities and ultimately lessen attrition of singers from the classroom to community ensembles. Therefore data from this study may impact music educators at all levels influencing the structuring of curricula and fostering lifelong music engagement.

### **Researcher Lens**

At the beginning of my senior year in high school, I began my work directing choral ensembles: My choir teacher approached me and asked if I would be interested in working with a church choir in need of a choral director. I was thrilled to find an opportunity to lead a musical ensemble outside of my high school, and I seized the opportunity. Little did I know the significance of the journey I was about to begin and the importance this opportunity would have for my future work in music education.

I conduct three community choirs: a college and community mixed choir, an auditioned madrigal ensemble, and a choir for singers 55 years of age and older. I titled my first season with one of my choirs “A Season of Miracles” because I felt it was a miracle that I moved to a new geographic location and seamlessly connected with a choir to continue my passion for choral conducting. Five years have passed since that first year, and this choir has taught me about how they learn, what they expect, how much they appreciate their singing experiences, and the high standard they hold for everyone in the

ensemble—including the conductor. Moreover, my experience with this choir prompted me to ask questions about working with adults in the choral setting. Despite years of experience conducting choral ensembles at the high school, collegiate, and community levels, my focus is on education, and this motivates me to investigate the experiences of adults in choral ensembles. The community singers I work with taught me that they have something to say and that it is worth hearing.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

Four adult amateur singers in two community choruses near Washington, D.C., delimit the study because they were accessible to the researcher. Studying only four singers allowed the researcher time to develop and create detailed and descriptive portraits of the individual singers. Four months of data collection bounded the study, which included observation of rehearsals, interviews, participant journal, and research memos. Participants were volunteers. Limitations included the willingness of stakeholders to provide access to the conductors, family members, and other interested parties.

### **Organization of the Study**

This study comprises seven chapters. Chapter One includes the introduction, statement of the problem, purpose of the study and research questions, theoretical framework, significance, and delimitations and limitations. A review of the pertinent literature discussing community choruses, meaningful experiences, sense of place, and participant perspective follows in Chapter Two. The methodology and the instruments for gathering data comprise Chapter Three. Then, Chapter Four presents portraits of

individual participants. Chapter Five contains the discussion and analysis of data as well as the identification of patterns and themes that emerged. Portrait summaries, a model of interactions, and discussion of theoretical constructs comprise Chapter Six. Finally, Chapter Seven includes a summary, conclusion, answers to the research questions, and implications for future research.

## **Chapter Two: Broad Strokes of Background**

Chapter Two reports and summarizes the pertinent literature discussing community choruses, participant perspectives in music, meaningful choral experiences, and sense of place. It begins with an overview of information on community choruses, addresses significant elements in this research study such as participant perspectives and meaningful experiences, and ends with the theoretical framework

### **Community Choruses**

“Nearly everyone knows someone . . . who sings in a chorus,” (Ahlquist, 2006, p. 1). The prevalence of choral singers throughout the country suggests that choral singing has a powerful influence on the lives of choristers. In the following section, I will address significant facets of community choruses, which I organized under the following categories: sense of community, transformative properties, the enjoyment of singing, influence of the conductor, health and wellbeing, and social benefits.

**Sense of community.** Comprised of many interdependent elements, choruses often have a strong sense of community within their membership, which sometimes spreads through their surrounding geographic location. Avery et al. (2013) presented contemporary perspectives on community choral singing in the United States. They identified singers, artistic leaders, organization or management, living and musical entity, joining a chorus, membership guidelines, literature, and music learning as elements of the traditional community chorus. The sense of community created in each ensemble was another important element, and Avery et al. concluded, “a healthy community chorus is a dynamic and multifaceted entity” (p. 252).

Focusing on sense of community in a specific city, Russell (2006) documented the choral music ensembles of Decatur, Illinois, from the early- to mid-1990s. Aiming to provide a holistic sense of choral music in the community, Russell studied school, church, and community choral ensembles. In conclusion, Russell found that choral music, even with a diverse set of practices between different ensembles, was “a fundamental thread in Decatur’s social fabric” (p. 67), suggesting that choruses have the ability to cultivate a sense of community outside their own organization.

Avery et al. (2013) and Russell (2006) studied choruses in the United States, yet community choruses exist throughout the world. They represent forces of colonization, Christianization, globalization, and industrialization (de Quadros, 2012b). In east Africa, for instance, Barz (2006) studied the sociocultural structures of kwayas, choirs that function “as a microcosm of an idealized social system” (p. 21): Members of kwayas meet on a regular basis to do things such as sing, pray, mourn, seek advice, and play sports. Barz found that kwayas are multidimensional communities singers embed within their lives.

In the United Kingdom, Malone (2009) attempted to infuse choral singing within the marginalized and divided community of South Oxhey in Hertfordshire. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) documented the creation of the largest community choir in the United Kingdom in Malone’s series, *The Choir: Unsung Town* (season two). Over the course of 9 months, Malone (2009) created three choirs in the town, accessing all members of the community from plumbers to boxers, most of whom had no previous experience singing in a traditional choral setting. After rehearsals and performances,

singers reported that participation in choir had provided them with a life changing experience, a distraction to common life problems, connections with the community during performances, self-confidence, and new friends. Malone concluded that choral singing is the culmination of people gathering together and enjoying each other's company, the enjoyment of community. It is the expression of something that is deeply human.

A small town in China created a sense of community that also crossed the boundaries of time. Xi (2012) presented a unique community choral singing situation in the Yunnan province of China. In a farming town named Little Well, population 475, a tradition of choral singing connected communities across generations. The inhabitants of Little Well were farmers who possessed the ability to perform choral music from the Western canon using the vocal tone production of bel canto mixed with their traditional Miao culture singing style. Singing, an integral part of farmers' lives in this town, occurred during weekly rehearsals that met on Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday evenings after work. In this unique situation, the singers of Little Well learned to love Baroque and Romantic music and sing in four-part harmony from an Australian missionary who visited in the early 1900s. Since then, with no professional conductor or voice teacher in the village, the persons of Little Well continued to labor hard during the day and sing together four nights a week. They passed down this singing tradition with care from generation to generation, keeping this precious choral community alive over time.

Sense of community crossed the boundaries of time and progressed from

generation to generation in the small Chinese town of Little Well (Xi, 2012). It contributed to a deeply human experience in South Oxhey (Malone, 2009), and remained a constant theme during the review of community choral websites in the United States (Avery et al., 2013). The sense of community in choruses, and the power to overcome boundaries such as time and marginalized populations, leads to the transformational properties of community choruses.

**Transformative properties.** Community choruses, because they are a part of the social fabric in their surrounding geographic location, have the ability to impact communities and instigate change even though most community chorus members and directors choose to protect their traditional paradigm. Yet, de Quadros (2012a) wrote, “worldwide, choirs are transforming the lives of their members and their local communities” (p. 1). Ericson (2002) viewed choral music as a cultural movement, a force that unites people, thus creating a community. Focusing mostly on choral community’s influence on the youth, Ericson believed that interaction with music stimulated a continued interest in music for a lifetime. Moreover, addressing the accessibility of the choral community, Ericson wrote, chorus is “one of the best and simplest human social activities; it is fairly undemanding and very democratic, it promotes equality” (para. 29).

Continuing with the theme of transformation and equality, Mbuyamba (2008) addressed the importance of the community experience found in community ensembles, claiming that choral singing can prepare one for life. The choral practice is “a basic tool for social cohesion” (Mbuyamba, 2008, para. 3) and it “promotes attitudes of humility and tolerance” (Mbuyamba, 2008, para. 3). Focusing on both musical and social harmony

as main components of choral singing, Mbuyamba proposed that issues of humanity and society are a vital part of the choral context where singers connect with one another, the histories and stories of the choral texts and composers, and the mysteries of life. By connecting with one another, learning about each other, and exploring life, choral singers may transform into tolerant and more harmonious individuals.

Singers in a community chorus possess the ability to create social change (Wanyama, 2008), another transformational characteristic. In an overview of two community choruses located in Minneapolis, Minnesota, Wanyama highlighted the ability of each chorus to raise critical issues in society while maintaining an artistic program. The first ensemble, The Minnesota Chorale, developed a program specifically for community outreach in 1994. Entitled Bridges, the mission of that program was to connect members of the chorus with local visual artists, dancers, museums, and social service agencies in order to cultivate fruitful partnerships. Ultimately, partnerships resulted in a final benefit concert, which not only provided the audience with an interdisciplinary artistic experience but an awareness of important issues in the community.

Fashioned after Bridges, the Alchemy Project, founded in 2007, promoted community engagement and partnerships between the arts in a choral setting. Based in Minneapolis, the singers of this chorus came from all locations of the United States to rehearse and perform together. Accomplishing a mission similar to that of The Minnesota Chorale, the Alchemy Project offered collaborations between university students and professional musicians. For both Minnesota ensembles the exploration and support of a

nonmusical issue was equal to their mission to present concerts of artistic quality as they strove to make a positive change in the social fabric of their community (Wanyama, 2008).

Prior to Wanyama (2008), Wolensky (2006) studied social change in the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union chorus from Pennsylvania, founded in 1947. According to Wolensky, the chorus "played an integral role in transforming women garment workers into a powerful community-conscious alliance" (p. 223). It became a political instrument for the union and advocated political agendas during performances. Performances throughout the state, including in its capital, anchored the ensemble in the social fabric of the state. The chorus maintained a transformational agenda, which not only provided a community for the workers, but also strengthened singers' resolve and message in the communities of Pennsylvania.

The power to transform and cultivate a sense of community was a relevant theme in the literature review on community choruses. In addition, specific motivators for choosing to sing in a community chorus were important factors in understanding the phenomenon of community choral singing experiences; such factors were the enjoyment of singing, conductor influence, health and wellbeing, and social benefits.

**Enjoyment of singing.** The joy of singing was a popular motivator for adult chorister participation. For instance, Vincent (1997) surveyed 25 mixed-voice adult choruses in Kentucky. Participants answered questionnaires relating to self-perceived influences and motivations for singing, past and present musical experiences, the musical involvement of family, achieved educational levels, and demographics. Data analysis

suggested that the majority of the participants were well educated white Americans with average or above average salaries. In addition, three-fourths of the singers participated in high school choruses. Vincent found that singers reported the love of singing, personal enjoyment, and beauty of music as motivators for their participation, but the love of singing ranked as the number one motivator. Love of singing was a predetermined category in this quantitative study, but enjoyment of singing naturally emerged in other qualitative studies.

For instance, Bailey and Davidson (2005) identified the enjoyment of singing during performance as an important benefit for one chorus in their study. The researchers sought to clarify the emotional impact of choral singing by comparing members of a chorus for homeless men and members of a middle-class chorus. Eight participants completed semi-structured interviews. Initial results indicated that group singing and performance provided emotional, social, and cognitive benefits. One such emotional benefit was the enjoyment of singing during performances. According to Bailey and Davidson, marginalized singers embraced all aspects of the choral performance and enjoyed the choral performance.

Larger quantitative studies indicated that choral singers participate for the joy of singing. For example, researchers representing Chorus America (2003) conducted telephone polls and focus group interviews of 1,000 randomly selected choral singers. Participants in the first poll answered questions about their level of choral participation and attitudes and motivators for singing; the most frequently cited reason for participation was to make beautiful music. In addition to the joy of making music, participants also

cited enrichment of the greater community and personal fulfillment as reasons for their participation. Respondents in this poll also noted that the choral repertoire and the grandness of the choral sound make the choral experience powerful. In a second telephone poll, participants answered questions about their membership in civic organizations, charitable giving, volunteerism, ability to work with people from different backgrounds, and level of political activism. Responses indicated that choral singers were important leaders and improve the lives of people in their local communities. In focus group interviews, researchers questioned what types of leadership skills developed in the choral rehearsal and participants identified teambuilding, listening and following directions, creating art, balancing a busy schedule, and socializing with fellow choir members (Chorus America, 2003).

The enjoyment of singing is also cultivated in nontraditional choral contexts. Kennedy (2009) examined music teaching and learning in an informal context by studying the particular culture of the Gettin' Higher Choir (GHC), an intergenerational nonauditioned choir. According to Kennedy, informal contexts are “community groups, at-home groups, social clubs and the like” (p. 183). Applying ethnographic approaches, Kennedy studied the choral organization of over 300 singers by conducting observations, interviews, and document examinations. Get-to-know-you sessions sponsored by GHC encouraged newcomers to join, especially if they were seeking a community of singers. GHC was known for welcoming all ages and stages of choral singers in a nonauditioned environment, which influenced the following emergent themes: teaching and learning processes, choir's ethos, outlier view, byproducts of membership, and who joins and

why. One of the major reasons that singers joined the choir was for the love of singing (Kennedy, 2009).

In 2009, Rensink-Hoff sought to examine the perceived effects of adult choral singing and what role the community chorus had in providing both a musical education and a pleasurable experience for its members. Participants answered questionnaires that provided information on demographics, singer perceptions of ensemble and individual musical achievement, and reasons for choral participation. Data indicated that the joy of singing was the most important motivator to participate in community choruses; however, the impact and leadership of the conductor followed the joy of singing closely in importance. Furthermore, participants in this study reported the quality of the music and the development of skills as the greatest benefits to participating in community chorus. Rensink-Hoff (2009) claimed that the community choral tradition was at risk due to the aging demographic of adult singers and asserted that the community choral participant is worthy of ongoing, deeper investigation. This study may contribute to such an investigation by providing detailed and personal portraits from volunteer adult singers.

Previous research suggested that singers of all ages are motivated to join choral ensembles because of their love of singing (Bailey & Davidson, 2005; Kennedy, 2009; Rensink-Hoff, 2009; Vincent, 1997). Despite the variety of singing experiences from homeless choirs (Bailey & Davidson, 2005) to intergenerational choirs (Kennedy, 2009), singers valued the enjoyment of singing during rehearsal and in performance. Another benefit that arose during review of the literature was the influence of the conductor.

**Conductor influence.** Conductor influence was an engaging factor for choral singers. Adult singers from the Rensink-Hoff (2009) study acknowledged the impact and leadership of the conductor as the second most important motivational factor for participation in choir.

Years earlier, Bell (2000) examined the attitudes of adult singers and the conductor's influence on that experience. Members of 10 community choruses in the New York City area completed surveys. Less than 20% of the participants were under 40, and the largest percentage of singers was between the ages of 40 and 70. Singers rated personal and behavioral skills of the conductor higher than musical and technical skills. According to participants, the five most important conductor actions were (a) giving clear and understandable directions, (b) instilling confidence in singers, (c) selecting appropriate repertoire, (d) identifying and correcting errors, and (e) having enthusiasm. Bell's (2000) study acknowledged the importance of the conductor's impact on the choral experience. The rehearsal behavior of a choral conductor may impact the sense of place and meaningfulness of singers.

A decade later Wis (2011) claimed that conductors are leaders whose influence changes everything in the choral setting. According to Wis, the conductor has the responsibility to select challenging repertoire; create an environment of trust; inspire singers beyond the individual benefits of music; create sufficient pacing between performances; plan for fewer rehearsals than are expected; set performance goals early in the season; prepare singers for logistics and performance expectations; always have a secondary plan and seamlessly transition to it if required; implement a whole/part/whole

approach in repertoire preparation; and define success as an engaging and challenging learning process, not just as an excellent performance.

Previous choral research acknowledged the role of the conductor as a motivating factor for choral singers (Bell, 2000; Rensink-Hoff, 2009; Wis, 2011). According to Wis, conductors influence everything; however, Rensink-Hoff indicated that even though the influence of the conductor was important, the enjoyment of singing was the most highly motivating factor.

**Health and wellbeing.** Conductor influence and the joy of singing were only two of the many benefits found in the literature regarding choral participation. Health and wellbeing was a frequent motivator to join and continue singing in choral ensembles. Busch and Gick (2012) completed measures of wellbeing on 59 adult singers before and after one choral rehearsal. Results indicated that an increase in positive attitude, vitality, and personal growth is associated with one choral rehearsal. Focusing on older adults, Cohen (2006) measured the impact of cultural programs on the physical, mental, and social factors of adults 65 and older. During a 12-month period, researchers assigned 166 adults to a musical group or another activity. Data from questionnaires, collected at the beginning and end of the study, indicated that participation in the cultural programs, one of which was a chorale, promoted participant health and reduced risk factors associated with aging.

On a larger scale, Clift et al. (2007) surveyed 600 singers, distributing a questionnaire that measured psychological, social, and environmental wellbeing factors. Participants also answered open-ended questions. A high degree of consensus existed on

the positive benefits of choral singing, and researchers predicted six choral factors that may impact wellbeing: deep breathing, positive affect, social support, focused attention, regular commitment, and cognitive stimulation. Five years earlier, Bailey and Davidson (2002) conducted a qualitative study seeking to describe the influence of choral singing on wellbeing. Researchers used semi-structured interviews to explore the singers' experiences and found that singing positively influenced emotional, social, and cognitive processes. According to Bailey and Davidson, active participation in a choral program may alleviate depression, increase self-esteem, induce cognitive stimulation, and provide an opportunity for social interaction. In an international study, Hillman (2002) distributed a questionnaire in the Glasgow area of Scotland to singers past the age of retirement who participated in the community arts project titled "Call That Singing?" The questionnaire addressed the physical, emotional, social, and cultural benefits of group singing. Participants were involved in the organization for 12 years prior to participating in the research study and reported no deterioration to their health during their 12 years of participation. In addition, adult singers reported significant improvements to their quality of life, understanding of singing, and emotional wellbeing. A decade later, Dingle, Brander, Ballantyne, and Baker (2013) studied the impact that choral singing may have on adults with a chronic mental illness or disability. Implementing semi-structured interviews, researchers explored the personal experiences of 21 choir members in relation to their wellbeing. The three emergent themes were personal impact, or emotions; social impact; and functional outcomes, such as health benefits and routine.

In a quantitative study, Beck, Cesario, Yousefi, and Enamoto (2000) collected

saliva samples from members (n=97) of a professional chorale during two rehearsals and one performance of Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*. The purpose was to determine if choral singing is associated with physiological changes in the immune system. Participants described experiences such as relaxation, changes in mood, feeling a kind of high, and stress. Beck et al. suggested that singing was both an anxious and a highly stimulating experience that led to positive feelings and satisfaction. Sanal and Gorsev (2013) supported the findings of Beck et al. when quantifying the effects of singing on the anxiety levels of singers and how those effects impacted their emotional state. Researchers prepared an experimental group of 35 singers in a choral setting and a control group of 35 subjects who were involved in an unstructured timed activity. The researchers collected data both before and after a 1-hour rehearsal. Results indicated that singing in a chorus created a positive impact on psychological indicators of affect and anxiety.

Another study on wellbeing by Taylor (2014) traced the researcher's journey of joining a gay men's chorus after losing a partner. Taylor specifically focused on the grief and healing experienced during the year after losing a partner. Applying ethnographic methods, Taylor collected self-reflective data from field notes, reflections on Facebook posts, and choir documentation (viz. programs). Results from the data collected over a year suggested the themes of awakening, healing, and vulnerability.

The themes of healing, vitality, and reduced risk factors reoccurred in the literature review on health and wellbeing. Overall, Hillman's (2002) findings summarized this section best by noting choral singing's influence on an improved quality of life.

Researchers (Bailey & Davidson, 2002; Cohen, 2006) noted the importance of social factors and their influence on health and wellbeing. Alternatively, the popularity of social benefits for choral singers warranted specialized focus on this specific benefit.

**Social benefits.** Social benefits emerged as an important aspect of singing in a chorus. Baird (2008), for example, cited the social, intellectual, and emotional aspects of singing as important perceived benefits of participation in choir. Seeking to explore what adult choir members found meaningful, Baird distributed a survey to more than 400 respondents. Adults in this study reported an elevated mood that allowed for relaxation, a sense of accomplishment, and a sense of unity. Booth (2014) praised community choruses for their ability to create wide networks within a community, connections between amateurs and professionals, and their inclusive nature, all factors that represent social benefits.

The sense of unity and social benefits in adult choral singing were not unique to the choral literature. About forty years before Baird (2008), in one of the initial research studies on community choruses, Simmons (1962) examined the benefits of singing by studying more than 500 community choral singers in the Detroit area. Simmons found that singers participated for both musical and social reasons. Participants reported that enjoyment of performing and increasing musical skills were musical benefits, and the desire to be with friends and to meet new friends were social benefits. A study by Darrough (1990) examined the role of music in the lives of singers age 65 and older, as well as their needs, preferences, and abilities. More than 400 participants completed a survey, and in addition to social experiences, the adults valued the music, recreation, and

attitudes created during the choral music experience.

In 1995, Holmquist studied community chorus members and the influence of their previous secondary choral experience on their choral singing as an adult. Holmquist aimed to identify common experiences between the school music experience and the adult choral experience. Utilizing surveys and interviews, adults reported the appreciation of a sense of community, the use of common choral language, memories of high school choral experiences, the desire for effective teaching, and the desire for further performance opportunities.

Participation in choir continued to provide social benefits in the 21st century. Clift and Hancox (2001) studied the perceived benefits associated with choral singing in two phases. Members of a college chorale (n=84) completed questionnaires regarding the benefits of singing and how these benefits impacted their health. Eighty-seven percent of participants reported social benefits, and the common themes were meeting new people, feeling more alert, increased control over breathing, spiritually uplifted, and feeling more positive. The second part of the study reflected ideas presented in the first phase. Questionnaires completed by 91 singers contained data which suggested the following benefits from singing: wellbeing and relaxation, heart and immune system, spiritual benefits, breath and posture, emotional and social benefits. A decade later, Clift et al. (2010) distributed questionnaires to 633 choral singers from eight choral societies in England. Results replicated the findings of the 2001 study including the significance of social benefits.

Willingham (2001) examined the choral experiences of a choir in Toronto by

asking what effect choral singing had on the lives of participants. The researcher grouped results from a questionnaire into the three main themes entitled forming relationships, functioning as a community, and working toward a common goal. Participants also reported individuality, the healing function of choir, and the opportunity to develop musical skills and overcome challenges in the rehearsal as important aspects of the choral experience.

In addition to the quantitative studies above, qualitative studies exist that support the importance of social benefits in choral singing. Silber (2005) documented the establishment of an Israeli choir for women inmates. Data analysis suggested that a choir is a community with rules, relationships, and purpose. Silber observed the individual and interpersonal needs of participants and noted the potential and limits of the choral ensemble's ability to provide therapeutic intervention. In conclusion, group cohesion was a significant aspect of the choral outreach program. Southcott (2009) conducted a single case study on a small choir called "the Happy Wanderers." Comprised of older adults, this choir performed for residents in care facilities. The researcher implemented semi-structured focus group interviews to collect data. According to Southcott, singing provides an opportunity for active engagement with communities so that performers may give and receive positive benefits. Researchers identified themes, which included maintaining relationships, gaining a sense of purpose and fulfillment, and personal growth.

**Summary.** Many of the studies reviewed provided existing research on community choruses (Baird, 2008; Beck et al., 2000; Bell, 2000; Cohen, Manion, &

Morrison, 2006; Darrough, 1990; Kruse, 2012; Spell, 1989; Willingham, 2001) including quantitative details such as the demographics and characteristics of members, but lacked detailed qualitative information. Researchers used surveys to gather data (Busch & Gick, 2012; Clift et al., 2007; Spell, 1989; Vincent, 1997), and one researcher employed interviews to collect more data following the distribution of surveys (Bell, 2000). Qualitative studies (Bailey & Davidson, 2005; Dingle et al., 2012; Kennedy, 2009; Rohwer, 2010; Rohwer & Rohwer, 2012; Silber, 2005; Taylor, 2014) presented descriptive information regarding singing in choral ensembles.

Social benefits were a popular benefit reported by choral singers in addition to health and wellbeing, conductor's influence, and the joy of singing. Transformation and sense of community were additional themes in the community choral literature. This study addressed community choral experiences, more specifically, choral experiences from the perspective of the adult participant. Therefore the next section in the literature review presented information on participant perspectives in music.

### **Participant Perspectives in Music**

Several researchers studied lifelong engagement in music (Coffman, 2007; Dabback, 2006; Douglas, 2011; Griffith, 2006; Jutras, 2006; Kruse, 2007; Tsugawa, 2009); however, researchers still asked, "How can music education's lifelong and lifewide objectives best be achieved?" (Bowman & Frega, 2012, p. 13). Adult singers are students in the community context, and student perspectives are a focal point of music education because, according to some, teachers hold too much power (Bradley, 2012). The tendency of music education to focus on teacher experience neglects student

knowledge and implies “that students lack the potential to contribute to collective knowledge production” (Bradley, 2012, p. 422). Therefore, research on student perspectives in music education acknowledges their presence in the discourse on music engagement and learning. Gathering participant perspectives may identify what persons find valuable or beneficial, providing insight into their sense of meaningfulness. Several studies focused on musicians’ perspectives and the meanings they develop during musical engagement experiences. The two themes in this section were student perspectives (Arasi, 2006; Bartolome, 2013; Cape, 2012; Kempton, 2002; Mills, 1988; Piekartz, 2006; Wayman, 2005) and adult choral singer perspectives (Farrell, 1972; Hinkle, 1987; Horn, 2013; Johnstone, 2012; von Bannisseht, 2014).

**Student perspectives in music.** In order to determine the lifelong meaning and influence of participating in high school choral programs, Arasi (2006) interviewed adults who participated in choir while in high school but did not pursue music as a career. She focused on how the high school choral experience influenced the adult lives of participants, asking them to recall memories of experiences relative to friend and family influences on choral participation and for advice they would give to current high school students based on participant perspectives. In addition, participants completed surveys regarding effective teaching strategies of high school choral directors. Arasi also conducted site observations of the high school choral director. She identified the themes from most important to least important: the achievement of excellence, social aspects and friendships, and personal growth. During the second interview, Arasi asked what aspect of being involved in the high school choral program was the most meaningful for the

former high school singers. The identified themes reinforced findings from previous research and set the context for this study.

In another choral study, Bartolome (2013) observed the Seattle Girls' Choir (SGC) in order to explore the perceived benefits and values associated with participation. Over the course of a year, Bartolome gathered data related to what singers, parents, and faculty members found special and important about the SGC singing experience and observed behaviors during choir rehearsals, camp experiences, performances, board meetings, and community events. In addition to observations, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with choristers, parents of choristers, faculty, and staff members. Emergent themes were personal, musical, social, and external benefits. More specifically, participants expressed the valuable aspects of their choral experience as a worthwhile endeavor, an accomplishment, empowering, fostering discipline, a collective experience, commitment-oriented, and an ambassadorship.

Cape (2012) asked members of a wind ensemble and a guitar class to share their perspectives on the qualities that made their ensemble participation meaningful. Overall, students valued the opportunity to achieve, to form relationships, to construct individual and group identities, to engage with music, and to express themselves and communicate with others. More specifically, wind ensemble students valued a sense of belonging on several different levels. These students experienced belonging during the physical rehearsal, as part of the ensemble in general, and as valued members of a team. Wind ensemble members also found meaning in the challenging music that they performed, which at times led to intense, emotional moments. Students in the guitar class, however,

accounted for a different perspective in meaning through ensemble participation. Guitar students cited the development of skill as the most meaningful aspect of the ensemble because it positively influenced their music participation outside the classroom. This study was the first to acknowledge the influence of context on the creation of meaningfulness.

A decade earlier, Kempton (2002) studied the meaning of choral music at Ricks College in Idaho, an institution owned and operated by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Using ethnographic approaches, the researcher conducted interviews and field observations in order to study the nature, intensity, and evolution of what the college singers found meaningful in their choral experience. Kempton found that students entered the choral program with perceptions already shaped by their high school singing experience; however, these perceptions quickly changed once influenced by collegiate conductors and an institutional environment. Significant themes of meaningfulness as fostered within a religious context were a sense of a higher purpose, strong feelings of family, and a desire to share faith through music.

Mills (1988) created and administered the Band Meaning Survey to 1,140 high school band members using open-ended statements and addressed both marching band activities and non-marching band activities. Mills identified group accomplishments, social enrichment, musical performance, and recreational benefits as meaningful aspects for the students. Piekartz (2006) interviewed 26 high school students in focus groups to determine what they valued most about participating in choir. Students responded to questions about plans for future music study, memorable experiences, the importance of

high school experiences, and sources of musical influence in their lives. In addition, Piekartz reviewed choral curriculum documents. Themes that emerged from the student responses included performance skill development, personal growth, musical growth and appreciation, social growth, and contact with skilled music teachers. Wayman (2005) studied what middle school students valued or enjoyed while participating in general music. Wayman distributed surveys to 762 participants in nine middle schools and identified vocational benefits, academic benefits, social benefits, and psychological benefits as categories that students held valuable.

**Adult choral singer perspectives of meaning.** The following five research studies focused specifically on what adult singers found meaningful in the choral setting.

Von Bannisseht (2014) studied adult singers who participated regularly in a choral ensemble and what they found meaningful about the experience of singing. In a phenomenological study, von Bannisseht investigated the emotional and spiritual effects of singing on eight adults. This study sought to determine what it meant for participants to sing and to define the essence of singing. The researcher collected data with participant self-descriptions, in-depth interviews, and field notes. Findings from the study indicated the following effects as a result of singing in a choral ensemble: feelings of self-worth, healing through singing, expressing emotions, feeling spirituality, feeling freedom, experiencing connections with people, and experiencing the joy of singing. Eight participants limited the study; although this study provided detailed descriptions of the singing experiences of eight adults, it is not generalizable to the population outside the study.

To focus on what is valuable to the participant, and not the listener in music, Farrell (1972) investigated the sense of meaning that urban, adult, amateur musicians derived from their vocal experience. The researcher gathered the following data on the meaning of music experience, singer profile information, and influence of musical and social backgrounds on singer profiles. Fifty-two singers from choral organizations in the area of State College, Pennsylvania, identified eight meaningful categories: integrative, spiritualistic, incidental, communication, music purist, cultural, social, and psychological.

