Perceptions of success influencing male participation in choir

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For my children, Addison, Stratford and Savannah, who inspire and challenge me every day.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisors for their expertise, support and commitment and for always having the answers.

I would also like to thank my mother for her tirelessness and her conviction.
Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

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(Signature)
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Abstract

The aim of this research study was to investigate Australian males’ perceptions associated with belonging to a choir. My long-held belief that boys and men in Australia can miss out on an enriching musical experience in choir was a key motivation in this research. In particular the study focused on three main themes – masculinity, possible selves and success – seeking to understand the influence of each of these themes on male participation in choirs and forming the basis of the research questions. These themes partly grew from my Honours study on Boys who Sing and partly from my literature search since that time. The first question focused on the effect that notions of masculinity had on participation. The second question sought to understand the role of identity from a theory of possible selves, and the final research question aimed to explore participants’ perceptions of success and how these were perceived to affect male participation in choir.

The methodological approach was a combination of aspects of phenomenology, case study and narrative inquiry. The research, therefore, sought to understand the way in which males experience choir. To do so it investigated four choirs, each of which represented a different context and stage along an age continuum – a Junior School boys’ choir, a Secondary School mixed choir, a University male choir, and a male Community choir. The choirs came from Sydney and Greater Western Sydney regions. The experiential stories, constructed from interviews, focus groups, surveys, observation and video analysis, were used extensively in the findings to depict the voices of the participants. Data were analysed thematically and coded according to the three main themes and the associated subthemes.

Findings demonstrated that male participation in choir is significantly influenced by perceptions of success. Participants’ ideas surrounding success were also strongly connected to masculinity and possible selves. Notions of masculinity played a significant role in influencing male participation particularly from the perspective of Australian ideologies of ‘maleness’. This was represented by negative stereotypes, which were largely associated with
alleged soft and feminine forms of masculinity. The notion of ‘maleness’, however, incorporated the significance of sport in Australian culture. Part of the attraction of singing was its likeness to sport in terms of the physical experience and nature of singing. This raised implications regarding the power of embodied learning and choir as an embodied experience. Choral singing additionally held power in the opportunities afforded for public display. Men enjoyed friendships with other men and the freedom to interact as men, in a meaningful and socially conducive context. This was expressed in the uniqueness of male communication, humour and mateship. Although the process of vocal change was experienced differently by participants it held significance in its physical challenges for some as well as stereotypical responses to the unbroken voice. It was a time primarily viewed by those within choir as a natural progression to manhood.

Considering the role of identity from the perspective of possible selves, it was found that an individual’s past, present and future identities interacted powerfully to influence motivation and choices. The embodied learning taking place in choir was also a significant influence in learning motivation. Participants’ family background and experience of choir and music at school were influential factors, whether positive or negative. This affected the present experience of choir, particularly an individual’s self-confidence and self-perception. At the same time choir provided participants with a forum to consider and prepare for their musical future and so participation in choir had a range of purposes according to individual aspirations for the future.

The research showed the importance of public success and the desire to achieve, to perform, to be recognised and rewarded. It highlighted the need for musical success, expressed in terms of the role of the conductor, technical skill, tone quality and working together. Also significant was personal success, described as love of singing, expression, and self-confidence and private impact, incorporating audience response and expressions of spirituality. This research demonstrated the importance of creating a culture of male choral singing in Australia and recognising it as a meaningful male context with far-reaching benefits plus implications for education.
1 Introduction

Singing... it’s as human as speaking

(Choir 4: Community, Interview 1, p. 366)

Summary

The following introductory chapter provides the basis and rationale underpinning the research. It begins by providing a brief outline of the relevant literature that informs and justifies the foundation, purpose and direction of the study. The research questions are stated and an overview of each of the thesis chapters is provided.
This Australian research study is based on data gathered from four choirs across Sydney and Greater Western Sydney locations, each one representing a snapshot at distinct points along an age continuum. The study explores the phenomenon of males in choir by focusing on their perceptions of success, expressions of masculinity, and the role of identity from the perspective of possible selves. This refers to the way in which past and present experiences, or expressions of identity, shape future choices and identities.

The stimulus for undertaking the research came from my own professional practice as a classroom music teacher in junior and secondary school settings. Questions arose surrounding what motivated boys to sing in a choir and what deterred them. This led to the completion of an Honours thesis where I conducted two case studies of young males who had recently finished their schooling. They spoke in detail about their experience of music and singing at school, describing the perceptions held by peers that singing in choir was for girls. Boys who were part of the choir had serious doubts raised around their sexual orientation and they were generally labeled ‘gay’. Each of these young men had different experiences of singing but both reported that their decisions about singing were significantly affected by peer perception and a culture that they felt dictated what sort of singing was and was not acceptable for males.

Most people sing or have done at some point in their lives. Singing is a creative and personal means of expression linked strongly to a complex sense of self (Callahan, 2000). Listeners and performers also interpret it in a personal, emotional and subjective manner but for many people singing is reserved for times of solitude and even the thought of singing in public leaves them feeling vulnerable and exposed (Chong, 2010). Participating in a choir and singing in the safety of the group provides an ideal context to satisfy such a natural desire to sing and research supports that a primary reason people give for belonging to a choir is because they want to sing (Lucas, 2011; Sweet, 2010).

Research, however, indicates the existence of negative attitudes surrounding male choral participation and a decline in the number boys participating (Freer, 2006; 2007; 2010). A study by Lucas (2011) found that boys did not receive
support from their male peers regarding their choir membership. In the UK Ashley (2010) comprehensively demonstrated the destructive effect of young girls’ opinions and treatment of boys’ in the choir. The process of vocal change is significant in generating negative attitudes. Again the work of Ashley (2006) highlights this. Elorriaga (2011) explored the perception of the unchanged voice, particularly as it related to identity, saying that, “boys experienced [vocal change] as an affirmation of their own male identities” (p. 10). The study highlighted the perception that the unchanged voice was considered feminine and that the goal of the adolescent participants was for their voice to change “in order to ‘become a man’” (p. 8). Other research has demonstrated the gendered nature of singing and instrument choice (Adler & Harrison; 2004) and the associated belief that choir is an unacceptable male activity. Hall (2004a) identified such an attitude in her work with primary school-aged boys, noting explicitly, “it is clear they do not perceive singing to be an acceptable adult male activity or something they could do when they grow up” (p. 184). In Australia the research of Harrison (2001; 2005; 2007; 2009a; 2009b; 2010) has contributed extensively to understanding gendered preferences in music and singing (see 1.1 The Research Context).

At this point it is important to make a brief comment about the use of the terms masculinity and femininity. In order to more fully appreciate the way in which the ideology of Australian hegemonic masculinity influences the perceptions of participants it is necessary to define femininity. This is a large task and far beyond the scope of this study, however, a brief consideration is necessary. The Oxford online dictionary (2014) defines feminine as “having qualities or an appearance traditionally associated with women, especially delicacy and prettiness” and provides a number of synonyms such as “womanly, womanlike, ladylike, girlish, female; soft, delicate, gentle, tender, graceful, refined, modest”. The Macquarie dictionary likewise states that femininity is “the quality of being feminine” (p. 518), providing a variety of synonyms including, “unmanliness... effeminacy... emasculation...” (Bernard, 2005, 462.5). The term female is also listed synonymously with “negative” and “girly-girly” (462.6). Davies, Britt Flemmen, Gannon, Laws and Watson (2002) note the traditional view that
“desirable women are submissive, speak gently and are always available” (p. 307) and Brownmiller (1984) discusses expressions of femininity such as “vulnerability, the need for protection” and “Whimsy, unpredictability, and patterns of thinking and behaviour that are dominated by emotion, such as tearful expressions of sentiment and fear” (p. 16). Author Judith Butler argues against the second-class status afforded women, recognizing the elements of socialization in the construction of gender as:

...an ongoing cultural interpretation of bodies and, hence, to be dynamically positioned within a field of cultural possibilities (Butler, 1986, p. 36).

Such views about the second class status of women perpetuate the ideology that masculinity is defined, at least in part, by the belief that men should avoid feminine attributes (Schippers & Sapp, 2012; Summers, 2013).

Harrison’s (2010) research additionally advocates that the Australian male is faced with an extra challenge. Not only must he navigate his way through his own inhibitions and fears but he must also wrestle with the ideology of the ‘Aussie bloke’. This is typically encountered during school years where boys, learning to be men, try to make sense of the complexity of socio-cultural messages (see 1.1 The Research Context). Part of this dominant male image involves beliefs about success and whether or not an activity, such as choir, reflects these. An integral element of this process is the role of identity where choir can only be enjoyed or pursued if a male can visualise himself in that setting in a positive way. Understanding these facets provides choral conductors and music educators with insight into creating an experience that is meaningful, acceptable and appealing to the Australian male of any age or stage of life.

1.1 The Research Context

Understanding the complexities that underlie boys’ reluctance to be involved in musical activities such as choir is not new and is a phenomenon experienced internationally. Researchers have been asking these questions for some time, and music practitioners and educators continue to experience associated difficulties on a daily basis and to varying degrees (Koza, 1993; Collins, 2009;
Perceptions of success influencing male participation in choir – S. Powell

Ashley, 2006; Harrison, 2010). The motivation for this research came from my experience as a music teacher in a number of Australian schools, across the greater Western Sydney area, teaching children from Preparatory school through to Year 12 (4 – 18 years of age). Whilst I was always privileged to have boys in the choir and smaller vocal groups these boys generally displayed a set of social characteristics that excluded them from the higher status social peer group (that is, those students belonging to the ‘popular’ or ‘cool’ group). In the music classroom, boys from this high status clique, however, intensified this phenomenon by restricting themselves to specific types of music. This generally meant rock and popular music and if singing was involved the male student would only do so with his guitar as accompaniment. It appeared that boys, regardless of social status, were missing out on something important. For those who chose to join, they were missing the social acceptance of others and therefore their enjoyment was likely marred. For those who would not join (and wanted to) they were missing the opportunity to sing with others and enrich social interactions and personal experiences. There was always the boy who appeared immune to the censure of peers because he already enjoyed high social status, a phenomenon also observed by Harrison (2010) but the power of music and singing, it seemed, was not enough to separate many boys from the socio-cultural messages they had absorbed from birth, messages instilled in them by home and society, and messages that are often perpetuated at school (Harrison, 2010). The critical role of socio-cultural context in the music education setting has been explored by Welch (2007) and specifically in the United Kingdom by Welch, Himonides, Saunders, Papageorgi, Rinta, Preti, Stewart, Lani, Vraka and Hill (2008) and also by Welch (2011) within the context of the English cathedral tradition.

Australian researcher, Scott Harrison, has done significant work on the gendered nature of musical activities. Over a number of years he found that musical genres and instruments, including voice, have specific associations aligned with either masculinity or femininity, and that singing was considered a feminine activity (Harrison, 2001; 2005; 2007; 2009a; 2009b; 2010). Harrison (2009a) argues that, historically, Australian boys are raised to understand and
embody masculinity in its dominant form and that part of this ideology is the absence of anything feminine. Boys who engage in activities that are considered feminine run the risk of serious consequences such as being bullied and being socially isolated or excluded. Singing and singing in a choir both appear on the ‘feminine’ end of the continuum (Harrison, 2009b) and therefore, boys are reluctant to participate. As a result music educators continue to be faced with a battle that is determined by history and one permeated by socio-cultural underpinnings. Adler and Harrison (2004) describe part of this issue as “gender role rigidity” (p. 274) where boys are not allowed to cross gender lines or move outside of these socially constructed parameters. Involvement in feminine (or non-masculine) activities essentially equates to lowering their dominant, masculine status to the traditionally subordinate social status of women. The feminine label leads to being negatively categorized as non-masculine and consequently raising concerns about homosexuality. The issue is compounded then by “gender intensification” (Adler & Harrison, 2004, p. 274) in which boys behave according to acceptable and prescribed male norms, thereby perpetuating the stereotype.

This is a powerful force at a time of heightened vulnerability and uncertainty of self for the adolescent male. Adolescence is a time of identity formation during which, according to Freer (2009), individuals “try on possible selves” (p. 342), a range of different personas or identities, but because they do not possess the “strategies to achieve those possible selves” (Freer, 2010, p. 20) the result is often an increase in anxiety, making the whole process more traumatic. The early teenage years, or middle years, seem to be the most common time where such issues arise (Abrahams, 2012; Adler & Harrison, 2004; Collins, 2009; Freer, 2007; Harrison, 2010) and this will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2. Although there is general concurrence regarding this middle years phenomenon, Hall (2004a) calls for more research in the early childhood years suggesting that the damage may be occurring early, and that boys learn from a young age that “singing is for girls” (p. 179). This is closely aligned to the prior mention of the socio-cultural development of boys in Australian society.
According to Adler and Harrison (2004) such learned responses mean that boys are being restricted from enjoying an important human activity and one that provides enormous opportunity for self-expression and subsequent benefits to an individual’s wellbeing. There is growing evidence from research that music, singing, and singing in a choir, have real benefits for a participant’s health and well being (Bailey & Davidson, 2013; Chong, 2010; Clift & Hancox, 2010; Clift, Hancox, Morrison, Hess, Kreutz & Stewart, 2010; Hallam, 2010). Chong (2010) writes that human connection with voice and singing begins in the womb and a very young child quickly learns to respond to the mother’s voice. Chong reports that singing contributes to wellbeing in a variety of ways, which include expressing emotions and experiencing them more deeply; the pleasure derived from creating something beautiful; the satisfaction of performing and receiving “validation from their audience” (p. 123); a deeper sense of self and spirituality; and the shared experience of communicating with a group. Including the perspective of the audience in this study indicates the importance of public performance for the participating choirs and hence, the use of the Audience Members’ Survey (AMS). Descriptions of audience validation can be seen in the work of Clift, Hancox, Morrison, Hess, Kreutz and Stewart (2010) who find that reported benefits of choral singing vary according to personal situation but include happiness, focus, breathing, friendship, education and commitment. Clift and Hancox (2010) also mention the difference in the way women and men indicated the benefits of the experience, with women being “more likely to report stronger benefits compared with men” (p. 92). In addition to personal wellbeing Hallam’s (2010) research suggests that musical involvement enhances intellectual development and skills, such as numeracy and literacy, creativity and even physical health. A striking example is that reported by Bailey and Davidson (2001) who describe the increased “life satisfaction” (p. 30) of homeless men in a choir. Choir provided them with a common goal and the opportunity to exercise cognitive energy by focusing on a positive and collaborative pursuit. As a result, antisocial behaviours, such as drug use, were seen to diminish.
Chapter 1: Introduction

It is clear that singing in a choir has significant benefits across a range of different life criteria and that to ignore its potential is to deprive individuals, even societies, of an integral and potent form of communication. In Australian society and schools, boys are missing out on the vital opportunity to exercise creative and personal expression. This affects the development of identity and wellbeing, the consequences of which are far-reaching.

Whilst the study focuses on males, it does not attempt to compare genders, nor does it negate the experiences of females, rather it openly acknowledges that women of all ages also face difficulties associated with gender norms and social expectations. The study uses the research work already mentioned as its foundation and goes on to develop understanding by asking boys and men who belong to a choir about the significance of being in a choir.

1.2 Purpose and Rationale

The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences of males in choir by focusing on their perceptions and definitions of success; their expressions and understandings of masculinity; and the role of their possible selves.

The study proposes that participation in choir is significantly affected by the stereotypes defined by the dominant, ideological, Australian male. It also argues that male interpretations surrounding the meaning of success have substantial influence on their participation. The central ideas of this research are closely linked, one essentially overlapping with the other, and whilst it is difficult to separate perceptions distinctly into these overarching themes, the study intends to categorize in this way in order to gain as clear a picture as possible. The study acknowledges the importance of exploring and understanding each of these themes as separate concepts but also recognizes the significance of the thematic interrelationships. The research argues that for boys and men to participate in a choir there are a number of essential considerations. Firstly, the choir must satisfy particular criteria of success in the minds of its male participants. Secondly, it must be considered an acceptable male activity, and acceptability is defined in part by its level of perceived success. Thirdly, choral activity must
exist as a positive facet of the individual’s past and present identity in order for it to remain in their future identity, and for this to occur, choir must satisfy notions of success and masculinity. It is the intention of this research study to discover what these perceptions are and how they affect male participation in choir.

The study contributes to the body of research regarding boys’ music education and choral pedagogy and acknowledges the extensive work already done in this area by authors such as Harrison, Freer, and Ashley. Additionally, this research study offers a new perspective. Rather than formulating prescriptions for best practice, as discussed by much of the previous research, it explores the motivations and lived experiences of the participants. By using the personal stories of boys’ lived experience, the research seeks to gain insight into the way their perceptions of success, masculinity and possible selves influence their participation in choir. The four participating choirs provide four snapshots and each snapshot is representative of a different stage along the age continuum, depicted below in Figure 1.1.

![Participant choirs on the age continuum](image-url)
1.3 Research Questions

The research questions were strategically constructed in order to target this research topic. They were formulated based on the themes that emerged from literature and data analysis. Each question, therefore, reflects one of the three thematic strands: success, masculinity and possible selves.

Research Question 1:
What effect do notions of masculinity have on male participation in choir?

Research Question 2:
What is the role of possible selves in relation to male participation in choir?

Research Question 3:
How do perceptions of success influence male participation in choir?

The methods used to gather data were selected to reflect potential perspectives. Interviews and focus groups were used to obtain a more detailed picture of individual experience, by documenting how individual participants had experienced choir. The Choir Members’ Survey (CMS) was designed to obtain a number of responses in order to gain an overall sense or broader representation of how choir was perceived by choristers. On a smaller scale, the administration of Audience Members’ Survey (AMS) at each choir’s performance, offered a glimpse of listener or audience perspectives. The inclusion of various perspectives meant that a more comprehensive depiction of male participation in Australian choirs could be represented.

1.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the study by providing the relevant background to the research and its purpose. It presented the research questions around which the entire study is built and it discussed some of the limitations of the study.
Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2, Chapter 3, and Chapter 4 deliver an extensive review of the literature surrounding the topic. Each chapter concentrates on one of the three main themes that emerged: masculinity, possible selves, and success.

In Chapter 5 the research methodology is discussed. The chapter covers phenomenology, case study, and narrative inquiry, the three approaches combined for use in this research, and it discusses the instruments devised for data collection. A descriptive vignette of each of the four choirs is also provided.

Chapter 6 outlines the data from interviewing professional conductors and documents the experience and opinions of these five conductors from the United Kingdom and Australia. These interviews are connected with literature and a different context from Australia. The conductors are not participants in the study of four choirs. Data from the conductors enhance and complement the body of literature offering expert and practical insight into understanding the phenomenon of males in choir, as they are experienced in UK settings. They therefore form a comparison with the Australian context.

The findings of the research are then presented in the ensuing three chapters. Chapter 7 discusses the findings surrounding masculinity; Chapter 8 presents findings related to possible selves; and Chapter 9 presents findings regarding success.

Finally, Chapter 10 draws conclusions from the research and engages in a discussion about the subsequent implications. Suggestions or recommendations for future research are also raised.
Summary

The following three chapters present a review of relevant literature structured around the three primary themes of the research: masculinity, possible selves, and success.

Chapter 2 discusses masculinity in terms its social construction, focusing particularly on the construction of the Australian male, and the subsequent influence of this ideology on education and, most specifically, on perceptions associated with choir.

Chapter 3 explores the theory of possible selves and highlights the significance of context. It considers the significance of socio-cultural context, in shaping individual choices and pathways, and this includes discussion about the role of tradition. The chapter also presents literature surrounding the contextual influence of gender and the way in which gendered norms and expectations impact an individual. The discussion is extended to the adolescent context, which focuses on the development of identity at this crucial time of life, and it considers the context of choir, which presents a discussion combining several of the elements discussed in the preceding sections.

Chapter 4 focuses on success. It discusses the way success is understood in different contexts and it also presents the views of the professional conductors as they relate to notions of excellence, standard and pride, and the role of the conductor is highlighted as a significant driving force in the success of any choir.
Masculinity is a socially constructed concept. Its definition will vary according to socio-cultural context. It is often associated with activities and stereotypes that exude power, aggression, competition, strength and macho attributes (Ashley, 2002, 2006; Adler & Harrison, 2004; Harrison, 2012; Talbot, 2010; West, 2008), however, it is largely described in terms of that which it is not and this is generally synonymous with that which is feminine (Ashley, 2002; Connell, 2008; Harrison, 2001). This subtle, yet powerful, attitude exists in many societies and organizations and boys soon learn that being feminine is negative and not to be endorsed (Adler & Harrison, 2004; Ashley, 2006; Freer, 2008; Harrison, 2001; 2007; Hawkins, 2007). Subsequently, boys will often go to great lengths to avoid the stigma rather than suffer consequences, such as being bullied or labelled (Connell, 2008). Traditionally masculine characteristics have been perpetuated in the Australian education system, even with good intentions and a genuine commitment to boys' participation in music activities (Hall, 2004b; Harrison, 2010). Choir is associated with 'soft' masculinity (Ashley, 2006) and, therefore, participation has feminine and homosexual implications. In a similar way, the voice change process is potentially stressful for boys if not managed carefully and with sensitivity.
2.1 The Construction of Masculinity

Perhaps the most direct construction of masculinity is that of Demorest (2000) who defines masculine as anything that a man does. Understanding masculinity as a single entity is narrow but this conceptualisation is being increasingly challenged. Connell (2008) argues that there has always been diversity in notions of masculinity and that to think otherwise is too simplistic. A universal view of masculinity does not, in fact, exist. Expressions of it are innumerable, varying within cultures and between generations, but over time, significantly, these expressions have changed and will continue to change (Connell, 2008; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Definitions are as varied as the individuals who represent them and this is reflected in the more recent notion of ‘multiple masculinities’ or “multiple patterns of masculinity” (Connell, 2008, p. 132). The idea is supported by Hall (2004a), who believes that all masculinities should be given credence and that acceptance of this multiplicity should be instilled in children from a young age. Likewise, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) advocate multiple masculinities, describing the concept as “the plurality of masculinities and the hierarchy of masculinities” (p. 846), thereby implying an order of authority and import. Connell (2008) points out, however, that different manifestations of masculinity do not hold equal value and that each one of these forms is referenced against the hegemonic or dominant form.

Accordingly, every context, whether social, cultural or organizational, has a dominant ideology pertaining to manhood. Hegemonic masculinity is that which has been afforded the status of the “most honoured form” (Connell, 2008, p. 133) and with that comes power. Paradoxically, few males fit the description prescribed by hegemony, in fact “only a minority of men might enact it” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832) and yet it continues to burden males, particularly adolescent boys. Those who do not reflect the hegemonic male nor openly oppose the ideology are essentially “complicit” (p. 832) in it, and the pattern becomes the norm against which all men are measured. History has demonstrated the consequences of stepping out of line with this norm, particularly in relation to the violence experienced by gay men during the time of liberation in the 1970s (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Homophobia is the result, therefore, of the
power play between dominant and marginalised masculinities and is discussed in
detail by Plummer (2001a). He says that any departure from “collective
standards” (p. 2) risks the homosexual label and the ramifications inflicted on that
individual are severe, the possibilities of which may include, “rejection, isolation,
attack, murder, internalized homophobia, low self-esteem and, for some, self-
destructive behaviour” (p. 8). A study by McCann, Plummer and Minichiello
(2010) revealed that the male participants (adolescents) were most afraid of
being likened to gay students, boys who might be gay and even boys who
participated in activities that were thought to be reserved for homosexuals.
McCann, Plummer and Minichiello argued that homophobia was an essential
ingredient in the process of becoming a heterosexual male and those boys who did
not reflect hegemonic traits were given the ‘gay’ label. Set in an Australian school
context, this study also highlighted the use of humour as a means of both
delivering abuse and counteracting abuse, demonstrating “successful masculinity
in opposition to other sexualities” (McCann, Plummer & Minichiello, 2010, p. 506).

Significantly, Talbot (2010) states that, “hegemonic masculinity depends upon
subordinate masculinities” (p. 161), “especially homosexual forms, since it must
negate them” (p. 169). She argues that where there is a dominant ideology, a less
dominant position must also exist concurrently.

From its inception in the 1980s, hegemonic masculinity (Connell &
Messerschmidt, 2005) was understood, not only as the benchmark for men, but
also as the customary behaviour that “allowed men's dominance over women to
continue” (p. 832). By its very nature, hegemonic masculinity marginalises any
other form of masculinity, which leaves femininity as the primary option to
describe anything outside the dominant description. This “rigid binary” (Connell,
2008, p. 134) creates a negative association with anything female, so that anything
non-masculine is immediately considered feminine. Again Plummer (2001b)
suggests that boys, particularly adolescents, use the homophobic labelling
strategy to make sense of anything outside accepted norms. Talbot (2010) agrees
that gender is a socially constructed discourse, arguing that from an early age
boys “must distinguish their own identity as masculine from the identity of their
female parent” (p. 159) and “prove their masculinity” (p. 159). Young men quickly
learn the benefits of the male discourse, which include “respect, prestige, and the right to command” (p. 159), and they learn that masculinity is something to be valued, particularly when aligned with its hegemonic form. Boys come to understand, whether consciously or subliminally, that feminine associations are negative and to be avoided. The aversion is powerful and avoidance strategies are strong. One manifestation of this negativity is the way in which displaying ‘feminine’ qualities has been equated with being homosexual and to the heterosexual male, attempting to align himself with hegemonic masculinity, it is vital to circumvent such a label (Talbot, 2010).

Another perspective is put forward by Summers (2013) in her discussion of the economic inequality of men and women, pervasive in Australia today. She argues that the place of women in society remains inferior to that of men and they continue to be judged comparatively. Women continue to hold subordinate social status and as a consequence for a man to display feminine attributes or engage in activities deemed feminine they are essentially lowering their status to that of a woman. Males have been socially conditioned to view themselves very differently to females but the attitude is subversive and can be hard to identify. It is an “entrenched system of attitudes and practices” (Summers, 2013, p. 21) and this can make it difficult to challenge. Vaccaro (2011) advocates that as young children boys learn to embody dominant manhood. At school it is accepted they will be “active, competitive and physical with their bodies” (p. 72) much more so than for girls. They are socialised to act with a view to dominate others and, in this way, embodying manhood is “tolerated and even encouraged” (p. 72). This is typically expressed through sporting activities and represented by enduring physical pain and violence:

Through sports, young men learn techniques to use their bodies to enact violence against others proving that they are dominants – and asserting themselves as belonging to the category ‘man’ (Vaccaro, 2011, p. 71).

Hauge and Haarvin (2011) agree that sport and physical exercise play a significant role in the way boys view their own bodies and the way in which adolescent males construct their image. They describe the “technically skilled male body” (p. 8) as one that fits comfortably within an “acknowledged masculinity” (p. 9), used as a benchmark to assess other masculinities or
individual achievement of that image. This notion is closely connected with the theory of possible selves, discussed in Chapter 3, as adolescent boys strive to attain an ideal self, particularly as it relates to desired body image. Vaccaro (2011) discusses the male body discourse as it applies in areas other than sport. The strength and control associated with the male body has far reaching impact. It renders the female body as “passive[ly]” (p. 68) waiting for the “active and dominant” (p. 68) male, thereby heightening the distinction between gender roles. He also attributes the disinclination of men to seek medical assistance to a reluctance to relinquish control of their body, simultaneously admitting weakness. Ironically, the embodiment of such manhood in earlier life can become a man’s downfall later in life, suffering from the physical exploits of the past.

Adler and Harrison (2004) describe a similar phenomenon in “gender role rigidity” (p. 274), which acts to prevent boys from crossing gender lines. During school years girls are encouraged to challenge the gender barriers, most commonly observed in choosing subjects traditionally tailored for boys. Boys, however, are not encouraged in the same way and are much less likely to choose traditionally female subjects. To crossover is to risk serious consequences and compromise their male status (Summers, 2013), which is commonly endured as homophobic bullying, harassment, and isolation. To avoid segregation, boys conform to the socially acceptable construction of masculinity, the hegemonic form, thereby displaying “gender intensification” (Adler & Harrison, 2004, p. 274).

When masculinity is viewed as rigid and hierarchical these issues of power, dominance and exclusion emerge and insidiously influence social thought made evident in societies’ “gender regimes” (Connell, 2008, p. 137). Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) conclude that definitions and expressions of masculinity, although complex, should remain fluid, changing with time and context, and they must recognise other equally valid forms. To submit to dominant patterns is to perpetuate them and maintain an environment of marginalisation and oppression.
Harrison (2009a) provides a glimpse of the historical and cultural underpinnings that have informed and forged the Australian male identity, further illustrating the powerful influence of socio-cultural context. He traces the inception of the Australian male identity back to the nation's convict past and through events such as the Gold Rush and World Wars. In these harsh environments, the notion of ‘mateship’ was forged and defining characteristics were developed out of necessity and for the sake of survival. These traits developed over time, becoming the accepted norms of masculinity. The background of these men and boys, therefore, was one of harsh reality, struggling each day to survive. To show weakness in the tradition of the Australian male was potentially life threatening and so men learned to rely almost exclusively on themselves, demonstrating strength and toughness. As Harrison notes, a man had to “repress any softer emotions that might make him vulnerable to exploitation” (p. 5). Disregard for authority was another characteristic to emerge, a concept taken up by Connell (2008) in relation to the values perpetuated by the education system in its approach to educating boys. A brief discussion of this occurs later.

The vast majority of convicts and early settlers were male, which meant that the ideology established was overwhelmingly male focused. When women began entering the workforce in greater numbers this male-dominant worldview was threatened. The rise of feminism, therefore, in the 1960s and an increase in multiculturalism forced men to question the values in which their identity was entrenched. The “typical Australian male” (p. 7) - dominant, strong, and white - was in jeopardy, as new and different possibilities emerged. Mateship, however, continued to define the Australian male and this notion has endured to the present day.

### 2.2 Masculinity and Choir

According to the Macquarie dictionary (2005) choir is defined as “a company of singers, especially an organised group employed in church service” (p. 263). Likewise, the Oxford online dictionary (2014) describes a choir as “an organised
group of singers, especially one that takes part in church services or performs in public”. Choirs take a variety of forms, ranging from formal organisations to informal gatherings. Some require high levels of demonstrated musical ability and vocal prowess, whilst others, such as community choirs, are open to the public with no pre-requisites of skill or experience. It is possible that choral singing in Australia may have inherited its characteristics and associations from the cathedral tradition of its English ancestors. The unchanged, boy soprano voice is one such trait, which is considered in more detail below in the work of Ashley (2006; 2011). The issue is broadened by Adler and Harrison (2004) who found that some forms of singing were considered more acceptable than others for boys, for example, musical theatre and rock music (see below). On top of these factors, Hall (2007) highlights the perspective of an education setting, observing “singing in school exemplifies a space which is historically marked as feminine and typically represents risky territory for boys” (p. 23), her argument supported by Green (1997) whose worked aimed to trace the two-faced representation of the link between music and woman as it has been perpetuated through history and... to reveal the participation of music education in the continued production and reproduction of gendered musical meanings and practices, through the everyday musical interactions and experiences of girls and boys in contemporary schools (p. 3).

Choral singing presents a problem for males because it has strong associations with femininity and is often considered a feminine activity (Adler & Harrison, 2004; Ashley, 2006; Brockman, 2007; Harrison, 2001, 2007, 2010; Koza, 1993; Moore, 2008). As a consequence, and in order to preserve their masculine image, males, particularly adolescents, largely avoid it. The alleged femininity of singing is based on characteristics that display emotion and softness, expression and a sharing of the ‘self’, attributes incongruent with accepted, dominant masculine qualities, as already discussed (Adler & Harrison, 2004; Ashley, 2006). A study by Harrison (2010) demonstrated school-aged boys’ belief that “singing in a high voice was considered particularly un-masculine, even when the physiology prevented any alternate sound” (p. 46).

Another study by Harrison (2001) described a gender continuum related to musical instrument choice of boys and girls. Like flute and violin, singing was situated at the feminine end of the scale and this perception has been confirmed
in subsequent work (Harrison, 2007; 2010). Collins (2009) discusses similar themes in a music education context specifically in relation to boys and music. These include: “music is not a ‘manly’ thing to do” (p. 35) and “music is a girl’s subject” (p. 37). Not all forms of singing, however, are considered non-masculine. Musical theatre and rock music are perceived to be more acceptable forums for male participation, which could be attributed to the fact that they are deemed “implemental” (Adler & Harrison, 2004, p. 279) in the sense that playing an amplified instrument, taking on a role or playing a character ensures a level of removal and safe distance for participants. Collins (2009) highlights this trend as well, suggesting that a boy will choose forms of music and musical activities that “reinforce their masculinity” (p. 37). It remains, though, that in Australian society males will avoid certain activities if they are considered feminine. This is particularly potent in the adolescent years when boys grapple with the formation of an acceptable identity and seek to establish a secure place in their social setting. Deviating from gender norms directly compromises their position (Abrahams, 2012; Adler & Harrison, 2004). Hall (2004b) argues that whilst “boys making the decision not to sing” (p. 17) is usually observed during adolescence, such ideologies are established in early childhood and challenging the formation of these damaging understandings needs to be addressed early in boys’ lives.

2.2.1 The boy soprano and the English choral tradition

A rather different context is the English choral tradition. The work of Ashley (2002; 2006; 2011) demonstrates that the boy soprano, or treble voice, is afforded a high status and has retained that status since the seventh century (See Chapter 6 where contemporary UK conductors discuss the choral tradition). Of particular interest to this discussion is the introduction of girls’ choirs into a tradition that had always been male. According to Ashley (2006) when this introduction occurred, singing was no longer a boys’ thing and it became associated with femininity. Prior to this, however, “the very fact that girls were excluded legitimated boys’ participation in high-art singing as a form of masculinity” (p. 198). Confusion also arises for young boys whose voices remain unbroken and, therefore, sounding like a girl means that singing no
longer offers a valid avenue for being male, or of “doing boy” (Ashley, 2006, p. 197). The status of the boy soprano changed due to its feminine association and boys were faced with the derogatory charge of singing like a girl (Ashley, 2002, p. 182). It is important to observe, though, that when the context remained exclusively male, boys regarded singing in the choir as a legitimate and masculine pursuit (Ashley, 2006). The early 90s saw the cathedral choral tradition change due to the introduction of girls for reasons of “social justice” (Welch, 2002, p. 102) and yet it was considered by many to be at odds with the traditional boys-only arena. From a different perspective, Ashley (2011) argues that outside the sacred context of the cathedral choir, the boy soprano voice has enjoyed a “significant commercial market” (p. 62) in the popular music scene, particularly in the form of the boy band and that the audience for this genre has been shown to consist primarily of elderly females. The argument continues, therefore, that because “there is no adult male interest in boys’ singing, there is no reason for boys to associate singing with an adult masculinity” (p. 62). This phenomenon, coupled with the changing gender dynamics of the traditional cathedral choir, further perpetuate the association of choral singing with femininity. This perception also aligns with significant Australian research conducted by Harrison (2001; 2007), which strongly indicates the existence of a masculine-feminine continuum for instrument choice. Singing is firmly placed at the feminine end of this continuum.

2.2.2 Choir and Australian hegemonic masculinity

Connell (2008) argues that Australia has seen a culture emerge in education that favours and perpetuates the hegemonic pattern of masculinity. This pattern has been made apparent in a range of ways including the emphasis placed on sport, confrontational approaches to discipline, and the dissemination of particular understandings about boys’ learning styles. Sport has long held significance for men because it epitomises dominant masculine tendencies and values, such as “physical confrontation and (legal) violence” (Connell, 2008, p. 140). Talbot (2010) agrees that Australian society places significant emphasis on sport and exhorts men to reflect associated characteristics and values. This is confirmed by Adler and Harrison (2004) who discuss the gendered nature of
school subjects, saying that masculine subjects, with sport at the most male end of the scale, reflect “competitive and/or violent, hyper-masculine” (p. 276) values and models. In a large number of Australian schools, boys must make a choice between music and sport, but in reality, this is not a choice at all. Rather, the “vulnerable male supremacy” (Ashley, 2002, p. 182) will overwhelmingly choose self-preservation and not risk his “symbolic masculinity” (Adler & Harrison, 2004, p. 278) by choosing choir. Boys who play sport and sing in choir provide a strong exception; however, it is argued that their participation in choir is made acceptable by their participation in sport (Harrison, 2001; 2010). Examples exist where concurrent involvement in both sport and choir has become a deliberate strategy for boys (Gaul, 2006). The importance of physicality, however, should not be disregarded simply in these terms. The emphasis on sport and being physical may hold particular significance for men and boys in positive ways. This is considered briefly below in 2.2.3 Embodied learning.

Unfortunately, educators who fervently seek a better educational environment for boys often unwittingly perpetuate these stereotypes and the dominant Australian male ideology examined here. In the case of music education, and particularly of choir, much work has been done in trying to understand how to make choir more masculine, acceptable and appealing for boys. (Brockman, 2007; Freer, 2008). The underlying challenge with this approach is the assumption that there is a single form of masculinity, or “fixed pathway of development” (Connell, 2008, p. 135) and that all boys will respond to strategies planned in this light. There are several suggestions made in regard to engaging boys in choir. Freer (2007; 2008) summarises a number of suggestions to target boys’ choral singing, including the careful choice of repertoire, active rehearsal approaches, use of male role models, understanding adolescent brain development, and understanding boys’ learning styles. Whilst these suggestions are commendable it is important that these elements do not become a prescriptive approach to reaching boys and an integral part of engaging boys in music is recognising each child as an individual. Power (2007) identifies effective strategies suited to engaging and motivating boys in music. In general
these could be described as problem-based, authentic, and connected to lived experience, but she reiterates the importance of “helping individual boys” (p. 179) as the aim of engagement strategies and of breaking down stereotypes associated with boys. This is consistent with Connell’s (2008) statement that “boys have multiple learning styles” (p. 135) and quality teachers will recognise this and address it accordingly. The model devised by Collins (2012), *Boys Music Ecosystem*, identifies a range of factors, external and internal, that influence the individual. She encourages music educators to understand these factors in order to create a culture in which boys are content to sing in choir. Understanding the role of physicality is one step toward catering for the needs of boys and men in a positive and non-stereotypical manner.

### 2.2.3 Embodiment and embodied learning

Embodiment is mentioned briefly in relation to the discourse of the male body, and its significance to the way men and boys perceive themselves, especially in comparison to others, and this has been discussed by authors such as Hauge and Haarvind (2011) and Vaccaro (2011). Hornecker (2011) argues that humans are naturally bound by physicality, suggesting that a person is a physical creature, who exists in a physical world and who occupies a physical space. She goes on to say that human interactions are also based on physicality, experienced through the senses, and that the importance of touch continues to be neglected. The neglect, however, arises from its power to link the physical with the emotional:

> because touching something always means a close (and potentially dangerous) encounter, touch is responsive and dialogic and can be deeply emotional; the aesthetics of touch have immediate emotional responses (Hornecker, 2011, p. 21)

The connection between the physical responses of the body and personal wellbeing, whilst recognised, has largely been ignored (Hornecker, 2011), although Standal and Engelsrud (2013) suggest an increase in attention to embodiment across a variety of fields because it inseparably links mind and body. Similarly, the significance of effort in physical or embodied interactions, according to Lyons, Slattery, Jimenez, Lopez and Moher (2012) has been disregarded. They argue that the role of effort (or exertion) has strong implications for learning and should be considered more purposefully in the
design of learning experiences. For example, physical effort, kept within a range, is linked with improved memory, just as emotion is linked with memory. “Emotional state and bodily arousal are inextricably linked” (p. 80) and that changing one variable will influence the other. Of particular interest is the reference to display and its affective role. Lyons et al. (2012) argue that physical activity seldom occurs without an affective response and that this is especially true when “being watched by others” (p. 80). This is relevant to boys and men in focus circumstances, such as playing sport or performing musically.