Integrative singers found the need to be with others fulfilled when singing. Those who identified religious benefits from their singing were spiritualistic singers. Incidental singers described the nonmusical benefits of their singing experience as meaningful. Other adults valued the communication opportunities with fellow singers during rehearsals. The music purist category included adults who valued hard work in rehearsals and a high quality of performance. Adult singers who valued the collective benefits of singing found the cultural and continued traditions of the choral organization to be significant. Some singers valued the social status and prestige associated with singing in chorus. Finally, the psychological benefits of adult singing include meaningful emotional experiences associated with singing in ensembles.

Furthermore, Farrell (1972) identified seven singer profiles based on the above categories. Three categories represented 86% of participants: earnest musicians, music missionaries, and proud groupies. The earnest musicians were committed to learning and producing artistic music. Music missionaries felt that they made the world a better place with their singing and worshipping of God. Proud groupies attached themselves to their

singing ensemble and felt pride from their singing opportunities. Additionally, Farrell suggested that social class may relate to different types of choral groups, and for adult singers, learning about music may be less important than making music. In other words, social class and learning opportunities may impact meaningfulness in the choral setting.

In 1987, Hinkle addressed the subject of meaningfulness in the choral setting. He studied aspects of the choral experience that provided personal fulfillment and a sense of meaningfulness for community chorus members. Hinkle studied 133 participants from the United Singers Federation of Pennsylvania. The researcher collected quantitative data with a Q-sort instrument, musical background questionnaire, and the Choral Music Education Function Inventory. Like Farrell (1972), Hinkle identified three singer types: down-to-business, Praise-to-God, and ethnic heritage. The down-to-business singers liked a challenge and wanted to improve through singing. Praise-to-God singers valued sacred music and sang to fulfill a religious calling. Finally, the ethnic heritage singers found meaningfulness when singing music that sustained their tradition or cultural heritage. Participant responses indicated that the acquisition of musical knowledge and a heightened interest in achieving musical expertise were the two most meaningful aspects of their choral participation. Hinkle also concluded that social interaction was an important part of the choral experience of participants.

Nearly twenty-five years later Johnstone (2012) collected adult singer perspectives in a community choral setting; however, this study focused on defining Welshness and how its creation, performance, and strengthening evolved through choral membership. According to Johnstone, Welshness was “Welsh identity-creators’ own

perceptions of Welsh cultural identity” (p. 7). Exploring the choral membership and repertoire, Johnstone sought to capture how musical elements contributed to personal identity in Wales. Interviews and printed surveys distributed by the researcher provided data on why participants felt a sense of belongingness and what their membership meant to them. Analysis of the data suggested that language was one of the central signs of Welshness, including both the love for the language and the need to historically defend it. In addition, the connection between musical activities and cultural identity caused participants to assign meaning to songs and music making in Wales.

Horn (2013) presented an autoethnographic account of singing in a volunteer community chorus. Her purpose was to explore why adults choose to sing and participate in community choruses. Horn blended her personal singing experiences, cultivated for almost thirty years in a volunteer community chorus in New York City, with the experiences of other singers and choral directors to create a rich and descriptive account of the community choral setting. Historical accounts of choral repertoire and research studies on singing woven throughout the text supported the act of choral singing. Horn found that choral music transported her to another place and reminded her that despite life’s hardships, there is good in the world. Focusing mostly on the elements of “singing and unity” (p. 36), Horn shared the struggles and triumphs of learning to sing in harmony, participating in an art form, and singing for more than pleasure. One of the most valuable aspects of singing for Horn was the ability to participate, no matter what talents one may possess; she wrote, “you’re not just listening to the music, but becoming it” (p. 85). According to Horn, singing with others made her happy.

This section reviewed participant perspectives, an important contribution of this research study. However, the ultimate goal of this study was to identify what adult singers found meaningful from their community choral singing experience. Thus, the next section of the literature review will focus on meaningful choral experiences.

### **Meaningful Choral Experiences**

According to Elliott and Silverman (2012), “the nature of music becomes more specific [meaningful] when we understand the musical aims, values, uses, functions, beliefs, and skills/understandings (informal or formal) of the people who make and partake of ‘their’ musical sounds and actions” (p. 29). In other words, an awareness of participant stories regarding community choral experiences may contribute to the understandings, functions, beliefs, values, aims, and uses of choral music-making, contributing to an understanding of the meaningfulness of music participation. This section includes information about high school and middle school choral experiences and contextual factors, which go beyond the focused range defined by sense of place.

**High school and middle school choral experiences.** The choral experiences adult singers had during their time in high school or middle school could provide some insight into their sense of meaning. Hylton (1980) stated, “Experts have stressed the importance of providing meaningful musical experiences.... Little is known about how students view their participation in high school choral ensembles” (p. 17). In 1980, Hylton distributed the Choral Meaning Survey to high school singers. It listed 70 possible meaningful qualities participants might have experienced during their high school choir involvement. Results from 14 high schools in Pennsylvania highlighted seven factors

participants felt were the most meaningful: a sense of achievement; spirituality; ability to communicate; and musical, artistic, psychological, and integrative skills. Hylton (1980) proposed that the seven factors created a multidimensional conceptualization of the qualities that singers find meaningful in the choral setting. However, this quantitative survey did not provide the opportunity for singers to elaborate upon why and how certain factors were meaningful.

Other researchers (Farmer, 2009; Kwan, 2007; Sugden, 2005) implemented Hylton's (1980) Choral Meaning Survey in later choral studies. Kwan (2007) studied singers in 13 middle schools and high schools in Hong Kong. Results confirmed Hylton's (1980) previous findings that sense of achievement; spirituality; ability to communicate; and musical, artistic, psychological, and integrative skills. Additionally, Kwan suggested that social and psychological background, internal attributes, and emotional attributes contribute to meaningfulness. Farmer (2009) sought to determine whether high school singers prefer singing in a traditional concert choir or a show choir. During the study, participants shared their perceived meanings of the choral singing experience, which the researcher examined for indicators of choral ensemble preference. Participants, 307 high school students from Alabama and Georgia, completed an adaptation of Hylton's (1980) Choral Meaning Survey. Analysis of the data confirmed Hylton's (1980) findings, however Farmer (2009) identified social interactivity as an additional meaningful aspect of the choral rehearsal.

Sugden (2005) also studied the meaningfulness of the choral experience and the musical identity of middle and high school singers. In addition to completing the Choral

Meaning Survey, participants responded to optional, open-ended questions that expanded upon the concepts covered in the survey. Sugden confirmed previous claims that choir singers experience multidimensional aspects of meaning. Sugden's research also supported Hylton's (1980) claims, suggesting the dimensions of meaning remained fixed for middle and high school students.

**Contextual factors.** Research indicated that context is a key component in creating a sense of meaningfulness (Harrison, 2008; see also Britt, Adler, & Bartone, 2001; Cape, 2012; Morse, 2011; Sherman, Nave, & Funder, 2010). Harrison (2008) noted that while a specific phenomenon may be meaningful to a person, other "contextual factors" (p. 4) might influence meaningfulness. Examples of contextual factors are relationships formed in an ensemble, pride associated with membership, identity expression, or identity realization (Harrison, 2008). Expanding the lens of sense of place (see Sense of Place), Adderley, Kennedy, and Berz (2003); Bonshor (2014); Ruck Keene (2015); Schank (2007); and Snow (2011) explored contextual factors in the music ensemble setting.

Adderley et al. (2003) investigated students' experiences in the high school music classroom, including contextual factors such as motivations to join and remain in the ensemble, the social climate of the classroom, perceptions of musical ensembles by members and the community, and the values each ensemble fostered in their students. Each researcher engaged in structured interviews with 20 students from three ensembles (band, orchestra, and chorus), resulting in 60 participants. Analysis of the results indicated that students join music ensembles for musical, social, academic, and family

reasons. Participation in ensembles resulted in musical, academic, psychological, and social benefits. The social climate of each musical ensemble was a pervasive element during the study. Analysis of the data suggested that students placed great importance on the social aspects of their ensemble membership. Thus, researchers concluded that the high school music classroom might be “a home away from home” (Adderley et al., 2003, p. 190) for students, which may impact meaningfulness.

Exploring context in more than one community chorus, Bonshor (2014) investigated environmental and situational factors contributing to the lived experiences of adult choral singers. Conducting focus groups and semi-structured, individual interviews, Bonshor sought to identify influences on voice perception, performance ability, and factors affecting singer confidence. After three focus group discussions and 16 individual interviews with 18 singers involved in different choral groups, the themes of choral acoustics, choral configuration, concert venues, verbal communication, nonverbal communication, and collaboration emerged as contributions to the lived experiences of adult choral singers. According to Bonshor, all themes impacted the chorus as a community of practice, a group of persons who share a skill or art (Lave & Wenger, 1991), especially the contextual factors of choral direction, musical leadership, and group dynamics. Therefore, the factors identified by Bonshor may also impact the formation of meaningfulness for adults in the community choral setting.

Soon after Bonshor (2014), Ruck Keene (2015) studied the unique culture of collaboration, including contextual factors that contributed to the experience of combining amateur and professional singers in a UK community choral program. Using

qualitative techniques, Ruck Keene investigated the choir's mission of combining amateur and professional adult singers and if the experience was affirming or damaging to the amateur singer's musical identity. Ruck Keene also observed the relationship between amateur and professional singers. Online questionnaires and individual semi-focused interviews were techniques used to gather data. Sixty-six amateur singers responded to the questionnaire, and seven amateur and three professional singers provided information during interviews. Ruck Keene indicated four contextual factors: a sense of belonging, musical competence, enjoyment, and musical life stories. In the context of this study, musical life stories were the lived musical opportunities experienced by participants that guided their career path toward or away from a professional music career. Results from this study may indicate additional contextual factors that impact meaningfulness for adult singers.

In a sacred context, Schank (2007) studied contextual factors and their influence on Latter-day Saint Institute choral tours. The Church Educational System of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints sponsored choral tours for members of the church including adult singers. Schank explored, from the director's perspective, the value and purpose of choir tours, who finds meaning in the tours, and what influences creation of meaningfulness. Using qualitative methods, the researcher conducted three interviews each with four choir directors before, during, and after their spring choral tours. According to the choral directors the church members in the geographic tour regions, individuals not of the same faith in the geographic tour regions, students in the choir, and the directors themselves benefitted from the choral tours. Researcher analysis of the data

suggested that concepts of family, Priesthood, and the Church mission supported the creation of meaningful experiences on choral performance tour.

Snow (2011) identified the safe space created in a high school choral classroom and the tone of citizenship and positive learning occurring in this environment. According to Snow, citizenship and positive learning were contextual factors that provided support for identity development, both for the individual singer and for the choir as a whole. By combining Hylton's (1980, 1981) multidimensional views of meaning with the concept of contextual factors, meaningfulness included a variety of dimensions, such as the music itself, the context in general, or specific situations that occur within the context. Meaningfulness was not one-dimensional no matter its influence or creation (Harrison, 2008).

The studies in this section, provided an initial framework for meaningfulness in the choral setting. However, the dimensions of meaningfulness appear vague when viewed through the wide lens of contextual factors. Sense of place, the conceptual framework for place attachment theory, provided specific parameters through which to analyze dimensions of meaningfulness in the adult community choral setting. The next section of the review presents literature on the theoretical framework used to guide this study.

### **Sense of Place as the Theoretical Framework**

Place attachment theory explains the affective bond that connects people to places (Low & Altman, 1992). Sense of place is a multidimensional concept that focuses on the interaction of time, space, and experience (Stauffer, 2012). It is a phenomenon

understood and experienced on an individual level (Bricker, 1998; Halpenny, 2006; McBride, 2005; Stauffer, 2012) but also on a communal level (McClinchey, 2011), and it contributes to a sense of meaningfulness. The power of place is “kaleidoscopic” (Casey, 1997, p. 285); it can hold a variety of roles in divergent contexts. Sense of place is an appropriate theoretical framework for this study because it acknowledges a specific time and place while supporting complex actions in a multidimensional setting (Finnegan, 2007). In the following subsections, I explore the literature of place theory in the general literature and in the context of music..

**Initial perceptions.** Researchers identified the defining characteristics of place. According to Stauffer (2012), initial philosophies of place focus solely on the combination of time and space. Place could either be an exact geographic location or a general designation for the site where an experience occurred. Time could either be the measured time of the day or a general period of time in one’s life. The constructs of time and space distinguish one place from another. Flay (1989) noted that the same physical space might become a different place at different times of day. For instance, a community chorus that rehearses in a sanctuary will experience a different sense of place in that space during a rehearsal than they will during a church service, an Easter egg hunt, or a carpet restoration. Flay also recognized that a sense of place occurring during the same time may differ depending on the space in which it occurs. For example, multiple church choirs that rehearse at the same time but in different spaces may experience different senses of place due to their location even though they meet on the same day and time

each week. According to Casey (1997), discussion of space and time was only the beginning of understanding the “rich tradition of place-talk” (p. x).

**Contemporary perceptions.** Time and space are the defining characteristics of place; however, place is more than time or space. Contemporary definitions on sense of place included the actions and interactions of people within the time and space, which is socioculturally significant to sense of place (Stauffer, 2012). In 1993, Ryden proposed that sense of place takes on lived meaning assigned by people and their interactions within a space. Nearly ten years later, Jorgensen and Stedman (2001) wrote that sense of place is a multidimensional construct that includes relationships between self and space, behaviors that exclusively occur in a place, and feelings toward place. Stauffer supported this multidimensional concept and labeled it as “the becoming of places” (p. 440). The becoming of places encompasses the lived experiences and interpretations of individuals who act and interact within a space to create sense of place. Thus, Stauffer referred to sense of place as the nexus of time, space, and experience. The inclusion of experience acknowledged the subjective human interpretation of space.

Each person constructs a sense of place within multiple social contexts and interactions and is the only person who can understand this sense of place (Stauffer, 2012). Personal experiences define the individual, and each individual thinks and behaves differently in a space, even if place, time of day, and social context remain constant. An individual’s sense of place is never fully knowable because the sense of place constantly changes as the individual continues “to be in the world” (Stauffer, 2012, p. 440). Hummon (1992) proposed an integrative perception of a sense of place by considering

the balance between the emotive and cognitive components of each individual. “Sense of place involves a personal orientation toward place, in which one’s understandings of place and one’s feelings about place become fused” (Hummon, 1992, p. 262). Individuals understand place through the intersection of multiple understandings including the understanding of what a place physically is and the understanding of what a place means emotionally. Individuals constantly analyze their understandings to develop new senses of place (Stauffer, 2012).

Basing an understanding of sense of place on the experiences of individuals and perceptions makes it a subjective concept. Consequently, understanding the sense of place of an individual can provide multiple dimensions of the individual experience; a group of individuals may experience the same time and space together, but their senses of place will vary. Individuals develop a sense of place from experience; it is through this sense of place that individuals perceive meaningfulness.

**Sense of place in music.** Research investigating sense of place in music was sparse. Spring (2014) addressed the impact of music educators’ sense of place in a specific geographic region.

Spring (2014) explored the perspectives of four rural music educators to determine how place influenced the rural characteristics, music education praxis, and interactions with students and the community in teachers’ lives. Collection of data occurred through narratives of lived experiences in the classroom, school, and community contexts, which involved the use of autobiographical accounts, interviews, metaphorical perspectives, and one collaborative focus group session. Analysis of data

suggested that music teachers expressed a love of teaching, but a disdain for other job requirements, and were committed to building community relationships. In particular, data viewed through the sense of place framework suggested the following themes: uniqueness of travelling in rural areas, changing landscape, homogeneity of music curriculum, students leaving rural areas, and closing of rural schools. Spring focused on the physical dimensions of place, but did little to represent the social context of space between persons. The current study fills this gap, providing an in-depth look at how individuals experience place and how those experiences affect meaningfulness.

### **Discussion of the Literature**

Research on community choruses provided a rich background of meaningful factors identified by adult singers in the choral setting, but it did little to explain why these factors were meaningful to the individuals themselves. A review of the research on participant perspectives in music provided a detailed backdrop of descriptive information regarding individual musical experiences. Some of this research representing adult choral perspectives, however, was dated. Although quantitative studies did represent the adult singer perspective, the singer categories were predetermined, and the researchers ultimately shaped the data to fit the participants into certain categories. The current study instead focused on the nuanced and detailed story of each participant, representing who they were and their meaningful experiences.

Lacking from the literature on the transformative properties of community choruses was the perspective of community singers and, more importantly, whether singers found the transformational power of their ensemble to be a meaningful part of

their singing experience. The research journal articles and dissertations listed in the Community Choruses section provided detailed information regarding the community choral experience, but did not address the participants' sense of meaningfulness or the influence of the choral place on meaningfulness. The current study will provide a new perspective on the benefits of community choral singing.

## Chapter Three: Planning the Landscape

### Rationale for a Qualitative Study and Research Design

**Qualitative design.** Traditionally, quantitative research follows a deductive approach, creating a preconceived notion for testing. Alternatively, qualitative research is inductive, inducing information from collected data (Patten, 2009). The purpose and research questions of this study justified a qualitative approach over quantitative because, without any preconceived notions, I sought to investigate what adult singers found meaningful and how place impacted the formation of meaningfulness. Researchers emphasized the significance of relating one's choice of research design to the nature of the research questions (Bernard, 1994; Froehlich & Frierson-Campbell, 2013; Judd, Smith & Kidder, 1991; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Lichtman, 2010; Merriam, 1988, 2009; Patten, 2009; Phillips, 2008; Yin, 1994, 2011). For example, Merriam (1988) stated, "how the problem is defined and questions it raises determine the study's design" (p. 29). The questions in this study, which begin "in what ways...", were exploratory in nature and thus warranted a qualitative design (Yin, 1994, 2011). However, there are other qualities in this study that supported a qualitative design.

The current study focused on the meaningful experiences of adult choral singers in two community choruses. Community singing is quite popular in the United States (Chorus America, 2003) and something with which adults are familiar. According to Silverman (2013), "valuable qualitative research" (p. 151) does not treat everyday life as boring or obvious. In fact, Yin (2011) wrote that "every real-world happening can become the subject of qualitative study" (p. 3). Moreover, the intention to collect the

participants' perspectives and inquire after how participants experience and define meaningfulness formed from everyday community choral singing made this research qualitative in nature (Silverman, 2013). In order to describe the everyday experience of individuals, rich and descriptive accounts are necessary. Consequently, due to the detailed nature of the data collection process, this study required a smaller population of participants, another typical trait of qualitative research (Patten, 2009).

More specifically, Yin (2011) identified five features of qualitative research that support the choice of a qualitative design for this study. As mentioned above, I collected data from the study of living people in real-world conditions, the first feature in qualitative research. The second feature of qualitative research is representing the perspectives of the people: Sharing adult singer perspectives on meaningful experiences in the community chorus was the purpose of the current research study. The current study acknowledged contextual conditions of people's lives, the third feature of a qualitative study; application of place attachment theory acknowledged the context of participants' lives. Additionally, the application of place attachment theory in data analysis contributed to explaining the social processes of the community chorus. Contributing to emerging concepts in human social behavior is the fourth feature of qualitative research. This study did so by evaluating participant perspectives of meaningfulness within the social context of a choral setting. Finally, the use of multiple sources to collect data is the fifth feature of a qualitative study. The nature of the questions and the purpose of the current study suggested more than one method of data collection.

Qualitative research empowers people and gives them a voice (Bauer, Gaskell, &

Allum, 2000). This study aimed to empower adult choral singers and display their voices with individual narrative portraits. However, in order to exhibit the strength of portraiture as the research design for this study, I considered alternative qualitative methodologies, which appear in the next section.

**Rationale for portraiture as the research design.** I contemplated the following alternative research designs while preparing the research study proposal: case study, phenomenological study, and narrative inquiry.

A case study, for example, could have offered more detailed information on one or more participants in this study. However, this detailed information would have focused more on the individual adult singer (his or her personal background, statistical information, and life history) instead of what they found meaningful about the experience of singing in a community chorus. In addition, the adult singer would have been the case, and therefore observations of how place or context impacted meaningfulness would have gone beyond the bounded case. In particular, case studies often lack “philosophical underpinnings” (Lichtman, 2010, p. 81), and with a theoretical framework guiding this study, I continued to look for a design that would better suit my research questions and framework.

Results from a phenomenological study could have offered information on the lived experiences of meaningfulness in the community choral setting. If I had used a phenomenological research design, the ultimate goal of the research would have been to capture and describe the experience of meaningfulness in community choral singing through the eyes of the four participants as a group. Consequently, the voice of the

individual would have been lost to the description of the common essence of experiencing meaningfulness in the community chorus. As the researcher, I would have had to bracket my opinions and not have allowed them to shape descriptions of the studied phenomenon. This design also would have excluded the importance of place, and therefore I would have been unable to study its impact on the creation of meaningfulness.

Narrative inquiry design would have included detailed narratives of the four adult singers, focusing on the stories of each singer and interweaving them together. But, the danger in this design was losing the voice of individual participants. Meaningfulness is a subjective experience resulting in divergent viewpoints from one participant to the next. Attempting to bring four different accounts into one storyline might have compromised the uniqueness of each experience. As in the two designs above, the narrative inquiry design did not include the opportunity to acknowledge context or the impact of place.

This study, which investigated adults' perspectives on the formation of meaningfulness in the community chorus through the lens of place attachment, best connected with the methodology of portraiture, particularly due to the depth of context that it develops. In portraiture, research and art combine resulting in art becoming a "mode of inquiry" (Knowles & Cole, 2008, p. 1). Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983), a sociologist, ethnographer, and biographer, established portraiture as a research methodology to blur the boundaries between science and art by "its explicit recognition of the use of the self as the primary research instrument for documenting and interpreting the perspectives and experiences of the people and the cultures being studied" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 13). She developed social science portraiture not

from a theoretical framework, but from her experiences working as a painter and sitting for portraits (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Acknowledging the power of art to liberate and free both the subject and the artist, Lawrence-Lightfoot applied the notion of “painting with words” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 5) to the domain of qualitative research.

According to Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983), the painter, or researcher, often brings qualities to the surface that a subject or participant might not ever notice or acknowledge. Portraiture is the dialogic relationship of researcher and respondent (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). As in painting, the subject of a portrait appears in a context or place. “Through portraiture, researchers can demonstrate a commitment to the research participants and contextualize the depictions of individuals and events” (Dixson, Chapman, & Hill, 2005, p. 17). Moreover, portraiture contributes to humanness in our society. As Seidemen (2006) wrote, “at the very heart of what it means to be human is the ability of people to symbolize their experience through language” (p. 8). Portraiture research includes a commitment to participants and the context in which they operate (Dixson et al., 2005).

**Rich description of portraiture.** In particular, this study employed portraiture, a methodology that “reflects a way of being in the world as a researcher that is paradigmatically different from other ways of thinking about and designing research” (Knowles & Cole, 2008). More specifically, the importance of the search for goodness, researcher’s role, commitment to humanness, depth of context, and freedom in artistic expression lead to selection of the portraiture methodology.

Portraiture was an appropriate design for this study because of its focus on goodness (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983). Originating in the writing of scholars such as Plato (Irwin, 1995), the search for goodness in portraiture is a direct contrast to the positive paradigm of social science. According to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997), social science often seeks to identify social problems focusing on “pathology and disease rather than health and resilience” (p. 8). Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983) developed portraiture to examine ways in which participants meet, negotiate, and overcome challenges (Dixson et al., 2005). Finding what adult singers value or hold significant in their choral experience is ultimately a search for goodness, a search intended to honor the experiences of adult singers from their perspective. Goodness is a lens through which the researcher viewed the overall context of the choral place in this study. The researcher focused on moments of negotiation that led to success instead of frustration (Dixson et al., 2005).

According to Gaztambide-Fernández, Cairns, Kawashima, Menna, and VanderDussen (2011), in portraiture the researcher seeks to portray experiences of people as they negotiate through their world. Gaztambide-Fernández et al.’s project involved a team of graduate students working with a faculty advisor as an introductory to qualitative research methods. Researchers focused on “building relationships, negotiating boundaries, and constructing representations” (Gaztambide-Fernández et al., 2011, p. 3), all dimensions of portraiture. The construction of three short studies in this project illustrated how debates arise during group negotiations of theme identification and portrait production and how researchers learn through the process of debate. Most importantly, this research project emphasized the role of researcher as both instrument

and observer in portraiture, which ensures movement “through the necessary explorations that are the heart of qualitative research” (Gaztambide-Fernández et al., 2011, p. 2). More specifically, Gaztambide-Fernández et al. used portraiture methodology as a vehicle for learning to introduce and gain first-hand experience in qualitative research for a graduate research team. The resulting portraits of learning from the field included pedagogical concerns of methodology, research context, and the researcher’s role.

Portraiture allows the researcher to capture the essence of the human spirit within a particular context (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), and this study aimed to capture the experiences of adult singers within a specific place, the community chorus. As Boyer Doty (2009) wrote, to truly paint subjects, one should view them from all angles. Like visual artists, researchers in portraiture consider the value contrast of their narratives, or the contrast between light and dark. The researcher chooses which stories to bring to the forefront with lighter hues, which stories remain in the dark, and how to negotiate transitions from light to dark in the final data presentation. More specifically, focus on goodness in portraiture is the portrayal of light. The value contrast and use of chromatic tones, or colors, impacts how believable the final portrait will be (Boyer Doty, 2009). It is this level of focus on each participant that enables the creation of rich, thick portraits, but that also limits the sample size: Portraiture is not meant to represent the general population.

In portraiture, depth of context is a necessary component. The researcher makes decisions regarding use of color and value contrast in the descriptive narratives and the context in which they exist. Visual artists use intuitive space to bring a two-dimensional

figure to life. Intuitive space is the use of particular methods to create depth, volume, and mass in a two-dimensional object (Boyer Doty, 2009). In turn, portraiture researchers use intuitive space during data analysis and narrative composition as they create living portraits set within a vibrant context. Researchers make decisions about perspective, sharing, color, and light, artistic factors that represent a person in a particular time and place. Gaztambide-Fernández et al. (2011) wrote that the purpose of portraiture is to “explore participants’ experiences and the complexities of how meanings are produced within a particular context” (p. 2). These complex experiences contributed to the value contrast and intuitive space in the final construction of narrative portraits and further substantiated the importance of sense of place as the theoretical framework.

Finally, because portraiture is a form of arts-based research (Dixson, 2005; Dixson et al., 2005; Hill, 2005), it provides researchers a clean palette for artistic expression in interpreting and reporting the data. Dixson et al. (2005) explored extended versions of portraiture that blended music and poetry with data collection and analysis. For example, Dixson (2005) incorporated the elements of jazz into a portraiture study on African American women teachers. By adding “solos, breaks, and riffs” (Dixson et al., 2005, p. 21) into the narratives, Dixson (2005) developed a jazz methodology for qualitative research. Dixson (2005) used portraiture to bring the stories of marginalized African Americans to the forefront just like jazz. Alternatively, Hill used poetry to construct portraits of African American women educators and illustrated their perspectives, experiences, and practices. According to Hill, the final portraits resulted in “poetic afriographies” (Dixson et al., 2005, p. 22). In this research study, I combined

thematic quotations and found poetry with narratives in the presentation of participant data. Portraiture provided the ultimate framework for molding this research into a reputable scientific work equally able to exist in an artistic dimension.

### **Participant Selection**

**Community choruses.** For this study, I selected participants from two volunteer community choruses listed in the choral societies and choirs section of the Maryland Manual On-Line published by the Maryland State Archives (2014). Selected ensembles included mixed voices (soprano, alto, tenor, and bass); a formal concert series; and a paid, professional conductor. After identifying potential choirs, I sought permission for the study from the conductor or artistic director of each ensemble.

I sent an e-mail to conductors seeking potential interest in the study and expressing the logistical issues of visiting, observing, presenting the study to the choir, and obtaining consent from those who volunteered for the study and met the criteria. As Currah (2005) suggested, I let the conductor know that I would not be involved in this study as an expert, but as a learner.

**Participants.** According to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997), portraiture studies require a small sampling to allow time to build a relationship of trust with participants. Consequently, two adult singers from each chorus who expressed a willingness to participate in the study served as the participants. Participants identified one family member each who would be willing to participant in one interview. Each participant kept a personal journal that documented meaningful experiences in the choral ensemble. The choral conductors participated in one interview as well.

I spoke with choral members during rehearsal and distributed a recruitment letter (Appendix D) for the study. According to Koelsch (2011), the findings and process of research may impact participants in a positive manner. This supports prior claims by Lather (1986), who wrote there is potential for “respondents to gain self-understanding and, ideally, self-determination through research participation” (p. 67). After sharing the potential contributions of the research, I shared the participant criteria and asked for those who were interested to stay after rehearsal. From these initial volunteers, I identified four singers in total, two from each ensemble, to represent their respective community chorus. More than two people from each chorus met the criteria and volunteered; however, preference fell to the four adult singers who responded and completed their interviews first.

### **Data Sources**

This study included all of the necessary steps for data collection in portraiture, as noted by Gaztambide-Fernández et al. (2011), which included creating protocols, writing field notes, conducting interviews, and presenting the study to participants. More specifically, data collection consisted of in-depth interviews of adult singers, adult singer family members or friends, and two community choral conductors; adult singer journal entries; observations of choral rehearsals and performances; and an impressionistic record I collected in the field. The variety of data types in this study enriched data collection (Patton, 2002). In general, data collection “[began] by asking what is happening here, what is working, and why?” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 142). I used a laptop for observations and interviews and took notes in a Word document. To protect the data, I

stored all electronic research materials in a secure, password-protected file on a password-protected computer located in a secure, locked filing cabinet with other collected research materials.

**Interviews.** Interviewing is a basic form of inquiry in qualitative research in which the research pursues “the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (Seidman, 2006, p. 9). I employed semi-structured interviews, also known as in-depth interviews (Gaskell, 2000), which are informal and conversational, mostly including open-ended questions (Fontana & Frey, 1994; Lichtman, 2010; Patton, 2002). The nature of open-ended questions permits one to go into further detail and follow leads during the interview (Gaskell, 2000). This allowed for maximum flexibility in the interview process and afforded the respondents the most freedom to share their stories (Lewis-Beck, Bryman, & Liao, 2004). My goal was to provoke thoughtful responses and to “enter into the other person’s perspective” (Patton, 2002, p. 341). Full interview questions are located in Appendix A.