Somerville and Lloyd (2006) acknowledge the tradition of denigrating the body in favour of the mind. They argue that neglecting the importance of the body as an integral part of learning has a negative impact on individuals, particularly expressed as a lack of awareness of self in relation to body. In the adult setting of workplace learning, Somerville and Lloyd suggest that embodied learning is crucial for workers’ immediate and on-going safety. Understanding the physical body and watching the bodies of others is a fundamental element of learning processes and procedures, safety and physical care.

Atkinson, Watermeyer and Delamont (2013) discuss embodied learning in the context of masterclasses for developing opera singers. Singing is a physical act, involving an intricate interaction between producing vocal sound, controlling breath, and posture. Aside from the personal physicality of singing, they also argue that the masterclass setting requires “an intimate dialogue of bodies” (p. 495) between student and teacher. Such physical interaction involves “gesture, physical demonstration, touching” (p. 495). They describe the teacher, in this pedagogy, as having ‘embodied authority’ (p. 495), which context of ‘embodied can also be attributed to the conductor in a choral context. In a very real sense the conductor or teacher becomes a demonstrator, a practical guide, and even a role model. Their expertise comprehensively coaches their students to improve and develop their skill. The process of voice change is a pertinent example.

2.2.4 Vocal change

Vocal change is a factor that has attracted significant research over a number of years (Harrison, Welch & Adler, 2012). Freer (2007) admits that for a time he
believed that the primary reason for boys choosing not to sing was directly related to vocal change. Although other influential factors exist, it remains that vocal change affects all boys during a period of adolescence. The focus of this chapter, however, narrows this expansive topic and looks at voice change through the lens of hegemonic masculinity. Voice change leaves boys vulnerable and, as stated, Ashley (2006) notes that when the unchanged voice is likened to a girl’s voice, boys are inclined to avoid singing. It follows, therefore, that in this climate, voice change (or the unchanged voice) is problematic when it is seen as a deviation from the strength of dominant masculinity. Part of the issue is the way in which this process is managed by teachers, vocal coaches and choral conductors. Some provide a supportive and informed environment while in other situations boys stop singing as a result of the change being handled poorly (Freer, 2006). Much research has been devoted to the subject and researchers and professionals agree that it is extremely important for this period of vocal change to be dealt with carefully, strategically and intelligently (Ashley, 2002; 2006; 2011; Callaghan, Hughes & Power, 2009; Cooksey, 1992; Freer, 2006; Kennedy, 2004; Killian, 1999; Stupple, 2007; Trollinger, 2007). Ashley (2011) also discusses the treble or unbroken voice particularly in relation to the social construction of masculinity and the subsequent impact on the “voice of angels” (p. 60).

### Chapter summary

This chapter has explored perceptions of masculinity. This theme directly extends the Honours thesis study. It also has positioned the theme of masculinity as having an impact on embodied learning and vocal change.

Understanding expressions of masculinity and the powerful role of gender and socio-cultural context, particularly from the perspective of a dominant Australian male ideology and its relationship to perceptions regarding choir, has a direct impact on the identity of an individual. The formation of identity is difficult to separate from the context of an individual and the following chapter discusses this from the perspective of possible selves theory.
3 Possible Selves

So if this can help me now, it’ll get me better prepared for the future

(Choir 2: Secondary School, Interview 2, p. 298)

The most straightforward definition of possible selves consists of past and present conceptions of self that effectively shape the future identity, or identities, of an individual. These ideal representations and manifestations of the self-concept have the power to motivate behaviour toward the realisation of a goal or the avoidance of a projected possible end-point. This chapter presents literature regarding possible selves, outlining and defining the characteristics of the theory, discussing the influence of socio-cultural context and the way in which socialized constructions of gender and individually defined contexts affect the formation of possible selves. Understanding male motivation surrounding choir is considered in this research from the perspective of possible selves because it offers a tangible interpretation of the way in which past, present and future identities interact to influence choices.

3.1 Possible Selves Defined

Possible selves are the formulations or descriptions of a future self or selves. They represent desired, expected, or feared future selves, and sometimes a combination of these states. In broad terms, these possibilities are representations of an individual’s future, sometimes described as their ideal self (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Freer, 2009, 2010; Sica, 2009; Cross & Markus, 1994).
Markus and Nurius (1986) first conceptualised possible selves and understood it as having three strands. The first was described as that which a person would like to become and the second was that which they expected to become. The third element was defined as a feared self, or that which a person wants to avoid. Markus and Nurius (1986) also discuss the influence of self-concept and possible selves on behaviour, suggesting that self-concept is one of the “most important regulators of behaviour” (p. 965). Possible selves guide behaviour and provide a framework for interpreting aspects of current selves as they relate to future possibilities. Carroll, Shepperd and Arkin (2009) described possible selves as “mental representations of one’s aspirations and fears” (p. 550). The possible selves perspective was proposed to counteract the focus on backward-looking ideas about identity formation and the perceived lack of attention on the significance of the future (Freer, 2010; Markus & Nurius, 1986). Subsequently, Sica (2009) recognised the need to acknowledge temporality in identity, defining the self as “a personalised and subjective cluster of different dimensions: current self, relational self, past, future and possible selves, unconscious self, and so on” (p. 222). Possible selves are separate to the present or current self, and yet they are connected. They are products of the past, whether formed as positive or negative responses to an experience, and they are representations of the future, both desired and feared. Cross and Markus (1994) suggested that possible selves bridge the gap between present self and future self and that they are a way of organising beliefs and actions in order to achieve a desired result. Those who have a well-formed idea regarding their abilities, or those who have developed an accurate self-concept, are more able to imagine achieving their future goals. Additionally, they are able to devise strategies in order to make that future self come to fruition. Those who do not recognise their ability and who lack the ability to structure a path to attainment are more susceptible to failure and their performance in that specific area suffers. Cross and Markus (1994) suggested that this is particularly apparent when external forms of motivation and assistance are not readily available, making them more “vulnerable to the adverse effects of negative feedback about the self in that domain” (p. 424). This is supported by Oyserman, Bybee, Terry and Hart-Johnson (2004), who state that when possible selves are detailed and
highly developed, they succeed in regulating the necessary behaviour for the attainment of a goal and that lacking strong conceptions of possible selves is akin to being without a roadmap. Individuals with a variety of detailed possibilities are also more inclined to follow positive paths to possible future selves, as opposed to focusing on avoiding the negative possibilities. This framework has been used strategically to help recalibrate thought processes that end in negative patterns of behaviour. Oyserman and Markus (1990) provided a good example of the influence a possible selves perspective can have on delinquency, and Oyserman, Bybee, Terry and Hart-Johnson (2004) described its effect on academic outcomes. The future or ideal self has a direct influence on the current self (Strahan & Wilson, 2006). This “hypothetical self” (Strahan & Wilson, 2006, p. 3) prompts the individual to assess their present self and subsequently adjust their behaviour in order to reach a goal.

Past experience plays a significant role in the formation of identity, particularly in relation to remembering positive and negative situations. These experiences have the effect of shaping the current or present self but they do not dictate possible future selves. The ideal self is not determined nor restricted by the past, and whilst many past experiences cannot be revisited in a physical sense, the associations that are retained as memories remain potent, regulating an individual’s desire to actively pursue or avoid a perceived end point. Strahan and Wilson (2006) suggest that it is not simply the memory of an event or circumstance that has influence. Rather, it is “how the past was recalled” (p. 4). The efficacy of a past self to enact change on the current self depends largely on the emotion attached to the original experience. It is the future self and not the past self that has the greatest motivational power to alter the present self. Each of these temporal representations, however, exists reciprocally. Past and future selves influence the current self and the current self simultaneously influences future ideals and even affects constructions of past experiences. This is due in part to the human desire to preserve a positive opinion of current self, or as stated by Strahan and Wilson (2006) in their theory of temporal self-appraisal (TSA), “people are motivated to think highly of themselves” (p. 5) and they remember the past “in ways that maintain or enhance current self-regard” (p. 5). Whitty (2002) supports this idea and suggests that people create stories or
narratives about their life, and choose to recall past experiences in “a certain way” (p. 213), which in turn, influences the way the current self is depicted. Erikson (2007) endorses the narrative nature of possible selves, although he asserts that these self-stories offer interpretations of the possibilities but do not provide justification of them.

Strahan and Wilson’s (2006) focus on the temporality of possibilities gives rise to an important consideration. They emphasize that actual time distance is very different to psychological time distance and each will exert influence in different ways. For example, an individual may envisage that a possible future self might occur ten years in the future. Although this self is chronologically distant from the present self, if the motivation to achieve that end remains strong and behavioural momentum is maintained, then that projected self is considered psychologically close, thereby remaining possible and attainable. Such a notion is particularly relevant to this research because the participating choirs represent different stages along a continuum of lived experience thereby providing a glimpse of the interaction between these distinct temporal selves.

The possible selves theory differs from other theories regarding self-concept because it places significance on the unknown element inherent in conceptualising the future. It involves an unverified and imagined aspect of a person’s identity. It defines a phenomenon that does not yet exist and for which no evidence or validation has been given. For this reason, possible selves remain a vulnerable facet of an individual’s identity, particularly that of an adolescent (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Freer, 2009; Sica, 2009). Erikson (2007), however, is adamant that possible selves have been experienced at some level and it is this factor, alongside actively pursuing a goal, which sets them apart from notions of wishful thinking, dreams and fantasising about the future. Creech, Hallam, Varvarigou, Gaunt, McQueen and Pincas (2013) agree that experience of possibilities is an important characteristic of well-developed possible selves and this “allow[s] the individual to vicariously experience the desired or feared self” (p. 4).

Other terms have been used to describe notions similar to possible selves, such as “potential social Me”, “the ideal self”, “self-definition”, “The Dream” and
“imagined self” (p. 956). Self-schemas, or self-schemata, are also considered conceptually related to possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Cross & Markus, 1994). Cross and Markus (1994) define a self-schema as an interaction between the ability to achieve in a particular area, and the personal belief in the importance or significance of that ability. They argue that self-schemas enable an individual to make judgements, interpret information and feedback, and reject that which is inconsistent. Markus and Nurius (1986) suggest that self-schemas are used by individuals as a way of interpreting the world and determining their place in it. Self-schemas influence the considerations and choices of the individual and, in a similar manner to possible selves, they contribute to the broader picture of self-concept (Cross & Markus, 1994).

Possessing the skill or ability does not equate to having a self-schema associated with that ability. On the contrary, Cross and Markus (1994) note that an individual may be skilled but without holding a self-schema related to that skill, they are likely to lack persistence for the activity and in their subsequent execution will not excel. The argument of Oyserman et al. (2004) described earlier, is the same, although they describe it as having detailed possibilities for future-oriented selves. Erikson (2007) clearly states that possible selves are not self-schemata. Self-schemata facilitate possible selves by providing the structure and knowledge required to formulate them and, therefore, act as a “foundation for the development of possible selves” (Cross & Markus, 1994, p. 434). Self-schemata can be viewed as constructing experience whilst “possible selves are manifest as experienced meaning” (Erikson, 2007, p. 354).

The conscious and cognitive nature of the conceptualisation of possible selves is, as mentioned, a key characteristic and it implies a substantial degree of action and considered choice. Erikson (2007) and Knox (2006) refer to this notion as agency. Individuals construct a future image based on a desired outcome or one they wish to avoid. Because possible selves are actively pursued or avoided, they can be viewed as cognitively selected pathways. Recognising and channelling the power of the individual in this process assists in the construction of positive possible selves. It follows logically, then, that possible selves have the power to modify an individual’s behaviour to conform to the direction of attainment (Freer, 2009; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Cross & Markus,
It also follows that motivation is strongly linked to the image of a future self. Motivation is apparent when belief in ability coincides with personal attribution of importance to that ability (Martin, 2002; Simpkins, Vest, Dawes & Neuman, 2010; Strahan & Wilson, 2006) and, therefore, goals are pursued, altered and abandoned as dictated by the activated possible self.

As stated, Markus and Nurius (1986) believed that possible selves and self-concept had a substantial effect on behaviour. Feelings associated with a particular self-concept can activate possible selves and subsequently guide behaviour. If these feelings cannot be sustained an individual is forced to choose a new identity, or set of self-perceptions. Individuals make judgements about who they are and what they do in a present tense in an attempt to align current behaviour with the hoped-for self. Strahan and Wilson (2006) support this notion that possible selves need to be activated and supported by self-regulation, but they develop it further, suggesting that temporal distance, as mentioned earlier, plays a significant role. In this way, “how subjectively close the past or future self feels” (p. 5) will have a strong moderating influence on the individual’s behaviour, because it either reduces or widens the gap between past, current and future selves. They also add that people keep positive memories, or successes, close and distance themselves from negative ones, or failures, thereby protecting their view of the current self. Vignoles, Manzi, Regalia, Jemmolo and Scabini (2008) express a similar view regarding preservation of an esteemed self. Attaching an emotional response to an experience, past or future, will help impel a person toward their goal (Stevenson & Clegg, 2011). Discrepancies between different selves are minimised when individuals hold detailed and clear images of their possible selves (Oyserman et al., 2004; Stevenson & Clegg, 2011) and having multiple futures also means that the individual is less likely to focus on negative possibilities. Carroll et al. (2009) discusses the process of discarding possible selves, perceived as unattainable or endangered, describing this as “downward self-revision” (p. 551).

Identity, from the perspective of possible selves, is always forward-looking, always future-oriented (Cross & Markus, 1994; Erikson, 2007; Freer, 2009; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Sica, 2009). Erikson (2007) adds that possible selves
are an integral part of the self-concept, stating that “there is a fundamental interdependency between possible selves and other parts of the self-concept” (p. 353). The primary link to which Erikson refers is that of “personalized meaning” (p. 353), which means that possible selves exist only when the projected self holds internalised meaning for the individual (Oyserman & James, 2011). The reciprocity highlighted by Erikson demonstrates that possible selves are both a product and part of the self-concept. “Personal investment” (Dunkel & Anthis, 2001, p. 774) is also used to denote the importance of personal connection with possible selves and, according to Dunkel and Anthis (2001), this will increase the stability of future selves. Stevenson and Clegg (2011) agree that possible selves are essential to self-concept and link it with stimulus. They comment that possible selves have a “cognitive and an affective role in motivation” (p. 233) and comparably, Carroll et al. (2009) state that possible selves are “personalized goal representations of the self in desired or undesired future end states” (p. 550).

### 3.2 Possible Selves and Context

Possible selves, however, do not exist in isolation but rather are directly influenced by context. Oyserman and James (2011) state that,

> Possible identities are not fixed. Rather they are amended, revised, and even dropped depending on contextual affordances and constraints, and these changes are not necessarily conscious and deliberate (p. 120).

The images of projected selves may be individually constructed, they may be kept private or made public, but they remain constructed within a set of contextual parameters and most often in reference to others (Erikson, 2007; Oyserman & James, 2011). The overarching limiter in this sense is socio-cultural context, where a person can only make decisions derived from the norms of the cultural context in which they exist or of which they have had experience, however small or vicarious (Elmore & Oyserman, 2012). Gender is considered an aspect of this socio-cultural construction and adolescence is a time of grappling with such elements. The choral perspective is also considered in light of these contexts, discussed in section 3.2.4.
3.2.1 The socio-cultural context

The theory of possible selves highlights the significance of social context in the conceptualization and striving for future selves or goals. Researchers concur that possible selves are always socially constructed. They argue that the decisions and choices individuals make cannot be separated from the context and society in which they live. In a very real sense, social and historical context define the individual, shaping them and influencing their choices (Cross & Markus, 1994; Erikson, 2007; Freer, 2009, 2010; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Oyserman & James, 2011; Sica, 2009). Self-belief in ability is also an important factor, yet the perception of peers and social acceptance (aspects of social construction) are major contributors to the development of possible selves.

From the perspective of music education, Welch (2007) argues that socio-cultural factors have the power to influence and “shape musical behaviour” (p. 25), which is particularly apparent when considering longstanding, historical traditions of a culture such as the English cathedral choir tradition. Sica (2009) suggests that the relationship between the individual and their context is reciprocal in that self and context simultaneously define and are defined by each other. A significant part of this context involves the perceptions of others. Even past experiences of success and failure are social “due to these successes and failures frequently being successes and failures with others” (Sica, 2009, p. 224). This is supported by Erikson (2007) who says that possible selves involve “situations in which we are interacting with others” (p. 354). In addition, actions based on personal values and beliefs are inherently social because a belief system has been developed over time in a social context. Significant others, such as parents, peers and role models, can greatly influence an individual’s choices and future directions context. Simpkins, Vest, Dawes and Neuman (2010) discuss the influential role of parents on the development of their child’s abilities, interests and pursuits. Freer (2009) and Elmore and Oyserman (2012) also recognise the power of parental influence. Parents act as role models for behaviour, values and motivation. Sica (2009) agrees by saying, “specific others and social contexts play an important role in the creation and maintenance of possible selves” (p. 224). Vignoles, Manzi, Regalia, Jemmolo and Scabini (2008) discuss the way individuals use significant others as comparisons in deciding
about their own possibilities. They reiterate the relevance of socio-cultural context, suggesting that an individual not only learns the possibilities available within their context but even more significantly, they learn what options are most attractive or advantageous. As a consequence, the values associated with the context become an assumed part of identity, otherwise described by Vignoles et al. (2008) as “internalizing stereotypes and norms relating to important social identities” (p. 1168). In a similar way, the traditions of a culture, an element of socio-cultural context or social construction, can be powerful influences on an individual’s identity and subsequent choices. The potential to be limited by stereotypes or traditions can be heightened. Sica (2009) cautions that, when these values become “self-guides” (p. 225), the exploration of possible identities is potentially restricted, and Brown and Dickman (2010) draw attention to the role of gender in formulating possible selves.

### 3.2.2 The gender context

Socio-cultural influence is also reflected in constructions of gender. Chapter 2 discussed masculinity from the perspective of the Australian male, as it has developed over many years. Possible selves, therefore, are significantly affected by the traditionally generated roles assigned to the male and female genders and it is important to consider the “socio-historical contexts within which individuals develop” (Anthis, Dunkel & Anderson, 2004, p. 151). The nature of the research study highlights that which pertains to males but this focus does not negate or ignore the female perspective. It is acknowledged that females must also navigate their way through prescriptive gender norms and that, even in this era, this remains a difficult and often unrewarding task (Summers, 2013). Adler and Harrison (2004) recognise that women must conform to male societal standards in order to experience similar levels of workplace success or equal standing, and Summers (2013) discusses in detail the prevailing inequality reflected in the status of men and women in Australian society. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this piece, the gender context will focus on how socialized meanings of gender affect male possible selves.

Brown and Dickman (2010) provide a clear statement, indicating that,
women’s and men’s ideas about what is appropriate for their own gender emerge from their internalization of the current social structure [and that] internalized social roles provide the basis by which men and women seek to regulate their behaviour (p. 569).

In other words, and consistent with references made previously, both men and women are bound by the context in which they exist. Gender roles have been established over many years during which they become an assumed aspect of social life, often going unquestioned or unchallenged. Brown and Dickman (2010) also suggest that gender roles influence actions and futures in different ways at different times. Sometimes gender role difference appears minimal, such as that of school-aged children and even students at university. The task in these contexts is to study toward the completion of a course. After that, however, age and stage of life play a more differentiating role. Gender roles become more specific and are generally attached to life tasks such as parenting and career. Traditional roles suggest that a man should be concerned with succeeding in a career in order to earn money and support his family. The woman is typically allocated the nurturing role. Despite progress in the breaking down of such stereotypical assignments, the culture remains and continues to fashion and limit choices (Summers, 2013).

According to Elmore and Oyserman (2012) “gender is a core identity” (p. 177) and is established in the early years of life. By two years of age children are aware of their gender and the gender of those around them. They interpret their world in terms of what is and is not acceptable to their gender’s discourse, and this learned response perpetuates the gender stereotype. “Gender congruent action” (p. 177) is apparent in most decisions made by young children and even adolescents, including decisions regarding suitable toys and desired careers (Elmore & Oyserman, 2012). Brown and Dickman (2010) found that this phenomenon was apparent in relation to perceptions about the role of caregiver. Men believed that engaging in this role meant they were essentially lowering their gender status because it was gender-stereotyped as feminine. Another related interpretation was that caregiving reflected a relationally focused role, which was also attributed to women. Consequently, men reported this “role-incongruous” (p. 577) self as a feared self. There is the suggestion by Elmore and Oyserman (2012) that the gender restrictions governing males are
more severe, than those for females, and that males face greater censure from teachers, parents and peers for stepping outside ‘male’ behaviour patterns. Males learn to conform to that which has been socially assigned to the male gender and their ensuing congruent behaviour, once again, perpetuates these gender regimes (Connell, 2008). According to Knox, Funk, Elliott and Greene Bush (2000), however, “gender-role socialization intensifies at adolescence” (p. 302). The importance of adhering to masculine values is reflected in the descriptions provided by Knox (2006). She says males are inclined to be goal-focused, that these goals relate to their individual aspirations, and that male possible selves “emphasize autonomy and separateness” (p. 62). Knox also reports that the possible selves of men are “extreme” and are viewed as “superior to others” (p. 63) but she proposes that this demonstrates the gendered expectation on males to be the best and the “social comparison necessary in establishing superiority” (p. 63). Having high expectations, often unattainable, can have serious ramifications for self-esteem and Knox notes the importance of further research into understanding the nature of male possible selves. Similarly, Elmore and Oyserman (2012) recommend further investigation, suggesting that understanding the way school-aged children formulate possible selves can be used in the development of strategies related to motivating students, both male and female. Gender remains an important factor of influence for adolescents even though “gender stereotypes may become more flexible during adolescence” (Elmore & Oyserman, 2012, p. 177).

3.2.3 The adolescent context

The social context of possible selves is particularly relevant to understanding adolescent identity formation. There is general agreement that adolescence is a time when young people are grappling with the construction of identity (Dunkel & Anthis, 2001; Freer, 2009, 2010; Knox, Funk, Elliott & Greene Bush, 2000; Message, 2009; Sica, 2009). By this stage adolescents are capable of imagining themselves as they may exist in the future, even when there are several competing possible images. This includes pursuing desired paths as well as avoiding unwanted or feared outcomes. Freer (2009) describes adolescence as an opportunity for an individual to “try on possible selves” (p. 342) and a range
of different personas or identities, without the pressure of having to choose one or commit to any of them. He adds that adolescents do not necessarily possess the “strategies to achieve those possible selves” (Freer, 2010, p. 20), which has the potential to increase the anxiety associated with those unwanted futures they perceive as possibilities. Knox et al. (2000) concur that adolescents experiment with possibilities and assess their prospective ability in any given area and that for boys this is usually associated with the gendered notion of being the best, as stated previously. The theory of ‘self-in-relation’ (Knox et al. 2000; Knox, 2006) reflects the notion of developing possible selves and identity based on socialized gender norms. A direct manifestation of this phenomenon is seen in the readiness of boys to communicate feared selves, and these feared selves are usually based on gender-incongruent possibilities, such as expressing emotion. This means that boys are afraid of deviating from gender standards and the “traditional masculine gender role” (Knox et al., 2000, p. 301) so their feared selves are described in terms of not being capable of exhibiting the expectations of the masculine place in society. As mentioned, significant others can play an important role in the development of possible selves. For adolescents, validation from respected role models, regardless of what they may represent, is extremely powerful and generates “success in possible selves” (Knox, 2006, p. 64). The media can act as a significant other, confronting adolescents with a range of behaviour modelling, both positive and negative. At the same time, however, boys are socialized to attribute their successes to personal ability and their failures to external factors (Knox, 2006), which can directly affect visions of self.

Martin (2002) discusses self-concept in a way that both confirms and extends the theory of possible selves. He describes three combinations, or “lethal cocktails” (p. 76), of self-belief, sense of control, and fear of failure. In the context of students’ school achievement levels, Martin (2002) discovered that students who had a high level of self-belief, a heightened sense of being able to control whether they succeed or fail, and a low fear of failure, equated to students who were considered success-oriented. They were able to persist at tasks, to adjust their strategies in order to achieve a better outcome, were not anxious about failing because it did not form part of the picture they had of
themselves. Rosevear (2010) echoes this belief. In contrast, failure avoidant students exhibited low self-belief, low sense of control, and high fear of failure. Carroll, Shepperd and Arkin (2009), Oyserman et al. (2004), Sica (2009), and Stevenson and Clegg (2011) discuss similar phenomena. Martin’s (2002) work highlights the cognitive processes associated with choosing future directions in the same way that possible selves theory does. He argues that adolescents need provision of opportunities through which they can enhance self-belief, enhance their sense of control, and reduce any fear of failure. He suggests practical ways of addressing these issues, including “real experience of success” (p. 82), focusing on those areas that students feel able to control, and finding ways of “minimising the link between students’ self-worth and their achievement” (p. 82). Overall, there is a suggestion that effort be rewarded and viewed as success, rather than emphasis being placed on achievement per se. This is interesting in light of Knox’s (2006) argument that boys’ valued possible selves are achievement focused and their successes are attributed to ability and talent. At the same time, girls’ successes are attributed to effort, not ability. Fearing failure is a powerful motivator and for boys, who often only nurture a single possible self (Freer, 2009), failure leaves them with having to establish a new goal or future self, having had to abandon the last.

With specific focus, Nagel (1990) discusses the fear of failure in the context of musicians’ performance anxiety. This phenomenon is characterised by an intense desire to succeed, to perform at their best, coupled with the counteracting force of the perceived negative social ramifications of failure and the intense desire to avoid failure. In support Osbourne and Kenny (2008) state that,

Negative cognitions appear to have a more important role in causing performance disruption than physiological or behavioural components of performance anxiety (p. 448).

With practical sense, Message (2009) discusses ways of addressing a fear of failure in the context of boys and art, agreeing that lack of self-confidence and self-belief have a detrimental effect on perseverance and motivation in art making. The notion of gender-socialized possible selves, however, could offer an effective explanation for this. Art-making is traditionally aligned with the
feminine gender and so boys risk engaging in gender-incongruent behaviour. Participating in a choir also represents a gender-incongruent context for Australian boys because singing has been socially constructed to reflect non-masculine qualities (Harrison, 2009a).

3.2.4 The choir context

Freer (2009) extends the discussion of possible selves to encompass a musical context, and more specifically, the male choral singer. Adolescent boys tend to pursue a single possible self rather than multiple possibilities and focus is usually based on perceived skill. That is, boys are considered to pursue something for which they believe they possess adequate ability to achieve success. As mentioned, because adolescence is a time characterised by anxiety and uncertainty, and because the individual conception of possible selves remains untested and unverified, this feature of identity continues to exist in a state of vulnerability (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Freer, 2009; Sica, 2009) and it is the individual's immediate social context that poses the most significant, potential threat. Likewise, Freer (2009) comments that a boy's self-esteem is indelibly linked to their perceived competence, that "boys ascribe self-esteem to skill and ability" (p. 342) and motivation for an activity will follow if the conception of possible selves is strong. The consideration and exploration of possible selves is not enough, however. Thinking about possibilities must be accompanied by action and behaviour, which is "directed toward the goal of realising a possible self" (Freer, 2010, p. 20). Realisation and internalisation can be viewed as creating a self-guide devoted to the "hoped-for and to-be-avoided possible selves" (Freer, 2009, p. 344). A number of factors affecting the possible selves of boys in a choir context are discussed by Freer (2009, 2010) and echoed in a more general sense, by others (Martin, 2002; Simpkins, Vest, Dawes & Neuman, 2010; Sica, 2009; Durrant, 2005). These elements include: positive role models, particularly older males, who provide adolescent boys with the confidence to pursue a future involving their participation in choir; positive relationships and significant others, such as the conductor or choir leader, parents and friends, providing support and validation; a well-defined picture of possible selves (or self) fostering motivation; and providing opportunities for
boys to enjoy success, thereby associating positive feelings to the activity of singing in a choir. A study by Varvarigou, Creech and Hallam (2013) demonstrated that for young musicians, interacting with significant others in a context of musical excellence was a powerful motivator involved in the development of detailed possible selves.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter has explored possible selves theory, the self-concept and identity formation. The intentionality of constructing possible selves implies that there is scope to aid boys in creating a positive possible self, which envisages choir in their immediate and long term future. To this end, Freer (2009) applies the Possible Selves Questionnaire (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Oyserman & Markus, 1990) to devising a Possible Selves Program in Music. This program represents a planned approach to adolescents imagining, visualising and conceptualising their possible futures by navigating through a series of stages. Each stage refines the thoughts of the individual and directs them to create strategies for achieving desired possible selves. Part of this process also entails identifying the negative or unwanted possible selves and planning strategies for avoiding these as outcomes. Boys move through two main phases, conceptualisation and realisation, through processes of discovering, thinking, imagining, reflecting, growing, and performing (Freer, 2009, p. 343).

The significance of socio-cultural context is exemplified in the work of Durrant (2005) who offers a glimpse into the context of Scandinavian choirs. The men involved in these choirs fiercely defended the inclusion of cultural folk songs, sung in their traditional languages, and reported that the social aspects of belonging were almost as important as the musical aspects. They gained satisfaction from working together and described a “collective identity” (p. 93) and they believed in generating and subsequently maintaining this strong sense of cultural identity. Faulkner (2012) offers another example in an Icelandic male voice choir. He comments on aspects of cultural significance in the music and traditions as well as the masculine values inherent in the practice. Welch,
Saunders, Papageorgi and Himonides (2012) offer their insight from the perspective of the United Kingdom, again highlighting the power of socio-cultural context. Like Erikson (2007) and Knox (2006), Schnare, MacIntyre and Doucette (2012) also note the importance of agency, and in the context of practising musicians this sense of being able to exert control of their future is an important factor. In their study, Schnare et al. (2012) found that musicians’ positive possible selves involved motivational aspects related to improvement, social interaction, success and enjoyment. Their feared selves were converse representations of their positive possible selves. For example, “being a poor musician” (p. 103) was a feared self and an opposite representation of “improvement” (p. 100), which was a positive possible self.

The socio-cultural context pertinent to the Australian male has been discussed in the previous chapter. Chapter 2 discussed masculinity from this Australian perspective and demonstrated the power of culture to influence values, gender, and behaviour. Harrison (2012) summarises the situation of the Australian male by saying,

*Men who do participate in certain art-forms can be perceived as living outside the expected models of Australian masculinity and risk ridicule, bullying, and social rejection (p. 68).*

Also from an Australian perspective, Collins (2012) advocates creating a culture of boys’ singing by focusing on individual contexts. She describes her model, *Boys’ Music Ecosystem*, which requires the balancing of a range of influential social and environmental factors in order to establish “successful methods for encouraging and maintaining a culture of singing in a school” (p. 103). Barrett (2012) also suggests that a rich experience of early childhood music particularly in the social setting of their family is important to a child’s future involvement in musical activity, which supports the theory of possible selves that says the formulation and experience of detailed positive possible selves has significant impact on the subsequent realisation of those possible selves. It also demonstrates the integral role of culture in the development of contextual possible selves.
It can be seen, therefore, that ideologies of masculinity, both individual conceptions and those socially influenced, in conjunction with the formation of identity (or identities) have significant impact on the decision-making processes of boys and men. In addition, and conceptually very closely tied, is the notion of success. This is considered in the following chapter, Chapter 4: Success.
The notion of success involves a variety of meanings and is largely dependent on the values, beliefs and goals held by an individual and the context in which they function. Success is a ubiquitous term and universally understood, however, it does not hold a single or universal meaning. Instead it is a subjective term that reflects the concerns and contexts of an individual. It is often linked with financial and material gain, academic and educational achievement, status, and the personal expression of satisfaction and enjoyment through an activity.

Dyke and Murphy (2006) suggest that the definition of success for a man will almost always be based on the acquisition of wealth and status, and is connected to the dominant stereotype of masculinity. Male success is associated with fulfilling the roles traditionally ascribed to a man such as “breadwinner” and “provider” (p. 358) and it is through work, or career, that a man seeks to sustain his family and fulfil these roles. Success, therefore, is primarily defined by positive career prospects and advancement, and accompanying income. Men and women may achieve comparable levels of career attainment but their interpretation of their success will be quite different and they will employ different methods of evaluating their achievements. Subjective success is considered the way in which an individual “measures how successful they are according to personal criteria” (p. 359). A similar sentiment is echoed by Rosevear (2010) who discusses the link between personal enjoyment and
success, as well as the importance of effort in defining successful behaviour. In contrast, women's view of success is characterised by the significance of relationships and personal concerns, and whilst Dyke and Murphy (2006) make the distinction between men and women, they conclude that personal definitions of success will directly affect the variety of choices that confront an individual throughout life, in much the same way that conceptions of possible selves direct a person's behaviour and course of action.

In his exploration of measures of aesthetic quality in the arts, Ginsburgh (2003) considers the aspects that denote success in relation to movies, books and music. He makes an overall conclusion that the receipt of awards is a good predictor of success but not of quality, and it does not necessarily follow that receiving an award will equate to success. It is important to understand the definition of success used in this instance. Ginsburgh considers three facets or measures of success: expert rankings and the awarding of prizes; economic benefit and money earned; and long term reputation. He analyses movies in relation to the effect of winning an Academy Award or Oscar, and books in terms of the effect of winning the Booker Prize. The Queen Elisabeth Piano Competition was used as the context for assessing the effect on a musician of winning a prestigious award. The measures used here included the number of subsequent recordings by the artist and the ratings provided by music critics. Ginsburgh admits there are limitations and factors that may influence the emergent outcomes – performance position, age, nationality, gender – but nevertheless it appeared certain that “rankings definitely affect success” (p. 108). What remain potent are the elements of success implied in the analysis: the importance of expert opinion, that of a significant other person; and the public manifestation of some form of material or financial gain. Cooper (2010) supports this and provides the example of the success of male recording duos, which is measured by “chart ranking and sustaining repetitive song popularity... [and] public recognition and influence on fellow performers” (p. 237). Strobl and Tucker (2000) approach their exploration of influences on popular chart success by considering standard 'measures of success' such as the number of albums by an artist, and the number of weeks spent on the popularity chart.
Moore, Burland and Davidson (2003) define the successful musician as a practising, professional performer. They go as far as to define unsuccessful as the musician who does not earn money from playing music. They found that whilst motivation and practising their instrument was important in the musical development of a child, it did not equate to success. It is interesting to note that Moore, Burland and Davidson support the view that parents and friends play a significant role in the successes, or otherwise, of an individual.

The career success of classical musicians was explored by Jarvin and Subotnik (2010) who considered a range of developmental stages associated with the classical music student. They propose that success is defined through a number of elements including, level of attainment in analysing music, creativity in interpretation, practical or technical skill, and musicality. Success, related to what Jarvin and Subotnik describe as “giftedness” (p. 78), is the development of ability firstly, into “expertise” and then into “the realm of elite talent” (p. 79). They acknowledge that innate, genetic, and environmental factors also have an impact on outcome. The study identified a range of characteristics in a series of discrete stages, each building on the previous stage in complexity and increasing musical autonomy and identity. These characteristics were considered the “keys to success” (p. 85). For Lanier (2007), success in the context of the performing choir is about being the best, reaching the highest possible standard and maintaining that standard. A high standard of performance requires proper technique, authentic interpretation, appropriate choreography, good leadership and consistent quality of sound. Two keys to success offered by Lanier are the suitable matching of repertoire with the personality and nature of the choir, and the development of appropriate choreography. No innovation should ever be applied at the expense of the vocal quality, a belief endorsed by Sigman (2010) in his discussion of successful professional choirs.

Consistent with the suggestion that definitions of success are many and varied, is the proposal of Jones (2004) that too often success is only considered as an outcome. In the educational context that outcome is exemplified by “higher levels of achievement” (p. 7). Jones suggests that success be increasingly defined
by the processes associated with effort and learning, which connects with Knox et al. (2000) who discuss ability and effort, and Lyons et al. (2012) who argue that effort has strong implications for learning. Jones (2004) agrees that success has a subjective nature and definitions are influenced by socio-cultural context. She goes on to argue that success is a “dynamic social construct” (p. 20), which is interpreted in different contexts. She also distinguishes between two forms of success in a school or institutional context: frontstage and backstage. Frontstage success consists of the outward representations of the quality of the school or institution. This traditionally includes examination results, citizenship, and public image. Backstage success, a neglected area, consists of action related to effort and process, rather than outcome alone. It is much harder to quantify this form of success because it changes according to the immediate social context. Backstage success is particularly characterised by student agency, control and attitude, viewed in action. For this reason, Jones purports that teachers need to be trusted to “assess these qualities over time” (p. 17).

Social capital and its effect on career success is the subject of a study by Seibert, Kraimer and Liden (2001) and it highlights, once again, that success is dependent on social context. Social capital is defined as those factors within the social organisation of an individual that attribute value to that “social structure” (p. 220). The study aims to combine past theories of social capital to form one more accurate and comprehensive understanding of the effect it has on the career of an individual. Career success remains defined by salary, promotion and satisfaction but it is affected by a range of social constructions within the workplace, particularly those related to networking – “access to information, access to resources, and career sponsorship” (p. 232). Wandersman (2009) offers yet another perspective on success in the context of programs and policies but which has applicability to other settings. He outlines a number of elements that facilitate success but tends to describe what happens if the elements are ignored. The first element is theory, which provides guidance and aids the planning of strategies for the attainment of goals. It also affords a sense of the relationship between present and future goals. The second, implementation, is the act of putting something into practice, the success of
which depends on the quality and resources associated with the implementation. Evaluation is the third element discussed. It focuses on considering the efficacy of the action and is influenced significantly by the personal opinions of those involved. The final element, resource/system support is concerned with having appropriate support, which exists in various forms within a company or institution. Wandersman's discussion aligns with research on self-belief, self-concept and possible selves in that it recognises the deliberate action associated with choosing a specific course, which is perceived by an individual to offer potential success.

**Chapter Summary**

Success is defined in a number of ways and whilst it is universally recognised and has aspects understood consistently across a range of contexts, it remains a subjective term, holding individual meaning and significance. It is commonly considered in terms related to achievement and wealth creation, personal satisfaction and goal attainment, excellence and standard. It can also be seen, that definitions and ideologies of masculinity prevalent in Australian society, as well as the formation of identity or the potential identities explained by possible selves theory, have a significant and reciprocal influence on perceptions of success.

The next chapter describes the method, research instruments and analysis used for this study. The chapter immediately following the method is a study of five professional conductors, included to show a contrasting context to the Australian experience. The chapters following Chapter 6 outline the findings of the research conducted with four choirs under the themes of the Literature Review.
Chapter 5: Methodology

5 Methodology

Our lived space and mind define each other reciprocally

(Pallasmaa, 2000, p. 7)

Summary

The following chapter provides a description of the research methodology, research instruments and analysis employed in the research with the boys and men in choirs. Additionally, Chapter 6 presents the methodology and findings associated with including the opinions and experience of five professional conductors, providing a comparison context to Australia. It was not intended for these professional conductors to be considered participants in the choir study but rather their contribution is an expansion of the literature.