At the beginning of the interview, I reminded participants of the research purpose and questions, as indicated by Berg (2009). Following the previous work of Britzman (2000) and Peshkin (2001), I strived to cultivate rapport and develop a sense of mutual trust throughout the interview. All participants responded to the same interview questions; however, other questions arose with individual participants based on each story (Froehlich & Frierson-Campbell, 2013; Riessman, 2008). Interviews with the four adult singers, family members of adult singers, and conductors took place during the first month of the research study. Each interview lasted for approximately 90 minutes, and I

recorded and transcribed all interviews. Torcivia (2012) recommended that researchers note important mannerisms or body language, questions that arise, patterns that emerge, and connections to theory. I articulated all recommendations in the interview protocol.

**Journals.** Participants maintained a personal journal to express their perceptions and experiences throughout the study and to note any thoughts they wished to share with me at a later time. “Journals are a powerful way for individuals to give accounts of their experience” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 102), and allowing participants to have free rein over their journals provided such data. According to Torcivia (2012), journals provide a deeper level of reflection: “Participants mentioned how the interview had brought certain experiences and memories to the surface and that, after having time to reflect, they were able to remember additional details to make connections between their experiences” (p. 62). I provided participants with journal instructions and suggested prompts (Appendix B) at the end of each interview.

**Observations.** Observations differ from interviews and journals because they provide a new perspective in the natural field setting and represent an immediate encounter with the studied phenomenon (Froehlich & Frierson-Campbell, 2013; Kawulich, 2005; Merriam, 1998). Observations may give the researcher a better understanding of the context and phenomenon studied (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002). Silverman (2013) referred to observations as ethnography, “highly descriptive writing about particular groups of people” (p. 2). According to Silverman, during observations the researcher looks for no answers to specific questions, but instead collects “naturally occurring material” (p. 46).

Furthermore, observations represent my perspective as the researcher. I observed two rehearsals for each community chorus. All observations began before the choristers arrived and ended when the choristers departed. During the observation, I took detailed field notes according to an observational protocol. As recommended by Glesne (2006), field notes in this study contained descriptions of events, activities, and informal conversations. According to Phillion (1999), field notes provide a place for researchers to struggle and work through developing data analysis and interpretation. My recorded struggles as a researcher contributed to an overall understanding and the construction of research texts. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) noted, field notes contribute to the overall understanding by highlighting the important and distinguishable moments of reflection and questioning during the research process.

**Impressionistic record.** Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) described the impressionistic record as “a ruminative, thoughtful piece that identifies emerging hypotheses, suggests interpretations, describes shifts in perspective, points to puzzles and dilemmas (methodological, conceptual, ethical) that need attention” (p. 188). The impressionistic record for the current portraiture study was a journal I kept to organize and manage information including interactions and behaviors between participants and me (Schendel, 2009). I made notes in an impressionistic record during interviews and observations, which included first impressions, surprises during interviews, reminders for future meetings, my thoughts during the interview, and any immediate interpretations (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). I continued to record thoughts in the impressionistic record throughout the process of data analysis and interpretation.

## **Analysis and Interpretation**

Construction of research texts took place through a process of coding. Coding is the analysis and interpretation process in which the researcher questions the meaning and significance of the collected data, sorting it into patterns and themes (Hay, 2005). In other words, coding allows the researcher to dissect data in a meaningful way (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this study I followed the process of coding as presented by Charmaz (2006). The four major steps of Charmaz's process are initial, focused, axial, and theoretical coding. Initial coding involves the naming of words or segments of data in order to portray meanings and actions. During initial coding the researcher describes segments of text line by line. Focused coding occurs when the researcher selects the most frequently occurring or significant codes from the initial phase and begins to organize them. It is more directed and selective and begins to create larger segments of data called categories.

The third step in qualitative coding is axial coding (Charmaz, 2006). Presented by Strauss and Corbin (1998), axial coding involves the organization of large amounts of data around a central axis, or category. This phase represents the specific dimensions of each category as the researcher develops subcategories. In the final step, theoretical coding, the researcher identifies possible connections between major categories named in focused coding. The researcher concludes the data analysis by clarifying the general context in which the studied phenomenon exists (Charmaz, 2006). In addition to following Charmaz's (2006) analysis techniques, I incorporated portraiture analysis.

In portraiture analysis, themes emerge from the data as a consequence of resonant

metaphors or symbols that repeat often throughout the data and give shape to the beliefs and values of the participants (Schendel, 2009). In addition, I considered the rituals that held “a symbolic importance in the context of the group” (Schendel, 2009, p. 63).

Revealing patterns was the final step of portraiture analysis and involved the use of reflection and interpretation. The revealed patterns present dissonant themes, themes that diverge from those already identified. In order to see and present the adult singers as more than face value, I viewed all data sets. Extrapolating from the ideas of Boyer Doty (2009), the results of this artistic live study, a study in which artists paint or draw living subjects, will not be an exact imitation but instead, an interpretation of meaningfulness in adult singers from my view as the researcher.

I conducted analysis of data sources with seven steps described by Schendel (2009): I maintained contact with participants throughout the study, composed written reflections of each story soon after leaving interview sites, immersed myself in the data by listening to interview recordings at least twice, created transcriptions, completed initial coding, completed focused coding, and combined all data sets (interviews, observations, and participant journals) to create the final portrait. In an impressionistic record, I recorded reflections on participant stories immediately after collecting data. During these reflections I developed follow-up questions and emerging themes. I listened to audio recordings several times after interviews and focused especially on tone of voice and pauses in conversation. After transcribing interviews, I read and coded the transcriptions using the process of open coding as described by Priest, Roberts, & Woods (2002). During open coding I read through the data and assigned meaning. I asked

questions suggested by Schendel (2009) such as, (a) what is the context of the participants' view? (b) how does the participant feel? (c) how do the participants' responses and stories relate to what I observed? (d) what are the divergent points of view? (e) how do the stories of participants align with the views and beliefs of their conductor, family, and friends? and (f) how do the stories relate to place attachment and sense of place?

After initial coding, I identified the most frequently occurring categories and reread transcripts while focusing on the good in the data as opposed to any negative themes, as suggested by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997). I embraced negative themes for their "complexity and contradiction" (Gaztambide-Fernández et al., 2011, p. 4). Next, I completed axial coding in which I identified subcategories and began connecting them with categories. Finally, I returned to the dimensions of place attachment theory and created relationships between categories in theoretical coding.

Next, I composed initial portraits for each participant and created a model of interactions (Torcivia, 2012) between portraits in which I identified similarities and dissimilarities between participants' senses of meaning in the choral ensemble. Finally, because the process of research is "circular and reflexive" (Gaskell, 2000, p. 56), I revisited all data including recordings, the impressionistic record, and the research questions and created the final portrait. Circular research involves the process of moving from later steps to previous steps in a continuous fashion; the act of continual thought from data collection, to analysis, to theoretical framework during interpretation is reflexive thought (Maxwell, 2013). In creating the final portrait for each participant, I

strived “to capture the complexity that would inevitably spill over the edges of any framework” (Gaztambide-Fernández et al., 2011, p. 19).

### **Authenticity**

Authenticity in portraiture is a synonym for trustworthiness and validity (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2000), validity in qualitative research involves characteristics including depth, richness, honesty, and scope. It is the researcher’s role to always question truth and authenticity in portraiture. As Gaztambide-Fernández et al. (2011) wrote, truths “are not only transient and tentative, but also incomplete and always-already imperfect” (p. 23). I strived to adequately represent the choral participants and their location by employing the following conventions of validity used by qualitative researchers (Bauer, Gaskell, & Allum, 2000; Cohen et al., 2000; Kincheloe, 1995; Knowles & Cole, 2008; Lather, 1986; Lincoln, 1995; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002; Saukko, 2005; Wolcott, 1994).

**Member checks.** Member checks provided transparency, a critical aspect of establishing credibility (Cho & Trent, 2006; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Phillips, 2008). Some researchers argue that member checks may benefit participants and might even become a form of therapy (Harper & Cole, 2012). At the conclusion of the study, participants verified that I portrayed their interviews accurately, a goal of the study. Researchers and participants co-create narrative portraits (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), which can lead to some difficulties in creating a final portrait. According to Angen (2000), member checks can become problematic for the researcher because participants could change their minds about a specific issue, or they could disagree with the

researcher's interpretation. In addition, I acknowledged that my career in choral music might influence participants to share what they think I want to hear instead of what they find meaningful from their own perspectives, otherwise known as the Hawthorne effect (Payne & Payne, 2004).

**Dialogic validity.** Dialogic validity has its roots in ethnographic study (Saukko, 2005) and captures the point of view of the participant as authentically as possible. According to Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007), sensitivity to the lived realities of participants, or dialogic validity, is a part of critique in cultural studies. In dialogic validity, just as in portraiture, participants are involved in constructing their own reality, or portrait (Lincoln, 1995). The aim is “to capture the experiences of the other with a self-reflexive awareness that both our understanding of other people as well as their understanding of themselves is mediated by social discourses” (Saukko, 2005, p. 350). The portraiture characteristics of personal context and historical context ensured dialogic validity in this study. Additionally, Herr and Anderson (2015) claimed that dialogic validity lies in the researcher's ability to dialogue or converse with peers throughout the research process. In particular, the Institutional Review Board at Boston University reviewed my proposal and, after dialogue and revisions, approved my study. The nature of this dissertation study provides three stages of expert review, including three collegiate-level readers, and a constant dialogue between advisor and researcher throughout the writing of my dissertation. The final stage of dialogue with all members of my review panel will occur during the dissertation defense.

**Triangulation of sources.** Triangulation of sources occurs when one collects data from at least three different sources, thereby “converging evidence” (Yin, 2011). According to Patton (2002), the attempt to understand differences and similarities in different types of data sources gives credibility to the overall findings. Triangulation of data sources involves comparing what people say in public and private, comparing observations with interviews, and checking for consistencies in what people say over time. I tested for consistency in the data sources by comparing the data received from the eight different interviews, four journals, and four observations. I paid special attention to the participants during public observations and looked for consistencies or inconsistencies between adult singers’ choral participation and private information from their interviews and journals. I checked for consistencies in stories told over time through participant interviews, journals, and observations. More specifically, in this research study, I identified multiple data sources through participant background and personal stories shared in journals and interviews, participant experiences during observations, informal conversations with them before and after observations, excerpts from personal journals, and follow-up member checks conducted through e-mail.

**Catalytic validity.** Catalytic validity energizes and rejuvenates participants in a research study (Gall et al., 2007). According to Koelsch (2011), member checks strengthen catalytic validity because the feedback provided may impact a study’s findings. Credible findings are an important element of a research study, and as part of catalytic validity, I examined the results of this study to ensure emergence of intended data (Bailey, 2010). Kincheloe (1995) provided support for the definitions above, writing

that catalytic validity occurs when participants better understand their story through interviews and reflection. The current study provided opportunities for storytelling and reflection during the interviews and member checks. Moreover, participant journaling provided additional time for reflection and continued development of understanding after interviews. The final element of catalytic validity, the participants' movement for action once their understanding has changed and developed (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Koelsch, 2011; Wolcott, 1994), was also present and noted during interviews in this study.

### **Ethics of Confidentiality**

In this study, I maintained a commitment to and awareness of ethical values and protected the dignity and welfare of participants at all times, as recommended by Gall et al. (2007). "A researcher's ethical stance serves to protect participants and honor their being" (Schendel, 2009, p. 66). After approval from the Internal Review Board for Human Subjects Research at Boston University, research occurred with the following considerations.

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) claimed that a deep connection between the participant and the observer honors all involved in the research. The researcher fosters a strong relationship and good rapport by searching for goodness, developing and maintaining clear boundaries, and regarding participants with empathy (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis suggested identifying the roles and responsibilities of researcher and participant to establish and maintain clear boundaries. "Empathy is seen as the channel of emotional resonance, the vehicle for gaining a deep understanding" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 147). In order to

maintain a strong relationship in this research study, I thoroughly prepared for site visits by assembling protocols and arriving early, interacting with participants on site using dignity and care, and guarding established relationships during the writing of the final portrait.

### **Time Line**

Data collection occurred for three months. During the first month, adult singer interviews, journal assignments, and initial observations took place. In the second month, I interviewed conductors, family members of the adult singers, and conducted status checks on participant journals. During the third month, I conducted member checks and final observations.

Data analysis began at the onset of data collection. Once data collection was completed, I continued analysis and interpretation for one month and began developing initial portraits. During the fourth month, I created final portraits and compared similarities and dissimilarities between portraits to develop a model of interactions (Torcivia, 2012). I completed the study by the end of the fourth month.

## **Chapter Four: The Gallery**

### **Observations of the Choirs**

#### **Vignette One**

I could barely contain my excitement as I drove my car into the church parking lot and followed the curved entrance to the back of the building. Gingerly, I backed my car into a parking spot, eager to not miss any detail of the prerehearsal parking lot action. At 84 degrees, it was a lovely summer evening, and I rolled down the windows to relax in the light, soaking the last rays of sunshine for the day. The entrance to the church was well-kept but unassuming. The birds chirped and flew across the rooftop as the breeze gently moved my hair. I pictured too how desolate and cold this parking lot could feel in the middle of winter and was quite happy to be conducting my data collection in June.

Little by little, the cars trickled in and the whirring of running engines began to compete with the chirping birds. Singers stayed inside their cars, probably aware that it was too early for the church to open. I suspected some singers were finishing their phone calls before rehearsal, grabbing the last bites of their Subway dinners, or perhaps even perusing their scores to prepare for the evening's rehearsal. Finally, 20 minutes before rehearsal was supposed to begin, one gentleman left the safety of his car and checked the front doors of the church. Just in time to save singers waiting on the locked doors, one car quickly and haphazardly pulled into the handicapped parking spot. Thereafter singers were flocking from their cars to the church doors. This prerehearsal ritual is one experienced by many community choirs on a weekly basis.

In a highly resonant room, the bustling preparation occurred as singers scuffed

folding chairs on the floor and set them up in the typical semicircle formation. A routine by now, seven or eight people flawlessly set up at least 50 chairs in the middle of the room in synchronized fashion. On the left hand side, large tables were set up as singers sifted through plastic bags of food and waited for others to bring donations in for distribution; cans of tomatoes, corn, and soup littered the tables. A few members met in the back of the room and looked over programs and lists in final preparation for the imminent concert. A cellist entered the rehearsal space and set his chair up front next to the piano. The mellow tone of his light playing settled under the continuous chatter of singers that built stronger as more singers arrived for rehearsal. The space was alive with excitement and the need to complete tasks. Even the 2-year-old in the back toddled around singing his song and received his due attention before rehearsal began.

Nine minutes before rehearsal started, the director entered the building escorted by choristers who had greeted him in the parking lot to talk and ask questions about the rehearsal or the upcoming performance. At about 3 minutes before rehearsal, the conductor found his position next to the piano and urged his singers to locate their seats using body language only. Singers continued to either saunter in or quickly make their way to their spots. Some singers stopped to greet friends on their way and catch up on weekly gossip, but some singers sat quietly in their seats, studying their scores in preparation for the evening's rehearsal.

I sat in the back with my own table in a spot right next to the electric outlet. Most singers entering the room noticed my presence right away as they scanned the room and greeted me with a smile and a welcoming exchange of words. Even though I was at the

rehearsal to observe, the conductor invited me to warm the choir up that evening, as was customary when a guest conductor was in the rehearsal. I accepted, although I was looking forward to not working during a choral rehearsal for once! After the kind introduction provided by a chorus member, I quickly got the choir humming, sighing, moving, and interacting with one another. I stood on the piano bench to demonstrate new exercises; otherwise, no one would have been able to see me. Standing in front of this choir, I felt welcomed and respected. I saw many singers who were eager to do new things—and I also saw some with reservations regarding my warm up approach. However, I enjoyed working with the ensemble, and I happily returned to my role as researcher once the warm ups were over. Little did I know that one of the reserved choristers would be my first research participant.

### **Vignette Two**

“I want my choir of the living dead back. Walk and sing at the same time” (Observation, 6/9/2014), said the director from behind the piano. I observed the singers rising from their slumped positions with the occasional groan or sigh, but there was hardly any backlash. The singers welcomed a diversion such as this and the opportunity to move around near the end of the rehearsal. (For the rest of my life, I will hear the *Hostias* of Mozart’s *Requiem* and see 60 choral singers walking in time—well, most of them—with their heads bowed in their scores.) Fascinatingly enough, there were very few collisions even though most heads were in scores. As the singers moved throughout the room, their location and the singers who surrounded them altered their harmonic contexts.

I tried my best to place myself in an inconspicuous location where I would not distract or collect attention, but with the chorus walking around and singing during rehearsal, I greeted different singers as they approached my table and continued on their march around the room. Immediately I thought, “How cool! Why don’t I do this during concerts?” The chorus surrounded me, and the continuous, mobile effect of the walking singers was a constant stimulation to me as I continued to hear variations on Mozart’s *Requiem* that I have never heard before and will probably never hear again. When the movement of Mozart’s *Requiem* finished, most of the singers shared a quick laugh and chatted with those in their immediate locations before they returned to their seats.

### **Vignette Three**

Singers filled the stage with bubbling energy as I entered the dark and empty auditorium to find a seat. I heard the pop of a clarinet and the quick, frantic interjections of the violins practicing the tricky lines they missed the night before. As orchestra members waded through seats and stands, choir members patiently sat in their assigned seats and waited for the warm up to begin. One at a time, the soloists entered like rock stars from stage left and gave a little glance to the choir before assuming their special seats on the lip of the stage. The assistant conductor took the podium and began rehearsal with announcements while the conductor informally chatted with choir members off to the side.

As he presented the plan of attack for the afternoon’s rehearsal, the assistant director said, “We are going to put some shine on the apple.” A quick announcement became an open discussion regarding taking photos of the choir before the concert. The

assistant director and director talked about the options and many choir members chimed in with their suggestions of when and how to take the photos. Finally, the warm up began and the seated choir protested, but then took part in the “minimum, aluminum, minimum” vocalise modeled for them. After the quick warm up, the assistant director rehearsed through challenging spots in the *Requiem*, hoping to add more shine to the afternoon’s performance.

Singers focused intently on the rehearsal notes as they worked on the most challenging parts of Mozart’s composition. Some members asked questions regarding specific rhythms. The orchestra joined and the choir members looked down and stared in their score as they muddled through to the best of their ability. Abruptly, the conductor jumped into the middle of a musical phrase and told the singers they were singing incorrectly. This led to a woodshedding moment with individual vocal parts where the assistant director focused on just the bass and tenor line with assistance from the organist. The assistant director and director continued to work side by side; the director stood on the floor and gave verbal notes, and the assistant conducted the choir and orchestra. They demonstrated a healthy partnership.

Finally, before releasing the choir for last minute concert preparation, the conductor shared his pride for their work, and the choir clapped enthusiastically for the orchestra. He gave his last minute reminders to look up at him while singing and reminded them that each movement has a certain character, which he would model on his face. At this comment, the singers giggled and joked about the conductor’s arousing body motions and intensity during performances. They knew he would certainly show them

much more than the character of each piece. Jokingly, the conductor mentioned that he would have failed Strauss's conducting class because Strauss always said, "Never let them see you sweat." A singer wittily replied, "That's okay; he wasn't conducting us."

#### **Vignette Four**

"Again, again, we must get this working before the night is over," the director coached from behind the piano. The air in the room was thick with concentration as singers intensely whipped back in their scores to the beginning of the *Confutatis*. With a slight adjustment of their weight in their seats, the singers began singing of the doomed flames of woe in hopes of meeting the standards set forth in rehearsal. The tenors and basses roared with malice into their scores. The director charged the room with energy and dared all singers to reach greater heights. Just moments before, all of the singers had been entranced in the *Lacrimosa*, their favorite movement of Mozart's *Requiem*, pleading for eternal rest during the judgment of all humanity. After giving perhaps too much in the *Lacrimosa*, the director pushed the threshold of comfortable singing in the final moments of rehearsal, demanding the aggressive strength needed from the tenors and basses in the *Confutatis*.

Finally, the tension dissipated in the music and the women sang, "Call me, call me blessed." The tenors and basses counted their blessings because the director allowed the music to continue and chose not to stop to adjust the male voices. They must have finally met the standards. The chorus continued to burrow through the score with palpable intensity; I was so entranced that I could only breathe when they did between phrases. Finally, at the end of this bipolar movement, the choir begged in homophony,

“Help me in my last hour.” Mozart surrounded them in a major tonality in the end, promising assistance in the afterlife. For tonight, the choir received aid in their last hour by the conclusion of rehearsal with a grandiose gesture from the director once the final chord had dissipated. At this moment, I sensed a release and a feeling of great mental fatigue but noticed the singers as they looked around and shared a silent or verbal, “We made it.” In moments, the character of the room changed from immense pleading to relief, celebration, and appreciation that others were with them during that particular journey.

#### **Vignette Five**

Sharon, a participant in the study, gave me a wink and a smile as I made my way to the chair with my name on it labeled by an index card. We were approaching the end of the rehearsal, and a part of me wished I could sneak away to my car now and begin the hour drive home. I sang with the choir that particular evening because the conductor invited me, and I felt it would have been rude to appear antisocial and aloof in the presence of such a warm group of people. I felt welcomed and comfortable as those around me shared a quick greeting before we dug into the repertoire.

In the midst of singing on neutral syllables and speaking in rhythm, I started to make silly mistakes, mistakes that I would never have made if it were before 5 p.m. When did I get so old? By 9:25 p.m., I wished that I was the one on the podium right then; I knew I would not have been sleepy. I never got tired on the podium; there was always something to accomplish. But that night in my seat, I tried hard not to make any silly mistakes singing a piece I had studied and performed before! Somehow I made it to

the final announcements at 9:55 p.m. and thought that perhaps I should stop for a soda before I drove all the way home. It was going to be a long drive.

On the way home, I pondered my lack of enthusiasm for the later part of the rehearsal and wondered where all the energy of my youth had gone. I remembered falling asleep in the middle of a Renaissance piece while singing during graduate school, but that was due to extreme fatigue and the constant barrage of singing. I wondered why I had not felt the charge of energy and excitement that others felt from singing in a community choir, or that I felt when I was on the podium. What was most meaningful to me as an adult choral singer in a community choir?

I did not know the answer to this question because I had not sung in a community choir since graduate school, and even then I was a conducting intern. I did know that from my first honor choir experience in middle school, I was hooked on choral singing. Thinking back on all of my experiences from high school through college choral singing was important because of my direct contact with the conductor. Perhaps it was because early on I decided I wanted to conduct, but I could remember—especially in my graduate and undergraduate studies—seeking the approval of my choral conductor in each rehearsal. I had wanted to do exactly what they had called for, whatever the interpretation, which I had never questioned. I had attentively made markings in my score as my conductors shared their views of articulation, expression, and characterization qualities of each piece that we sang.

I had lived for that wink that I would receive when I was in the moment, making music with my conductor in rehearsal. To me, the most meaningful thing was to know

that I was making music with the conductor and that he approved of and appreciated my contribution. Of course I adopted the winking habit and soon dropped it when my high school singers commented on me winking at them during rehearsal. I thought maybe that was not such a good connection to share between a young teacher and high school students. However, even with the few singing experiences I encountered prior to this study, I realized that I continued to search for that connection from the conductor, that moment when we could share a smile or a glance, when he or she could show approval and appreciation of my efforts. I had not found that moment in my few experiences singing in a community chorus, and I realized how fortunate I was to have sung under conductors who shared those moments with me when I was studying at school.

We had a war one time with a long-term member and a high school student singing with us on scholarship. The high school student was singing with the choir for both her Junior and Senior year in high school. She read music well, but her musicianship threatened one of our older singers. The high school student was dependable and even though she wasn't mean spirited, she spoke in a brash way. Quickly a group of people in the community chorus really liked her because she was young, vibrant, and had a good voice. I think the long-term member in the community chorus thought her territory was being threatened. The high school student and long-term member would call each other names. Once I heard the long-term member call the high school student a bitch out loud and to her face. I thought, "She must be joking," but she wasn't. Both singers were in our select chamber choir and both were first sopranos so they were always in close proximity of each other. There really wasn't much that anyone could do about it. Some people smiled or ignored it. The conductor ignored it. I am not sure if the section leader tried to do anything about it. It was a tricky situation because the long-term member was with the chorus forever and she was very confident of her place within the group. Whereas the high school student was feeling bullied by the older woman's behavior and she wasn't going to back down. (Sharon, interview, 6/24/2014)

## Interviews of the Singers

The following section presents data gathered from the four respondents in the study. To paint a portrait (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983) and to provide thick and rich description (Merriam, 1998), the narratives merge data from interviews and singer journals, featuring thematic quotations and found poetry, both using direct quotes from participants, to situate singer context. Found poetry is a collage created with words rather than pictures (The Found Poetry Review, 2014). Found poets create a new piece of art by rearranging previously printed text. More specifically, I used the technique of free-form remixing to create found poetry by taking excerpts of text provided by participants in their journals and interviews and rearranging them to form poems (The Found Poetry Review, 2014).

**Fiona.** “I have a triangle of happiness which includes my husband, my research, and my music,” (Fiona, *the scientist*, Interview, 7/22/2014).

Reserved, anti-social  
 I hated being in front of people  
 Music is a relief from academics  
 Music ties together the loves of math and science in me  
 I am still pretty solitary  
 Choir is the one platform in which I interact freely with others  
 Music ties my world together  
 Outside of my work and my family,  
 Singing is the most important thing that I have.

One of the first responses to my e-mail poll for participants in this study occurred minutes after I sent the inquiry. In an e-mail titled “Appointment for Interview,” Fiona shared that her husband and she would be available for an interview before the rehearsal and concert, and we could meet in the performance venue. Honored that she and her

husband would be willing to show up early on a concert day and pleased because I intended on observing both the rehearsal and the concert that day, I eagerly began the interview.

The concert was at the performing arts center where I taught during the school year. The drive there was very familiar to me, but I always appreciated swerving through the rural back roads, especially as I surveyed the horse farm moments away from the college entrance. That day the road trip gave me plenty of time for meditation and contemplation as I prepared for the interviews ahead. When I arrived on campus, a month after the spring semester concluded, the setting was eerily quiet and peaceful. I did not have to dodge cars full of frenzied college students flying off to make their work shifts on time, nor did I have to put a blinker on and wait for someone's spot in the lot; I had my choice of where to park. In fact, there was only one other car in the lot.

I quickly secured the conference room, which really did not matter—we could have met in any room that day—and scurried to meet Fiona and her husband Kenny at the front entrance of the building. I was immediately comfortable with Fiona and Kenny. They were both in their 30s, and I admired Kenny's willingness to participate in the interview. As we walked through the poorly lit but quiet halls, Fiona and I discussed her excitement for the upcoming concert that day. I showed Fiona and Kenny into the conference room, a place where the office and leadership staff normally met during the school year, and they both elected to be present for the other's interview. Kenny sat across from me, and Fiona sat next to him. I did not think twice about this in the moment, but later I realized exactly why we had sat in this formation.

I started with Fiona first since she had to get to a dress rehearsal soon. When I asked her what her first ensemble singing experience was like, she disdainfully replied that she was a piggy in her first ever singing performance. She was 5 and forced to take part in the church Christmas pageant. “I hated it,” she shared. Singers and actors from the church presented a Hawaiian rendition of the *Twelve Days of Christmas* that year. When asked why she disliked it so much, Fiona responded, “I hated being up there in front of other people and I hated being looked at and fearing failure.” After the pageant, she told her mother that she did not want to participate in anything like that ever again, but her father explained that everyone is scared the first time they perform.

He suggested she try it again the next year to see if she still hated it. She did participate the next year, but played the keyboard instead of the piggy role. Later, I looked up the Hawaiian version of the *Twelve Days of Christmas* and noted that the piggy role is for the number 5 in the countdown and refers to the Five Big Fat Pigs. Oh no, this probably made her first singing experience even worse! Apparently, in Hawaii pigs in a blanket was very popular on the school menu, and thus the pigs made their way into this rendition. No fun for Fiona, but luckily she took her father’s advice and tried again. Her role at the keyboard the second year was not as bad. In fact, she had been a part of music ensembles for fun since kindergarten. She had sung in school groups, played in recorder groups, and taken violin lessons when she was young. She had even participated in Vacation Bible School groups. In her youth, Fiona had participated in any program with a musical element. But, she did not like acting. At this point in the interview, Kenny stifled a giggle.

In a matter of a fact way, like she had come to peace with the concept, Fiona shared that she had always considered herself antisocial. She said even her report cards at school had always listed that she needed to interact with others her own age. For this reason, choir had always been a part of her life. Her mom had wanted her to sing in choir for the social interaction, and her father had thought it was “less brainy” than her normal course load. According to her parents, singing in choir would give her much-needed brain rest during the school day. They had “mandated” that she sing so that she “would not be overburdened” with science and mathematics. Fiona confessed, “I didn’t realize this until later, but music became the most peaceful time of day for me.” Music had helped her with other subjects. Learning the musical language was very theoretical and it contained mathematical components that coincided with her study in other classes. Fiona admitted, “I feel that in high school I found that music tied together the loves of math and science in myself and bound all those subjects together to make me feel whole.”

I was curious to hear if Fiona’s parents had an intimate connection with music-making themselves. She told me that both of her parents loved to sing but were not good at it—she had experienced a lot of sing-alongs on trips when she was young. I remembered those days too, the days before we all had our ear-buds in, when we entertained each other on long car rides. Fiona stated, my father “could not carry a tune in a bucket.” Fiona had sung in church with her younger brother, and he had also been in the school choir. So it seemed her parents had supported music in both of their children’s lives. Fiona claimed that now her brother used his singing ability in the car or to show off for other people. He had always been more social, so he had used choir as a way to flirt.