The chapter provides discussion and justification surrounding phenomenology, case study and narrative inquiry, highlighting the relevance of the three approaches adopted for this particular research. The chapter provides a description of the participating choirs and their school or community context. A brief poetic description of one participant from each of the four choirs can be found in the coloured boxes, offering a glimpse, or ‘snapshot’, of the individual male participants who were involved, highlighting and strengthening the phenomenological and narrative aspects of the methodological approach. The chapter goes on to outline the various instruments used for data collection: surveys; interviews; focus groups; observation and video analysis. Ethical considerations are identified and the approach to analysis is demonstrated.
The design of the fieldwork was directly informed by the literature from Chapters 2, 3 and 4. Literature identified the significance of socio-cultural context in determining notions of masculinity as well as influencing possible selves. The focus on Australian choirs indicates the understanding and relevance of context. The decision to include interviews with professional conductors from the UK added an element of comparison, contributing to a greater understanding of the role of context and culture. Literature about masculinity indicated the importance of physical interaction and embodied learning, and the use of video was chosen to capture and analyse these types of interactions, particularly during rehearsal times. Chapter 2: Masculinity also demonstrated the impact of voice change. Using four choirs, in a case study approach, which each represented a different life stage, was a strategy intended to build a more longitudinal picture of the process and how males experienced this development. The case study approach also reflected the recognition that context played an essential part in shaping behaviour, perceptions and choices of individuals. The importance of public recognition, performance and achievement, as described in Chapter 4: Success led to the inclusion of audience perspective from the Audience Members’ Survey (AMS). Researching experience and perceptions relies on qualitative approaches, such as phenomenology, case study and narrative inquiry. These approaches allow participants to describe their personal perspectives in an attempt to extract the essence of that experience; hence the use of interviews, surveys and focus groups.

The methodological approach in this research draws on aspects of phenomenology, case study and narrative inquiry. The reasons for this are discussed in the context of the philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology and the rationale behind each methodological approach. Figure 5.1 depicts the overlapping nature of the three approaches, where the section common to all three approaches represents the essence of a phenomenon.
Figure 5.1 Overlap of Methodological Approaches

The similarities between phenomenology, case study and narrative inquiry will also be considered in relation to how each approach supports and explicates the others, forming a more comprehensive picture of the research problem.

5.1 Phenomenology

Phenomenology is the study of phenomena in the context of the everyday life and reality of the individual. Meaning and reality exist in a reciprocal relationship in which each one defines, and is defined by, the other, simultaneously. The various approaches to phenomenological research, although different in minor ways, are essentially concerned with discovering meaning, and depending on the approach, interpreting meaning as it exists in the form of an individual’s reality.

Researching the creativity of individuals is potentially idiosyncratic. The fundamentally subjective nature of phenomenology makes it an appropriate framework for contemplating the creative pursuits and the aesthetic experiences of individuals. Singing is a particularly pertinent example of this
because not only is it an intensely creative and personal means of expression, it is also interpreted by listeners and performers in a personal, emotional and subjective manner. Callaghan (2000) suggests that,

The act of singing involves the whole person: the body responding in particular ways to express thoughts and emotions, verbal meanings and musical meanings. While singing involves language and music, the body registers internal sensations of vibration, movement and sound, and it attends and responds to external sensations such as the sound of its own voice and the sight and sound of other singers and instrumental accompaniment (p. 16)

Employing a combination of methodological approaches is a valuable way of obtaining rich and detailed data. It offers the potential for exploring themes in more depth and the way in which these directly relate to the individuals involved. Phenomenology focuses on understanding a particular phenomenon; case study broadens and contextualises the study of this phenomenon; and narrative inquiry provides an opportunity for the experiences of the individuals to be reconstructed and retold from the viewpoint of participants. From the perspective of this research study the phenomenon of interest relates to the perceptions of success held by males in the context of singing in a choir, with the stories of participants being constructed through the dialogue resulting from surveys, interviews and observation.

Voice is a natural part of what it is to be human and singing is a natural expression of that humanity, an intrinsic characteristic (Durrant, 2005). It is both an internal and external activity; a spiritual and physical interaction. Pallasmaa (2000) suggests that the physical experience of life is understood, mediated, interpreted and defined by context:

We behold, touch, listen and measure the world with our entire bodily existence, and the experiential world is organised and articulated around the centre of the body... We are in constant dialogue and interaction with the environment, to the degree that it is impossible to detach the image of the Self from its spatial and situational context (p. 8).

An individual simultaneously defines, and is defined by, their physicality and their associated milieu. Singing both constructs and expresses what it is to be living. When people sing they are offering something of their internal self to the external world in which they exist. Singing publicly invites a range of responses
connected with that gesture, and not all of these are consistent with each other. For the singer, the vocal response is a representation or expression of their lived experience and, at the same time, their lived experience is influenced by their vocal expression. Put another way, an individual’s experience of a phenomenon, object or concept, influences the individual, and the individual influences that experience in a reciprocal and dependant relationship. Experience is shaped by a person and a person is shaped by experience. Lived experiences are the constituents of being (Pallasmaa, 2000; 2006; Vitale, 2008) and present experience is shaped by past and will, in turn, shape future experience (van Manen, 1997).

Pallasmaa (2006) considers this notion of lived experience extensively in his work. As an architect he believes that the meaning in every building is contained within an individual's understanding of 'self', and that art should always enable us to experience ourselves as complete human beings. The reciprocal relationship inherent in phenomenological experience is also evident in Pallasmaa’s thinking, “We are inside and outside of the object at the same time” (p. 29), and “…our lived space and mind define each other reciprocally…” (Pallasmaa, 2000, p. 7). Consciousness both constructs and perceives experience (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000). The creative experience is a juxtapositioning of an intensely personal moment and a public aesthetic expression. These combine to form multiple existential realities (Pallasmaa, 2000).

Phenomenology is a field within philosophy that seeks to understand and explain phenomena as an individual experiences them subjectively. Merleau-Ponty (2002) defines it as “the study of essences” (p. vii) adding that phenomenology then “puts essences back into existence” (p. vii). Such philosophy aims to suspend judgement, believing that reality is constructed through conscious experience, where the individual and the phenomenon cannot be separated. Subjectivity is therefore the key to understanding individual experience, where the individual and the phenomenon exist in a symbiotic relationship. For Flood (2010), phenomenology is concerned with uncovering meaning associated with an experience and not refining information...
for the purpose of generalisation or theory building. She suggests that there are two levels of meaning that need to be considered in the phenomenological context. One is the cognitive meaning, which relates to the information, conceptual knowledge and description gathered. Cognitive meaning is also associated with information being understood or accessed by others. Non-cognitive is the second type of meaning, which is the expression or emotion evoked through the experience, and one that deepens the receiver’s understanding of the researched lived experience. Cognitive meaning and non-cognitive meaning combine to form a conceptual - felt understanding to allow different outside interpretations and perceptions.

From the perspective of O’Leary (2004), phenomenology is the study of an individual’s experience of a phenomenon, otherwise known as lived experience. This is relevant to this research project in that it seeks to study the individual experience of males in choirs. Phenomenological research and philosophy is a search for the meaning associated with a lived experience (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Flood, 2010; Pallasmaa, 2000; van Manen, 1997). The phenomenon, also known as the object, is neutral – a construct devoid of socially constructed meaning. The lived experience therefore is not endowed with any sense of judgement. Phenomenology is not interested in understanding or judging the reality of the object, but rather it seeks to understand an individual’s experience of it. The reality of the situation is not being questioned but rather the experience associated with that reality. Phenomenology is not about cause, it is not about definition, it is about experience – the relationship between the individual and the object. Whilst phenomenology is dependent on the individual, the focus is not the individual. The focus is the individual’s lived experience, their interaction, connection and relationship to the object. According to van Manen (1997),

Lived experience is the starting point and end point of phenomenological research. The aim of phenomenology is to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence (p. 36).

The research whose method is described here and whose findings are in Chapters 7, 8 and 9, aimed to explore the lived experience of males singing in the context of a choir and provide a detailed reconstructive description of these
experiences. Cresswell (2007) states that phenomenology is a description of the essence of a phenomenon, and suggests that researchers aim to identify the commonalities of experiences described by participants. Describing or illuminating the essence of a phenomenon is a common characteristic of phenomenological study and philosophy (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Cresswell, 2007; Glendinning, 2008; Pallasmaa, 2006); however the purpose behind this strategy differs depending on the phenomenological perspective.

A transcendental approach to phenomenology, based on the work of Husserl (1927), is particularly interested in consciousness. It advocates the investigation of a phenomenon outside the social and cultural context, and uses rich, detailed description as the primary method of disseminating findings. Researchers pursuing this avenue of inquiry are required to candidly acknowledge their standpoint and then place their own beliefs and perceptions to the side. This process, known as ‘bracketing’ (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Cresswell, 2007; Flood, 2010; Morse & Richards, 2002), enables the researcher to view the experiences of others with fresh and impartial eyes, and attempts to mitigate the influence of the researcher’s own perspective. This is an important process to consider in terms of the current research study due to the personal and professional beliefs and experience of the researcher. Flood (2010) notes that, historically, transcendental or descriptive phenomenology – and its belief in the importance of researching subjectivity – developed in response to the dominance of scientific methodologies. It was within this climate that the notion of ‘bracketing’ was employed to “ensure scientific rigour” (p. 9). Proponents of the transcendental approach also believed that there was a single way of experiencing a particular phenomenon, one essence of the lived experience. This stands in considerable contrast to existential phenomenology.

An existential approach to phenomenological research, based on the work of Schutz (1970), differs in one main regard. It believes in the significance of background, culture and social context in influencing the experiences of the individual. “People are considered to be tied to their worlds – embodied – and are understandable only in their contexts” (Morse & Richards, 2002, p. 45). An existential understanding, one based largely on personal experience rather than
logic or reason, proposes that whilst these influences impact experiences, the experiences are in fact derived from these contextual influences (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). In addition to this, and integral to such an approach, is reflexivity, the premise that lived experiences have no meaning in themselves except when reflecting upon them. Morse and Richards (2002) concur and suggest that individual behaviour must always be interpreted within contextual and relational parameters. Gubrium and Holstein (2000) describe these phenomenological characteristics in similar terms and confirm that the perception of an object forms part of the reality of that object, implying that the two cannot be separated. They also discuss “natural attitude” (p. 489) as being the meaning attributed to an object, concept or phenomenon regardless of how people experience it. The meaning embedded in an experience essentially directs individual perceptions of an object, to the point that individual experiences ultimately resemble familiar, everyday social constructions. Described as “intersubjectivity” (p. 489), these constructions, “typifications” (p. 489), are created over time through the interactions of everyday people.

In this personal contact you internalize another person’s way of existing and you somehow also internalize a collection of embodied reactions (Wall, 2009, p. 75)

An existential approach to phenomenology is very similar to an interpretive or hermeneutic approach. Based on the philosophy of Heidegger (Flood, 2010), this perspective is primarily concerned with understanding and describing lived experience in its complete social context and it is not the investigation of the individual, nor the investigation of the phenomenon that is of interest. Consequently, this existential phenomenological perspective does not align with the current research project because it is the investigation of the phenomenon itself that is of particular interest and is at the heart of this research. It remains, however, that the aim of phenomenology is to produce a thorough, descriptive picture of everyday experiences. Hermeneutic phenomenology seeks to interpret lived experiences and discover the meaning associated with them. It is this meaning which determines the realities of the lived experiences. Hermeneutic phenomenology, unlike other approaches, is interested in providing interpretation of lived experiences (Cresswell, 2007; Flood, 2010). Cresswell (2007) writes that phenomenology is about describing what was
experienced, “textural description”, and how it was experienced “structural description” (p. 61). Researchers attempt to find commonalities in individual accounts of their experience by way of determining the essence of the phenomenon. Heidegger used the term ‘dasein’ (Flood, 2010; Réé, 2000) in reference to lived experience. 'Dasein' can be studied ontically, where the experience is considered from the internal, subjective perspective of the individual, and ontologically, where it is interpreted from the external perspective of the world that surrounds the individual. This is expressed by Flood (2010), who says that,

The hermeneutic phenomenologist will focus on describing the meanings of the individual’s 'dasein' and how these meanings influence the choices they make rather than seek purely descriptive categories of the real, perceived world in the narratives of the participants (p. 9).

Phenomenological research can also be conducted through the analysis and synthesis of existing texts. A phenomenon may be considered from the perspective offered by authors of poetry, letters, song lyrics, books and movies. These sources are usually rich descriptions of an author's lived experience (O'Leary, 2004). These ‘other’ texts can be used in support of transcripts obtained through formal interviewing of participants. Whilst poetry, letters, books and movies are 'texts' that can be sources of lived experience, the 'text' most relevant to this research is performance, captured in audio and visual recording. Observations and recordings – audio and visual – are also valid sources of information for the phenomenological study (Cresswell, 2007).

Morse and Richards (2002) describe a variety of strategies for gathering data, indicating that,

Researchers gain insight into the phenomena they study by using a number of strategies: tracing etymological sources, searching idiomatic phrases, obtaining experiential descriptions from participants, observing and reflecting further on the phenomenological literature, and writing and rewriting (p. 147).

Conducting phenomenological research involves a number of steps and processes and these are consistent regardless of the phenomenological approach taken. O'Leary (2004) suggests that there are three main stages when planning a phenomenological study: selecting participants; collecting data; and analysing data. The act of gathering descriptions and analysing them is both the process
and product of phenomenology; the two cannot be separated. The aim of phenomenology is to obtain a variety of descriptions about a specific moment or instance in order to gain a more accurate picture of its essence. Compared to other methodologies the sample of participants will be small, but it is important to recruit a valid number to ensure variety of response and a sense of “saturation” (p. 124). The first step in phenomenology is choosing whether or not this paradigm is appropriate and Cresswell (2007) believes it is important that the chosen phenomenon be of deep interest to the researcher and that broader assumptions surrounding the phenomenon be recognised. He also notes the importance of choosing participants who are known to have an experience of the phenomenon. Flood (2010) outlines three phases through which a phenomenological study will pass. The first involves recognising the context of the participant’s experience; the second involves building a picture of that experience; and the third involves a reflective process of understanding the meaning of the experience.

5.2 Case Study

The value of using a case study approach in research is manifested in the versatility and scope available in such an approach. The case study allows for a deep investigation of a person, group, issue or phenomenon within the unique boundary of its context. It aims to explore the issue in the context of those involved and thereby uncover the ‘truth’ or reality of the instance. In this way the intention of scrutinising a specific example becomes the formulation of a “more general principle” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000, p. 181). There is debate as to whether the case study is a form of methodology (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Cresswell, 2007) or whether it simply describes that which is to form the subject of study (Stake, 2000). Either way, the result is the study of a particular case or multiple cases.

The case study is a common strategy employed in qualitative research and may be used to investigate a single person, a number of individuals, a whole group, or an activity, all of which are considered in the relevant context. Cresswell
(2007) briefly discusses various types of case studies, which differ in terms of the perspective of intention. For example, the “instrumental case study” (p. 74) is the study of a single case that seeks to exemplify the broader subject or problem. Similarly, a “collective case study” (p. 74), as the name suggests, is the investigation of a number of cases in order to provide a general picture of the larger concern. The preference by many researchers for this approach is the richness of perspective that multiple opinions and descriptions can provide. An “intrinsic case study” (p. 74) is different to the other forms in that the case itself is the focus of the study rather than a way of providing an exemplar of a broader issue. These case study categories are also discussed by Stake (2000) who adds that they overlap and are “heuristic more than determinative” (p. 438). For example, the intrinsic case study can indirectly lead readers, and researchers, to apply the research findings to other situations, or it can provide insight into a broader experience, beyond the bounds of the original intrinsic case. It should be noted that it is not the intention of case study research of the participants from four choirs to provide a generalised descriptive essence of the experiences researched. However, the value of what is discovered and retold may offer potential insight into similar situations, and will add to the body of knowledge focused on understanding the subjective nature of the musical creativity and expression, and the musical identity of the individual. Other modes of case study research are defined by their intended outcome, many of which are outlined by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000). They advise that exploratory case studies are used in the same manner as pilot studies and seek to “generate hypotheses” (p. 183); descriptive case studies provide “narrative accounts” (p. 183); and explanatory case studies aim to test theories. They continue to describe other categories, such as the interpretive case study, which is preoccupied by creating concept groups to explain data; and evaluative case studies which seek to highlight meaning and make judgements.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) also suggest that the case study is a useful way of understanding the ‘cause and effect’ relationship and that it provides an authentic glimpse into a reality, albeit a contextual and possibly subjective reality. The significance of this is recognising that context will always have an
effect on its subjects and the individual or phenomenon within that context subsequently determines reality. The current research recognises the inherent subjectivity of each case and consequently seeks to describe and interpret without the preoccupation of generalizability. It acknowledges, however, the potential worth and applicability of findings to other settings or cases.

Having a clearly defined context is the first step to beginning case study inquiry, followed by the selection of participants. The choice of case will depend on what is being researched. If, for example, a variety of perspectives on a particular theme, activity or concept is going to be most useful for achieving desired results, then a multiple, or collective case study will be the more appropriate approach. Gathering data is the next phase and involves a widespread sourcing of information, including interview data, observation, recordings and documents. Yin (2003, as cited in Cresswell, 2007) endorses six different sources of material: “documents, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant-observations, and physical artefacts” (p. 75). After collecting data the process of analysis begins. Holistic analysis and embedded analysis (Cresswell, 2007) are two types of case study analysis. The first considers the research case as a whole entity, and the second focuses on a particular element within the case subject. At this point a comprehensive description of the study is compiled by communicating contextual elements such as geographic location, a timeline, or chronological representation of ‘events’ and relevant actions associated with the everyday mechanics of the case (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Cresswell, 2007). Similar to the analysis of phenomenological texts, discussed earlier, the case study descriptions are then analysed using a thematic approach. The intention is not necessarily to create a generalisation but rather to make the intricacy of meaning accessible and apparent. When a collective case study approach is employed there are two main analytic steps to consider: within-case analysis and cross-case analysis. Within-case analysis involves deconstructing each of the descriptive texts separately according to themes that arise. These themes are then compared to each other in a cross-case analysis of themes. Generating themes effectively
Chapter 5: Methodology

enables the researcher to provide an interpretation of the meaning inherent within the case.

One of the most significant criticisms regarding a case study approach in qualitative research is that it often reports on the peculiarities of a case rather than the commonalities or consistent elements across cases. This brings into question the purpose that impels the study. For the qualitative researcher they are rarely concerned with reporting information so that it can be used to generalise beyond the bounds of the case. Within the qualitative context there remains criticism about the worth of researching the particular (Stake, 2000). It is not the aim of this research study to establish generalizability, however, because the research focuses on four cases, there is a significant element of cross case analysis involved when considering the responses of participants. The research attempts to provide a snapshot of the lived experience of males in a choir setting at different stages of life. In this way, commonalities or consistencies across cases will be considered but only as far as it relates to the choirs involved at the time. It is predicted, however, that the results of this research will provide valuable and applicable insight into the experiences of those outside this particular instance of exploration.

5.3 Narrative

A narrative approach uses the descriptions – written or spoken – of an individual’s response to a phenomenon, issue, situation or activity, to construct a detailed account of this experience. Significantly, a narrative text can form the object of study as well as be the product of a narrative study. Life stories such as biographies and autobiographies are larger scale examples of narrative texts and a sample on a smaller scale depicting the events of a personal experience forms the basis of narrative study. As Cresswell (2007) indicates, narrative studies can focus on a particular context, they may simply be stories told about something, or they may be generated by a perspective or theoretical belief or standpoint. The narrative process seeks to include the reader in the text and in so doing rejects the traditional view of research which suggests the reader is not actively involved but rather a passive recipient (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).
The main outcome of narrative study is to construct a story of the life experience of an individual. Cresswell (2007) reiterates this by saying that,

Narrative research is best for capturing the detailed stories or life experiences of a single life or the lives of a small number of individuals (p. 55).

Data is collected from a variety of sources including researcher observations, participant journal entries; relevant contributions from significant people in the life of the individual; documents; photos; and physical objects of worth to the individual. For the purposes of this research, observations of rehearsals, video recordings of performances, and dialogue between researcher and participant in the form of surveys, interviews and focus groups, were used as sources of data. The researcher then established the context of the story in terms of social, cultural, historical and personal influential factors. The researcher’s task is a process of arranging and rearranging material in order to tell a story. This would ordinarily assume a standard form of following a sequence constrained by chronology, which is the element that characterises it and separates it from other forms of research. Conventions associated with story writing play a significant role in the construction of these stories. These include, “time, place, plot and scene”; “stories have a beginning, a middle, and an end”; and good stories have a main character, and a “predicament, conflict, or struggle” (Cresswell, 2007, p. 56).