Flirting in the choir was not unheard of, but I noted a hint of regret or jealousy in her voice when she spoke of her brother being more social than she.

As Fiona got older in school her music making took a more serious turn, and she became a choir member for small ensemble competitions. The first time she remembered being happy in a group was “when [she] was selected for the women’s ensemble to sing in a competition.” She had been very proud that her conductor thought she was vocally strong enough to contribute to the small ensemble. She had also been very proud to represent her school in the competition. Fiona’s father had been in the military, so she had traveled often and had experienced many different musical competitions. She had graduated from high school in Florida from a well-balanced choral program that had often performed classical composers’ works. After her father’s retirement, when her geographic location was stable, she had joined a local church choir and had sung with them for three years. Then, Fiona left the choir to enlist in the service, which had restarted the life of travel.

When we started to talk about her experience with community chorus singing, Fiona shared stories from her first substantial community chorus experience in Houston. According to Fiona, it had not been your average choir. She had sung in an ensemble of 225 singers. Selected for small ensemble singing, she had often sung in the women’s ensemble for special holiday gigs, but it had been much easier to hide in the masses. Fiona noted that after this incredible experience, it had been hard to stay engaged in the church choirs in which she had continued to sing as she moved around in the military. In rehearsal, she had noticed that other singers had not taken it as seriously. The church

choir director had often let go of quality in the performance to maintain numbers in the ensemble. From working with the community chorus in Houston, Fiona had learned she was seeking more quality and left church singing altogether to join another community chorus.

I learned that when Fiona joined a chorus, she entered with a specific agenda. She knew what she is looking for. In choir, the most important thing for her had been the act of reproducing the music with a complete awareness of the composer's intentions. When she learned her music, she first learned her individual part and then found a recording for context. She used to go to the library and check out CDs or even tapes of recordings! Now, she did all of her choral practice research on the Internet. For Fiona, it was important to first gain her own understanding of how a choral work sounded. Then, she would be better able to take notes and listen to how the director wanted it interpreted. In this sense, Fiona worked very independently and took impressive initiative outside of rehearsal. In rehearsal, she tried hard to follow the director, but did not like changing things in the score. Fiona realized that each person conducting a choral work would have his or her own interpretation. Fiona prepared thoroughly for rehearsals and practiced at home with her keyboard. However, she needed complete privacy; not even her husband could be around. The only times her husband might have heard her sing was when she was in the shower. At this point in the interview, Kenny could not help but chime in, "Yes, I hear plenty of shower singing." I found Fiona's perspective fascinating as I imagined what it would feel like to not even want to practice singing in front of one's husband but then revel in the chance to sing in small groups in an advanced community

chorus. I myself never sang in full voice in front of my husband, but there was something intriguing and surprising about this young lady who would not sing a lick in front of her husband, but still continued to sing in what most people, including Fiona, considered to be a bubbly, social setting.

With a leery glance and a sheepish grin toward her husband, Fiona admitted that choir is one of the only social things she does. She stated that not much had changed since those reports in grade school, “I am still pretty solitary, an introvert.” Singing in community choir each week was one of the only things she did with other people. Fiona credited choir for bringing two things to her life: social interaction and the chance for continued vocal expression. In choir, Fiona admitted, she was “forced” to talk and listen to other people. She explained that many choral members used their time in rehearsal as a buffer from their normal life—so much so that she often heard fellow singers chatting about everything when given the opportunity. Usually, they were not talking about music. Fiona was unwilling to converse but was usually included in these conversations. She chose not to share her own personal experiences, but she did comment and give opinions to others. She noted that sharing personal information is a pretty normal occurrence when large groups of women get together. She was surprised that a lot of conversations often dealt with personal information like singers’ families, but guessed this was because the singers spent so much time rehearsing together and felt comfortable enough to discuss personal life details.

Fiona then explained what she meant by *vocal expression*. She did not mean expression in the artistic, theatrical sense, but instead “the usage of the laryngeal

anatomy.” She liked the act of singing: “I think that since I get a satisfaction out of producing pleasant sounds from the vibration of my ‘vocal cords’ I wish to maintain their optimal health.” Fiona thought it was fascinating that just by pushing air through the vocal folds, humans could produce an expressive sound. One is able to produce non-sung expressive sounds, and every time we speak our vocal folds are vibrating, but I did think that Fiona loved to make musical, singing sounds with her “laryngeal anatomy.”

The repertoire choices of Fiona’s community choir director were very diverse. The director was interested in a wide variety of music, and that was another thing that kept her in choir. Her choir did challenging works, which appealed to her. However, Fiona had experienced frustration from time to time. In rehearsal, the learning needs of others in the community chorus frustrated her. She felt the most accomplished in rehearsal when she learned something but frustrated when the inaccuracies and issues of other singers took up rehearsal time. Fiona could read music, so she only needed the notation, and she was able to sing her part. She admitted that she took this for granted because there were many singers who needed to hear their part played for them. But, Fiona said, “The repetition of playing something so others have to understand how it sounds is inefficient.”

She confided in me that her fellow singers often approached her with questions regarding the music they were rehearsing. They sometimes asked her to sing louder so they could follow her, which upset Fiona because, “I can’t believe they don’t have a clue!” Her husband saw it written all over her face at times when he was watching her from the audience. Sometimes even the director did not know or maybe did not want to

acknowledge the inaccuracies. Fiona would not speak up and tell others when they were singing something wrong, though she heard it often! Despite her frustration with how other singers learned, Fiona stated, “my desire to sing overrides the fact that other singers are doing it wrong in my head.” She presumed that “if their interpretive deviation was too much,” she might not want to sing with the choir anymore. But that had not happened in this choir yet. Fiona had left an ensemble before because she did not agree with the quality of performance. Once, when she was fourteen and stubborn, she had decided not to sing in the church Easter production because she did not like the artistic interpretation of one of the hymns. Fiona displayed a strong opinion for the choral performance and high standards for herself and those around her.

Fiona’s attachment to the community ensemble she was singing with at the time of this study was minimal. She had only sung with this community choir for a short amount of time in comparison with many other singers in the group, so it would not have been hard for her to leave. She had begun to form new relationships by making friends within her section, but she did not think leaving would hit her as hard as it would some other singers; she said, “It wouldn’t be heart breaking.” It took Fiona a long time to get comfortable. She had only been with the choir for a year, so it was too soon for her to tell if she felt at home. She did seem hopeful about the future and said that if someone asked her about this in a couple years, she might have a different answer.

Fiona planned for her involvement in this choir’s future. Despite her introverted tendencies, she invited the challenges of being social in this setting. She even challenged herself to sing a solo sometime in the future with this choir. She always entertained the

idea and then talked herself out of it. Her inner critic told her that she sounded funny and she never felt that she could do a solo justice, but she wanted to try singing a solo in the following year. I admired her brave and ambitious plans. She had sung a solo in the past, but it was from the back balcony. She had volunteered for that solo because she really liked the idea of not having to sing in front of anyone. She admitted that, in a very narrow sense, she liked to challenge her comfort zone, but she would not take on too many challenges at one time. The challenge to sing alone came from a prior life experience when she had auditioned for a large symphony orchestra choir, but she had not made it because she was not comfortable singing by herself. This motivated her to start working on her solo singing. Fiona was a scientist and was much better at challenging herself in the lab. She was much more at home in the lab with her experiments than she was in the real world—even family events or “any other of the numerous socially contrived functions to which adults must maintain a presence.” Working with others in choir provided Fiona a sense of completion alongside other people, something she did not experience in the lab.

As we continued through the interview, I was still amazed at how someone so introverted and uncomfortable around social situations sought a volunteer experience that surrounded her with other people. Fiona confirmed, “I am an introverted person and don’t like being in social situations.” So I asked, when did she feel comfortable in the choral rehearsal? Fiona felt the most comfortable in rehearsal when warm ups began and everyone started to sing together. She felt more at ease when the music began because then everyone stopped talking and sang. Fiona even admitted that she waited in her car

until the last few minutes before rehearsal began to avoid talking to her fellow singers before the singing began. She arrived just in time, “so that I don’t get drawn into anything outside of the music part.” However, Fiona acknowledged how important the socialization of choir was in balancing her life. She thought she would be more reclusive if she had not had choral singing in her life. Actually, she claimed, “I might have had some serious nervous issues given the types of things I have done in the academic setting.” Now this next statement baffled me, given all that we had already discussed regarding choral singing. Fiona said that singing in a choir did not necessarily force her to interact with others. In choir, she sang and she did not have to talk with others, especially if she arrived right on time and left as soon as rehearsal was complete. So it seemed that Fiona avoided much of the social talking that occurred in choral situations, but as she stated above, she still experienced the sense of completion alongside other people. Choir provided Fiona a time to interact with others without talking, something that she valued greatly.

Fiona fondly remembered her earlier experiences with choir while she was growing up. Singing had always given her a break in school; it had been stress relief. If she had not sung in a choir, she suspected she would experience stress and probably feel like something was missing. She said that people have both analytical and creative outlets, so without choir, she would not have had the ability to be creative. She “would feel out of sorts” and would have found a lack of balance in her life. Using a metaphor, Fiona stated that she would be like a lever only falling in one direction. She did not think she would have tried to find another social outlet because, since her youth, she had

always done things in solitary except for singing. She had once tried out for the baseball team, but moving around in a military family had made it geographically impossible to maintain a commitment to sports. The one part of singing in choir that she would not want to give up was the constant challenge of self-improvement. According to Fiona, a choir is a sum of individuals who are all striving to be their best at a particular moment in time. She would not want to lose the changes she had made to better herself in choir.

Choir gave Fiona something that she could not find in her career. When she was at work, she did not feel comfortable around others. There were very few people in her life she was comfortable doing things with. But, Fiona said, “choir is the one platform to which I go and interact freely with others.” If she were not in choir, she probably would not do anything else and instead bug her husband all the time. I did not even have to look; I could feel Kenny rolling his eyes at that comment. But, Fiona said, “My husband still forces me to be social,” as Kenny said, “She would love to be the soloist at the performance for no one.” Singing, whether in choir or not, was a major part of Fiona’s identity and she probably would still sing even if she were not in choir. She would still sing with movies. Fiona once had a job in a video store and would always play *West Side Story* or *Phantom of the Opera* so she could sing along while working. Fiona and her husband had attended high school together, and he had been more involved in the theatre programs, while she had usually helped backstage. Kenny had also been involved in the band program, which had been a different experience altogether from the choral program, but had spoken with Fiona intelligently about music, and she had appreciated that. Fiona said, “I love to talk about the mechanics of music.” The individual voice parts fitting

together in choral pieces and how the dynamics of a movement impacts everything fascinated Fiona.

Kenny and Fiona had plenty of time to discuss choir and the mechanics of music. He drove her to and from rehearsal each week, so he often got an earful of choir drama. Their discussions each week were comforting to Fiona. This was not the first time her husband had listened to her talk about choir rehearsal, and Kenny claimed that with other groups the drive home had been more caustic. Even though in this choir Fiona still had some frustrations, they were minute in comparison to what she had complained about before. The choir she sang with at the time of this study was just a continuation of her life's involvement in music. She had loved being in choral ensembles in high school "because it was there I came to the realization that music was a large part of my universe and tied so much of my world together." She assumed that her connection to singing in choir was due to the fact that all humanity instinctively strives for connection with others. Fiona said, "While my higher brain functions move me toward alienation, I feel that the choir appeals to my base instinct to connect, and while it is not much more than a few hours a week (more around concert time) it satiates me." She did not want to lose the challenge of singing in a choir and the chance for self-improvement that it brought her. Fiona had left choirs because she felt unchallenged. She believed that beauty was lost in the music when the ensemble stopped striving beyond their current level of performance. She recalled feeling very frustrated in church choir rehearsal because sitting there was more gossip than anything else, and the director settled for mediocrity. As she said, "I cannot accept that [settling for mediocrity] in my director any more than I can accept that

in myself.” Her director at the time of this study wanted the singers in the choir to make themselves better, and she respected this approach and did not want to lose the element of self-improvement from this choir.

It was at the very end of her interview that Fiona summarized her opinions on the choral experience and placed it within the framework of her life. Fiona claimed, “I think that, outside of my work and my family, singing is the most important thing that I have.” She was a true introvert, and daily forced social paradigms she experienced could be very draining, but singing was a way for her to recharge her energy. If she missed a practice, she felt low-energy for the rest of the week. As Fiona so artfully expressed it, “Making music resonates through all the rest of the components of my life.” More specifically, in her journal she wrote,

I have a triangle of happiness which includes my husband, my research, and my music. I need all of these things to feel happy and if something is off with any of the three, I can feel it. I hadn't thought about it quite like this, until I tried to verbalize in this entry, but if my husband and I are off a little then I can notice it in my work and singing. If my research isn't going well, or I have to step away for a bit, then I get cranky at home and my singing suffers. If I miss practice—well, it isn't as outwardly noticeable as the other two but life is off for me. I feel as though something is missing. (Fiona, interview, 7/22/2014)

If she had not had this chorus to sing with, she would have had to find another.

“Nature abhors a vacuum according to the laws of physics and chemistry, and the lack of a choir would cause a vacuum in my life,” said Fiona. With that, I thanked Fiona and Kenny for their time as we all got up and stretched. I shook their hands before they quickly left and made their way to the preparation rehearsal before the concert that day. Once my items were packed, I headed into the auditorium where I noticed Kenny setting

up audio equipment in the audience. Fiona was already on stage in her seat, waiting quietly for the warm up to begin, for that moment when she felt comfortable in challenging herself and achieving the choral sense of completion.

**Martha.** “I am just proud that over this year I didn’t drop out,” (Martha, *the gardener*, Interview, 6/24/2014).

The Blues, release, movement  
 Always faking the high notes  
 Constantly moving geographic locations in youth  
 Home is a secluded lake property where gardening is my love  
 Book club: Imperfect Harmony  
 Let me try out for this choir and see if I am a horrible singer  
 Most important thing: Not making a mistake  
 I am not the worst singer in the room  
 Stumbled into singing in a community chorus  
 I could have left after this year, but I think I will stay.

Slinky and smooth, Martha moved her hips in time to the blues. With closed eyes she focused on her breath and the mournful but entrancing sigh of the husky singer’s last note. Martha knew she was not too old to be dancing alone amidst the sea of attendees at the blues festival, and she liked the attention she got when she released her inhibitions and moved her body with pleasure through the musical phrases. She had always been a doer, and for Martha and her husband the blues were perfect for bringing their interests together in a shared hobby. Curtis, her husband, liked listening to the blues and reveled in the unique interpretations each artist brought to the genre. Martha, on the other hand, preferred music that she could be involved with and so danced up a storm when she and her husband attended blues festivals.

Blues was a fairly new interest for Martha considering how long music had been a part of her life. In her youth, she had started singing during elementary school in a

mandatory music class, which she continued to take until high school. She fondly remembered her general music teacher standing her in front of the class and having her sing scales to demonstrate the wide range of her voice. She also remembered singing a Christmas solo in elementary choir, "What Child Is This." She had not had to stand in front of the audience alone but had been able to sing from within the choir. She had been relieved when it was over. Even to the day of the interview, she was still glad when things were over! Martha's voice had always been very low for a female. She luckily was very tall, so she had always stood next to the boys. She could not reach the high notes, so she had either faked singing or had sung with the boys. Martha said, "I'm thinking this is the source of my nervousness, knowing I couldn't meet expectations in terms of the upper ranges." Other choral deterrents besides performance anxiety and a low range had existed for Martha in her youth.

Martha had moved a lot due to her father's occupation in sales. She had moved so much she had attended eight different public schools before eighth grade. She had always taken the mandatory general music class that was mostly singing no matter what school she had been in, so she had always sung. Martha had also taken part in private piano lessons offered through the public school until seventh grade. For one year, in sixth grade, she had even taken guitar lessons. As the memories came back, Martha retorted, "I hated piano recitals," which had been an inevitable part of piano lessons. She had not liked practicing piano and had known others were better than her. After having raised a hyperactive son, Martha believed that she was also hyperactive, and the droll process of practicing the piano everyday had not appealed to her in her youth. Additionally, she had

defied the well-practiced habits of her sister who would practice her clarinet at 5:00 in the morning. Yes, she confirmed as she looks at me intensely, “Five in the morning.” At the interview, she said she could still hear a clarinet a mile away, and she detested the sound! Martha had another sibling involved in music. Her brother, thirteen years younger than her and a professional pianist on a cruise line, had played the drums throughout his youth. Music was a part of Martha’s extended family as well; her maternal grandmother had played the piano and her father had played the drums. Her parents had valued instrumental music lessons and had encouraged all of their children to be involved in music. Both of Martha’s children were musical. Her daughter was very good in music, but Martha and her husband had talked her out of majoring in music because her son, the eldest child, was having a hard time trying to make it as a musician.

As I listened to Martha talk, I looked out over the lake behind her house and admired the reflection of the shimmering sun. The drive to Martha’s house was pleasantly short, only 20 minutes from my residence. In fact, I passed the main entrance road to her house at least six times a week on my trips in and out of the Washington, DC, area. My husband and I yearned for a location like that of Martha’s secluded home. In directing me to her house in an e-mail, she wrote,

We live on a ‘street’ which is really a named driveway. Once you turn on our street the first two houses are real easy to see. But you have to keep going, making a right turn after the mail boxes. Once you see this drive split again, we are the drive on the left except you really can't see our house until you get up over the hump. (Martha, personal communication, 6/10/14)

When I arrived, she greeted me and asked if I was able to find the place without trouble. Years ago, in New Jersey, I would have fretted over such directions, but now I

took pleasure in the split driveways and endless roads that curved and disappeared through the woods. So I told her I had enjoyed finding her house—and I had. Martha guided me straight to the back porch where I sat during the interview, admiring the view. I could only imagine what this property looks like during autumn—it must be breathtaking.

Music maintained a place in Martha's adult life, and she entered the world of ensemble singing by joining her church choir. But singing was not the only hobby in which she partook to pass the time. Martha was also involved in a book club. Strangely enough, this book club had been her gateway into community choral singing. Martha had received an early release of Horn's (2013) book, *Imperfect Harmony: Finding Happiness Singing With Others*, and it was then she had realized community choirs exist. Martha said, "I had never heard of them before!" Reading Horn's experiences singing in a large community choir showed her a completely different aspect to choral singing from the 12-member church choir she had sung with every week. The experience in Martha's church choir was dull compared to Horn's description of community choirs, and let's face it, no one in her church choir was getting any younger. She even pointed out the one singer in particular in her church choir who never knew the exact key in which the choir was singing. Martha mentioned that she did not think the singer minded!

After reading *Imperfect Harmony*, Martha decided to contact a couple of her friends who sang with a local community choir and audition for it. At the least, she said, "I would learn if I was the one off key in church choir!" More specifically she thought, "Let me try out for this choir and see if I am a horrible singer." Martha had been very

nervous for her auditions, but she made it, and within the first 2 hours of being a member of the group, she shelled out \$300.00. She knew after that point (paying the money for membership dues, repertoire, and concert attire) that she would stay in this community choir whether she liked it or not. “There was no going back after such an investment,” Martha told me. Aside from the financial commitment keeping her in the ensemble, Martha liked the challenge of singing with a community choir. She had to read music and know when to enter and cut-off. She had to keep time; it was all a great mental challenge. Martha considered her participation in community choir as a form of adult education or even cultural enlightenment. Singing in the ensemble was a challenge and she enjoyed the act of using her inner drive to accomplish something like singing Mozart’s *Requiem*.

I admired Martha’s fearless abandon and bravery for jumping into the community choir pool with little to no experience. I was thankful to Stacey Horn for her publication, for without it, I wondered if Martha ever would have joined a community choir. I secretly considered how many other adults had followed the path of Martha after reading Horn’s account of singing in community choirs. I began to admire Martha even more as her personal story unfolded. Martha naturally preferred isolation and was a bit introverted. Therefore, she admitted, making the choice to join a community choir had been difficult because it was a social commitment. It was not easy for her to make friends, but she did like camaraderie. The couple of friends that she knew in the choir, and the financial investment, helped her stick with her choice.

Martha had met some really nice people in the choir even though she had only been in the group for a year. She admitted, though, that not all of the choir members were

nice. “There are only two people in the ensemble that I avoid,” she stated. Martha avoided one singer who was very good, but extremely arrogant, and a second singer because she was not strong enough to sing next to someone who, as she said, “pulls me off key.” Martha had also noticed that she could not sit anywhere near the tenor section because she wanted to sing their part. She sang tenor in church choir and had found it difficult to not sing tenor in community choir. She really had to focus on the director’s comments and make sure she followed those given to the altos in rehearsal, not the tenors.

Martha paid diligent attention to the notes from the director. The most important thing to her in choir was not making a mistake—she was mortified at the thought. As Martha explained, “Those kinds of solos are painful.” Martha did admit to a “painful solo” during the past concert, but she felt better about it because the woman who stood next to her, a much more accomplished singer, made an even more painful solo than her during the concert. For Martha, singing in the community choir for a year had taught her much. She considered it a form of adult education. She had learned that many singers who she thought were good in her church choir were just singing loudly. She had a better understanding of certain music terminology and understood the difference between a whole and half step. Martha then understood why choirs should do warm ups; something she had never experienced in church choir. Martha looked forward to growing as she experienced the adult community choir education.

Martha’s goals for the future in this choir were to make fewer mistakes. As a singer in this choir, Martha really wanted to please the director. “He is very professional

and when he tells us we did a good job, it means a lot to me,” said Martha. There were many singers in this choir with a strong musical background, and that was very intimidating for someone like her. However, the fact that she was not the worst singer in the room reassured her. After all, Martha was learning to sing a new voice part. Because of her childhood experience singing low notes with the boys and her church choir experiences singing the tenor part, Martha naturally auditioned as a tenor for the community choir. The director told her that she was not a tenor and placed her in the alto section, but when she saw notes that were higher than the D above middle C, she just crossed them out. Martha elaborated, “I know that my chances of getting there are slim to none and I don’t want that agony.” In choir, it was reassuring to know that she was not the only alto uncomfortable with singing high notes, and singers were encouraged by the director to fake it if they could not hit it.

Throughout the interview, I admired Martha’s frank comments and thoroughly honest responses to my questions. I was impressed when she shared, “I am just proud that over this year I didn’t drop out.” Martha had performed three concerts this year, the first of which was really hard because it had been all madrigal music. Then the second concert had been a breeze, a pop concert. Somewhere in between those two concerts one of Martha’s fellow singers asked her if she was going to stay, and she replied, “well, I don’t feel like I am getting sick and I think the worst is over.” After a year in this ensemble, she felt pretty connected, but not completely at home. Martha planned to stay with this community choir but not her church choir. She was learning so much in her new community environment and was grateful for her new education and new friends. There

were people in the community choir that she would miss seeing if she left. Martha really felt connected to her new community choir when she attended the yearly general membership meeting.

Despite her newly forming positive connections, Martha had experienced some frustrating situations with her fellow singers. The last concert of the season was when she first realized that she was an annoyance to other singers around her. This comment garnered particular attention, so Martha told me the whole story. There was a really good singer standing next to her, and at one point she yanked Martha's folder down. Later, after the concert, the director told the choir to lower their music during solo moments because the choir should be listening to them, not following along in the score. I giggled on the inside because I realized that the person who yanked Martha's folder down was surely the same person who reminded the director to make a blanket statement announcement to the choir regarding following soloists in the music. Martha experienced positive learning experiences too during the final concert season. Before the final performance, the director told the choir to move in sync with the music. This changed Martha's entire experience. She was a mover whether listening to the blues or singing Mozart. She felt such freedom and comfort in the last concert when she knew she did not have to make herself stand still during the concert.

As Martha and I continued to travel through her story of her first year singing in community choir, she said, "I could have left after this year, but I think I will stay." She knew that because she had stuck with it through the year, she liked it. Besides, she told me, "The director says he needs more singers." Martha shared that being the new kid on

the block had been tough this year. Everyone else had known each other. She had even created a cheat sheet to help her learn names. There were many people who had shown up for one or two rehearsals and then disappeared. Martha thought she could help the group next year by reaching out to new people and making them feel more connected. While Martha planned to help next year, she was also apprehensive for what was to come. Next season, the director was going to listen to singers' voices and consider placement based on vocal blend. Martha said, "I sure do hope my voice 'blends' with my friends' voices." She did not know many people other than the altos. Martha felt at home with her section because they worked a lot together during sectionals.

During her interview, Martha admitted to me that she was not quite comfortable using the words *home* or *love* in the context of her community choral singing experience. She stumbled into singing with her community choir, and admitted that without it life would be much more boring. However, Martha would probably find something else to fill the void. As her husband had stated before, she was a doer. She lived on five acres of wooded land. Martha's most time consuming hobby was her gardening. Even during the winter, she did not sit around. She cleaned her property and worked around the house. Choir rehearsals during the winter would be easy times to stay home, said Martha, but she was always worried that she would miss something. "Singing is important in that it gives me something uplifting during the winter months." Martha was not a people person; she liked being by herself. Singing in choir made her stay with other people and helped her combat the winter blues and her isolation tendency. Once she made personal connections in choir, she felt better: "I don't feel confident enough to say I *love* singing

in an ensemble,” said Martha. For her, feeling comfortable in the ensemble was progress enough.

The performance anxiety that had kept Martha from enjoying piano performances years ago continued to be a small part of her singing experience. After singing with her church choir for 7 years, she no longer felt nervous when she sang. After three performances and 1 year with her community choir, Martha still felt pretty nervous, but she knew that she enjoyed what she was doing. She also enjoyed the people who sang with her. Martha boasted, “I’ve never come home after choir practice feeling sad; rather I have a feeling of accomplishment.” She thought that singing in choir held importance in her life. She looked forward to her time in rehearsal and the challenge it brought her. Martha planned to serve the choir in the future with new member education and grant writing. More importantly, she considered her membership in community choir as a growing part of her life and looked forward to greater commitments in the future.

**Noah.** “For us, singing in an ensemble provided a sense of home no matter what our geographic location,” (Noah, *the loyalist*, Interview, 6/12/2014).

I am compelled to sing  
 Graduate school choir changed my life forever  
 My wife and I met in choir; we continue to sing in choirs together  
 Choral music remains a common bond throughout the family  
 Military life, moved often, choir was always there for us  
 Making music with others is the only music I make  
 Choral singing provides me a sense of belonging, a sense of purpose  
 Without singing I would miss something that provides me joy,  
 There would be something missing from within  
 I am always in choir.

Noah’s interview was located an hour and a half from my residence, so I had plenty of time to mentally prepare for my meeting as I drove through the endless number

of traffic lights on a two-lane highway; at least I was driving against commuter traffic. I arrived in Noah's condo complex with just enough time to find a spot and gather my belongings. Noah was waiting for me in his reading chair next to the front door, and I could see him as I approached to ring the doorbell.

Noah greeted me with a warm smile as I entered his living room and found a spot to make my own. He offered me a cup of tea, which I quickly accepted. Noah and I exchanged pleasantries as he quickly brewed a cup of tea and brought it to me once I was set up. I clasped the warm mug in my hands and was thankful for his graciousness in making me feel comfortable on my first formal data collection ever, (no pressure). I eagerly anticipated hearing Noah's story and waited for him to settle in and get comfortable before we began.

Early in the interview I learned that choral singing was a constant in Noah's life. His father had sung in an Episcopal boys' choir in New York City and had always loved classical music. As a child, Noah had grown up with church music and listened to a lot of classical music played by his father. Noah shared, "We had a piano, which I could kind-of play, and my sisters both took piano lessons." When he was young, Noah had thought he was getting away with murder because his sisters despised lessons and he never took lessons. Now, however, he wished he did play the piano and admired the musicianship of both his sisters. I heard a bit of regret in Noah's voice as he mentioned that that is just the way things were back then: Boys played sports and girls took music lessons. Noah's younger sister was now a professional jazz singer, and his other sister was a very good singer. Singing had always been a part of his identity. He remembered singing in primary

school and in church choir as a child. However, Noah had not sung in high school and undergraduate school because he had not had the time to devote to singing. I noted another sense of regret for loss of experiences in his voice.

Noah's graduate choral experience in the mid-1970s changed his life forever and reignited his love for singing, which he had developed as a young child. The Choral Union at the University of Michigan was the first choral group that he had truly loved singing with. As a new, young graduate student in Michigan, he had felt isolated, and the Choral Union gave him a social diversion and an artistic outlet. It was in this choir where he met his wife Nancy, and since that ensemble, they continued to sing together in choirs. Noah and his wife had another strong attachment to the Choral Union, because years later their daughter had attended the same university and had sung in the same choir. It was likely that she had even sung some of the same repertoire that he and his wife had sung in this college ensemble.

Noah's son also sang in choir and had joined another choir of which Noah and Nancy were formerly members. Stationed in Colorado, his son found himself divorced and in a stressful job situation. He joined a choir that Noah and his wife used to sing in when they lived in Colorado. Noah's son had that ensemble when he did not have anything else; his son had continued to find a choral home no matter his geographic location. Recently in Africa, his son had joined a choir of expatriates led by a British conductor. Choral music was a common bond for Noah's entire family. In fact, it was a tradition for his family to watch the movie *A Christmas Without Snow* once a year. The family loved watching it because it reminded them of the choirs of which they had all

been a part. The movie crystallized the relationships between choir members in a realistic way.

Fascinated by Noah and Nancy's story, I was touched that choir remained one of their common bonds. Now retired from the Air Force, Noah had spent most of his career on the go. However, he and his wife had always found an ensemble where they could sing. They had always sought a place to sing because singing in choral groups provided a sense of belonging, explained Noah, "For us, singing in an ensemble provided a sense of home no matter what our geographic location." Moving so often made Noah and Nancy flexible choral singers able to enjoy and appreciate the differing experiences from choir to choir. Often, singers in their 30s and 40s, the typical family rearing age, do not have time to commit to weekly rehearsals. I was so impressed that Noah and Nancy had continued to sing in choir together once they had started a family. They would bring their children to rehearsal and the children would sit in the back of the chapel. As a choral conductor and a parent myself, I admired their display of dedication to weekly rehearsals and singing from all perspectives.