Narrative analysis provides an explanatory reconstruction of collected data in the form of a ‘story’. It seeks to retell an individual’s experience through the gathering of information and the subsequent interpretation of that information in the form of a story. One of the defining features of a narrative approach is the “focus on story building” (O’Leary, 2004, p. 199). It views the process of conceptualising, constructing and writing as a collaborative partnership between the individual, who owns the story, and the researcher. The method highlights the potential for multiple readings of a text, and consequently validates a range of perspectives and perceptions. Whitty (2002) notes that a “story-writing approach” (p. 225) is an appropriate one when researching and describing an individual’s hopes and dreams for the future. It is not concerned with actual reality except as the individual defines it. Narrative inquiry is not
threatened by the way events and memories change in the process of being remembered and recounted. It recognises that individual life stories are situated by time, past and present. It also recognises that meaning, also situated, is inherent in the experience and the resulting narrative account (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

Despite the overlap in the qualitative and interpretive methodologies of phenomenology, case study and narrative research, each contributes a different perspective about experiences of individuals, and varies in intent. Table 5.1 below outlines this.

**Table 5.1 Characteristics of Methodological Approaches**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Methodological Approach</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phenomenology</strong></td>
<td>- seeks to understand lived experience</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- a search for ‘truth’</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- recognises socially constructed meaning</td>
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<td>- interested in the subjective meaning of experience</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- descriptive of individual experience</td>
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<td>- the study of phenomena</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- interested in personal reality</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- is both process and product</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- interpretive</td>
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<td>- interested in the influence of context</td>
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<td>- uses observation and interview</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Case Study</strong></td>
<td>- a search for ‘truth’</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- studies an individual, group, issue or phenomenon</td>
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<td>- attempts to generalise</td>
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<td>- recognises socially constructed meaning</td>
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<td>- acknowledges the influence of context</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Narrative Inquiry</strong></td>
<td>- descriptive</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- concerned with the individual or group of individuals</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- is both process and product</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- seeks to reconstruct a ‘story’ of an experience</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- uses observation and interview and artefacts connected to the individual</td>
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<td>- recognises the influence of context</td>
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5.4 The Participants

The aim of this research project was to gain insight into the experiences and perceptions of males, across a range of ages and situations, who belonged to a choir. A number of choirs were invited to participate. The purposeful selection was based on demonstrated elements of success, including regular community and school community performances, involvement in competitions, availability and geographical location. Four choirs were selected for study according to the parameters outlined.

Choir 1 was a Junior School choir consisting of 56 boys aged 10 – 12 years with 40 completing surveys. Choir 2 was a Secondary School choir of seven boys and eight girls, aged between 14 – 17 years and 8 completed surveys. Choir 3 was a university group consisting of eight males aged 20 – 24 years, with 7 completed surveys. Choir 4 was a community-based choir, considered semi-professional, made up of 35 adult men over the age of 30 years, 13 of whom responded to the survey. Because the research is particularly interested in the perceptions held by males, the choirs consisted exclusively of boys, with the exception of Choir 2 of mixed-gender. The intention was not to exclude or devalue the experiences of females who belong to a choir but rather to explore the uniqueness of what occurs in an all-male setting. The mix of boys and girls in Choir 2: Secondary School provided a slightly different context in which to view male experience of choir. Choir 1: Junior School and Choir 2: Secondary School both belonged to the independent school system. There were four conductors involved as participants. The total number of participants, therefore, was 112.

This research also briefly considers the perspective of the audience through the completion of a short, written survey, undertaken during the recorded performance of each corresponding choir. The administration of these surveys was done during the choir performance and collected at the end. The purpose of the AMS is to add another layer of meaning by including the listener’s perspective. It was predicted that the audiences would largely consist of parents and guardians, other family members, peers, friends and other community members. Numbers in the audiences at the school events for Choir 1 and 2 were
136 and 120 respectively whilst at the Choir 3: University event a smaller audience of about 20 attended and 17 responded. The audience for Choir 4’s performance was 91. The following four snapshots provide a brief demographic description of each choir and their contexts. The shaded boxes give a more poetic picture (or snapshot) of each geographical context and an example sketch of a single participating male. The snapshots align with the narrative nature of the study but also foreshadow the separate cases of the study.

5.4.1 Snapshot 1 - Choir 1: Junior School

**At a Glance**
An urban landscape. An iconic beach a stone’s throw.
And suddenly, the school.
The boys. 10, 11, 12 years old.
Friends and fun.

Not far from the centre of the city, in the Eastern Suburbs of Sydney, this independent, Catholic College caters for boys from Year 5 to Year 12. Formed in 1903, the College follows the Catholic tradition of Edmund Rice, which has a particular focus on giving to the less fortunate. The College places a significant emphasis on this religious faith and aims to integrate it into every area of daily school life. This ethos is reflected in its integration into the curriculum and school discipline procedures, a commitment to social justice and an active commitment to a range of charities supported by the school community. The boys enjoy a nurturing environment and staff members are considered role models, fostering mutual respect and a sense of community. They are encouraged to be self-disciplined and responsible, and are expected to participate, with their family, in the community life of the school. Families are asked to attend Mass on a weekly basis and commit to attending other regular school events.

The College consists of two campuses: the Junior and the Senior. The Junior school caters for 290 students across Years 5 and 6, after which the boys can
attend the Senior school for Year 7 through to Year 12. Junior school boys are regularly involved in activities on the senior or main campus including Chapel, liturgies, swimming, assemblies and other whole school functions.

Boys at the Junior school have a range of opportunities throughout the year in which they can be involved, including regular sport and music activities. Some of the music opportunities include string ensemble, concert band, percussion group, private instrumental tuition and choir. Each year group also receives general instrumental tuition in Strings (Year 5) and Brass (Year 6). Developing a sense of pride and representing the school is an important aspect of participation in these activities. Students are, therefore, encouraged to think beyond themselves and consider their talents as a way of contributing to the wider school community.

The choir is a longstanding tradition at the school and is directed by an experienced conductor. The conductor is also the specialist music and drama teacher, taking all five Year 5 and 6 class streams, twice per week. The choir consists of 56 boys, rehearses once each week and performs at Masses each school term. They perform at local nursing homes, music festivals, Eisteddfods and occasionally they amalgamate with the Senior school choir for special independent school massed choir events. Participation in the junior school choir has become increasingly popular over a number of years due to a positive shift in school culture, partly owing to the ‘No Tolerance’ bullying policy. This is particularly important in the process of developing a culture of encouragement, excellence and acceptance. To become a member of the choir, boys undergo a trial, rather than a formal audition. During this time the conductor listens to all the boys together and makes decisions based on ability to match pitch, blend and behave. Choir membership enjoys a high status at the school and it is considered a significant achievement to be selected, particularly as over 200 boys ‘try out’ but only 50 – 60 are successful. The conductor suggested that it was important to make choir special, or something that stood apart from other school activities:
It became something that was a little bit special... the more special it became, and that’s been supported by the executive, they stand them up in assembly and we clap them...and tell them how good they are. They love that (Choir 1, Conductor 1, p. 228).

5.4.2 Snapshot 2 - CHOIR 2: Secondary School

At a glance

The sound of kookaburras and the big black crows scavenging forgotten lunches.
This is the architecture reflecting the dun, earthy tones of the surrounds.
And the choir.
Camaraderie and support.

Surrounded by the bush of the Blue Mountains with an architecture that both draws on and reflects its backdrop, the school to which Choir 2 belongs is independent, co-educational, and caters for students from Preschool to Year 12. It offers a more tailored education and fosters relationships built on mutual respect between students and staff. The school has a variety of programs and differentiated approaches to learning, which include: gifted and talented programs; extension and enrichment across all years; an early childhood transition program; boys’ education in Kindergarten; vertical streaming for Literacy groups in the Junior School; a Year 9 program focused on individual development in areas such as academic, relational, spiritual, leadership, and community awareness; Creative Arts endeavours; instrumental ensembles such as junior and senior choir, string group, and concert band; competitive and recreational sporting programs; optional music tuition; as well as a reasonably comprehensive range of standard curriculum subjects for study.

The school places a significant amount of emphasis on the impact and meaning of the Christian faith and this affiliation plays a substantial role in defining the culture of the school. This was expressed by some of the boys interviewed, and had significant personal meaning for them:
It’s coming from inside you and I think there’s something deeply kind of spiritual (Choir 2, Focus Group, p. 297).

One popular avenue for expression of this nature is involvement in worship bands, and these, significantly, are most often student-driven. A worship band consists of students singing and playing religious songs in a church-like scenario. The majority of boys interviewed expressed their enthusiasm for organising, leading and participating in these worship sessions within their own year group. Staff members are also involved, both with the students and in the past as a staff group:

We've had more of a singing culture in terms of devotional singing (Choir 2, Conductor 2, p. 284).

The culture of the school is one of support and commitment, offering a safe environment for students and staff to develop as individuals, and whilst the boys mentioned criticism or judgement from peers it did not appear to have substantial defining effect.

Everyone’s like quite supportive round here (Choir 2, Interview 2, p. 297).

I’m supporting them, they’re supporting me, we’re supporting everyone (Choir 2, Interview 1, p. 289).

We have a pretty good school culture when it comes to males and singing (Choir 2, Conductor 2, p. 284).

Music is an integral part of school life for a large number of students, particularly those belonging to the choir. The choir is a small group of 15 students, half of whom are boys and all of whom are between the ages of 14 and 17 years. Participation in the choir is entirely voluntary and rehearsals take place in a music classroom during lunchtime, once every week, in an informal, unstructured manner. The members of the choir show commitment and openly display their enjoyment.

**Boy Soprano. Now Tenor.**

5.4.3 Snapshot 3 – CHOIR 3: University

At a glance

A suburban landscape. Natural too.


A path through gum trees. The red brick of buildings.

Eclectic structures reflect diversity of being.

United in purpose.

Teachers. Scientists. Artists.

Kaleidoscope.

Greater Western Sydney is a culturally and economically diverse area, and the university to which Choir 3 belongs, is a reflection of this diversity. Spread across a number of campuses, the student population, in excess of 40 000, represents a range of ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds including local, national, international and Indigenous students. The university is committed to the educational outcomes of its students, offering a variety of support services and structures designed to enhance the university experience academically, personally and socially. It boasts an international reputation for research and is dedicated to working in partnership with local communities.

The undergraduate Music program, from which Choir 3 emerged, provides students with a broad range of musical learning experiences. Students study music from different historical periods; gain valuable experience in solo and group performance; and have access to facilities for recording, digital audio-visual and MIDI. Other aspects include learning about “concert administration and production, recording, composition, audio production, library research and retrieval, film music and collaboration” (website). Completion of this qualification leads to various career prospects, further study and other Arts-
based avenues such as teaching, directing, composing, performing, audio engineering, administration, management, and community music.

Choir 3 was formed for a unit of study, *Collaboration and Live Music Performance*. Students become part of an ensemble, such as a choir, a percussion group or an instrumental group. The unit is student-driven and consists of weekly rehearsals and workshops in which repertoire is selected and practised, and finally, performed as an element of unit assessment.

Obviously it’s an assessment so we have to do it (Choir 3, Interview 1, p. 339).

The choir created consisted entirely of young men in their second year of study, between the ages of 20 and 24 years. The conductor or leader volunteered for this role, and the group confirmed this. Essentially, however, leadership and the rehearsal process were collaborative.

We get thrown into this inherent professionalism about it all, and we control each other; we mediate each other... and sure I was directing it musically but for the most part we control ourselves (Choir 3, Conductor 3, p. 330).

There was a wide range of singing ability and choral experience amongst the men. A small number of the students were vocally trained and very experienced, whilst others played an instrument, which did not fit the ensemble choices available. These students were generally less familiar with this area of expertise. The group also experienced a range of commitment levels, having to navigate their way through these and other issues both individually and as a group; however, the experience was viewed as positive and valuable.

I enjoyed it... it was a struggle sometimes... obviously in a group there’s people who don’t turn up and all that, so that’s always an issue (Choir 3, Interview 2, p. 352).

A difficult thing as well is making sure that everyone has the same intentions, and the same motivations (Choir 3, Interview 1, p. 340).

I loved it. I absolutely loved it (Choir 3, Interview 2, p. 354).
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5.4.4 Snapshot 4 - Choir 4: Community

At a glance

From across Sydney. From the Blue Mountains.


The physicality of sound resonating through the wooden floor of the old house.

Camaraderie.

Touring. Recording. Performing.


The sound of men singing with men.

There’s nothing like it.

Choir 4 was established more than 10 years ago when its director finally acted on a longstanding dream. He belonged to various other choirs, all of which reflected different musical genres and tastes, but none of which allowed him to significantly exercise his musical influence. He wanted something that reflected his ideas and his music. The name of the group had been in his head for five years at least. He wanted to create something entirely new and unique; a space where men could be men without apology; a place of fun and mates. He wanted men to laugh at their idiosyncrasies and accept them at the same time; poke fun at themselves whilst acknowledging their strengths and masculinity:

The beauty and stupidity were written into the DNA...both of them are as important as each other (Choir 4, Conductor 4, p. 359).

The timbre of men’s voices goes well with the timbre of other men’s voices (Choir 4, Conductor 4, p. 358).

We want to sound as beautiful as possible without looking like we are that serious (Choir 4, Conductor 4, p. 360).

The choir involves 35 men, the majority of whom are over 30 years of age, and all of whom have significant career and family commitments. Whilst these men have varied levels of past singing experience, they must demonstrate a high level
of competence in their audition and it is important for them to show compatibility with the ethos and character of the group.

We make fun of men and their feelings, so we pretend that we are emotionally illiterate, but ironically, [we] are quite emotionally literate (Choir 4, Conductor 4, p. 362).

Every week, in the peace and charm of a typical Mountains cottage, the choir meets for rehearsal over dinner and laughter, support and friendship. These men are close; important to each other. This is not simply a time to sing. It is a time to be near, to listen, and to say what they cannot. The old house beckons, and then sighs in relief as the men arrive. This is what it waits for: the laughter; the freedom; the mates; and the music. The wooden floorboards resonate, the strength of the song warming the room. The sound is physical, palpable. It is an expression of much more.

The language of men with each other... can be expanded to express the fact that they mean something to each other (Choir 4, Conductor 4, p. 363).

But the closeness amongst the men, I think it functions as a very good and very important community (Choir 4, Conductor 4, p. 363).

The group has a history of international tours, has recorded several albums, and performs regular shows locally, nationally and internationally.

The Artist.
Clever.
Profound.
Funny.
Constant movement.
Articulate and discerning.
Loves his mates.
Shows it.
The creation of a genre critiquing the archetypal male.
A signature style.

5.5 Ethics

Conducting research that appropriately complies with ethical regulations is particularly important when using visual data, and Prosser (2011) points out that the main issue for an ethics committee centres around the reduced capacity for maintaining anonymity when using visual approaches. Managing visual data
can be complex and there exists a tension between ensuring anonymity and distorting the ‘voice’ of participants. As Prosser states,

any attempt to disguise people without careful reasoning and due cause can remove the very point of the data and the moral rights of participants who wish to have their voices heard (p. 493).

As part of the invitation to participate the research information statement, distributed to potential participants, openly disclosed the intention to use video recording to gather important data. The purpose of the video was for the researcher to be able to attend to rehearsal data on separate levels – what participants said as well as the visual data about their reactions while singing. An information statement was given to potential participants outlining the intent to record a rehearsal and a performance. It also asked that consent be given to be interviewed either as part of a focus group or one-to-one. Prospective participants were also informed of the potential use of recorded footage in the dissemination of findings and that particular effort would be made to ensure the anonymity of participants. Participants gave their informed consent and they were free to withdraw at any time during the study. This is an important step according to Flewitt (2006) who describes consent of this nature as “provisional” (p. 31), stating that consent is conditional to the negotiated terms. Those under the age of 18 years were required to obtain the permission of a parent (or guardian), who was also fully informed of what the research entailed. All choir members, parents/guardians and conductors gave their consent and none withdrew from the research. They were all offered the opportunity to review their interview transcripts.

5.6 Methods and Research Instruments

A number of methods were used to collect data, all of which are particularly suitable for phenomenological research, case study and narrative inquiry. Data sources included written survey responses from members of the choirs and from the audience at each choir’s performance. Interviews were conducted with individual choir members and each conductor. Focus groups were run with two groups of four boys from Choir 1: Junior School, and one group of four boys from Choir 2: Secondary School. Focus groups were only used with Choir 1 and
Choir 2 to assist these younger participants to feel comfortable about talking within the safety of a peer group. Choir members were approached by the conductor to participate in a focus group. Focus group questions were the same as interview questions and these can be found in Figure 5.6 and Appendix B.1.3. Focus groups were not considered necessary for the older participants of Choir 3 and Choir 4. Each of the four choirs was observed during a rehearsal and this was also recorded using audio-visual recording equipment. In addition, the four choirs were filmed performing at a school or community event.

The strategies employed in data collection are presented below in Figure 5.2 reflecting the different levels of probing used to delve deeper into the phenomenological picture.

![Data Collection Methods](image)

**Figure 5.2  Methods of data collection**

The methods of data collection are consistent with the methodological approach and were specifically selected because they are commonly used tools across phenomenology, case study and narrative inquiry. Figure 5.3 below combines information from Figure 5.2 (above) and Table 5.2 (below). It illustrates the features common to these three methodological paradigms and consequently exemplifies the applicability of the chosen methods. Surveys, interviews, focus groups and observations are particularly suitable for exploring subjective experience and personal realities of individuals and small groups. These methods are equally appropriate for considering social context and constructed meaning and they allow scrutiny of both process and product in describing lived experience.
5.6.1 Survey

Conducting a survey is an effective method of obtaining a large number of participant responses to specific questions. It offers a significant level of confidentiality and anonymity and can use a combination of open-ended and closed questions. The surveys used are examples characteristic of the “explanatory survey” (O’Leary, 2004, p. 153), which relies on open-ended questions that attempt to move beyond simple description and endeavour to explain perspectives (O’Leary, 2004). There were two surveys used in this
research. The first was a choir members’ survey (CMS) and the second, an audience members’ survey (AMS).

It is important to reiterate here that each choir was selected on the basis of levels and external elements of success, which was construed in terms that included regular school and/or community performances; participation in competitions such as Eisteddfods and national festivals; and commercial features such as CD recordings and merchandise. Both the Audience Members’ Survey (AMS) and the Choir Members’ Survey (CMS) were written from this perspective and with this understanding.

5.6.1.1 Audience Members’ Survey (AMS)

The Audience Members’ Survey (AMS) was administered during the performance event for each choir. Chong (2010) discusses the satisfaction derived from public approval through performance, and the participants in this study demonstrated a strong desire to perform. The AMS was designed to capture an aspect of this ‘public’ perspective. For Choir 1 and Choir 2 this event was an end of year celebration school concert. For Choir 3: University the performance was the presentation of an assessment task, and for Choir 4: Community their performance was at their own, ticketed concert. The AMS was designed to obtain a glimpse of what people who did not belong to the choir thought about choral participation and particularly their perception surrounding boys in choirs. This was in keeping with the aim of understanding perceptions regarding boys in choirs. The survey was designed to be short so as not to intrude on the performance and to encourage completion. It was recognised that much of the audience would consist of family and friends and so to determine this, the first question asked if they knew someone who belonged to the choir. Surveys and a pencil were placed on auditorium or performance space seats prior to the beginning of the performance. An announcement was made from the stage by concert organisers requesting that people take a moment during the performance to complete the survey. Clearly marked boxes were placed at the exits for completed surveys to be deposited at the close of the performance. The AMS can be found below in Figure 5.4 (see also Section B:...
Appendices B.1.1). The number of audience responses collected were: Choir 1 – 136; Choir 2 – 120; Choir 3 – 17; and Choir 4 – 91. An example of the method of analysing this data can be found in section 5.7 Analysis.