Once we established Noah's family connections to choir, he began to expand upon his personal singing identity. Noah considered himself a choral singer only. He never ventured into solo singing. As Noah admitted, "I have no other musical skills than singing and therefore making music with others is the only music that I make." For Noah, singing in choir with others was rewarding because choir offered a goal-oriented group that drove toward an end. He enjoyed the process of experiencing the progression of repertoire from week to week in rehearsals.

Noah enjoyed the journey more than the destination in choir and so enjoyed rehearsal more than the performance. In choir, he was the singer who listened intently and worked hard toward the director's goals. Noah got highly frustrated with singers who were there to merely chat with their neighbors and did not listen to the director.

"Socializing should be left for break time," he told me. But then Noah rethought his use of the word socializing and claimed that listening is a social activity and singers should listen intently to what is going on around them during rehearsal. So then, Noah pointed out that there was a way to be social during rehearsal without talking. Noah enjoyed singing in a mixed formation and liked hearing other voice parts around him. He did not consider himself a musical snob and enjoyed singing all types of choral music. However, Noah never tired of the classics, and he savored the surprising gems of famous composers that often went unheard. Noah had an appreciation for classical music that existed outside of choral music. Perhaps influenced by his father before him, Noah listened to the Classical station on Saturday mornings; he enjoyed learning about Classical music and building upon that knowledge through his participation in choir.

It was clear that Noah enjoyed, but took seriously, his commitment to choral singing. Even though Noah did not consider himself a solo singer, he expressed enjoyment in being a member of a smaller ensemble. He liked it the best because as an individual he mattered greatly. Singing in a small ensemble was something that Noah had experienced for much of his life. Most often, he had found himself a member of church choirs. These ensembles had usually been his first connection to the community, and then he had sought out a community choir. Noah reminded me that choral singing gives him a

sense of belonging and a sense of purpose. Choral singing offered the opportunity to participate in the music making, not just to listen. While Noah enjoyed listening to music, he knew the connection was more immediate when one was singing within a performing group.

Noah was no stranger to the choral rehearsal process, from professional choruses under the direction of Robert Shaw to church choirs preparing for Easter Sunday. He had fond memories of the University of Michigan May Festival, which featured four consecutive performances with the Philadelphia Orchestra each spring. One of the performances always featured a major choral work. Noah remembered singing major works such as Dvořák's *Requiem*, Verdi's *Te Deum*, and Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast*. "It was a thrill to sing with such a great orchestra," he said.

One of the most memorable performances for him was the Berlioz *Requiem* conducted by Robert Shaw. Noah remembered specifically that his conductor at Michigan had been very concerned during preparation for Maestro Shaw. As a choral singer, he felt the choir had been ready to work with Robert Shaw when the conductor arrived for the first rehearsal. Yet, after two bars of singing, Shaw placed his baton down and said, "The first thing we have to do is get this chorus in tune." For the rest of the 2-hour rehearsal Noah and his fellow choir members had sung nothing but scales. Shaw had meticulously moved the singers up and down in semitones, and the choir had sung no Berlioz at all for the rest of rehearsal. When I asked him if Shaw's tactics had helped to create a better performance, Noah was not sure. He did remember the impression that Shaw had left on the choir, though. Later in his life, in Hawaii, Noah had sung Verdi's

*Requiem* under Maestro Shaw's baton once more. During a break, Noah could not help but jog Shaw's memory regarding the Michigan–Berlioz tuning experience. Noah told me that Shaw had remembered the experience precisely. Shaw had left quite an impression on Noah. “His approach to rehearsal was unlike any other conductor I have encountered,” said Noah.

Noah took pride in his former singing engagements. Over the years, he had sung with Soli Deo Gloria choir in Colorado Springs, the chorus of the Hawaii Opera Theater, the Honolulu Symphony Chorus, and the Dayton Symphony Chorus, among others. One of the most memorable musical experiences was overseas in an Anglo-American chorus in Mildenhall, England. With that choir, Noah had performed Handel's *Messiah* in Ely Cathedral, a space with wonderful acoustics in the medieval stone nave. Another great choral experience overseas had been singing with a choir in Kaiserslautern, Germany. The culminating performance of Verdi's *Requiem* had occurred in the city's concert hall. For this German choir, Noah's conductor was British, but “he gave all of his choral instructions in a kind of rapid-fire, English–German pidgin,” said Noah. Despite the obvious linguistic issues, the conductor of that choir had coaxed a wonderful performance out of the choir in which Noah and Nancy sang, which further strengthened their belief that music really was the universal language.

Despite their many choral experiences abroad and on American soil, Noah and Nancy felt at home with their community choir at the time of this interview. Due to Noah's retirement, they had been in this geographic location the longest and had been members of this choir longer than with any other choir. Noah had held leadership

positions, and Noah and Nancy had hosted business meetings at their house. Noah admitted that he and his wife would not have had any problems moving on to another choir if they had had to because their military life had trained them well. However, the permanence of their roles in this community choir would make them sad to leave.

Without choral singing, Noah would be missing something that provided joy. He shared that he would not notice it outwardly, but there would be something missing from within. Noah was not an outwardly social person, and therefore his life would be a bit lonely without his fellow choir members. Choral singing offered Noah an escape, a break from the stresses of life. Noah wrote,

Singing to me is a form of structured relaxation. I find this somewhat of a paradox, since one must concentrate very hard at rehearsal, and you wouldn't think such level of extended concentration is relaxing—but it is. Somehow focusing all my attention for a few hours on a weekday night, singing in concord with others, displaces, all the stresses of the workday world with a peaceful, relaxed frame of mind. (Journal, 6/12/14)

At this point in his life, choral singing was an ingrained habit for Noah. He and his wife were used to being out a couple nights a week for rehearsals and Sunday services. Noah's best memories were from singing in choir, "I am always in a choir," said Noah. He found he was compelled to sing in choirs; even if he was in the audience during a choral performance, part of him wanted to sing with the choir on stage. Noah said, "Sometimes it's hard to refrain from singing along in my seat; the attractional [sic] pull to participate is almost too strong."

**Sharon.** "I am happier personally when making music in a group," (Sharon, *the collaborator*, Interview, 6/24/2014).

Soprano  
Private voice lessons  
Raised by Italian immigrants  
Degree in Music Education  
Now I balance my life as a teacher, choral director, choral singer, composer, and a performer,  
I am a person who makes roots  
It is unimaginable for me not to sing in a choir—  
There are so many everywhere!

As I pulled into Sharon's driveway, I immediately noticed the blooming flowers that surrounded me on both sides. I marveled at the lack of grass on their property due to the years of expanded gardening. I paused for a moment before ringing the doorbell to look through the intertwining vines and blooms, trying to identify a few of the many plants before me. Before I was ready—because I felt a bit awkward admiring the garden for too long—I rang the doorbell, and her husband Curt welcomed me. I entered their home while two delightful, yapping dogs greeted me with excitement from upstairs where they were contained until they were calm. As soon as I complimented Curt on the beautiful yard in the front, my eyes found the sliding glass window in the back revealing even more delightfully green pathways. I should have known the back garden would be even better than the front! It was complete with fountains and tiny sculptures. I peered at the garden through the window, again complimenting Curt, who I later learned was the gardener, on his many years of work. Curt invited me to walk around out back and take in the view as he made me a cup of coffee. I could hear a blow dryer upstairs and figured Sharon was making her last-minute adjustments before we started our interview. Once Sharon arrived—and I gave each of the dogs a treat—I settled in and prepared to listen to her story.

As a child, Sharon's first musical experiences were taking private voice and piano lessons. Raised in a home by two Italian immigrants, both of her parents had firmly believed in taking advantage of all the opportunities that America offered, including private music instruction. Sharon's mother had received singing opportunities during her childhood, and so she had enrolled Sharon in singing lessons at the early age of 6. What she had learned most from these early lessons, because she wondered how one could really develop the vocal instrument at age 6, was confidence and performance practice. The opportunities to sing in front of others from an early age in many different venues contributed to Sharon's ease with performance.

Sharon's primary and secondary education had occurred in Catholic schools. From those years, she could remember particular experiences that contributed to the musician she was today. In middle school, she had been part of the talent show, and in eighth grade she had become acquainted with a church musical ensemble. The church musicians were older than she was, but she had begun to sing with them at Catholic Mass each Sunday. She had even learned to play the guitar while performing in church. Sharon had not realized it at the time, but playing and singing with that ensemble would one day point her in the direction of her future career.

Sharon's initial foray into the educational world of ensemble music-making had been during a high school musical. In her freshman year she had landed a role in the musical, and her peers told her, "No freshmen ever gets into a musical." She had greatly enjoyed her time in the musical because she had worked with a group of students that had a clear purpose. As Sharon said, "It was the most fun I had ever had." She had made

lasting friendships from her experience in the musical freshmen year.

Sharon sang with the chorus during the musical, and the year after joined the chorale in her high school. Because of her prior experience with reading music in her private piano lessons, Sharon felt at home in the chorale where singers eagerly read music. There had been 50 to 60 singers in the choir, and a nun with tons of energy had directed. Sharon had a smile of delight on her face when she talked about the nun choir director. For a moment, I wished I could have watched this nun work with the students; it seemed she made quite an impression. Sharon shared that the choir had performed lots of varied repertoire including choral arrangements of contemporary rock music like a Queen medley. I thought, once again, that I would have loved to see a Catholic high school choir and nun performing Queen. “We loved it and performed well,” said Sharon.

From early on in her singing career, Sharon had held leadership roles. Her first experience leading groups of performers had been during her sophomore year talent show in high school. She acknowledged that by directing the talent show, her eyes had first opened to collaboration and the partnerships that can exist between performance ensembles. She and a group of friends from her freshmen year had written parodies and skits and had choreographed small dances to perform. Her drama director had encouraged her to also listen to the ideas of other students who were not musicians but were still interested in the language arts. It was through this process that Sharon had realized she loved the exchange of artistic ideas.

During her time in high school, Sharon had gained a great sense of accomplishment and self-confidence. In fact, she had become a resource for her friends

with musical questions. She had helped her friends learn their music and prepare audition pieces. This educational role was something she had naturally grown into, but little did Sharon know that she would continue to help people with musical advice as a career. During high school, Sharon had developed her critical listening skills and had worked on valuing precision in an attempt to help her classmates succeed. Her experiences teaching her peers during high school brought much purpose to Sharon's life.

After high school, Sharon had realized that performing was not the only career path for her. She had known she loved to sing, but had felt limited by only being able to perform as a singer. Sharon had wanted to do more. There she was, the daughter of Italian immigrants raised during a time when people did not necessarily think young women needed a career because they would get married and raise a family. Ahead of her time, Sharon had felt she needed to financially support herself as a first generation American. So, she had worked in physical therapy for 15 years before going back to school to receive her certificate in physical therapy.

It was soon after her return to education that music had become the focal point of her studies once again. In her second year of physical therapy classes, Sharon had started adding music and theater classes in order to raise her grade point average. At that time in her studies, Sharon had experienced a great musical theater teacher who had observed each of his students and had given sound life advice to them. When this particular teacher had asked Sharon why she was not studying music, she had thought hard about her choice to go into physical therapy. It turned out that Sharon had acquired a degree in music education after all. She had faltered on the common debate of a music performance

degree versus a music education degree. For her, education was a stronger calling and a better guarantee to financial success after graduation.

Even today, Sharon found herself following in the footsteps of that inspirational but caring drama teacher she had met during her undergraduate studies. When Sharon taught voice lessons, she asked her students why they wanted to study voice. She believed if someone wanted to study voice for the first time, he or she should learn to be a good choral singer before he or she becomes a soloist.

Sharon summarized the events of her studies and life experiences on her current career and exposure to choral music:

All of these experiences shaped my life's work to this point. Now I balance my life as a teacher, choral director, choral singer, composer, and a performer. I teach music, how to succeed in a role they are seeking, how to maximize their natural talent, and how to look confident. Feeling confident will follow. And most of all, an appreciation of how your fellow performers enhance and support what you do and what an audience feels.

All of these experiences also led me to conclude that I am happier personally when making music in a group. I never enjoyed the competitiveness that is part of a professional singer's life. And don't really enjoy the "solo" limelight. There is more pressure to be vocally perfect, and a lot less time to be with others, because you have to spend so much personal time training and practicing. (Journal, 7/23/2014)

Sharon's atypical soprano philosophies of singing intrigued me. It was refreshing to listen to her opinions on music making with others. Sharon greatly valued team accomplishment, especially that moment of "aha" when most of the singers realized they had finally met their goal. This was due to her previous experience as a teacher. Sharon's favorite part of putting together a performance during her teaching days had been watching the final production on video at the end. She could not believe how much they

had all accomplished together, and she had never been disappointed in the final product. Sharon felt guilty knowing she had had that much excitement from her work for 20 years of her life. She knew that most others never felt this way about their jobs. Another benefit that Sharon received from singing in community choir was the challenge from the assigned repertoire and the incentive to keep her vocal training in top shape. In choir, she sought the benefits from all music performed, even if it was not her favorite piece.

To Sharon, the most important aspects of community choir were the director and the repertoire. According to Sharon, directors must be able to clearly communicate expectations and choose repertoire of high level and quality. Sharon laughed and said, “I would enjoy singing a Queen medley again, if a good arrangement is done with authenticity.” Her biggest challenge in community choir was grasping and liking contemporary music. Sharon grew up with the Romantic aesthetic in her ear and the lush melodies of operas. She found it hard expressing her musicality with choral works that she did not find “musical,” but she realized that she did not have to agree with every piece of music the choir performed. She would still get something out of every experience.

As a conductor, I wondered why Sharon was able to change roles from conductor to singer in her community choir. Especially when she expressed difficulty in connecting with particular pieces, I wondered why she had continued to sing under a director who would choose such music when she could conduct whatever she liked in her church choir. Sharon told me that she thoroughly enjoyed not having to make any decisions during community choir rehearsals; she did enough leading in her other director positions. Once

again, I admired her ability to be the atypical soprano, or in this case, the atypical conductor as she transitioned smoothly from role to role in her life.

Sharon was a very social person and naturally gravitated towards social settings. However, she stated, “I am a person who makes roots.” The only way she would remove herself from the community choir was if she was not happy with the management. Sharon felt at home with her community choir and had often shared personal thoughts and goals with her fellow singers, some of whom she called her friends. Sharon told me that most of the community singers had shared goals and wanted the choir to prosper. Her director was helpful in promoting a sense of community. He was personable and conversed with everyone, which made people feel at home. Section leaders also made singers feel at home by communicating over e-mail outside of rehearsal and reminding singers of upcoming events. Sharon continued to use her strengths as a leader in her community choir. In the past she had served on the board of directors and had organized financial and administrative matters. At the time of this interview, she contributed to the group in her role as soprano section leader.

Making music was what made Sharon feel the happiest, and the ability to express her singing voice in many different ways and having plenty of opportunities to sing was of great importance. Sharon broke the soprano mold because she enjoyed singing many other voice parts, sometimes contralto—or even tenor—if needed. She proclaimed, “I enjoy not being pigeon-holed and love the flexibility of switching parts in a choral ensemble.” But of greatest importance was that Sharon must sing with a quality choir. For her, good quality resulted when the group ran efficiently, the director was talented,

and the performances were of a high caliber. Sharon never wanted seclusion in a practice room as a lonely musician. She could not fathom musicians who only played in solitude. The companionship of other people who enjoyed what they were doing was magnetizing to her. In fact, Sharon would have liked to build more social time into choral rehearsal. She thought that she did not get enough structured time to talk and share ideas with her singing colleagues. As a choral conductor, I thought, “What a great idea,” but we would have to rehearse more than one night a week!

Sharon concluded her thoughts with a quote from her drama professor in college who said, “Music Theater is an expression of language that results when the emotions in the words are so powerful, that you have to burst into song. Talking is just not expressive enough.” Sharon wrote, “I know that an actor might dispute this, but it works for me.” Sharon would not be able to express herself enough if she could not sing. It was unimaginable for her to not be in a choir because there were so many everywhere! Sharon admitted that singing in choir may have brought her a lot of work and stress, but it brought her a lot of pleasure as well.

### **Conductors’ Perspectives**

Both choral conductors in this study were eloquent when providing information on the adult singer in the community choral setting. There was common agreement on the concept that the community choral experience offers a social setting which is important to the singers. Additionally, conductors mentioned health benefits, chemicals released while singing, the need for the arts, and the educational aspect of singing. Conductors provided information they gleaned from conversations with their singers mostly

regarding their previous singing experiences in other choruses. Opportunities arose during auditions or the social hour of chorus rehearsals for conductors to learn about adult singers' experiences and values, but the conductors in this study did not go out of their way to formally gather opinions from adult members of their singing ensembles.

### **Family Members' Perspectives.**

Family members in this research study provided information that mostly substantiated the opinions of the adult singers. I interviewed the spouses of three out of four participants in this study. Because both Noah and Nancy sang in the same chorus, I interviewed Noah's daughter.

Fiona's husband confirmed her introverted tendencies and echoed most of her perspective. He did provide more information regarding specific interactions with her fellow singers and especially shared her frustrations with different learners in the choral setting. Fiona's husband also offered some dissonant perspective in his interview. According to him, she would not be any different without chorus in her life and he thought she would have continued to sing even if she were not a member of a community chorus. This perspective is quite divergent from Fiona's description of the triangle of happiness in her life, which included her husband, her career, and her choral singing.

Sharon's husband confirmed her social qualities and love for collaboration. He knew that, for Sharon, singing in a group was the ultimate reward. Sharon's husband shared more information on other choruses with which Sharon was singing. He noted that, as a soprano, choral singing offered her more outlets than solo singing would. Sharon's husband discussed an idea of importance that one might expect to hear when

speaking of a community chorus. He spoke of the choral ensemble's role in the community and how it was "embedded" in the community's structure (Interview, 6/24/2014). Sharon also touched upon the community service aspects of singing in the chorus, for instance, when they sang at retirement facilities. The choral directors were the only other participants to raise the subject of service to the community. Perhaps because Sharon and her husband served as directors in other ensembles they brought that responsibility to all of the groups in which they were involved, whether conducting or singing. Sharon's husband noted that without chorus, Sharon would not be the same person.

Martha and her husband also presented coordinating accounts of Martha's perspective on community chorus. Her husband confirmed that she had been very nervous to audition for chorus, but she liked the challenges she confronted in the ensemble. He echoed her introverted characteristics by stating that she did not easily make friends. Martha's husband offered more insight on why she stayed with her commitment to community chorus this year, and it was more than the financial down payment. Even though Martha was not the most comfortable in social situations, she did like being involved, and according to her husband, "she is a doer," (Interview, 6/24/2014). Her "doer" tendencies were probably what kept Martha involved in her community chorus even though it was her first year. She witnessed other new members quitting throughout the year, but stayed with her decision to learn something completely new. Martha's husband also confirmed her accidental brush with joining the community chorus, "If she didn't stumble into chorus, she would have done something else." If

Martha had read an inspiring book titled “Imperfect Brush Strokes,” perhaps she would be painting now instead of singing.

After speaking with spouses of adult singers, it was refreshing to hear from Noah’s daughter. Her perspective as a child from a military family with two parents who always sang in choral ensembles was enlightening. Noah’s daughter supported his statements and offered a bit more insight into his personality. She remembered that he had always been part of a chorus and described choral singing as the anchor in his life. Having sung in a chorus herself, she agreed that being a member of a choral ensemble took great discipline and was hard work but very rewarding. Noah’s daughter provided more detail regarding his personal life and stories. She shared stories about his family connections with choral singing, for instance singing with his sisters in a choir and his son’s experiences in choral ensembles. Finally, his daughter stated that Noah did not surround himself with multiple social groups, but instead lived a happy, quiet life and saved his social interactions for the community chorus.

### **Chapter Five: Elements of Light, Texture, Shape, and Value**

I collected data that described in what ways adults experience meaningfulness in community choruses. I also considered the impact that place attachment has on meaningfulness. Ten semi-structured interviews, four journal entries, four observations, and my impressionistic record contributed to the data collection. I conducted initial, focused, axial, and theoretical coded analysis (Charmaz, 2006) and maintained the practice of portraiture analysis by keeping contact open with participants, composing reflections soon after interviews, reviewing interviews more than once, creating transcriptions, and using all data sets to create portraits.

I was aware that coding, analysis, and interpretation of data in this study provided a perspective that was unique to me because of my preconceptions and life experiences. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983) wrote, “the voice of the researcher is everywhere” (p. 85) in portraiture. My researcher bias is natural because my voice is the research instrument (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983). However, these findings may only be significant to me. In order to ensure authenticity throughout data analysis and reporting, I employed member checks and triangulation of sources. I also made note of catalytic validity and strived for dialogic validity in the creation of the portraits.

#### **Coding Discussion**

First, I prepared analysis charts for initial coding (example provided by Charmaz, 2006), which included three sets of charts for each adult singer participant: an interview transcription chart, a journal chart, and a family member interview transcription chart. Additionally, I prepared transcription charts for the two choral conductor interviews and

for my observations. After this, I read through each set of data and began assigning initial coding, or descriptions of the segments of text, in a line-by-line fashion. Once complete, I read through the charts again, highlighting significant quotations from participants to use in the creation of portraits.

Next, I transferred initial descriptions to color-coded Post-it notes, arranging the descriptions thematically in colors and assigning a specific color of writing to each participant. The categories developed during focused coding were opportunity, mental stimulation, personal enhancement and growth, and connection with others. Mental stimulation, connection with others, and personal enhancement and growth were the largest categories, but axial coding helped determine the most significant categories in this study.

During axial coding, I developed subcategories with the Post-it notes and organized them under the axes of the four categories developed during focused coding as represented in Table 1.

Table 1

*Results from preliminary axial coding*

| Subcategory                     | Number of occurrences |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Connection with others          |                       |
| Human connection                | 49                    |
| Frustration                     | 16                    |
| Personal enhancement and growth |                       |
| Musical identity                | 17                    |
| Vocal expression                | 15                    |
| Revitalization                  | 13                    |
| Pride                           | 5                     |
| Healing                         | 4                     |
| Creative/expressive             | 3                     |
| Mental stimulation              |                       |
| Challenge                       | 37                    |
| Intellectual stimulation        | 26                    |
| Enjoys the process              | 18                    |
| High standards                  | 8                     |
| Opportunity                     |                       |
| Leadership                      | 9                     |
| Director                        | 8                     |
| Common ground                   | 6                     |
| Specific repertoire             | 5                     |
| Financial time/commitment       | 3                     |
| Community                       | 2                     |
| Orchestra                       | 2                     |
| Better than church              | 2                     |
| Accessible                      | 1                     |
| Smaller choir experience        | 1                     |

I identified two significant categories after axial coding: connection with others and mental stimulation. Both categories contained a smaller amount of subcategories, which were more concise, and support from the collected data was dense with examples. It was clear after the first three phases of coding that the social and intellectual

characteristics of singing in a community chorus were the most meaningful elements for adult singers.

After axial and focused coding, I considered place attachment theory as a lens to connect the two major categories in theoretical coding. Place attachment is a multidimensional construct including the three dimensions of process, place, and person (Low & Altman, 1992). After aligning the categories and subcategories with each of the three theoretical dimensions, place and process emerged as the most significant. The place dimension involves what places are and what they become, and process refers to the psychological dimension of place, including cognitive components (Lewicka, 2014). The choral place and process aided in the creation of meaningfulness in the community chorus. Results suggested that the community chorus is a dynamic and multifaceted place (Avery et al., 2013).

After moving through all four stages of coding, I continued portraiture analysis and, with an eye for goodness (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), refined the titles and descriptions, revealing more nuance and connection to participant data. More importantly, I paid close attention to participants' context and feelings, as suggested by Schendel (2009). I noted divergent views and brought them into the positive context of developing categories and subcategories. At this time, I began composing participant portraits and conducting model of interactions analysis, in which I compared and contrasted all sets of participant data from interviews.

In conclusion, I renamed the major categories contributing to meaningfulness from human connection and mental stimulation to connectedness and achievement. I

believed that connectedness better explained the social web of positive and binding experiences shared by participants in community choruses. In addition, I created more specific subcategories better describing the dimensions of connectedness. Camaraderie, part of a greater whole, precarious crossroads, active participation, and binding agent were the final subcategories in connectedness. The subcategory previously labeled frustration became precarious crossroads during my final analysis as I attempted to focus on the good in connectedness.

Mental stimulation and challenge were clear forerunners for subcategory titles in the second major category. Once I reviewed all subcategories and read through participant experiences, I realized that achievement better described the meaningful experiences shared by all participants. The final subcategories under achievement were ambitious endeavors, intellectual stimulation, feelings of agita, process over product, and alternate identity. In order to view the subcategory labeled challenge in a positive light, I altered the title to ambitious endeavors. The category of achievement represented two divergent views: feelings of agita and alternate identity. The next section presents the final categories and subcategories of this research study. There exists no claim that any of the findings below are applicable to other settings.

### **Codes of Connectedness**

One of the largest categories prevailing across the four forms of analysis, which contributed to meaningfulness in the choral setting, was the opportunity to connect with others in a community chorus, a finding well-supported in the literature (Booth, 2014; Ericson, 2002; Hinkle, 1987; Kennedy, 2009; Malone, 2009; Mbuyamba, 2008; von

Bannisseht, 2014). Five subcategories represented connectedness: camaraderie, part of the greater whole, precarious crossroads, active participation, and binding agent.

**Camaraderie.** Previous research indicated the importance of the social aspects in community choral singing (Baird, 2008; Barz, 2006; Bonshor, 2014; Darrough, 1990; Dingle et al., 2013; Farmer, 2009; Holmquist, 1995; Kempton, 2002; Kwan, 2007; Malone, 2009; Schank, 2007; Simmons, 1962; Snow, 2010; Sugden, 2005; Willingham, 2001). More specifically, Simmons reported that the desire to be with friends and to meet new friends was a benefit from community chorus participation. Clift and Hancox (2001) reported the significance of social benefits in a community chorus and the importance of meeting new people, a finding later supported by Clift et al. (2010). Clift et al. (2007) and Bailey and Davidson (2002) noted that social support involved in choral singing impacted wellbeing. Malone (2009) suggested meeting new friends and Southcott (2009) identified maintaining relationships as positive benefits of choral participation. Willingham found that forming relationships was an important aspect of adult singers' participation. Kennedy (2009) acknowledged that "getting to know you" sessions were an important part of the choral recruitment process and made new members feel welcomed. Both choral conductors in this study cited social reasons as the number one reason for adult singers to participate in the community chorus. In some cases, longer lifetime commitments, such as marriage, resulted from the friendships formed in the choral setting.

In this study, participants spoke often of their friendships and of forming new relationships in the community chorus, which are parts of the process of place creation.

For instance, after her first year of participation in the community chorus, Martha not only valued her newly found friendships, but also hoped to cultivate them into something that bloomed outside of the choral context. Martha joined her particular community chorus because she had friends who were already involved in the organization, a motivation discussed by Simmons (1962). However, Martha went out of her way to maintain relationships with new people by creating a “cheat sheet” of names. Meeting new people was a common benefit of community choral singing in the literature (Clift & Hancox, 2001; Clift et al., 2010; Kennedy, 2009; Malone, 2009; Simmons, 1962; Willingham, 2001). Martha was pleased because there were many fellow singers her age in the choir; she hoped to eventually cultivate her friendships formed in chorus outside the boundaries of weekly rehearsals and to do something social in another venue.

Sections (soprano, alto, tenor, or bass) emerged as an important vehicle for creating and maintaining a close connection between choral singers. All four singers mentioned the camaraderie created within the soprano, alto, tenor, and bass sections in a chorus. Sharon shared a sense of pride when she mentioned her function as soprano section leader in her community chorus. She highlighted the important role of a section leader who keeps singers connected by reminding them of events within the chorus and in the surrounding community. In the soprano section of Sharon’s chorus, section leaders e-mailed detailed rehearsal notes to singers on a weekly basis, allowing those absent to mark their scores and those who were there a chance to review and enhance, if needed, their own rehearsal notes.

Noah mentioned the relationships formed within a section due to close proximity

and similar singing goals. It was the close proximity and bonding of the alto section that made both Martha and Fiona feel more connected to their community chorus. They both had been members of their choir for one year and were making friends within their section. As Fiona wrote, “Most singers use choir to talk to each other about family information” (Journal, 6/22/2014). Talking about personal business surprised Fiona, but she realized that singers in community choruses were together so often they probably felt a sense of comfort in sharing such details. Martha even looked “forward to hearing about others singers’ lives” (Interview, 6/24/2014) when she attended her weekly choral rehearsals. Her weekly dose of personal stories from others socially nourished her. Even though Fiona herself would never share personal stories with her fellow altos, she did listen to them when they shared stories with her and even offered advice if anyone sought it. Maintaining social relationships was a positive benefit of community choral singing cited in the literature (Southcott, 2009).

It was this sense of camaraderie and friendship between chorus members that contributed to a sense of rootedness, a feeling described by Noah regarding his community chorus experience. In fact, Noah described his feelings of home as “immediate” (Journal, 7/23/2014) and of his fellow singers as family. “Community choruses often have a strong core of singers who put down roots,” said Sharon (Interview, 6/24/2014). Noah, Sharon, and Martha all mentioned that they would miss their fellow singers if they had to leave their current community chorus. Sharon cherished the social connections she made and knew the friendships would be hard to leave behind. After a year in her community chorus, Martha felt “pretty connected” (Journal,

7/23/2014). She mentioned at two times that she would miss the people if she left her community chorus. During her first year, other members of the chorus would ask her if she was going to stay involved in the group. Such interactions made her believe that she was a valued member of the group. Fiona did not feel after a year of membership that she would miss any fellow singers, but she did believe that after more time in the ensemble she might feel differently.

Even though not all the singers felt a sense of rootedness, the community chorus offered an opportunity to be social and that was enough for some. The social connectedness experienced in chorus may have been the only human connection the singers perceived in their lives. Fiona defined chorus as the only social outlet in her life since her youth. For her, “choir offers the only platform for interacting” (Interview, 6/22/2014) with others. Martha admitted that singing was a motivator “to engage outside of the house” (Interview, 6/24/2014), and Noah described chorus as a “social diversion,” (Journal, 7/23/2014).

Sharon wished for more time to socialize in choir; she thought there should be more time to converse with others and share ideas during the choral rehearsal. She valued the social interactions with others that she experienced and knew that “the warm and friendly relationships increase the enjoyment” (Interview, 6/24/2014) of choral singing.

In conclusion, all adult singers in this study discussed the importance of their section in making them feel comfortable and supported in the community chorus setting. Those who were new voiced their appreciation for their surrounding fellow singers. Choral conductors often hold sectionals in an attempt to master all pitches, rhythms, and

text in the quickest amount of time possible, but perhaps a nonmusical reason exists for conducting sectional rehearsals throughout the season.

Results under the subcategory camaraderie substantiated previous research on the importance of maintaining friendships and meeting new friends (Clift & Hancox, 2001; Clift et al., 2010; Kennedy, 2009; Malone, 2009; Simmons, 1962; Southcott, 2009), social support (Bailey & Davidson; Clift et al., 2007), and forming relationships (Willingham, 2001) in the choral setting. In addition, data from this study offered reasons for why camaraderie may be meaningful to adult singers. For Fiona and Martha, community chorus was their only social outlet. Noah expressed that his social connections contribute to a sense of rootedness, which he valued. Sharon even requested more time for social events during community chorus rehearsals.

**Part of a greater whole.** All participants expressed the sentiment that community choral singing provides singers with the opportunity to contribute to something greater than themselves. One of the choral directors mentioned that “group achievement is vital” (Interview, 7/15/2014) in the community chorus and that nothing tops the sensation of being in the moment together. Previous research suggested that making music with others is a deeply human endeavor (Malone, 2009) and part of a collective experience (Bartolome, 2013). Willingham (2001) found that working toward a common goal was one of the important aspects for singers in a community chorus, and Baird (2008) found that singing in chorus could provide a sense of unity. Moreover, Mbuyamba (2008) documented the importance of musical and social harmony in the choral setting that contributed to a feeling of social cohesion. Silber (2005) identified group cohesion as a

significant aspect of the community chorus, a place that fostered relationships and purpose among members. Adderly et al. (2003) suggested that choral programs create a social climate from which singers benefit and that singers greatly value, and Ruck Keene (2015) identified a sense of belonging as an important aspect of community choral participation.

Sharon's preference was to sing in a group because she greatly valued "team accomplishment" (Interview, 6/24/2014). She enjoyed working with others and having a clear purpose, reasons Willingham (2001) discussed. Sharon further clarified her point by sharing that working together in choral music was different than working together on a team. A community chorus was "not training to compete with anyone," (Interview, 6/24/2014). Sharon wrote how important the team accomplishment was to her experience in the community chorus:

Particularly when I can see that "aha" moment on the faces of an ensemble when they hear what they've accomplished. I wish I could magically have them sing and stand in front of their group and listen. We can't record most of what we sing, but often, I just listen to them and go "wow." I know my face says it. And then I say, "Did you hear that?" (Journal, 7/23/2014)

Sharon and Noah shared this team-oriented view. Sharon enjoyed working with others who had a clear purpose, and Noah appreciated that he and those around him had a common goal. Noah described how unique community choral singing was in its combination of many forces of differing degrees of musicianship.

Choral singing really is the last bastion of amateur musicianship—economic reality virtually requires that large choral works (on the scale of Verdi *Requiem* or Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*) be sung by amateurs, even if the vocal soloists and instrumentalists are usually paid professionals. This is a simple fact of musical economics, but it opens the door for humble choristers such as myself—dedicated and reasonably musical—to perform in public alongside very talented professionals. I can name very few other human endeavors where this is true.

(Journal, 7/24/2014)

Fiona mentioned that it was impossible to do choral singing alone, and thus it provided the opportunity for singers to achieve a sense of completion with others. Singing in a choir allowed people to see the greater whole, and it was for this reason that Sharon believed choral singing was more meaningful than singing alone. These statements supported previous research by Aliapoulios (1969), who suggested that making music with others was a valuable part of the adult singer experience.

Regarding her life experiences, Sharon wrote,

All of these experiences also led me to conclude that I am happier personally when making music in a group. I never enjoyed the competitiveness that is part of a professional singer's life. And don't really enjoy the 'solo' limelight. There is more pressure to be vocally perfect, and a lot less time to be with others, because you have to spend so much personal time training and practicing. (Journal,

7/23/2014)

While making music with others has emerged as a meaningful part of the

community choral experience, the common goal does not always have to be a musical goal to make singers feel connected to the greater whole. A unique factor that emerged from data analysis in this study was that other meaningful activities exist besides making music in community choruses. Volunteer singers often served in leadership positions in the community chorus, and it was in these positions that the singers contributed to the process of place intensification. Sharon and Noah both mentioned their previously held leadership positions on the boards of their community choruses. They felt senses of pride, service, and commitment from having served their choruses as leaders. Sharon felt that she contributed to the greater whole in her service as section leader.

Noah did his best to make new members feel connected to the ensemble by supporting and informing them. Even Martha, with one year in her chorus, wanted to assist new members in the future by helping them to feel a part of the ensemble. Martha looked forward to assisting the choir as a volunteer for grant-writing as well. The act of volunteering provided Martha with a sense of purpose and created a specific identity for her within the context of the greater whole, contributing to a sense of group cohesion (Mbuyamba, 2008; Silber, 2005). Martha mentioned that her participation in the general membership meeting at the end of the year enlightened her perspective on the inner workings of the community chorus and made her feel more connected.

I've met very nice people. I tend to be a bit of an introvert and isolate myself naturally. So joining the community chorus was a social commitment; something where I am a piece of the whole. As I get better, I get more engaged in the other aspects of the ensemble. I think I can welcome new members better because I'm

so new myself. I've written grants in my professional life, so I hope to work on grants for the community chorus. Eventually, I can see connecting with other members outside of practice. So I see this ensemble as being a growing aspect of my life and look forward to greater commitments. (Martha, Journal, 7/23/2014)

Previous research noted the importance of the collective, cohesive elements of community choral singing (Baird, 2008; Bartolome, 2013; Mbuyamba, 2008; Silber, 2005). In this research study and others, participants benefited from being part of the whole and working toward a common goal (Adderly et al., 2003; Willingham, 2001). The human endeavor of working together contributed to a sense of belonging in this study and previous research (Keene, in press; Malone, 2009). In particular, participants noted nonmusical ways in which participants can contribute to the greater whole. Leadership positions in the chorus offered more opportunities for singers to provide their expertise and knowledge in nonmusical but important and impactful ways.

Choral conductors commonly believe that singing together and even performing together is what creates the vital social bonds in a community chorus. However, participants in this study, especially new singers, shared other ways to make adult singers feel connected and to feel a sense of worth in a chorus. One singer reported that she finally felt a part of the group when she attended the end of the year general membership meeting. During this meeting, she was privy to the inner business workings of the chorus, which made her connect to the group on a deeper level. Other singers felt more connected when they could serve as leaders or contribute in nonmusical ways such as printing the concert programs or hosting a party at their house.

**Precarious crossroads.** Feelings of connectedness sometimes created strong friendships, making singers feel part of a large whole or providing for those who sought social interaction in a positive manner. On the other hand, the complex web of personalities led to precarious and sometimes complicated social situations. Bonshor (2014) acknowledged the presence of “stress and friction between singers” (p. 179) in the community choral setting. Bonshor reported rift-causing traits such as loud and inaccurate singers, rehearsal talkers, rehearsal criticizers, and prima donnas, labeling them “clashes and conflicts” (p. 179). Horn (2013) also discussed the territorial needs of choral singers often resulting in conflicts. All participants in this study at one time or another discussed the precarious crossroads that existed between singers in the community choral setting. It was quite clear that these interactions were part of their multidimensional sense of meaningfulness in community chorus.

The inflated ego of a singer was to blame for many of the uncomfortable social situations that occurred in the community chorus. Sharon faulted a singer’s ego for her lack of “warm and fuzzy” (Interview, 6/24/2014) feelings in chorus. She noted that there were often “wars between singers” (Interview, 6/24/2014) in chorus. Sharon was often “trying to tip-toe around egos” (Interview, 6/24/2014) and found that the singers’ egos interrupted the feelings of community in a chorus. According to Sharon, a sense of rootedness was what might initiate the strife between singers in the first place. She believed that usually long-term members clash with new members due to believed ownership of territory (see Horn, 2013, for discussion of territoriality in choir). Sharon was not alone in her perspective from the soprano section. Even the newest adult singer,

Martha, witnessed strong personalities and evidence of precarious situations, which she tried to avoid in rehearsals.

In addition to singers' egos, rehearsal discipline and learning styles caused frustrating circumstances for community chorus members as Bonshor (2014) also found. Noah and Fiona, both military veterans, voiced concern over a perceived lack of discipline in the choral rehearsal. Neither enjoyed listening to socializing peers during rehearsal. Noah believed that conversations are for break time only. Fiona believed that socializing happens because many singers use choir as a "buffer zone" (Journal, 6/22/2014) to their daily lives. More so than talking in rehearsal, Fiona's sense of frustration stemmed from other singers' inability to read music and take independent ownership of their learning in chorus. Her advanced listening skills made her sensitive to all the gross inadequacies that occurred around her on a weekly basis. Whether she was singing in the alto section or singing in mixed formation, Fiona identified who was singing incorrectly and what needed correction. Yet Fiona did not voice her frustrations in rehearsal and instead saved them for her husband's ears on the way home.

Martha, however, sat next to singers who heard her mistakes and corrected them. She "doesn't like her fellow singers correcting her" (Interview, 6/24/2014), even though she embraced her director's comments. It was possible that such precarious situations as described above were part of the community choral fabric and played an important role during weekly rehearsals and throughout the season. The human element of conflict is bound to exist when connections occur, for better or for worse.

Though not a significant part of the literature on community choruses, stress and

friction were a meaningful part of adult singers' community chorus experiences in this study. Prior research addressed such choral conflict (Bonshor, 2014; Horn, 2013). However, I viewed stress and conflict in this study through the eyes of goodness and acknowledged the role of such attributes as natural in human nature. Specific reasons for these precarious crossroads were inflated egos, lack of discipline, varying musical abilities, and choral singers who correct their peers in rehearsal. Two characteristics of the subcategories in codes of connectedness contributed to precarious crossroads. Sharon suggested that a sense of rootedness resulted in feelings of ownership and created conflicts between new members and seasoned members. Additionally, socializing between adult singers, a part of the camaraderie subcategory, contributed to precarious crossroads for some adult choral singers.

According to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997), portraiture should always focus on the good. At first, the discussion of precarious crossroads, even though carefully labeled, may seem to be the antithesis of focusing on the good. However, knowledge that other community choruses experience situations in which members may disagree could be comforting to the choral conductor. Therefore accepting and acknowledging precarious crossroads as normal aspects of community choruses is a positive way to support the inevitable outcome of many adult singers gathered together in one room. Precarious crossroads are part of the community choral territory. Place release explained why these uncomfortable situations contributed to meaningfulness for adult singers in this study. Unsettling events that occur in a meaningful location may cause a deep, emotional connection even if they are sources of frustration or anxiety.

**Active participation.** Previous studies acknowledged the enjoyment of singing as a significant component in singers' reasons for participating (Aliapoulios, 1969; Bailey & Davidson, 2005; Beck et al., 2000; Horn, 2013; Rensink-Hoff, 2009; Sanal & Gorsey, 2013; Simmons, 1962; Vincent, 1997). Bailey and Davidson (2005) found that marginalized singers, singers with little or no previous musical training, experienced enjoyment from choral performance. Beck et al. (2000) and Sanal and Gorsey (2013) reported a positive and stimulating choral singing experience from choral participants. One of the choral conductors in this study acknowledged the physical pleasure of singing as an important reason for singers to participate in chorus. He suggested that, "on a deeper level it [choral singing] is giving them joy even if they resist it" (Interview, 7/2/2014). Another conductor mentioned that everyone enjoys the physical aspect of singing. But it was the singers themselves who explained their enjoyment of and active participation in singing.

Adult participants shared their enjoyment and love of singing and acknowledged that the choral place provided them with the outlet for active participation. Martha thoroughly enjoyed the art of music, particularly because she loved to dance and she loved the blues. Community chorus allowed Martha an opportunity to be actively involved in the music making, which she appreciated. Fiona loved to sing in general, and community chorus provided an outlet for that love. In addition to singing, Fiona enjoyed the process of researching and preparing her choral repertoire. She "gains a self-understanding of a musical work" (Interview, 6/22/2014) in the beginning of each season. Fiona and Sharon both enjoyed singing, but also honed their skills of music preparation

and vocal technique maintenance during their weekly exposure to community chorus. Noah acknowledged that community chorus was the only outlet for his music-making passion:

Singing in a group brings sense of belonging, sense of purpose. It offers the opportunity to actually participate in (rather than simply listen to) great music. Now, I love to sit back and listen to music as well. That in itself is enjoyable. But, somehow, I hear music differently when I'm actually participating in it. Hard to explain: it's more immediate. More visceral. I do attend choral concerts from time to time, but sometimes it's hard to refrain from singing along in my seat. The attractional pull to participate is almost too strong. (Journal, 7/23/2014)

The enjoyment of singing was a well-documented benefit of participating in a community chorus in the literature (Aliopoulios, 1969; Bailey & Davidson, 2005; Beck et al., 2000; Horn, 2013; Rensink-Hoff, 2009; Sanal & Gorsey, 2013; Simmons, 1962; Vincent, 1997). Data from this study may suggest why the enjoyment of singing is such a popular benefit. Beck et al. (2000) and Sanal and Gorsey (2013) found that singing in chorus was a stimulating experience, and participants from this study agreed. All members enjoyed singing because they were actively involved in the ensemble. Moreover, the act of singing was not the only practice that encouraged adult singers to become involved with chorus. Adults enjoyed preparing the score and practicing outside of rehearsal. In short, the act of singing provided participants in this study with the opportunity to be involved in ensemble music-making and with a sense of place identity.

**Binding agent.** Perhaps the most unique factor that developed in this study was the community chorus and its role as a binding agent in the lives of adult singers. The Chorus America (2003) study included personal fulfillment as one of the factors in adult participation in choruses. Additionally, Xi (2012) documented the power of choral singing and its connection across generations of a farming village in China. Choral music, embedded in their daily interactions, bound the villagers to past and future generations. Johnstone (2012) suggested that choral experiences contribute to the creation of personal identity as well as a cultural identity. In this study, a choral director described music as an integral part of life and said that choral music “feeds and sustains” (Interview, 7/2/2014) adult singers. Martha, the participant newest to community choral singing, admitted that chorus was “an important aspect in her life” (Journal, 7/23/2014). She stated that leaving the chorus would create a gap in her life that “would need filling” (Journal, 7/23/2014). For different reasons, but similar degrees of significance, Noah, Sharon, and Fiona reported singing to be a major factor in what kept their lives together.

Choral singing had been a part of Noah’s life since he was a young boy. He shared that he would “be lacking something without choral music” (Journal, 7/23/2014) and would miss something that provided joy in his life. Noah had experienced many memorable moments in choir, some of which were completely unexpected; his “best memories are from singing in choir” (Journal, 7/23/2014). For instance, Noah met his wife in chorus in graduate school. At each location in the military, Noah and his wife always found a chorus with which to sing. Noah’s children sang in choruses and had even sung in some of the same ensembles in which he participated. He sang Christmas Eve

services with his sisters as a member of the choir. Noah knew that he would be lacking a part of himself without his experience in a community chorus. It provided joy in his life but also kept his memorable moments alive in the choral place. Place release is the phenomenon Noah experienced, a feeling experienced when unexpected or unsettling events occur in a meaningful location (Seamon, 2014). Choral singing was a love and a constant, ingrained habit for Noah. His daughter deftly described it as an “anchor” (Interview, 7/21/2014) in his life.

Sharon knew she would be a different person if it were not for her experience in choral singing. She participated in a few musical ensembles and conducted her own church choir, but she felt connected and was able to grow in her community chorus. In fact, Sharon was unable to comprehend why someone would not be a member of a community chorus when she asked me the rhetorical question, “Why would you never be part of a choral ensemble, they are everywhere” (Interview, 6/24/2014).

Finally, Fiona described choral singing as part of her triangle of balance in her life. She claimed that her husband, career, and participation in chorus were all an equal part of what makes her whole. For now, her participation in community chorus fulfilled the musical need in her life triangle. Because of their past experiences singing in choral ensembles it was possible that both Sharon and Fiona experienced place release during their participation in community chorus.

I think that, outside of my work and my family, that singing is the most important thing I have. I have mentioned previously that I am, for the most part, a solitary individual. Aside from my husband I do not relish social interaction. I am a true

introvert, and the times I spend in forced social paradigms throughout the day are very draining. However, singing is a way for me to recharge my energy. If I happen to miss a practice, I feel strangely low through the rest of the week. Making music resonates through all the rest of the components of my life, and not being able to do that makes me feel off kilter. I have a triangle of happiness which includes my husband, my research, and my music. I need all of these things to feel happy and if something is off with any of the three, I can feel it. I hadn't thought about it quite like this, until I tried to verbalize in this entry, but if my husband and I are off a little then I can notice it in my work and singing. If my research isn't going well, or I have to step away for a bit, then I get cranky at home and my singing suffers. If I miss practice—well, it isn't as outwardly noticeable as the other two but life is off for me. I feel as though something is missing, and have to think on what has happened. Then it will strike me that I didn't have choir practice. So, if I didn't have the community chorus, I would have to find another [chorus].... Nature abhors a vacuum according to the laws of physics and chemistry and the lack of a choir would cause a vacuum in my life. (Fiona, Journal, 6/12/2014)

The power of choral singing connected singers across generations (Xi, 2012), contributed to the creation of singer identities (Johnstone, 2012), and caused personal fulfillment in the lives of singers (Chorus America, 2003). The binding properties of choral music making were a significant theme in this research study for differing reasons. For Noah, choral singing was a constant throughout his life. Fostered by his father, his

love of choral singing was responsible for him meeting his wife and a love that he shared with both his nuclear and extended family. Noah and Fiona both traveled in the military, but choral singing was something they managed to continue no matter the geographic region. Sharon began singing at an early age and continued to sing as much as possible. For her, choral singing remained a constant thread in her life. Choral singing was not only a binder for Fiona, but also a balancer. From childhood Fiona relied on singing to balance her scientific mind and maintain her equilibrium.

It would behoove choral conductors to acknowledge and perhaps even try to connect the community chorus with the larger community choral place. Some singers who participated in chorus experienced a sense of place release, or the ability to keep singing memories alive from different times in their life. Others valued opportunities to sing with their family members or close friends who may not have enough time to commit to a chorus for an entire year. Establishing connections with local colleges and high schools may promote a bridge between the separate choruses. Hosting concerts and inviting special friends or family members to join for one or two songs may also create vital connections to the greater community choral place.

### **Codes of Achievement**

Previous research indicated that adult singers were involved in choral ensembles for more than the enjoyment of singing and the connection with others (Baird, 2008; Chorus America, 2003; Holmquist, 1995; Rensink-Hoff, 2009; Simmons, 1962; Willingham, 2001). According to the adult singers in this study, in order to contribute to a choral ensemble, one must put forth some effort and inevitably learn something along the

way. Adult singers expected the hard work and challenges that came along with the rewards of choral singing. In fact, these adult singers participated in community chorus because it offered a challenge. Achievement was a pervading theme throughout the choral process data and its subcategories were ambitious endeavors, feelings of agita, intellectual stimulation, process over product, and alternate identity.

**Ambitious endeavors.** Willingham (2001) addressed the importance of working toward goals in the choral setting, a theme supported by the adult singers in this study. Bartolome (2013) acknowledged choral participation as a worthwhile endeavor and an accomplishment. Two forms of ambitious endeavors identified in this study were setting goals and exceeding boundaries.

For Martha, choir was a feasible, attainable goal. She described it as “an accessible challenge” (Journal, 7/23/2014). One of the reasons community chorus was an attainable goal for Martha was because there were no age limitations like one might find in other hobbies. The act of singing in chorus allowed Martha to feel as if she was checking off another item on her bucket list; it provided her with the feeling that she had completed a goal.

As a community chorus rookie, Martha felt a sense of accomplishment just by participating in rehearsals and performances and making it through the season. However, Fiona’s approach to the choral context was much more scientific. She had specific goals in mind. Fiona mentioned, “Mastering a particular piece provides a sense of completion” (Interview, 6/22/2014). She frequently set goals for herself within the chorus like learning her score impeccably and auditioning for solos. Fiona was motivated to accomplish her

goals because singing in choir offered “a tangible result” (Interview, 6/22/2014).

According to her, “The most important rehearsals are when something is learned or accomplished,” (Interview, 6/22/2014). Fiona elaborated further in her journal:

I think that part of the ensemble that I would not wish to give up is the constant challenge to improve myself. I feel that music is very personal, and while it is a group which performs, that group is really a sum of each individual striving to be their best at a particular moment in time. I would not want to lose the challenge in making myself better. I think that should I ever find that challenge lacking, I would feel the need to leave the ensemble. I think that is the main reason that I left previous choirs (outside of relocation reasons). Once the director no longer pushes each person to do better and strive for personal perfection (okay, that may be a bit much...not everyone is an overachieving perfectionist) I believe that the choir loses something. An integral part of what makes their music beautiful is lost when the desire to go beyond the current level of performance is lacking.

(Journal, 6/12/2014)

Not quite the perfectionist that Fiona is, Sharon knew it took work to prepare and “become something of good quality” (Interview, 6/24/2014) in a community chorus. She enjoyed the opportunity to enact change upon something that needed improvement.

Participation in community choruses “offers the opportunity to impact” (Interview, 6/24/2014) and change for the better. The theme of impact and change eventually led from goal setting to boundary pushing in the choral process.

Adult singers enjoyed attaining their goals, but also looked to push beyond their

boundaries and comfort zones in community chorus. As Noah said, “Singing is not always easy” (Interview, 6/24/2014). Chorus is hard work; this made it challenging but rewarding. He explained that singing in chorus takes discipline; however, “satisfaction occurs with self-discipline and a product,” (Journal, 7/23/2014). More specifically, Noah enjoyed the challenge of singing in mixed formation during rehearsals and performances. During mixed formation in chorus, the sections of soprano, alto, tenor, and bass are singing interspersed, or mixed. In such a formation sopranos, altos, and tenors surround a bass. Singing in mixed formation challenged the singers’ ability to maintain their own part, and Noah looked forward to this particular challenge. Amid the choral challenges, Noah wrote that singing in community chorus provided him relaxation in his life:

Singing to me is a form of structured relaxation. I find this somewhat of a paradox, since one must concentrate very hard at rehearsal, and you wouldn’t think such level of extended concentration is relaxing—but it is. Somehow focusing all my attention for a few hours on a weekday night, singing in concord with others, displaces, all the stresses of the workday world with a peaceful, relaxed frame of mind. (Journal, 7/23/2014)

Martha wrote, “Involvement in chorus motivates the use of an inner drive” (Journal, 7/23/2014). Martha, like Noah, reported that maintaining her part independence was challenging. She found it difficult to maintain her “vocal part next to a weak singer” (Interview, 6/24/2014):

I’m not a strong enough singer to plow ahead alone. I can’t sit near the tenors as I’ll simply gravitate to their section. I sing tenor in the church choir and switching

between the two sections is actually becoming a problem. When the director provides directions, I have to stop and think which directions am I to follow.

(Journal, 7/23/2014)

Sharon concurred with both Noah and Martha when she said that singing in chorus challenged her skills and brought a lot of work but gave her pleasure. Sharon enjoyed the challenge and the flexibility of switching voice parts in a community chorus. Sharon spoke of the challenging repertoire she sang in chorus. She found it especially “difficult to sing contemporary music” (Interview, 6/24/2014), but strove to understand it and make the most out of her experiences.

Fiona also included repertoire in her list of choral endeavors, but her choral goals exceeded what most would consider comfortable. Fiona liked “challenging herself to be outside of her comfort zone” (Interview, 6/22/2014) in community chorus. For example, she socialized with others and prepared to sing by herself in front of others. In addition, Fiona felt that everyone in the chorus should push their boundaries because moving beyond the perceived limits in choral rehearsal and performance led to beautiful artistic moments. She wrote, “The act of pushing beyond limits is what brings beauty to the music” (Journal, 6/22/2014). Her philosophy on beautiful choral music making was such a part of her being that she would “leave choir if it wasn’t a challenge” (Interview, 6/22/2014).

Choral research supported that working through challenges and reaching a goal were worthwhile endeavors and accomplishments (Bartolome, 2013; Willingham, 2001). Adult singers in this study found their time in chorus meaningful because they enjoyed

setting goals and exceeding boundaries. Ambitious endeavors such as learning repertoire, singing in mixed formation, and changing voice parts were accessible to all age levels and skills and often self-induced. All participants in this study set goals for themselves within the choral context, whether it was learning music or planning to audition for a solo. In Fiona's case, the act of speaking with her fellow singers in weekly rehearsals proved to be an ambitious endeavor.

In the community choral process, adult singers valued the sense that they were working through challenges together. Adult singers held high standards and may have had life singing experiences with which to compare their community chorus experience. For some, they only stayed involved in particular community choruses because the chorus offered a challenge. Choral conductors should not be afraid to offer challenges for their singers.

**Intellectual stimulation.** Baird (2008) reported the intellectual aspects of singing as a motivating factor in adult choral participation. Clift et al. (2007) and Bailey and Davidson (2002) suggested that cognitive stimulation may impact the well-being of choral singers. Hinkle (1987) reported the acquisition of musical knowledge as one of the most meaningful aspects of choral participation. Adult singers in this study confirmed that intellectual stimulation was a meaningful part of their community chorus experience.

Martha expressed that singing is a "mental challenge" (Interview, 6/24/2014). According to her, community chorus is a hobby that "stimulates the mind" (Interview, 6/24/2014). She viewed her participation in chorus as educational. Martha repeatedly shared in her interview that chorus "is a form of adult education" (Interview, 6/24/2014).

Chorus caused her to grow intellectually and was even a form of “cultural enlightenment” (Interview, 6/24/2014). Martha enjoyed learning new things and it was the continual learning in chorus that kept her from quitting. She elaborated,

I consider my ensemble participation a form of adult education or maybe even cultural enlightenment. I’ve learned a lot moving from the church choir to community chorus. I consider this part of my journey or maybe even something on a “bucket” list, except I really don’t have such a list. I felt challenged singing the Mozart *Requiem*, but also very proud I didn’t drop out. I can feel my confidence increasing (slowly). There are not a whole lot of things that challenge someone of my age, so I think there’s some kind of inner drive to accomplish something new. (Journal, 7/23/2014)

Martha also valued learning music theory and solidifying and confirming her previous musical knowledge. This supports prior research, which indicated that singers join chorus to acquire and refine musical skills (Rensink-Hoff, 2009; Simmons, 1962; Willingham, 2001). Participating in a community chorus requires accountability on the part of the singer. According to Martha, one must read music and know the entrances and cut-offs. The individual singer is responsible for their location in the score at all times. While Martha assessed her performance and score location, she was simultaneously aware of what other singers were accomplishing around her in rehearsal.

Adult singers functioned as individual singers within a social learning context in the community chorus. Noah wrote, you must be “aware of other singers around you” (Journal, 7/23/2014), and he claimed that choral singing requires a great amount of

listening. Conductors often encouraged the singers to listen to those around them to tune their harmonies or match their vowels. Listening while in rehearsal is another form of intellectual stimulation, especially if one is singing at the same time. Perhaps this is why Noah wrote, “Choral singing feels like learning” (Journal, 7/23/2014).

Throughout the study, adult singers discussed learning components specific to the choral context. For instance, Fiona liked learning and performing a wide variety of music. She appreciated learning about and understanding the mechanics of music and analysis. Fiona took her independent work one step further and worked diligently outside of rehearsal to prepare her music. She practiced at home with a keyboard. In addition, Fiona sought various recordings of the repertoire her chorus was preparing and used them to learn the score and study the composer’s intention. Fiona “monitors other voice parts while in rehearsal” (Interview, 7/22/2014).

Sharon always enjoyed the opportunity to hone her reading skills. Noah liked extending his knowledge of Classical music and “enjoys learning little unknown pieces by exceptional composers” (Interview, 6/12/2014). Sharon agreed when she said that chorus “offers the opportunity to keep the mind sharp” (Interview, 6/24/2014). According to Sharon, harmony was a large part of the social learning in a community chorus. Singing in a chorus “offers the opportunity to work at and enjoy harmonies” (Interview, 6/24/2014).

The concepts of cognitive stimulation and intellectual aspects in the community choral setting existed in the literature (Bailey & Davidson, 2002; Baird, 2008; Clift et al., 2007). According to previous research, adult singers valued acquiring new musical

knowledge (Hinkle, 1987) and refining their musical skills (Rensink-Hoff, 2009; Simmon, 1962; Willingham, 2001). In this study, Martha continually referred to her experience in a community chorus as adult education. All singers reported that learning or refining skills such as sight singing, notation reading, music terminology, music history, and learning new choral repertoire were meaningful parts of their experience. A new perspective on intellectual stimulation provided by participants in this study was that learning took place in a social context and was often stimulated and impacted by other singers during rehearsals and performances.

**Feelings of agita.** The act of exceeding boundaries and taking a large group of singers outside of their comfort zone could certainly lead to anxiety and stress. “Choruses bring hectic and stressful situations” (Sharon, Interview, 6/24/2014). She witnessed high levels of anxiety especially when the ensemble was performing, even if she was not personally impacted by anxiety.