O’Leary (2004) suggests that potential weaknesses of the survey include poor response rate and a considerable amount of data to consider. Administering the AMS during performance time and providing a collection box was deliberately employed to combat the issue of response rate. The amount of data yielded by this approach served as a means of gaining insight into the types of themes surrounding the topic. These themes, alongside those emerging from literature, were then used to formulate questions for interviews and focus groups.

![Audience Members’ Survey (AMS)](image)

**Figure 5.4  Audience Members’ Survey (AMS)**

AMS Survey responses were collated for analysis purposes and can be found in Section B: Appendices (B.4.1)

**5.6.1.2 Choir Members’ Survey (CMS)**

Individual members of the four choirs were also asked to complete a survey, which was administered at the beginning of one rehearsal. Choir 1 provided 40 responses; Choir 2 had 8; Choir 3 had 7 respondents; and Choir 4 provided 13. Participants were asked to write their responses to the questions in as much
detail as possible and were assured that their contribution would remain anonymous and confidential. The survey was adjusted to suit the different age groups (a. school-aged and b. mature-aged) whilst maintaining continuity in terms of the themes being explored. An outline of the survey questions is provided below in Figure 5.5. The complete surveys, as they were administered, are included in Section B: Appendices (see B.1.2).

1. Do you like to sing?
2. Have you always liked to sing?
3. Where do you sing?
4. Are there situations or places in which you feel more comfortable singing?
5. What sort of music do you like to sing?
6. Do you have any say in what music the choir sings?
7. Have you experienced any difficulties singing in the choir? For example, physical, social, or parental.
8. What do your friends think of you being part of the choir?
9. Why is belonging to the choir important to you?
10. Would you describe your choir as a success? Why?
11. Why do you think boys might find it hard or avoid belonging to a choir?
12. Is singing in a choir something you would like to do in the future?

### Figure 5.5 Choir Members’ Survey (CMS)

Data from the CMS, in a similar way to the AMS, were used to identify important and recurring themes to inform and direct the interview and focus groups questions. Survey responses were collated for analysis purposes and can be found in Section B: Appendices (B.4.2) and an example of the method for analysing CMS data appears in section 5.7 Analysis.

#### 5.6.2 Interview

The interview is generally considered the primary tool of gathering descriptions of lived experience (Cresswell, 2007; Flood, 2010; Morse & Richards, 2002; O’Leary, 2004). When interviewing participants, the researcher is essentially
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asking two overarching questions: “What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon?” and “What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experience of the phenomenon?” (p. 61). According to O'Leary (2004) interviews are a process of probing participants regarding the way they experienced the phenomenon, or object. These questions generally ask participants to describe how they feel about the experience or if they are able to relate it to something else in their life. The notion of probing is about the interviewer going beyond the face value of the words spoken, and investigating the meaning implicit in those words. The subsequent collection of information, or narrative description, is created in an interactive process between researcher and participant, “co-creators of a narrative that is both descriptive and interpretive” (p. 124). Flood (2010) supports this “co-creation” (p. 11) adding that the data collected from interviews is not simply observational but rather it is “reflective” (p. 11). It is not based solely on the interpretation of the researcher, but is constructed through an interactive dialogue. Silverman (2000, 2001) also notes the way both interviewee and interviewer write the story of the experience together. It is important to reiterate the notion of ‘bracketing’ discussed above, particularly in the context of the practicalities of conducting phenomenological research. Morse and Richards (2002) emphasise the need for the researcher to begin a study “with no presuppositions” (p. 47) and suggest that they can achieve this by openly “writing their assumptions, knowledge and expectations” (p. 47). Phenomenology is based almost entirely on perceptions, but it is important that the researcher’s perceptions do not interfere with accuracy. Flood (2010) asserts that suspending judgement means the researcher can be more open to accepting the descriptions of participants. Ironically, though, the very nature of phenomenology, including the notion of co-constructed, narrative texts, suggests that the perceptions of the researcher will, in fact, play a role in the interpretation of the lived experiences of others.

The structure of an interview may take many different forms depending on the nature of the phenomenon, the participants and the researcher. Many interviews follow a defined and more rigid structure with the researcher following a line of pre-planned questioning. In other instances questions will
arise from and be guided by the direction of the researcher-participant dialogue. Likewise, researchers may or may not be guided by an overarching question but the aim of phenomenological interviewing endures as the search for describing and understanding the essence of lived experience (Morse & Richards, 2002). It is the subjective landscape of phenomenological research that prescribes a certain amount of freedom from standardised methodologies and for this reason phenomenological researchers do not necessarily delineate a particular method. Rather, their ‘method’ is an interactive, dialogic process of extensive reading, writing and rewriting, and reflection. This demonstrates an understanding that,

phenomenology differs from almost every other science in that it attempts to gain insightful descriptions of the way we experience the world pre-reflexively, without taxonomising, classifying, or abstracting it (van Manen, 1990, as cited in Morse and Richards, 2002, p. 146).

As stated above, the interview is a key tool in the process of gathering phenomenological descriptions of lived experience (Cresswell, 2007; Flood, 2010; Morse & Richards, 2002; O’Leary, 2004; van Manen, 1997). O’Leary (2004) describes the semi-structured interview as flexible and guided by the “flow of conversation” (p. 164), which is reflected in an informal approach where the researcher attempts to create an empathetic relationship, or rapport, with the individual, as researcher and participants navigate their way through an interactive, co-constructed dialogue. Semi-structured interviews often begin with a number of pre-planned questions designed to retain a sense of direction. The researcher, however, remains “ready to pursue any interesting tangents that may develop” (p. 164).

This research used individual, face-to-face interviews and group interviews (see focus groups). The individual interviews were conducted in a semi-structured and informal fashion, as described above, in a setting comfortable for the participant. The conductors approached a number of potential interviewees, asking whether they would be willing to participate at this level. In Choir 1 there were four boys interviewed. In Choir 2, two boys volunteered to be interviewed. Two members of Choir 3 were interviewed, and two men from Choir 4. Additionally, each conductor underwent an interview. Questions were
based on similar questions asked in the CMS, attempting to explore some of the ideas expressed in responses and so a number of questions were pre-planned for the interview to be used as a guide and a prompt when necessary. These questions are listed below in Figure 5.6 and Figure 5.7. They can also be found in Appendix B.1.3 and B.1.2.

| 1. | What are the things you enjoy most about singing in the choir? |
| 2. | Are there things about belonging to the choir that you do not enjoy? |
| 3. | How would you describe success in the choir setting? |
| 4. | Do you consider this choir successful? |
| 5. | Do you consider yourself a successful singer? |
| 6. | Have you experienced difficulties related to being a boy in a choir? |
| 7. | Why do you think more boys do not belong to choirs? |
| 8. | Is singing in a choir something you would like to continue doing in the future? |
| 9. | What would stop you from belonging to the choir? |
| 10. | Why is being part of the choir important to you? |

**Figure 5.6  Choir members interview (and focus group) schedule**

| 1. | What are the things you enjoy most about conducting the choir? |
| 2. | Are there things about this role that you do not enjoy? |
| 3. | How would you describe success in the choir setting? |
| 4. | Do you consider this choir successful? |
| 5. | Do you consider yourself a successful conductor? |
| 6. | Have you noticed any of the choir members experiencing difficulties related to being a boy in this choir? |
| 7. | Why do you think more boys do not belong to choirs? |
| 8. | Is conducting a choir something you would like to continue doing in the future? |
| 9. | What are the most challenging aspects of conducting the choir? |
| 10. | Why is being part of the choir important to you? |

**Figure 5.7  Conductor interview schedule**
5.6.3 Focus Groups

Focus groups were conducted with the school-aged students from Choir 1 and Choir 2 in order to facilitate a comfortable environment where conversations could flow naturally and where participants’ felt free to express themselves openly and candidly. Each of the focus groups consisted of four students, all male. There were two focus groups conducted with Choir 1 – one with four Year 5 students (aged 10-11 years) and one group with four Year 6 students (aged 11-12 years). From Choir 2 there were four boys from Year 9 (aged 14-15 years) who participated in the focus group. In each focus group the researcher maintained and directed the conversation, prompting further discussion and clarifying dialogue. Because group interviews can be hard to follow at times, the focus group sessions were audio-visually recorded to allow the researcher the freedom to revisit the sessions and ensure an accurate record of events (O’Leary, 2004). Again a series of pre-planned questions were devised to use to prompt participant conversation, based on those outlined in Figure 5.6. Consistent with a semi-structured approach to an interview, spontaneous questions were asked in direct response to the direction of the dialogue and the ideas expressed by participants.

5.6.4 Observation and Video Recording

The four choirs were each observed by the researcher in the context of a rehearsal and also during one performance. It was the intention of the researcher to reconstruct these situations through the audio-visual recording of each event and subsequently analyse this material. This provided the opportunity to review these real time recordings at later stages thereby creating a more comprehensive interpretation of the visual data. It allowed for the interpretation of the nuances of human interaction in terms of that which was spoken and that which remained unspoken, such as physical interactions, gestures, facial expressions and participant demeanour (Paterson, Bottorff & Hewat, 2003). The use of video recording also allowed the researcher to view participants in their natural, social context thereby giving insight into the normal processes undertaken in that context (Mondada, 2006). In this case,
participants were observed in their normal rehearsal time, practising and interacting in this comfortable and familiar context. Paterson, Bottorff and Hewat (2003) support the potential of video recording to “capture aspects of socio-cultural context” (p. 31). It is acknowledged, however, that the presence of the researcher does have some impact and this is taken into consideration during analysis. Morse and Richards (2002) recommend that the audio-visual recording of events be used purposefully and not left without being interpreted. They also describe the recording of observations as one of the most common qualitative strategies for gathering relevant information and that one of the benefits of researcher observation is the viewing and interpretation of behaviour of which participants may be unaware. Fitzgerald (2012) provides an overview of tools used across a range of research areas, specific to visual data, suggesting that,

Video captured in situ can contain a great richness of information, often revealing subtle yet important incidents (p. 47)

She emphasises the importance of the analysis process and suggests that the approach will depend on the aim of the researcher. This research approaches the analysis of recordings primarily on the basis of existing themes, those that have been identified in the research previously, such as themes extracted from interview and survey data. In addition, though, analysis remained open to the discovery of new elements outside of “initial hypotheses, theories or predictions” (p. 47). Similarly, Prosser (2011) provides a detailed discussion of visual methodologies and the continued development of its use, particularly within qualitative research fields. Consistent with Pallasmaa’s (2006) view of a visually preoccupied world, Prosser (2011) suggests that, “currently, no topic, field of study, or discipline is immune to the influences of researchers adopting a visual perspective” (p. 479).

In relation to the role of the researcher in the process of observation there is a suggestion that any observation can be defined as participation. Van Manen (1997) discusses “close observation” (p. 68) as a particular technique associated with researching lived experience. He makes a distinction between this and participant observation saying that it is important to maintain the focus of
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researcher whilst becoming close to participants in the process of undergoing and defining their lived experience. Whilst the approach described by van Manen is considered pertinent to phenomenological research, observation in this research was conducted in a non-participatory capacity, as far as possible, in order to reduce intrusion to a minimum and as a way of ensuring the researcher’s beliefs, perceptions and understandings are ‘bracketed’. This is an important consideration and one taken seriously by O’Leary (2004) who advocates that, for the researcher, observation is a “rigorous” (p. 171) interaction between the viewing of events or behaviour and the interpretation of those events. O’Leary suggests that recording observations is a process that begins with observing something, taking it in with the senses, processing this mentally, and finally recording the ‘official’ observation (p. 171). These steps take place within the personal context of the researcher and so ‘bracketing’ becomes imperative, even though the perspective of the researcher is an integral part of the phenomenological process. Paterson, Bottorff and Hewat (2003) discuss that the use of video recording aids in establishing a non-participatory role for the researcher because their position is “behind the camera” (p. 31) and not one of involvement, consolidating them in a position of “outsider” (p. 31). Having said this, though, they acknowledge that a significant part of the process involves the researcher’s interpretation of what they observed, which will be influenced by their “pre-existing values or theories” (p. 32).

In summary, the research used a range of methods for data collection consistent with the combination of methodological approaches employed. The primary purpose underlying the selection of methods was to elicit participants’ expressions of their lived experiences and thereby obtain a depth and richness of data and safeguard authenticity. Interviews, focus groups and surveys offered a space where viewpoints and personal realities could be articulated and individual experiences recounted. The use of observation and video recording added to these portrayals by offering an outsider (researcher) perspective. The extensive use of participant responses from surveys, interviews and video footage in the findings sections (Chapter 7, 8 and 9) further demonstrate the
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relevance of a narrative approach and reinforce the applicability of the methods chosen for data collection.

Table 5.2 below provides a summary of the methods used in the research study and the purpose associated with each.

**Table 5.2  Purposes of instruments for data collection**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Observation</strong></td>
<td>To record events and behaviour in both a written format and as an audio-visual recording to be accessed for clarification and ease of transcription and review.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video recording</td>
<td>To record one rehearsal and one performance of each of the four choirs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To obtain record of behaviour from the perspective of the researcher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To record behaviour of which participants may be unaware.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Survey</strong></td>
<td>To obtain a variety of responses from both audience members and choir members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To identify important and recurring themes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To obtain a large number of anonymous responses and gain insight into contrasting perspectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To determine the nature and direction of interview and focus group questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interview</strong></td>
<td>To interact with individuals in a semi-structured and informal, face-to-face conversation or dialogue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To gain a deeper understanding of the lived experience of individual members of the choirs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To understand the way in which an individual shapes, and is shaped by, their context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To gain detailed descriptions of lived experience through the use of open-ended questions, which facilitate conversation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus Groups</strong></td>
<td>To provide a safe environment for members to discuss their experience of belonging to a choir.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To stimulate honest and authentic discussion of issues surrounding the perceptions of males singing in a choir.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To provide participants with an opportunity to confidently discuss their experience in conjunction with other members.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.7 Analysis

The process of analysis was constructed around the three overarching themes – masculinity, possible selves, success – and data were assigned appropriate thematic codes aligned accordingly with the themes. As stated, these had been derived from an earlier Honours thesis and the extensive review of literature (see Chapter 1: Introduction).

5.7.1 Interview and focus group data

After the audio recordings of interviews and focus groups had been transcribed, analysis of this data produced a variety of initial codes, an example of which is shown below in Table 5.3, using data from the interviews and focus groups of Choir 2: Secondary School.

### Table 5.3 Initial coding of Choir 2 interview transcripts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Masculinity</th>
<th>Possible Selves</th>
<th>Success</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M1 Technical Support – Voice change; registers; breathing</td>
<td>P1 Prior Experience</td>
<td>S1 Technical ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M2 Culture of Males Singing</td>
<td>P2 Musical Satisfaction</td>
<td>S2 Love of singing/Safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M3 Stereotypes/Peer Pressure/Image/Masculinity</td>
<td>P3 Social Satisfaction</td>
<td>S3 Achievement/Results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M4 Confidence – teacher affirmation; student affirmation</td>
<td>P4 Personal Meaning of Singing/Purpose of Choir</td>
<td>S4 Recognition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M5 Lack of Confidence – teacher negativity; student negativity; criticism</td>
<td>P5 Images of Choirs</td>
<td>S5 Money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M6 Vocal Support</td>
<td>P6 Role Models/Leadership</td>
<td>S6 Impact</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A similar process was undertaken for each choir and the coding of interview and focus group data. An example of how this is provided below in Figure 5.8, which shows a transcript excerpt from Choir 3: University.
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Figure 5.8  Example of coding Choir 3 Interview 1

Several readings and analysing in this way produced a set of sub-themes aligned with the main themes and this is outlined below in Table 5.4. Additional elements, considered as part of the sub-themes, are also detailed in this table.

Table 5.4  Codes for analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MASCULINITY</th>
<th>POSSIBLE SELVES</th>
<th>SUCCESS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STEREOTYPES</td>
<td>PAST</td>
<td>PUBLIC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminine connotations.</td>
<td>Family influence.</td>
<td>Recognition, career, wealth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Soft’ masculinity.</td>
<td>Positive experience of school music.</td>
<td>Performance, competition, achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of sport.</td>
<td>Experience of choir.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MATESHIP</td>
<td>PRESENT</td>
<td>MUSICAL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>Self-perception</td>
<td>The conductor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physicality</td>
<td>Self-confidence</td>
<td>Technical skill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td></td>
<td>Working together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VOCAL CHANGE</td>
<td>FUTURE</td>
<td>PERSONAL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>Love of singing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conductor</td>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td>Expression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td></td>
<td>Enjoyment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRIVATE IMPACT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Response

Spirituality
5.7.2 Survey data

The set of codes from Table 5.4 above was then used to analyse survey data both from the AMS and the CMS. A system of highlighting relevant words or phrases was employed after survey data had been compiled into one document (see Appendix B4 Survey Results Table, B.4.1 for the AMS and B.4.2 for the CMS).

The following example is from the AMS of Choir 4: Community and shows audience response rates to Question 2 where the audience (n = 91) was asked to indicate all the reasons that applied to why they believed the choir was a success.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 2: This choir is a success because...</th>
<th>Related to success theme</th>
<th>Related to masculinity theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>they sound good.</td>
<td>71</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they present well.</td>
<td>51</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they enjoy singing and performing.</td>
<td>68</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they connect with the audience.</td>
<td>68</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the audience enjoyed the performance.</td>
<td>64</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other – please specify.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Their fascination with tying to be funny whilst mumbling!</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good play on words. The feeling they give out.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great sense of humour.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silliness.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent hats. High level showmanship.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great frontman.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humility and humanity.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They sing in Finnish.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great atmosphere and sense of humour.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are different and quirky.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light-hearted and fun.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They don’t take themselves too seriously.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They take the mickey out of masculinity.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are clever lyrics.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They listen to each other; look at the conductor and convey their emotions.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They sing with feeling.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comic presentation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clever, creative, imaginative.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly original, unexpected.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing else quite like it.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They speak on behalf of ‘human-ness’ with humour and insight.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I loved it!</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are mad and talented.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write their stuff = win.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They have the ability to grow beards and sing in tune.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comedic presence; charisma and voice.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall awesomeness.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are a bunch of cool cats.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are existential.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distinct persona.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The two examples given below show survey responses from the choir members. Table 5.6 is a compilation of responses to Question 11 from the CMS completed by Choir 1: Junior School. Words relevant to ‘success’ were highlighted.
5.7 shows responses to CMS Question 7 from members of Choir 2: Secondary School, applicable to ‘masculinity’ and specifically ‘vocal change’.

Table 5.6  Excerpt from CMS Choir 1 data analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 11: Do you think your choir is a success? Why do you think this way?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, because this school is <strong>well-known</strong> for singing in the past.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, everyone has a <strong>good voice</strong> (all are good singers) x5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, because we miss school work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>We learn</strong> a lot of songs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choir is a success because we rehearse a lot or <strong>practise hard</strong> x2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, we <strong>sing well together</strong> x3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, because we are pro x2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because our teacher is extremely helpful when it comes to organising the choir.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes x5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because <strong>everyone puts in 100%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We get chosen for out of school <strong>contests</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone wants us to sing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, because we <strong>win competitions</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It <strong>sounds good</strong> x2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like the <strong>sound</strong> of our voices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We are <strong>good</strong> singers, we’re a large group, we’re split into two parts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, it’s <strong>enjoyable</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have a <strong>good teacher</strong> x3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It <strong>sounds great</strong> and gets people into the subject of music.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, there’s a few who get bullied because of it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We are good at <strong>working together</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m not sure yet because we haven’t been in any <strong>comps</strong> this year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, because it can teach me new things about singing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It <strong>WILL</strong> be a success because lots of people have <strong>great voices</strong>.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.7  Excerpt from CMS Choir 2 data analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 7: Have you experienced any difficulties singing in the choir? For example, physical, social, or parental.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The songs can often be difficult and <strong>high</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes my <strong>range</strong> isn’t good enough so I change parts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, <strong>physical</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, <strong>voice strains</strong> sometimes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, <strong>physical</strong> – there are some <strong>notes I can’t hit</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, besides a bit of a <strong>sore</strong> voice.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Individual survey responses were combined and collated into a single results table for each choir, which can be found in Appendix B4 (B.4.1 AMS and B.4.2 CMS).