Martha’s feelings of anxiety stemmed from her lack of experience in the choral context. Despite her newness to community choral singing, she was aware of those around her and their accomplishments in rehearsal. She acknowledged her fellow singers in chorus who were more talented than her and further explained, “Chorus is intimidating for those who don’t have a strong musical background” (Journal, 7/23/2014). It was evident that Martha wrestled with her lack of choral skill, which often left her teetering near the verge of giving up. In her journal she wrote,

Considering how many times I’ve seriously considered quitting, I’m pretty much making myself stay as opposed to being unwilling to give anything up. Again,

I've learned so much that dropping out means I lose a pretty strong continuum, considering I started at such an elementary understanding. (Journal, 7/23/2014)

In general, singing in chorus made Martha feel nervous, but as Sharon noted, it is especially the performance that causes high anxiety. Martha mentioned that the "guilt trip" (Journal, 7/23/2014) given from the director during performance notes was actually quite effective and placed more pressure on her desire to perform well. Martha was always relieved when choral performances were over. In addition to performing, Martha was highly anxious about her audition into the community chorus. It was difficult because she had to sing alone. Martha's insecure feelings regarding her solo voice, which started in grade school, followed her to this stage of her life. She wrote about her experiences in school:

I couldn't reach the high notes expected for the girls' parts and I either faked singing or joined the boys. I'm thinking this is the source of my nervousness; knowing I couldn't meet expectations in terms of the upper ranges. (Journal, 7/23/2014)

Despite her early nervousness regarding her range, Martha still chose to take the risk and audition for a community chorus. Once she was in the chorus, she lived with the continual fear of making a mistake in rehearsal or concert because she did not want to be heard singing alone. Such an occurrence would be mortifying for her. Martha was very apprehensive of the next season because the director planned to conduct hearings, where he would hear all members of the choir sing alone to seat the voices appropriately. At the time of her interview, it was three months before hearings and Martha was already

expressing her anxiety over her performance in them.

Even though she did not discuss feeling much anxiety, Fiona tried hard not to be “anti-social” (Interview, 6/22/2014) in community chorus, which must have created some form of stress for her considering her natural inclination for introversion. Weekly choral rehearsals offered her a “platform for interaction” with other singers in a social environment. Like Martha, Fiona also found solo singing opportunities in chorus to be something that extended beyond her comfort zone, but she planned to face that anxiety.

Like the subcategory *precarious crossroads, feelings of agita* was a divergent subcategory in the data set. Recent research shows some support for the stress, friction, and singer conflicts that existed in community choruses (Bonshor, 2014; Horn, 2013). Once again, it was important to view these feelings through the lens of goodness. Combined, adult singers experienced performance anxiety, peer intimidation, nervous feelings, and the fear of making obvious mistakes during rehearsals and performances. Choral auditions and performances were most frequently associated with anxious feelings. Yet, despite the agitated and nervous feelings, singers chose to keep community choral singing in their lives.

**Process over product.** In the community choral literature, previous research indicated that the opportunity to perform is a motivational factor for adult singers (Holmquist, 1995; Simmons, 1962), but Wis (2011) encouraged conductors to focus on an engaging and challenging learning process when striving for success in the choral setting. Results from this study diverged from previous literature on performing in chorus. Adult singers in this study reported that the rehearsal process is more meaningful

to them. In fact, singers and conductors both reported that they enjoyed rehearsing more than performing. One conductor mentioned that educating the audience and the singers prior to the performance was more satisfying than the performance itself.

Noah savored the journey of making choral music and had respect for the choral rehearsal process. According to Noah, “rehearsing is the most enjoyable aspect of singing” (Interview, 6/12/2014). He enjoyed “the sensation of hard work and time flying by.” For him, the choral process was fascinating. During his interview, Noah shared his Robert Shaw story with me. His most memorable moments from working with Shaw were the rehearsals:

N: Do you want me to tell you my Robert Shaw story?

KM: I would love to hear it.

N: Robert Shaw came to conduct us in the Berlioz *Requiem* at the University of Michigan and because we knew Robert Shaw was coming our conductor was concerned...*laughter*...okay, that we be ready. So we had him for, we had been rehearsing it all semester from January till May and I thought we were...I thought that we were on top of it and we had him for a few rehearsals before the performance. And, he started off as a normal rehearsal, let's start with the *Kyrie* or whatever it was and we sang like two bars. He put down his baton and said, “The first thing we have to do is get this chorus in tune,” and for the next two hours of this rehearsal, it was Monday and the performance was Saturday night, we didn't sing a note of Berlioz we sang scales and tuned chords. He said “sopranos here, altos here, tenors here, and

basses here,” and he would move us down a half-tone, up a half-tone, down a half-tone just like a piano tuner just tuning and tuning...*laughter*...I don’t know if it made us any better or not but it was not what we expected and then the next rehearsal we did the Berlioz and we ran through it and I thought the performance was quite successful. Anyway that was not my last encounter with Robert Shaw because he came to Hawaii with the Hawaii Philharmonic and we were doing Verdi *Requiem*. Anyway, during a break he was on the podium chatting and I said, “What the hell, it’s Robert Shaw” so I went up to him and I said, “Mr. Shaw may I test your memory?” He said, “Go ahead.” I said, “University of Michigan, 1973 we did the Berlioz *Requiem*,” and he said, “Ah, that’s the chorus that was so out of tune,” *laughter*. So that’s my Robert Shaw story but he was a stickler for tuning and for getting things just so. He did not approach rehearsals like any other conductor I ever encountered. (Noah, Interview, 6/12/2014)

Being part of a community chorus is a “rewarding process,” said Noah (Interview, 6/12/2014). He appreciated being able to “witness choral works coming together week by week.” Noah enjoyed the feeling of progress and moving forward in his community chorus. He wrote:

Actually, the part of ensemble singing I enjoy most is rehearsing—even more than the performance itself. I’ve always thought ensemble singing, like any form of performance art, is essentially a *craft*. Unlike a purely creative art, like composing, choral singing is *re-creative*. It demands focused attention and

dedication to realize the artistic vision of both the composer *and* the conductor. To me, it is fascinating to follow progress of the rehearsal arc: from simple note pounding in early rehearsals to more and more refined and nuance shaping of musical phrases in the latter stages of preparation, right up to the point when we're ready to perform. A musical passage that takes but a moment in performance may take hours of rehearsal time to get just right. It is this artistic progression that I find most rewarding in ensemble singing. To move from simply singing *notes* to making *music*—this to me is fascinating, and, when successful, very rewarding. (Journal, 7/23/2014)

Sharon also found pleasure in the rehearsal aspects of community chorus. She claimed that she would be happy to go to rehearsal all the time and never perform as a group. For her the astonishment felt throughout the entire group when they accomplished something they thought they could not accomplish was her favorite feeling in the community chorus process. Sharon took pleasure in experiencing and witnessing the pride of others. She worked as a church choral director, so in community chorus she especially enjoyed the rehearsal process because she did not have to make any decisions. Community chorus offered Sharon opportunities for collaboration that were both “rewarding and interesting” (Interview, 6/24/2014). The collaboration was what she valued the most. “Artistic progression is a rewarding process” (Sharon, Interview, 6/24/2014), whether it involved a performance or not.

Noah and Sharon were not the only adult singers who savored the journey of the community chorus. Fiona expressed an appreciation for the rehearsal process as well.

Fiona's goal in community chorus was to maintain a positive outlook in rehearsal, and she "looks forward to seeing how much improvement advances from week to week" (Journal, 6/22/2014). Wis's (2011) suggestions to provide an engaging and challenging learning process in the choral rehearsal supported the statements provided by adult singers in this subcategory. Despite previous research, which indicated the importance of the opportunity to perform (Holmquist, 1995; Simmons, 1962), participants in this study claimed that their most memorable moments occurred during rehearsal. Noah, Sharon, and Fiona all expressed an appreciation for witnessing a choral work come together week by week over a period of time. Sharon, in particular, savored moments of group success and would be happy to only rehearse in community chorus. These testimonies suggested that to adult singers the choral process was more valuable than the choral product.

Adult singers and choral conductors both shared their recognition of the choral rehearsal and journey and its significance over the choral performance. Knowledge of this may alter how choral organizations choose to value process and product in the future. Currently, most musical ensembles exist primarily to create a product or performance, but data regarding the importance of the process and its meaning for adult singers may cause conductors in the future to redesign the community chorus season and purpose.

**Alternate identity.** Previous community choral research substantiated the value of the formation and maintenance of friendships (Baird, 2008; Darrough, 1990; Holmquist, 1995; Simmons, 1962; Willingham, 2001); however a unique theme emerged from this study representing a divergent point of view from previous choral research. Kruse (2007) found the same theme in his research on community bands and labeled the

category as alternate identity. Both Martha and Fiona were self-proclaimed introverts. Even Noah, though never describing himself as an introvert, admitted that chorus was his only social function.

In Fiona's case, her need to socialize, despite her introverted tendencies, with others was a common thread throughout her life and part of her identity. As her husband said, "she would love to perform at a concert for no one" (Interview, 6/22/2014). Fiona recognized her inability to feel comfortable around others as a weakness, but she continually strove to survive in the social setting of a community chorus. According to Fiona, humans are compelled to be social because they are social creatures. In some way, she is fulfilling her basic need to connect with others, whether she likes it or not, by participating in chorus. Malone's (2009) statement that choral singing is innately human supports this. Fiona's love for music and singing was undeniable; for her, choir offered a platform in which she could experience her joy for singing while exposing herself to small doses of social interaction on a weekly basis. Social opportunities naturally surrounded Fiona, like work or family functions, but chorus was the only situation in which she chose to place herself.

I am not a social person, and I strive very hard to not withdraw into my shell with only my husband as a link to the world. I am a scientist, who is more at home in the lab with my experiments than I am at family events or any other of the numerous socially contrived functions to which adults must maintain a presence. The choir is the one platform to which I go and interact freely with others. While my higher brain functions move me toward alienation, I feel that the choir appeals

to my base instinct to connect, and while it is not much more than a few hours a week (more around concert time) it satiates me. (Fiona, Journal, 6/12/2014)

Martha's first love was cultivating her property, but by chance she crossed paths with a book on community choral singing that compelled her to try it. The social context of the community chorus was something that Martha would otherwise not experience. Especially during the winter months, Martha could easily cuddle up with a good book and never leave the house, but her weekly rehearsals motivated her to become a part of something larger than herself. Martha wrote,

Singing is important in that it gives me something uplifting during the winter months. This is real important in combating my isolation-tendency and the winter blues. Having something that makes me get up and out of the house (beyond my job) is important. (Journal, 7/23/2014)

Noah spent his Saturdays listening to the classical station and had always enjoyed learning about music history. His daughter identified him as a quiet, solitary person without many social outlets in his life, and Noah himself admitted that chorus was a social diversion. It was surprising that three out of four adult participants in this study self-identified as introverted. For these singers, their experiences in community chorus allowed them to be social for a small part of their week. In this sense, previous research from Kruse (2007) indicated that music ensembles may provide a context which supports an alternate identity. Despite the reclusive nature of these participants, they still felt the need to socialize with other singers. Fiona suggested this occurred because humans are social creatures. Even though Martha had the tendency to stay isolated in her home, she

appreciated the opportunity community chorus gave her to interact with others in public.

Adult singers in this study presented dissonant themes to previous research on community chorus members when they discussed their introverted characteristics (Chorus America, 2003). Often choral conductors assume that singers who appear to be disinterested or bored are not dedicated members of the community chorus. An awareness of the introverted singer could provide choral conductors with a viable reason for why some adult singers may be reticent in complying with certain aspects of performance or in their connection with others in chorus. Choral conductors should be aware of singers who may exist on the fringe of a community chorus, not ever receiving the attention they deserve.

One question that continually appeared throughout this study was what does it mean to be social? The subcategory of alternate identities in this document reframed what it means to be social in the choral setting. Bicknell (2007, 2009) offered explanations on the social aspects of music, but I often wondered what about choral singing makes us feel social. Choral singers are part of a whole and focused on a final goal, but shoppers in a grocery store exhibit the same characteristics. Shoppers are in the same place at the same time, all attempting to make a purchase, all waiting in line for the final outcome. What are the subtle nuances in choral singing that make it social? And do all singers experience a social feeling when singing? One participant avoided talking to fellow singers at all costs, but still considered the experience of community choral singing social. Because of these questions, I decided to label one of the major categories, which included many social traits, connectedness. Research to further define what it means to be social, in what

ways we have social experiences, the impact of social experiences on the experience of meaningfulness, and what social and nonsocial events occur in choral singing would contribute to the literature and help us to better identify social experiences and connectedness.

The multidimensional components of connectedness and achievement representing the choral place and process contributed to a sense of meaningfulness in adult singers. The next section will present portrait summaries, comparisons between data collected from adult singers, adult singer family members, and choral conductors, discussion of authenticity and ethical concerns, and implications for community choruses.

### **Portrait Summaries**

#### **Martha, the gardener.**

I'm not sure I've yet to reach the level where I feel confident enough to say I 'love' singing in an ensemble. I'm a year into it and was pretty nervous for all three performances. I joined a very small church choir maybe seven years ago and no longer feel nervous singing in church, but still can't say it is something I love.

I enjoy it a lot and I very much enjoy the people who sing with me. (Martha, Journal, 7/23/2014)

Martha spent the past year, her first year in community chorus, preparing her choral flowerbed. She was still fertilizing the soil at the time of this study, but she planned to maintain and fortify her initial foray into her community chorus. Martha had planted her choral bulb long ago in her youth when she sang in front of her elementary school general music class. She remembered the teacher had wanted her to sing for the

others because of her impressive range. She also had sung a solo in a choral concert. Martha had continued to stay involved in music classes—mostly because they were required—and studied piano and guitar while in elementary school.

Like a bee buzzing from flower to flower, Martha had moved to eight different schools before eighth grade. Her father was a businessman, and relocation was common for their family. Despite the constant uprooting, Martha remembered the role music played in her youth. In adulthood, Martha became a member of her small church choir in which she sang tenor, but with only 12 members, it was hard to hide. However, Martha devoted her time to the church choir even though most of her interactions felt like weeding instead of taking time to smell the roses.

Then one day, the elements of sun and rain aligned perfectly and Martha received a book titled *Imperfect Harmony: Finding Happiness Singing With Others* by Horn (2013). Her awareness of the community chorus began to bloom. Martha realized that singing in church made her feel like one lonely, unattended rose bush as opposed to a garden of raspberries planted for cross-fertilization. After finishing Horn's book she decided to take the plunge and join a community chorus herself. Soon after her admittance, Martha made a heavy financial commitment for her membership dues, repertoire, and concert attire. The financial burden caused her to stay involved for the entire year and not quit, just like one who invests in costly plants will continue to water and feed them, keeping the investment alive.

After this year, Martha felt a sense of accomplishment and pride, like a young gardener developing her green thumb. Some of Martha's largest obstacles in the chorus

were her introverted tendencies, her lack of musical and choral vocabulary, her lack of understanding of choral traditions, and her fear of making a mistake. Like a tulip that needs transplanting, Martha knew she could find another hobby to fill the place of the community chorus, but she chose to stay for future seasons, becoming a perennial singer. Like the gardener that she was, Martha planned to invest more of her time and expertise in areas where the community chorus could use her help, like new member orientation and grant writing.

The seed of ensemble singing, sewn early in Martha's life and lying dormant for so long, had finally bloomed. Her involvement in the community chorus cultivated Martha's life in an educational and cultural way. Even though it still was not fully rooted into the choral terrain, Martha foresaw her future development in her community chorus blossoming in the years to come.

**Noah, the loyalist.**

Moving around as I have in the Air Force most of my adult life, I always looked for and invariably found community or base-affiliated groups with which to sing. Almost as soon as we arrived at a new base, my wife and I looked for opportunities to sing. Wherever we were stationed, singing in choral groups provided a sense of belonging. Over the years I've sung with Soli Deo Gloria choir in Colorado Springs, the chorus of the Hawaii Opera Theater, the Honolulu Symphony Chorus, and the Dayton Symphony Chorus. Among my most memorable musical experiences overseas was an Anglo-American chorus in Mildenhall, England performing *Messiah* in Ely Cathedral (wonderful acoustics in

that medieval stone nave!). Another great choral experience was singing with a choir in Kaiserslautern, Germany, culminating in a performance of the Verdi *Requiem* in the city's concert hall. Our conductor was British, but he gave all of his choral instructions in a kind of rapid-fire English-German pidgin. Despite linguistic issues, he coaxed a wonderful performance out of us, which further strengthened my belief that music really is the universal language. (Noah, Journal, 7/23/2014)

Noah's connection to the art of choral music had originated in his youth. His father, a singer in a well-established boys' choir, had helped engrain Noah's steadfast love of singing and Classical music into his soul. Throughout his youth, Noah had sung in elementary school ensembles and church choirs. However, high school had proved a radical change in his musical life because he had been unable to include singing in his academic schedule.

Finally, in Michigan, during his graduate study, Noah had reignited the steadfast commitment to choral singing that he had begun in his youth. It was in the Michigan chorus where Noah had met his wife Nancy. Their time singing together in graduate school had built the foundation of faithful commitment to choral singing still present in their lives at the time of this study. Even though Noah and Nancy had become a military family, frequently moving from base to base, their loyalty to choral singing had remained because it provided a "sense of home" (Noah, Journal, 7/23/2014). While raising young children, Noah and Nancy had remained faithful to the choral art even if they had to bring their children to weekly rehearsals.

Noah wove the art of choral singing throughout his life. He had sung with his wife on a weekly basis and with his sisters at family gatherings on important holidays. Noah's children had both participated in choral organizations in which their parents were once members. The web of connections between choral singing and Noah's family were so dense, it was no wonder that Noah had remained steadfast in his commitment to choral singing. Noah was any choir director's dream. Firstly, he sang bass. Additionally, he had discipline in rehearsal and carried with him a wealth of singing experiences. Noah had served on the board of his community chorus and had welcomed new members by taking photos of them and listing their contact information in the chorus's member directory.

While Noah had remained loyal to choral singing for most of his life, I believe that choral singing was the loyal friend that had carried Noah through his years. No matter where the Air Force sent them, Noah and Nancy had always found a group in which to feel a sense of home. Even their children had experienced feelings of home and a connection to their parents by singing in choral ensembles. Noah's participation in choruses, even though he was retired and rooted into a community, provided him with the opportunity to continue his commitment to the art of choral singing and to relive what he described as his best memories in life.

**Sharon, the collaborator.**

One of my first experiences in high school was being in charge of the sophomore talent show. This was the first time I was creating acts and other ensembles. A small group and I wrote parodies to songs, choreographed numbers and wrote skits. I was very comfortable with some of these friends I had made from

freshman year, but my drama teacher encouraged us to listen to other students and allow them to have their ideas used as well. The other students weren't performers, but had interest in language arts. That opened my eyes to collaboration. I love the exchange of artistic ideas, from the music to the overall look of the performance (solos, harmonies, costumes, sets, etc.). (Sharon, Journal, 7/23/2014)

Early in her life, Sharon had become a confident performer and had conquered the anxieties of stage fright that plagued most singers throughout their entire life. Sharon had gained a wealth of experience in voice and piano recitals, and having honed her solo art, was ready for artistic collaboration when some singers were still learning to feel comfortable in a group. She had attended Catholic school and was surrounded by nurturing teachers, was provided plenty of opportunities for leadership, and was cultivated in a collaborative atmosphere.

In her sophomore year, Sharon directed the school talent show and soon learned that working together to achieve a common goal was deeply fulfilling to her. Her experience for collaboration in high school had moved beyond the singing and had crossed into theater and the language arts. Outside of high school, Sharon had grown within a group of musicians in her church choir. She was part of a music ensemble that included singers and instrumentalists who created music together and lead the congregation in song each week. Sharon had even learned a new skill, the guitar, while she performed with this group.

From early in her life, Sharon had proved that she was open to new ideas and

change. In her high school, she had soon become a teacher among her peers and led them musically. Though initially she had fought it in hopes of making a more lucrative living, Sharon eventually received a degree in teaching music and worked at a private school for 20 years. Sharon had led the typical musician's life of teaching lessons, working at a church, and singing with more than one chorus.

A self-proclaimed social butterfly, Sharon appreciated the outcome of the sum of the individual parts. She contributed to the community chorus with both her leadership and singing. Sharon worked to keep an open mind in all aspects and wished for more time to socialize in weekly rehearsals. Making music in a group was more satisfying for Sharon despite her early experiences with solo singing. The never-ending evolution of choral ensemble singing was nourishment to Sharon's soul. The community chorus continuously opened her eyes to new perspectives, and for her, that was musical gratification at its best.

**Fiona, the scientist.**

I am not a social person, and I strive very hard to not withdraw into my shell with only my husband as a link to the world. I am a scientist, who is more at home in the lab with my experiments than I am at family events or any other of the numerous socially contrived functions to which adults must maintain a presence. The choir is the one platform to which I go and interact freely with others. I can speak upon how each part fits in with the others, and how by simply changing the dynamics of a movement the feeling of the pieces is changed. I love to talk about the mechanics of music, and I am grateful that my husband (though not a singer)

is a musician. He drops me off at practices and on our way home after we discuss music. It is comforting to me. I assume it is due to the fact that all humanity will instinctually strive for connection with others. While my higher brain functions move me toward alienation, I felt that the choir appeals to my base instinct to connect, and while it is not much more than a few hours a week (more around concert time) it satiates me. (Fiona, Journal, 6/22/2014)

It is Fiona, the scientist, who was the first to produce dissonant themes in my research regarding what adult singers find meaningful from their community chorus participation. From the beginning, Fiona's singing experiences had made her feel like a test-subject thrust into an unknown territory. Her first experience on stage as a pig was humiliating, and I am beyond impressed that she continued to keep music in her life. But, that choice speaks to music's importance in her being. With her father's encouragement, Fiona had continued to stay involved in her church musical productions as a young child, but instead of playing center-stage for the experiment, she had played the piano, a self-taught instrument.

Labeled in school as antisocial on her report cards, Fiona had grown up as a military child, constantly moving from assignment to assignment. According to her, despite all of the moving, music had always tied her academic subjects and life together; it was the controlled element in her experimental life. Fiona was involved in many singing experiences in high school and was selected for small group honor ensembles. After high school graduation, she had enlisted in the military and followed in her father's footsteps.

During her many tours in the military, Fiona had continued to sing in choral ensembles. Her most memorable experience was with a 225-member community chorus in Houston, Texas. Well known for their choral singing, this ensemble had provided Fiona with a significant choral experience, one that she measured every other chorus with in the future. Chorus had provided Fiona with the only social platform she experienced, and she felt comfortable in this environment, even if surrounded by fellow singers. Fiona felt at home in the laboratory, but in the community chorus, there were so many uncontrollable variables.

It is with great admiration that I viewed Fiona's volunteer participation in a community chorus. Even though she had been singing in choral ensembles for her entire life, she had always felt like chorus was the treatment in her self-inflicted social experiment. Fiona's husband had encouraged her to sing in chorus because at least then he knew she was interacting with someone besides him. She was able to discuss her choral experiences with him each week, but it did not soften the blow of inevitable social interaction. Fiona admitted that she waited in the car until the final minutes before rehearsal began in order to avoid conversations with fellow singers.

Fiona had chosen to remain a part of the ensemble. At first, this choice may seem confusing to an observer, but then Fiona shared the importance of music and singing in her life: Music resonated through her life and always had. It had served as her mode of relaxation and freedom during her early years in academia and now as an adult; music was a part of her triangle of happiness.

The introverted scientist who does not like to talk to others in chorus led me to

report that chorus was meaningful for her not because it exposed her to weekly doses of something that made her uncomfortable, but because she loved singing and, more specifically, the act of making music. She would not have led a balanced life without it.

### **Model of Interactions**

According to Torcivia (2012), a model of interactions identifies similar and dissimilar elements occurring between participants in a study. I compared and contrasted data three ways in this particular study: between adult singers, between adult singers and their family members, and between adult singers and choral conductors.

**Adult singers.** Many elements developed between adult singer participants in this study were worthy of note. There were similar and dissimilar themes between participants involving youth musical encounters, mobility, dislike of performance, church choir experience, introverted tendencies, leadership qualities, spousal interactions, and high motivations.

All participants displayed accounts of early musical experiences in their youth. Sharon began private lessons at the age of 6, Martha took private piano and guitar lessons in elementary school, and all adult singer participants were involved in their public school general music program. Noah, Sharon, and Fiona all mentioned the influence of church music programs on their early development in musical ensembles. Fiona and Sharon especially described opportunities for leadership and unique personal musical growth growing up in their church music program.

In this study, which proposed to discuss the impact of place on sense of meaningfulness, it was interesting that most participants experienced a mobile youth or

adulthood. Martha moved almost once a year in her youth due to her father's business job. Raised in a military family, travel was a normal part of Fiona's life during her school years; she herself joined the military after graduating high school and served for 5 years. Noah was in the military for most of his career and moved often with his family as an adult. Sharon, even though she did not relocate, was the child of first generation immigrants from Italy. This may have had some impact on her perception of community and home throughout her childhood and adulthood.

Another surprising theme among portraits in this study was the dislike of solo performance and the preference for rehearsal over performance, or process over product. Noah, Martha, and Fiona all voiced that they were not solo performers. Fiona mentioned that she would like to work on singing solos, but Noah and Martha were happy being one of the many choral singers. Sharon and Noah both stated that they would be happy rehearsing with the chorus without a performance as the goal; the rehearsal or learning process was their favorite part. Performances made Martha very nervous, even though she did not specifically mention it; her nerves might be calmer if she did not have to perform. Fiona's introverted personality may have made her feel the same regarding performances.

All participants had been or still were members of a church choir; Sharon, Fiona, and Noah all participated in their youth. Making music in church ensembles provided Sharon and Fiona with unique musical and leadership opportunities. All participants remained members of church choirs throughout adulthood. Noah always found a church choir to sing with at every assignment in the military, and Sharon was the choir director

at a church at the time of this study. Martha and Fiona, however, both expressed the plan to stop their participation in church choir. They both voiced frustrations in their current church choir situations and felt that other choirs would better meet their goals. Martha and Fiona both planned to stop singing in their church choirs due to their experiences in community chorus, whereas Noah and Sharon continued to participate in their church choirs.

Aside from Sharon, the social butterfly, all other participants showed signs of introverted tendencies. Noah was not a self-professed introvert, but his daughter mentioned that most of his social interactions occur through his choral associations. Both Martha and Fiona, however, claimed to be introverted and valued their participation in chorus because of its social qualities. Martha felt comfortable in her introverted ways, but still knew it was good for her to get out of the house for social reasons, not just work. Fiona felt as if her antisocial tendencies were weaknesses she had battled her entire life. She still chose to participate in a social musical ensemble because her love of music overrode her fear of other people surrounding her. Both Martha and Fiona expressed that they were not completely comfortable in chorus, but thought time would aid their feelings of isolation. Community chorus offered these singers a social outlet.

Fiona was the only participant who did not express an intention for direct involvement in the leadership of her community chorus. Both Sharon and Noah had served on their choral boards, held leadership meetings at their houses, and continued to serve in different leadership capacities, such as section leader and new member point-of-contact. Martha, after attending the general membership meeting, planned to assist the

community chorus by helping with new member education and assisting in grant writing for the next year. Community chorus offered these singers a place where they could grow musically, but could also lead and volunteer in nonmusical ways.

All participants in this study were highly motivated in their own way—an assumption I made since they all volunteered for the study. Noah and Sharon were go-getters and provided a great amount of experience and leadership for their community chorus. However, they also prepared their music and felt vocally responsible to their sections. Fiona also thoroughly prepared her score and took special note of the composer's intentions. In rehearsal, she was easily frustrated by the lack of focus from others, and so was Noah. Martha, holding the least amount of choral singing experience, was just happy to not make a glaring mistake in rehearsal; however, she worked hard to prepare her music and savored the educational opportunities that community chorus offered.

Not only were all of the participants highly motivated, but most held very high standards. Fiona in particular did not settle for mediocrity and explained that she could not accept that in herself or in her director and chorus. Since her experience in the Houston community chorus, she had sought after a similar feeling. Noah had had a wealth of experience in different choruses around the world; he had much knowledge with which to compare his current community chorus experience. Sharon held her choral directors to high standards. She believed directors should be clear and effective in their communication. If she were not confident in a conductor's ability to lead, she would not sing in their choral ensemble.

Perspectives of adult singers in this study intersected on many different levels. Musical encounters from their youth and mobility impacted their choral singing experience. Adult singers in this study shared many of the same characteristics like leadership qualities and introverted tendencies. They were highly motivated and had high standards. All adult singers in this study also sang in church choirs and all shared their choral experiences and stories with their spouses. The adult singers shared their appreciation of the rehearsal process, and some voiced their dislike of the anxiety and stress associated with the community chorus performance.

**Adult singers versus family members.** It was evident that all participants shared their choral ensemble experience with their spouses. In some cases, they sang or had sung in the same ensemble with their spouses. Noah and his wife met in college chorus and continue to sing in the same ensembles on a weekly basis. Choral singing remained a common denominator in their marriage and family. Sharon's husband had sung in her community chorus in the past, and while he did not at the time of this study, they both sang together in another small choral ensemble known for its early American historical performances.

Even though all spouses did not sing, music was still a common bond or shared interest between all couples on the study. The husbands of Martha and Fiona did not sing in chorus, but they both listened to and conversed about choral discourse that occurred throughout the season. Fiona's husband was privy to all the community chorus drama on a weekly basis because he drove her to and from rehearsal. They both enjoyed discussing musical issues and compared and contrasted his band experience with her choral

experience. Martha's husband also heard about select experiences in the community chorus, but he did not hear as much as others regarding the chorale experience. Martha and her husband connected on a musical level because they both shared a love for the blues.

All adult singers and family members agreed that singing in a community chorus promoted happiness and fulfillment in the singers; however, adult singers and family members did not agree on the role of choral music in the lives of adult singers. For instance, Fiona's husband said that she could move on from her community chorus and find another way to fill the void it would create in her life. Fiona, on the other hand, represented singing in a chorus as a major part of her three-point balancing system, which would falter if she were unable to sing in a chorus. Along similar lines, Martha's husband claimed that she could easily find another hobby to fill the space which chorus had in her life. Even though Martha reported that she was not in love with singing, she also shared that she would miss something if she moved on to another interest.

**Adult singers versus choral conductors.** The data comparison between adult singers and choral conductors was less agreeable than that between adult singers and their family members, but a number of similar factors existed between the two groups. Choral conductors stated that both the singers and the audience appreciate learning the historical context of the music they were learning or hearing in performance. The educational aspect of the community chorus was satisfying for conductors, singers, and audience members. For this reason, both conductors and singers admitted to enjoyment of the

rehearsals process over the performance itself. For both groups the rehearsal aspect of a community chorus was gratifying and fascinating.

Not surprisingly, conductors and singers cited the social aspects of the community choral place as benefits of choral singing. The conductors witnessed social relationships blooming in the community chorus setting from friendships to more serious, committed relationships. Involvement in a community chorus exposes adult singers to art, and for many of them it is a valued form of artistic expression. Conductors observed, and adult singers agreed, that they expected challenges and frustrations during the community choral process. Finally, conductors noticed that prior experiences of choral singing kept adult singers continuing in an art form that sustains them.

Conductors identified the two categories of connectedness and achievement, which emerged as most meaningful to adult singers, and yet other themes identified by conductors were not of significance to adult singers. For instance, conductors listed the physical aspect and the individual pleasure of singing as significant components of the adult singer experience, however only two adult singers mentioned the joy of singing. Conductors spoke of the general influence that conductors have on motivating and engaging a choral ensemble. While adult singers shared their high standards and longing for challenges in the choral setting, discussion of the conductor's direct influence on the ensemble was lacking.

Conductors spoke of the chemical rush of endorphins from singing and performing, which for some is more fulfilling than exercise. According to conductors, adult singers like to perform and perform well. Yet, results from data indicated that even

though adult singers held high standards, they preferred the engagement of the rehearsal to the performance. In fact, some singers voiced the anxiety that performance causes, and no singer mentioned the significance of chemical influence in the body while singing.

Choral conductors mentioned that adult singers like to give back to the community, but the majority of data collected from adult singers addressed personal benefits, and only one participant spoke of her singing influence in the community. Choral singing offered one of the only opportunities to sing in harmony, so many believe, as do the choral directors in this study, that singing in harmony significantly impacted the adult singers. Adult singers mentioned that the challenge of maintaining their own vocal part next to fellow singers maintaining different parts is an invigorating challenge, but they did not explicitly discuss the importance of harmony in creating a meaningful experience. Finally, one choral conductor concluded that adult singers must like performing with others in order to participate in a community chorus. Findings from this study indicated that adult singers can find singing in a community chorus meaningful even if they do not like performing with other people. Participants in this study found significance in their choral singing experience and chose to stay involved even if they did not feel comfortable in a social setting.

### **Authenticity and Ethical Concerns Discussion**

Throughout this study, I strived to maintain authenticity and ethics as outlined in Chapter Three. Member checks, dialogic validity, triangulation, and catalytic validity contributed to authenticity. After transcribing interviews, I sent transcriptions to participants for review and received responses from all but one conductor. In two cases,

my understanding of a specific story was incorrect, and I changed the transcripts to reflect the accurate storyline. Conducting member checks also helped me to achieve dialogic validity by ensuring accurate histories and personal stories. Another example of dialogic validity occurred in the final portraits of each participant, which included a wealth of personal stories.

Triangulation of data sources contributed to authenticity in this research study. I implemented personal stories, personal history, experiences during observations, informal conversations, participant journal excerpts, and member checks to ensure triangulation. Finally, catalytic validity, the extent to which research energizes and rejuvenates study participants, was apparent in this research study. The personal journal assignment, occurred after the interviews, and provided participants an opportunity to better understand and provide more detail for their own stories. It also offered a time for reflection on community choral singing.

Catalytic validity can also address participant action to move forward and make changes based on the research experience. I found two instances of this during my research. First, Noah's daughter seemed reflective and reminiscent as she discussed the meaning of choral singing to her father, her family, and herself. She mentioned that it might be time to join a chorus again because she did not realize how much she missed choral singing and how important it was to her and her family. Martha, an adult choral singer, mentioned that she would like to contribute to the community chorus next year in some way. As I listened to her talk about the frustrations of being a first year chorus member with little to no prior choral singing experience, she decided that she would

develop a new member manual for future singers like her, who needed assistance in acclimating to the community chorus.

I strived to maintain a good rapport with my participants during the research process. I always regarded the participants with empathy and scheduled interviews around their schedules and locations of choice. I provided suggestions and support for the journal assignment. Twice, one participant shared that the information provided might not be what I was seeking, and I assured this person that his or her perspective was exactly what I sought. There was one moment that occurred during the study when the opportunity for a breach in ethics was present. During a choral conductor interview, the conductor asked me what members of his chorus participated in the study. I declined to provide that information and protected the identities of the participants, as promised.

## **Chapter Six: Focusing on the Foreground**

### **Returning to Significance and Application**

Data from this study contributed to the community music making practice, one of the “most valued pursuits of our culture” (Finnegan, 2007, p. xviii). The community chorus, in particular, is a vital part of contemporary social fabric (Avery, Hayes, & Bell, 2013). Discovering what adult singers valued in their community chorus participation made a meaningful contribution to the thriving tradition of community singing by addressing the nonmusical needs of singers, the understanding of music’s impact on the whole person, the creation of fulfilling arts programs, lifelong music engagement, and potential practices in the music classroom. Influenced by the methodology of portraiture, which invites the audience to view and interact with the final product, this section includes suggested applications for leaders, teachers, and conductors in the community and music education classroom.

Bell (2008) first addressed the nonmusical needs of community choral singers when questioning what adults sought beyond music in the ensemble setting. The two major categories of data analysis in this study, though created within the context of music-making, were both nonmusical in nature: Adult singers valued connectedness and achievement the most. Cultivating camaraderie, experiencing group achievement, contributing as leaders, and attending general membership meetings were all examples of nonmusical aspects of the community chorus that adult singers prized. Additionally, some introverted singers appreciated the opportunity to interact with others during the choral ensemble experience. Conductors of adult choral ensembles, therefore, could

provide a more meaningful experience for their singers if they offer opportunities for group work, volunteer projects, or social functions before or after rehearsals. Creating a list of goals and expectations with the chorus at the beginning of each season and tracking their progress could highlight the experience of group achievement and effectiveness. Conductors could provide leadership opportunities: Adult singers could contribute as section leaders, officers, event planners, or language experts. Beginning and ending each season with general membership meetings in which adult singers may provide suggestions and share their experiences could also contribute to their sense of meaningfulness.

An awareness of how to “understand music’s effect on the whole person” (Coffman, 2002, p. 205) was partially addressed in this study. The individual portraits of adult singers provided context for their lives, which was necessary to see music’s effect. All participants began singing during elementary school. One participant took a long break from singing in a formal setting after elementary school and joined a community chorus in her sixties after learning about it during a book club reading assignment. Perhaps a participant with no prior musical background would have caused more dissonance in the themes of this study’s analysis. Some participants carried music through their lives no matter how often they moved. For others, music facilitated a strong connection between spouses and families. One participant in particular claimed she would not be a whole person, but instead off-balance, without music constantly in her life. The portraits afforded an intimate view into each participant’s life and thus aided in showing the impact of music on the entire person. Conductors who learn more about their

singers could better adjust rehearsal strategies and foster a more meaningful relationship with each their singers. It may benefit all conductors to collect condensed, individual portraits from their singers to better understand music's effect on the whole singer and how it impacts their ensemble's music making experience.

Findings from this research offered vital information to those creating arts programs for adults in terms of curriculum offerings and recruitment. The choral place and process had a major impact on participants' perceptions of meaningfulness. When preparing advertisements for recruitment and planning programs, administrators should consider the context, or surrounding place, they are providing. In addition, they should consider the process, or logistical flow of events, from registration to the final class. Connections with other people and achieving surmountable challenges were highly valued aspects of this study, which could directly influence any arts programs for adults. More specifically, leaders of arts programs for adults should consider and plan for time during which participants can interact with one another such as a group warm up activity or a closing session during which participants share their experiences with each other. Arts programs for adults should consider incorporating leadership opportunities for participants like snack organizer or attendance taker which may provide adults the ability to make an impact on the overall experience. Creating a personal profile bulletin board for the arts program can allow adults the opportunity to share their personal associations and goals in their particular arts program. An acknowledgment by program leaders of natural conflicts that occur during group activities may enable participants to accept such situations and learn from them.

Mantie and Tucker (2008) addressed the practice of adults involved in music-making endeavors throughout their lives known as lifelong music engagement. Participants in this study presented detailed perspectives of their experiences in community chorus and what they valued during the process, providing a personal glimpse into four examples of lifelong music engagement. Though not a prerequisite for this research study, all participants had been involved in musical activities from their youth and continued to practice. Tracking the stories of each individual presented four nuanced stories, all individualized but containing the common thread of musical engagement. Sharing stories of lifelong arts engagement with participants in adult programs may strengthen the overall experience and aid in the recruitment of new members.

Information regarding adult musical engagement collected in this study may also impact future practices in the music classroom, cultivating a lifelong musical influence. The work of Boswell (1992) and Cavitt (2005) suggested that a significant number of students who participate in secondary music ensembles elect not to participate as adults. However, if teachers applied what adults find meaningful in their ensemble participation to the music classroom, they could positively influence future lifelong musical engagement. The results of this study suggested that achievement and connectedness were of great value to adult choral singers. Music teachers focusing more on these elements may promote student participation in community programs after graduation. For example, celebrating the process over the product could allow music students the opportunity to gain more ownership over their music making experience. A group composition activity could afford the students an intimate experience with the process of

creating and preparing a choral arrangement. Such a project could facilitate a sense of connection as well as a sense of achievement.

Significant contributions from this study were a greater awareness of the nonmusical needs of singers, music's impact on the whole person, improving arts programs, lifelong music engagement, and potential practices in the music classroom. The next section will address the research questions and the specific findings associated with each.

### **Answers to Research Questions**

This study began with the formation of two research questions that guided the researcher through the study. The next section presents the answers to these questions, placing them within the context of reviewed literature. The following questions framed this study:

1. In what ways do adult singers find participating in community choral ensembles to be meaningful?
2. In what ways does place attachment impact these meaningful experiences?

**First research question.** The community choral place incorporated and cultivated two multidimensional categories, connectedness and achievement, that contributed to a sense of meaningfulness in adult singers. Findings from this study substantiated the importance of social qualities in the choral rehearsal, as evidenced by former research (Adderly et al., 2003; Aliapoulios, 1969; Baird, 2008; Bailey & Davidson, 2005; Bartolome, 2013; Beck et al., 2000; Clift & Hancox, 2001; Horn, 2013; Kennedy, 2009; Malone, 2009; Mbuyamba, 2008; Rensink-Hoff, 2009; Sanal & Gorsey, 2013; Silber,

2005; Simmons, 1962; Southcott, 2009; Vincent, 1997; Willingham, 2001). However, some findings offered new contributions to the literature on community chorus and adult singer perspective.

Two subcategories of the connectedness category provided new insight: precarious crossroads and binding agent. Precarious crossroads contained examples of the common positive and negative social interactions found in the choral setting. Previous research by Bonshor (2014) and Horn (2013) recognized the existence of stress, friction, and territorial needs in community choruses, but this study provided more explanation and examples of precarious crossroads. All adult singers in this study reported instances of conflict; even some spouses were aware of choral drama. These instances were still a part of adult singers' creation of meaningfulness: Though not always positive experiences in the moment, precarious crossroads contributed to a well-rounded experience.

Specific examples of precarious crossroads as reported by the adult singers in this study were dealing with the delicate singers' egos, long-term members vying themselves against newer members, varying styles of rehearsal discipline, varying learning styles and abilities, and navigating corrections from fellow singers. One interesting perspective presented by Sharon regarded the singers on the fringe of the community chorus, who view the ensemble with a pack mentality: Those who move into the center of the community chorus pack stay and thrive, and those who remain on the fringe usually leave within a few years. Another new perspective from these findings was that positive characteristics, well-documented in the literature, contributed to precarious crossroads. If not well-managed and acknowledged in the community choral setting, camaraderie and

part of a greater whole can lead to precarious crossroads between individual members.

The second subcategory under connectedness, community chorus as a binding agent, provided new insight. For three participants in this study, singing in chorus was a binding factor that held their lives together. Xi (2012) provided evidence of chorus as a binding agent in his research on a small Chinese town, showing that the choral music practice had the power to connect generations of singers. Yet findings from this study exemplified choral singing's power to connect or bind the life of one person together. For Noah, choral singing provided joy and the best memories of his life. His daughter described choral singing as an anchor for him. Choral singing was an important part of Sharon's identity, and she wondered why everyone did not sing in a choir. Finally, Fiona needed choral singing to balance her life. It was in equal balance with her profession and her husband; without choir she believed a vacuum would exist in her life.

As with connectedness, previous literature addressed the ambitious endeavors and intellectual stimulation subcategories of the achievement category (Baird, 2008; Bailey & Davidson, 2002; Bartolome, 2013; Clift et al., 2007; Hinkle, 1987; Rensink-Hoff, 2009; Simmons, 1962; Willingham, 2001). There were three new subcategories contributing to the literature in this section: feelings of agita, process over place, and alternate identity.

Feelings of agita were meaningful for participants even though this subcategory transpired from negative experiences. But members' ability to meet and overcome these choral stresses, which included performance anxiety, peer intimidation, nervous feelings, and fear of making mistakes, created an achievement aspect to feelings of agita. The two most frequent agitators for adult singers were performances and auditions, both common

experiences for community choruses.

Contrary to prior research, which found that singers appreciated the opportunity to perform (Holmquist, 1995; Simmons, 1962), participants in this study shared their affinity for the process over the product in community chorus. Participants did not mention performing positively at any time. More meaningful for the adult singers were the moments in rehearsal when a choral work comes together, all singers are working together towards a common goal, and group success occurs. One adult singer and one conductor mentioned that they would feel happy and rewarded if they only rehearsed in the community choral setting.

Alternate identity (Kruse, 2007) was a theme found in instrumental ensemble community music making, referring to instrumentalists who took on an alternate persona when participating in community band. The existence of alternate identities in this research study was the most surprising divergent finding for the researcher. Prior choral research denoted the transformative properties of choral singing (Ericson, 2002; Mbuyamba, 2008; Wanyama, 2008; Wolensky, 2006), however this study suggested that community choral singing may provide a safe environment for individuals to transform themselves. Three participants in this study, who self-identified as introverted and asocial, chose to participate in community chorus, a well-known social function. In fact, two of the participants sang in chorus because they knew it would force them to be social with others and perform in a social setting. This new finding may assist choral conductors in better understanding the members of the community chorus who are less extroverted in the choral setting.

Unique to this study was the gathering of adult singer family member perspectives. In general, family members supported the statements of adult singers and provided more background and stories, contributing to a rich context in the portrait presentation. In two cases, family members felt that their relative could easily move on without the community chorus experience even though they acknowledged the benefits of participation. Family members of the other two choral singers understood the impact and benefits of choral singing, mirroring the data of their family members as they shared their own personal experiences of singing. This suggested that in order to recognize the meaningful qualities of community choral singing, one may need the experience of singing in a chorus themselves.

**Second research question.** Place attachment was vital to meaningfulness in the adult singer experience because it describes the affective bond that connects people to places (Low & Altman, 1992). More specifically, place attachment offered adult singers the opportunity to cultivate their identity, develop deep emotional connections, and experience the “palpable presence” (Seamon, 2014) of the community chorus. Previous research indicated that context impacted the formation of meaningfulness in musical ensembles (Arasi, 2006; Bartolome, 2013; Cape, 2012; Kempton, 2002; Mills, 1988), but this study was the first to address context in the community chorus.

In this research study five interconnected processes of place (Seamon, 2014) influenced the creation of meaningful experiences. Place creation addressed the relational role between adult singers and the choral place. Therefore, interactions between fellow singers and the act of making choral music impacted meaningfulness. Place

intensification occurred when adult singers had the power to strengthen the choral place. For instance, serving as section leader or volunteering to lead a fundraiser were roles that adult singers valued. Adult singers' personal associations with the experience of community choral music making, known as place identity, influenced the creation of meaningful experiences. Unsettling events like embarrassing mistakes in rehearsal or an argument within the soprano section caused adult singers to create meaningfulness through place release. Finally, the physical ambiance of the community chorus combined with the rehearsal activities, otherwise known as place realization, was another way in which place attachment impacted the formation of meaningful experiences.

The breadth of interconnected experiences and affective bonding resulting from community chorus participation substantiated Malone's (2009) prior claim that choral singing is indeed a human experience. Opportunities for human influence in the choral place may explain the significance of social factors in the community chorus and may explain why social elements are such an important and reoccurring theme in research on community choruses. Previous research noted the sense of community in community choruses (Avery et al., 2013; Barz, 2006; Malone, 2009; Russell, 2006; Xi, 2012), but data from this study suggested that the sense of community might transfer from choral ensemble to choral ensemble. Moreover, the choral place was something that participants carried with them across states, across the world, and throughout their lives.

**Summary.** The choral place and process impacted the formation of meaningfulness in this research study. The choral place, best represented by the category of connectedness, addressed the bonds created between singers in the choral rehearsal,

including what places are and what they become (Lewicka, 2014). The category of achievement represented the choral process, including the psychological, behavioral, and cognitive components of place (Lewicka, 2014).

In the category of connectedness, four dimensions of place attachment theory impacted what adult singers found meaningful in the choral setting. Place creation, the relationships formed between singers and the choral place, influenced camaraderie and precarious crossroads. Place intensification, opportunities for singers to influence the power and design of the community chorus in order to strengthen the program, impacted the subcategory part of a greater whole. The ways in which adult singers associated with the community choral place connected with the subcategories of active participation and part of a greater whole. Lastly, life-altering events that occurred during community chorus activities influenced the subcategory of binding agent.

Achievement, the second significant category in the findings of this study, included three dimensions of place attachment theory in association with its subcategories. Place realization impacted a few subcategories of achievement because it addressed the physical characteristics of the choral place combined with the activities that occur during rehearsals and performances. Therefore, ambitious endeavors, intellectual stimulation, and process over product were all forms of place realization. Unsettling or stressful events that occurred in the choral place, known as place release, impacted the feelings of agita experienced by all adult singers in the study. Place identity, or how humans associated with the choral place, influenced those adult singers who chose to form alternate identities in the community chorus. The ways in which adult singers found

community chorus to be meaningful and the ways in which place attachment impacted this meaningfulness formed a synergistic relationship between the choral place and the choral process in this study.

### **Implications and Suggestions for Future Research**

Results from this research study supported the importance of the community choral place and its contribution to the sensation of meaningfulness for adult singers in community choruses. Nonetheless, it would be irresponsible to transfer findings from this study directly to other types of choral organizations. Results from this study may not be generalizable to other volunteer community choruses. However, results from this study could serve as a pivotal point for future implications and research regarding meaningfulness in the choral setting and beyond.

**Implications.** Implications for organizations beyond community choruses might include more focus on the place and process. For instance, programs that offer group experiences for adults may focus on fostering connectedness by planning activities that cultivate camaraderie and active participation. Curriculum writers could consider implementing characteristics that will offer opportunities for achievement and accomplishment, focusing on quality of process, not product. An awareness of precarious crossroads and alternate identities may assist organizations in planning future seasons and training employees to negotiate such circumstances.

Delving further into preventive applications, findings from this study may impact future policy regarding adult ensembles and organizations. For instance, a set of conflict resolution guidelines could provide leaders and participants with an unbiased path for

resolving inevitable precarious crossroad interactions. Perhaps in the future, group activities will include positive training or team building events to strengthen the bonds between participants, making connectedness a top priority.

According to Bell (2004), stories from community chorus members are essential contributions to the continued tradition; however, given the findings from this study and other contemporary research, perhaps there is a need to renew these traditions instead of merely continue them. Findings from this research may impact potential community choral singers and future community choral leaders. Those who desire to be part of an organization that cultivates working toward a common goal and providing intellectual stimulation and ambitious endeavors may eagerly join. Even those with introverted tendencies may be willing to attempt singing in a community chorus once they know that others, like them, are happily involved in community choruses. However, stories of the tensions and friction sometimes apparent in the choral ensemble may make other potential singers hesitant to join.

Findings from this study may impact future leaders of community choruses, including conductors and board members. More specifically, leaders may promote connectedness and use the subcategories of camaraderie and part of a greater whole as selling points for advertisement campaigns. The four portraits in this study provided evidence of the power of personal stories and testimonials. Perhaps leaders will collect stories from their chorus members and use them for advertisement or inspirational purposes. The finding that may have the most impact on leaders is the subcategory process over product. Most choral ensembles are performance based, always focusing on

the next concert. However, both adult singers and conductors in this study appreciated the process of score preparation and education over the performance. In fact, anxiety was the only meaningful part of performances mentioned in this study. Therefore, it would behoove leaders of community choruses to consider implementing workshops or live lecture sessions that include singing instead of holding traditional performances.

Avery (in press) asked, how do we address the musical and nonmusical needs of adults in choral music? Findings from this study begin to answer Avery's question and point to the need for more adult perspective data in choral music. Teachers in the classroom incorporate student-centered, or constructivist, learning into their plans, allowing the students a voice in their education. I believe it is time for leaders of community music ensembles to provide adult-centered engagement opportunities for their members, negotiating the territory between what choral directors expect and what adult singers prefer or need and allowing the adults a choice in what and how they will learn. Listening to and incorporating the perspectives of adult participants will only strengthen adult programs, making them more meaningful and engaging.

**Future research.** This study did not address the broad landscape of community choruses internationally; instead, it provided four intimate, rich accounts focusing on adult singers rather than the chorus in which they sing. Because this research focused on adult singers in American community choruses, and due to the set demographic of such choruses, it did little to address marginalized populations and the power and influence that community choruses extend throughout communities and the world. With the above implications in mind, future research may address some of the following ideas.

According to Bell (2004, 2008), community choruses in America are predominantly comprised of well-educated Caucasian singers. The four participants in this study fit that profile: They were all college educated Caucasian people. Future research could address marginalized populations in community choruses, including persons impacted by issues of race or poverty and their experiences in the community choral setting or as people who do not sing at all. De Quadros (2012a) noted that choruses exist beyond the traditional paradigm appearing in locations such as hospitals, slums, and prisons. More specifically, “communities that are marginalized, whether because of sexual orientation, political status, illness, or poverty, are finding opportunities for new expression” (de Quadros, 2012a, p. 1) through choral music. Future researchers could investigate what members of these marginalized choruses find meaningful from their choral participation or why members of marginalized populations do not participate in community choruses.

I emphasized the search for goodness in community choruses throughout this study. Nonetheless, choruses can be sites of humiliation (Knight, 2013) and oppression (O’Toole, 1994). Globally, the art of community choral singing implemented through the “forces of Christianization, colonization, Westernization, and, most recently, globalization” (de Quadros, 2012, p. 160) impacts singers in a variety of ways. Whereas this study identified three subcategories of meaningfulness that could instigate unease: precarious crossroads, alternate identity, and feelings of agita, it does not address all oppressive qualities of choral singing that do exist. Future researchers might look beyond the experiences of typical adult singers in the United States to address this issue.

Additionally, research focusing on the chorus as a mechanism of power and influence may provide an alternate perspective.

Many possibilities still exist for research in the traditional American community choral setting. For instance, researchers investigating adult repertoire and curriculum choices in music ensembles and programs may offer valuable information for those continuing their programs or starting new programs. Repertoire choices can impact feelings of achievement and accomplishment in adult musicians. However, beyond repertoire, considering music education and engagement aspects of learning may impact curriculum of adult programs.

Research investigating group dynamics and team building experiences within ensembles and programs may provide important data for those willing to incorporate such experiences within their groups. A comparison study contrasting the experiences of an ensemble with team building and an ensemble without team building might provide interesting results. Additionally, it would be intriguing to see if team building positively impacted musical learning and performance situations.

A research study seeking to define performance and question the value of it for adult musicians would inform community ensemble directors. Allowing adult participants to define performance and share their stories and experiences may provide directors with a new perspective on the value of performance. Another research study may investigate alternative activities such as workshops, lecture sessions, or sing-in events where a traditional performance is not the ultimate goal. Observing informal learning in music ensembles may inform future curriculum and performance choices for community

ensembles.

Lastly, there is more opportunity to bridge the gap between what choral conductors think is meaningful to adult singers and what adult singers find meaningful. However, in order to foster a more reciprocal relationship between choral conductors and adult singers, it is essential that researchers collect what choral conductors of volunteer community choruses find meaningful. Gathering what is meaningful to choral conductors and comparing that data with what adult singers find meaningful may contribute to the creation of a new paradigm in the community chorus, one that is more meaningful for all parties.

This study's results were testimony to the strength of the artistic process in research and the personal narratives of participants, meeting one of portraiture's major goals: bridging the gap between scientific research and the interests of the general population. In conclusion, here are the four final, succinct glances at the portrait subjects for this study.

**Fiona.** “I have a triangle of happiness which includes my husband, my research, and my music. I need all of these things to feel happy and if something is off with any of the three, I can feel it.” (Journal, 6/12/2014)

**Noah.** “Singing to me is a form of structured relaxation. I find this somewhat of a paradox, since one must concentrate very hard at rehearsal, and you wouldn’t think such level of extended concentration is relaxing—but it is.” (Journal, 7/23/2014)

**Martha.** “I’ve never come home after choir practice feeling sad; rather I have a feeling of accomplishment.” (Journal, 7/23/2014)

**Sharon.** “All of these experiences also led me to conclude that I am happier personally when making music in a group.” (Journal, 7/23/2014)

## Appendix A

### Interview Questions

In this document, I connected each interview question to a research question (RQ), and I provided an explanation and justification for each question.

1. What are your earliest choral singing memories? (RQ1)

Prior research suggests that singing experiences in early life influence how adults define their musicality (Hylton, 1980).

2. How does making music with others impact you? (RQ1 & RQ2)

The social benefit of singing with others is a well-known impact on choral singers (Barid, 2008; Chorus America, 2003; 2009; Darrough, 1990; Holmquist, 1995; Simmons, 1962; Willingham, 2001). In addition, place attachment theory focuses on the emotional content of subjective experiences and the relationships between humans and places in a particular environment (Relph 1976).

3. In choir, (a) what is important to you and why? (RQ1)

Previous research studying meaningfulness has sought to find what participants value and enjoy in the ensemble (Cape, 2012; Mills, 1988; Piekartz, 2006; Wayman, 2005).

4. Do you feel at home in your choir and, if you were to sing somewhere else, would it be difficult to move away from your choir? (RQ2)

Research indicates that context is an important factor for meaningfulness (Britt, Adleer, Bartone, 2001; Harrison, 2008; Morse, 2011, Sherman, Nave, & Funder

(2010). Context contributes to sense of place and place attachment (Hummon, 1992; McClinchey, 2011).

5. What would your life have been like if you never would have been part of a choral ensemble? (RQ1 & RQ2)

The final question encourages a synthesis of the above questions. Participants will reflect on past experience, their impact, and how their lives might be different without choral singing.

## Appendix B

### Journal Instructions and Suggested Prompts

Dear participants,

During this study you will keep a journal in which you will record your thoughts regarding meaningful experiences in the choral setting. Journal entries will begin after your interview and will continue for four months. I will collect journals at the final concert.

You may either write your journals in a notebook or type them in a word document which you can print and turn into me. You will write at least four entries which is the equivalent of one entry per month. You may write more than four entries.

You may write anything about your meaningful experiences in the choral setting. Four prompts are below to guide your entries if needed.

1. Tell me about the first musical ensemble that you loved being in and what made you love it?
2. What, if anything, does being in this ensemble bring to your life?
3. What single part of being in this ensemble would you never want to give up?
4. How important is singing in this choir in relation to other activities in your life and why?

Please contact me at any time during the study with questions or concerns.

Krystal Rickard  
krystal.rickard@gmail.com  
609-915-2644

## Appendix C

### Recruitment Letter

Dear Singers,

You are invited to take place in a choral music research study conducted by Krystal Rickard, a student at Boston University. This research is part of my dissertation work. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are able to stop participating at any time.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the factors that adult singers find meaningful about their participation in community choirs as learners and musicians and how sense of place impacts meaningfulness. The research questions are (a) In what ways do adult singers find participating in community choral ensembles to be meaningful? And (b) In what ways does place attachment impact these meaningful experiences?

Results from this study may assist explaining why adults find choir meaningful from the perspective of the participants themselves. It may contribute to our knowledge of meaningful experiences in community choirs and adult experiences in general and may assist conductors and professional organizations in providing valuable experiences for adults in community choirs. Participants may even enhance self-understanding and awareness by participating in the study.

If you volunteer to participate you will complete one 2-hour interview and four journal entries over a four month period spending approximately nine hours overall on the project. All data provide will remain anonymous and confidential.

Participant criteria:

(a) Individuals will be a member of the participating community choir; (b) individuals will express a willingness to participate in the study; (c) individuals will identify a family member willing to participant in one interview; (d) individuals will be willing to share their experiences and perceptions in a journal; (e) individuals will find participation in their choral ensemble meaningful; (f) individuals will speak and write English fluently.

Thank you for your consideration. If you are interested please complete the back of this form and return to Krystal after rehearsal.

Yes, I am interested: Name \_\_\_\_\_

Years in this this community choir \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

If at any time you have any questions. Please contact: Krystal Rickard, krystal.rickard@gmail.com, 609-915-2644 or Frank Abrahams, abrahams@rider.edu, 609-924-7416 . You may obtain further information about your rights as a research subject by calling the **BU CRC IRB Office at 617-358-6115**

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**Curriculum Vitae**