5.7.3  Video and observation data

As outlined in section 5.6.4 each choir was recorded using video recording equipment during a rehearsal and during a public performance. The video footage of rehearsals was analysed using the main themes and sub-themes, as explained above, and observational analysis notes were documented in table form. An additional column, entitled “OTHER”, was included to note aspects that were potentially outside success, masculinity, and possible selves. The table distinguishes between observational notes made by the researcher, words
spoken by the conductor and actions or activity observed. A separate table was constructed for each of the four choirs. The example below in Figure 5.9 is a screenshot taken from the rehearsal video analysis table of Choir 3 (see Appendix B.3.3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUCCESS</th>
<th>MASCULINITY</th>
<th>POSSIBLE SELVED</th>
<th>OTHER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Vocal Change</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90.</td>
<td></td>
<td>A couple of very strong voices but most blend with others and do not stand out.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Highest voice stands and one middle part voice who is a voice major.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Possible links here with PC4 saying about this age group still having young’ male voices.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Stereotypes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Men and movement; rough play; physicality.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>While middle part work on a small section, the conductor and guy adjacent much around, pretending to beat each other up.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Similar interaction later between two other guys.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Confidence and membership.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Parts are often rehearsed in pairs at the same time as others are doing the same. They often ask the person next to them for help rather than address the group.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>There is a lot of joking and laughing throughout the rehearsal.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Presence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Body language of one bass (sitting, arms folded) demonstrates a disconnection with the activity. The act is simply connected to this being a course assessment task.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Piano player very engaged and takes his role seriously.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Continually helps the different parts, the conductor, playing their individual parts and providing the starting notes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Barnes rarely ask to go through.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>This rehearsal is run by the students - no teacher present. The group is preparing the piece to perform as a course assessment task.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.9  Excerpt from B.3.3 Choir 3 video analysis results table

The rationale behind the use of video footage as a data source was based on the opportunity to explore another layer of participants’ lived experience, or at least a part of it, as it unfolded, which is consistent with Flewitt (2006) who argues that using a range of data sources provides “multilevel analysis” (p. 30). Audio and visual recording enables the researcher to capture a “precise record of naturally occurring interactions” (p. 30), which aids in understanding the multifaceted nature of verbal and non-verbal communication. Haines and Klopper (2015) describe the use of video recording and analysis in phenomenological research as an authentic way of reporting on participants’ experiences. My research simply used visual data as another perspective and data source, whilst Haines and Klopper sought to create a documentary to show others. My research, however, shared their purpose of using video analysis to
“best serve the authentic lived experiences of the participants” (p. 255). Like Haines and Klopper my approach to analysing video data was about “dissecting the visual footage according to the themes and clusters that had emerged from the written findings” (p. 254). Flewitt (2006) used a more complex system of transcribing into text the conversations of participants and adding notes about accompanying actions and positions in the scene. In my research, and as previously stated, Appendix B3 provides a “representation” (Flewitt, 2006, p. 34) of each choir’s visual data, by combining researcher observational comments, transcription of relevant words spoken by the conductor and additional statements about actions, gestures, and facial expressions observed by the researcher. Layering this visual data with the spoken data from interviews and focus groups, as well as the written data from surveys not only constructs a more detailed story of experience, but it helps “articulate how different representations produce different strands of knowledge and different ‘truths’” (Flewitt, 2006, p. 46).

The final aspect of methodology is concerned with interviews conducted with five professional conductors for the purpose of providing a comparison context with Australian experience.

### 5.8 Professional Conductors Methodology

In keeping with phenomenological research, including the voices of these professional conductors added another layer of meaning, enhancing and contextualising the experiences of the main participants in the four choirs. The interviews sought to understand the essence of the conductors' professional journeys.

**5.8.1 Participants**

The following discussion is based on the interviews of five renowned conductors, four of whom were from England and one from Australia. The possibility to engage conductors from the UK in my research first arose through
family plans to travel to England. After establishing my location during this six-week period, I conducted an internet search for the names of institutions, within a manageable radius of my own location that had choirs of reputation. This search included schools, universities, colleges, churches, and cathedrals. I then extended the initial search to ascertain the level of renown enjoyed by these choirs using descriptors similar to the recruitment of my Australian participating choirs, such as regular public performances, CD recordings, and reputation. After compiling a list of ten potential choirs I contacted each conductor or director via an email, explaining my research and imminent travel and then invited them to undergo an interview with me during this time. As a result four conductors elected to be involved and arrangements were made. In this way, there was an element of self-selection by the professional conductors and there were limiting factors such as availability and location. For example, a number of conductors replied that they wanted to be interviewed but the period of time being offered was not convenient for them.

The fifth professional conductor, from Australia, was recruited differently. A colleague of mine had known Conductor 5 for a number of years and suggested to me that he would be an excellent addition to my research. This colleague then contacted Conductor 5 and inquired if he was interested and willing to be interviewed. Conductor 5 agreed that I could contact him and arrangements for an interview were made from there, via email and telephone conversations. This interview took place after the UK conductors were interviewed.

Four of these five conductors have a continuing and extensive professional career. Their expertise and experience is wide, and ranges from the school setting through to working with professional choral and orchestral ensembles, locally and internationally. The fourth conductor holds the position of Music teacher and Organist in an independent school in the United Kingdom, having come through the tradition of the English cathedral choir.

Table 5.8 below indicates that the professional conductors represent different contexts and levels of experience including school choirmaster, university professor and organist, and professional freelance conductor of international acclaim. Conductor 1 holds the position of Music teacher and Organist at an
Independent school in England. His responsibility outside of the Music classroom is that of choirmaster for the boys’ chapel choir. Like a number of British schools, once in the boys’ boarding school tradition, this school became co-educational nine years ago, but has managed to maintain a number of traditional practices, such as boys’ chapel choir and Sunday evening chapel services. The boys’ choir, however, shares this role with the girls’ choir, alternating chapel performance responsibilities on a weekly basis and collaborating for specific events.

Table 5.8  Professional conductor contexts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conductor 1</td>
<td>Teacher/Organist/Choirmaster</td>
<td>Solihull, West Midlands.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Berlin, Germany.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conductor 3</td>
<td>Professional, freelance conductor</td>
<td>Major cities, England.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conductor 4</td>
<td>Reader in Music Organist</td>
<td>University city, England.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conductor 5</td>
<td>Professional, freelance conductor</td>
<td>Major cities, Australia.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The other four conductors have extensive professional careers, both locally and internationally. Their expertise is broad and ranges from the school setting through to working with professional choral and orchestral ensembles. Conductor 2 has held a number of conductor positions with a variety of professional ensembles, orchestral and choral, in major English and German locations. Conductor 3 was a school Music teacher for over twenty-five years, recently retiring from this role and beginning a career as freelance choral conductor. This role involves running choral workshops for children around Britain in addition to his regular London children’s choirs. Conductor 4 has had a long career in a university context. His position involves academic roles in teaching and research, and a conducting role as organist (choirmaster) for the college chapel choir. Conductor 5, an Australian conductor, also began as a classroom Music teacher but quickly moved into a conducting career and gained experience and training within the United Kingdom’s choral tradition, hence his inclusion in a chapter providing contextual contrast.
5.8.2 Interviews

Each of the five conductors chose the venue for the interview. Interviews with Conductor 1 and Conductor 4 were held at their place of work – school and University College – and with each of these the opportunity arose to attend and observe their choir rehearsing. Conductor 2 was interviewed at one of his rehearsal venues. Conductor 3 and Conductor 5 chose to be interviewed in their home. All conductors were informed that they would be recorded for the purpose of transcription. They agreed that their interviews could be included in this research with all references remaining anonymous and they signed a consent form to acknowledge their understanding and permission. Transcripts were subsequently sent via email to each of the five conductors and they were given the opportunity to review these and could indicate changes and edits if they wished. They all chose to review their transcripts and only minor changes were requested, particularly instances where clarification was required. Figure 5.10 below is an outline of the pre-planned interview questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Can you describe what your role is presently and a bit about your past experience?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Did you sing as a boy and as you got older? What was this experience like?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Was conducting/teaching always something you wanted to do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What do you enjoy most about conducting?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What do you find most difficult or challenging?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Why do you think choir is so important? To you and for others?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. How would you define success?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Are their particular elements that affect success?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Is your choir successful? Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Do you consider yourself a success? Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Have you seen changes in boys’ involvement in choirs?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Have you found it difficult to recruit boys to choir?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Does culture play a significant role in success of choir?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Have you seen choir impact the lives of the boys/people who belong?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Have you had to deal with the voice change process in your choir? How does this get dealt with?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.10  Professional conductor interview schedule
The interviews were semi-structured, as a way of enabling them to tell their ‘story’, and questions focused on their present context and past experience. They were asked questions that required their reflection on the main research themes - masculinity, possible selves, and success – and they had been made aware of these in the original contact email, which described the nature of the research and the ideas upon which they would be asked to reflect. The conductors were encouraged at the outset to speak freely about their experience and not to be limited by the schedule of questions, which was designed primarily as a guide and to prompt if necessary.

### 5.8.3 Analysis

A number of themes surfaced in the interviews, and several of these were common to each conductor and relevant to their professional experience. Interview transcripts were read a number of times and key words and phrases were highlighted and categorized according to the emergent themes. An initial reading extracted the themes outlined below in Table 5.9. The subcategories related to culture and to role of the professional conductor, both provide comparison data from which to consider Australian data.

#### Table 5.9 Professional conductor themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Aspects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Culture</strong></td>
<td>Tradition and Cultural Heritage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Creating a Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Religious Foundations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Excellence</strong></td>
<td>Standard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pride</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expectation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Conductor</strong></td>
<td>Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Repertoire</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The excerpt below in Figure 5.11 provides an example of the initial thematic approach to analysis. The example is from the interview with Professional Conductor 1.
As previously mentioned, the professional conductors were asked to consider the three research themes and Table 5.10 shows the way the subcategories, or preliminary conductor themes, align with the research themes that have emerged in the literature.

Table 5.10  Preliminary themes and research themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Aspect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Success</td>
<td>Achievement, Performance, Impact, Excellence, The conductor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculinity</td>
<td>Vocal support, Image, Stereotypes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possible Selves</td>
<td>Vision of the future, Career goals, Creating a culture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An excerpt from the interview of Conductor 5 is provided below in Figure 5.12 to demonstrate coding according to one of the research themes, success.
C: Well, I would… as far as music is concerned, I would define it as something you constantly work to achieve. So, to say you’ve had a success for me it’s final, and I’m not saying that things aren’t good or things that have happened haven’t been good, I’m not saying that, but what I’m saying is success should be in the real meaning of the word success, “to follow”, something that happens that you would consider successful, should inspire you to go on to do something else and not say, That’s the end.

Figure 5.12 Example of coding Professional Conductor 5

The themes that emerged in the professional conductor transcripts, as outlined in Table 5.9 and Table 5.10, significantly, are underpinned by music. When the conductors talked about achievement and excellence it was in direct relation to the development of musical skill. When the conductors discussed goals and career they included the musical impact on listeners. Supporting boys through vocal change involved musical, technical and physical strategies. A similar phenomenon was apparent in the four Australian choirs. Music underpinned what participants had experienced and what they perceived in relation to masculinity, possible selves, and success.

Another example, shown below in Figure 5.13, concerns possible selves.

O: Well, I think that it’s socially important for them, is one thing, because life at university can be very daunting and the choir provides them with a sort of instant social set of about thirty people. It also provides them with a very, hopefully enjoyably intensive framework of doing something four times a week. I think it’s important because the Oxbridge choirs are a major feeder of the continuing flourishing of the choral traditions of the UK. In that, on the one hand, professionally, if one looks at those who are singing in all the London churches and professional choirs a lot of them are Oxbridge choral scholars. Of the professional consorts particularly early music consorts, a lot of them went through this sort of training at university. So it’s very good for professional training. It trains people in the very quick learning of pieces and even sight-reading, even if they weren’t when they arrived. They’re singing with a young version of the kinds of… if they want to go on to professional… the kinds of professional consorts they hope to be in after university. For those who want to go on to Conservatoire training as soloists, it gives them many solo

Figure 5.13 Example of coding Professional Conductor 4
This example includes comments about tradition and the creating of a culture as well as preparation related to career opportunities and trajectories. The example is taken from the interview with Professional Conductor 4 who worked with university students.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided a description of the methodology employed in the research study, describing the suitability and relevant aspects of phenomenology, case study and narrative. The participants were described via a snapshot of each of the four choirs and ethics was discussed. Details about methods and research tools were provided and the process of analysis was discussed and various examples were included, which depict the analytical processes. The chapter included description of the contexts of five professional conductors, the way they were recruited, the use of interviews and the approach to analysis showing how the professional conductor themes reflected the research themes.

The next chapter adds to the body of knowledge offered in the review of literature by shedding some light on the experience, practice and opinions of five professional conductors. The chapter, through the input of these conductors, extends the literature from Chapters 2, 3 and 4 by providing insight into the experience of these professionals and it provides a useful comparison between the UK experience and the Australian experience of choir.
Chapter 6: Professional Conductors

6 Professional Conductors

Summary

The following chapter documents the findings associated with the inclusion of the professional opinions and experiences of five renowned conductors from the United Kingdom and Australia. They represent different contexts with experience ranging from school choirmasters, university professors and organists, and professional freelance conductors of international acclaim. The discussion is structured around Possible Selves, Success and Masculinity, as well as The Conductor, themes that emerged consistently in the literature review.

The intention is not to suggest that the professional conductors be considered as participants. Rather their contribution offers a useful comparison context to the Australian choral context and represents an expansion of the literature.
The literature in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 presented three main research themes and a number of subcategories emerged linked to masculinity, possible selves and success. Interview questions were devised for the professional conductors drawn from these themes. In addition, however, the conductors were also asked to speak generally about their experience. The conductors were invited to participate on the basis of criteria for success discussed in the literature, which included having a reputation as leaders in their field. Socio-cultural context was also raised in the literature as a significant influence on possible selves and, therefore, the choral tradition of the United Kingdom represents a social and cultural context worthy of investigation in relation to the path chosen by these professional conductors. The UK choral tradition also presented an opportunity for comparison, having had a long history and culture of boys singing.

The opinions expressed by the professional conductors aligned closely with the research themes. Including the accounts of their experience and hearing their perspectives provides a useful comparison for the Australian context and strengthens the consistency and consolidates the significance of the research themes as they were experienced by the participants from Choir 1, 2, 3 and 4. As stated previously these conductors were not considered participants in the same way as those in Choir 1, 2, 3 and 4. Rather their involvement develops concepts that emerged in the literature.

This section provides a discussion of the findings from the five professional conductors, which has been structured according to the research themes – masculinity, possible selves and success. Some common subcategories also emerged. Within masculinity the conductors spoke of vocal change and image or stereotypes that added to the challenge of getting boys to sing in choir. Possible selves incorporated discussion about creating a culture, visions of the future and career goals. The conductors discussed success as well, including extensive consideration of excellence and the conductor in determining and maintaining a standard of success.
6.1 Masculinity

The conductors acknowledged that at various times in their careers they had experienced difficulties associated with getting boys to sing and persuading them to be in the choir, which they at least partially attributed to being male and issues of masculinity, especially in relation to sport. Conductor 1 said, “getting the boys to sing is a challenge [because] they’ve been in school all morning, they’ve had a hard morning of lessons, and it’s... their lunch time” (p. 400).

Particularly noted was the constant battle for time when sporting activities conflicted with choral commitments. This was only apparent with those conductors who were, or had been, schoolteachers. Most of the conductors interviewed were not in positions where recruiting boys was an issue and this was primarily due to the selective nature of their ensembles. The culture and tradition associated with boys’ choirs in England that has been discussed already is an important consideration when discussing masculinity in this context.

The time when boys experience vocal change was a phenomenon experienced by Conductors 1, 3 and 5. Conductor 4 expressed a slightly different perspective as someone whose choir consisted of young men. “They’ve only been singing on their broken voices for a few years. They tend to have, therefore, less experience vocally on their adult voice” (p. 436). The challenge for Conductor 4, therefore, involved working with these men to find their natural voice and not one that was “artificially over-mature” (p. 437) and simultaneously working to create “a powerful and flexible instrument overall” (p. 437).

Conductor 5 had a straightforward approach. He advised singing through the change process and did not believe it should be turned into a negative issue. He expressed this opinion clearly, saying, “Just keep singing and if you can’t... stop. If it hurts, stop. Easy” (p. 451). Conductor 3 communicated a comparable opinion. He described the process as natural and always treated it in this manner. He offered the following anecdotal account of how he would deal with a boy whose voice was ‘breaking’:
I say to them, “Oh, it’s going, isn’t it? ... gradually you’ll find that you can’t get the high notes or there’ll be a patch in the middle of your voice that you can’t do or it will be squawky. Sometimes you can sing it, sometimes you can’t. Carry on singing - but here’s where your musicianship comes to the fore - leave out bits that make you uncomfortable. If it’s painful come and tell me, you can stop singing for a bit (p. 430).

Conductor 3 added that he had the privilege of working closely with singing teachers at the school and so the voice change process was managed professionally and carefully. Conductor 1 reported that he too worked in close conjunction with the singing teachers so that boys’ voices were managed appropriately and explained, “We are very supported here by the vocal coaches and the School’s Head of Singing” (p. 401). He relied heavily on the ability of these singing teachers to assess where each of the boys were at in terms of their vocal change and at which point they were ready or needed to change to a lower part. Conductor 1 explained that he was constantly faced with the fact that “boys want to be in the back row” (p. 401). He described that they “try and push their voices down” (p. 401) but “they just need a little bit of support to stay in the boys’ choir because they’re not quite ready for the back row” (p. 401) and this was where the support of the vocal coaches was invaluable. Conductor 1’s comments also indicated that the boy soprano, or unbroken, voice was not desirable in older boys “particularly the older trebles. It’s a very public thing to be singing treble in front of people” (p. 401).

Conductor 5 agreed that there were stereotypes surrounding boys who sang in choirs, such as “if you sang that was gay” (p. 446) but he also felt that these views were the result of fear and lack of understanding and could be held for any number of different activities. Even in a culture where boys’ choir was embedded in heritage and tradition, Conductor 1 acknowledged the potential for unpleasantness and felt that attending to the boys’ welfare was an important part of retaining them in the choir, saying, “we do have to keep an eye on them and make sure they’re happy to do it and they’re not getting bullied” (p. 401).
6.2 Possible Selves

Concepts pertinent to possible selves were generally made evident through the relation of personal aims for career. For example, from a young age Conductor 5 was adamant that his career would involve music. He said, “it was always music... that was never in doubt” (p. 444). Likewise, Conductor 4 communicated his conviction saying, “certainly by the time I was at my second year at university I was pretty clear that one of the things I wanted to do alongside being a scholar and a university teacher was the choral director” (p. 435).

Conductor 2 demonstrated an awareness of self in relation to his own abilities and career, reflecting findings about self-perception and self-confidence from the four participant choirs. He stated,

I think that I’m quite a good musician... but I have a great deal of energy and I’m very well organized. Now, my music ability is sufficiently good that I can be at top table and taken seriously, but the people I work with... are Simon Rattle, and Daniel Barenboim... They both take me seriously as an equal. But as a musician I am nowhere in the same field as either of them... but I can provide something that they can’t get from anyone else (p. 419).

6.2.1 Culture

This can be an elusive concept to define due to the infinite variances in contexts; however, a number of recurring features were identified, encompassing tradition and cultural heritage, creating a culture, and religious foundations. One of the most frequent references to culture was discussed in terms of tradition. Conductor 1 used this term several times throughout his interview. For example, he described a time when his school was once in “the tradition of... a boarding school” (PC 1, p. 398) and despite the fact that it had become coeducational in the last nine years, it had maintained its “Sunday evening tradition” (p. 398) where the chapel choirs were rostered to perform each week at the school’s Sunday evening chapel service. This conductor also referred to the “Cathedral traditional” (p. 398) manifested in the type of music performed and the way in which rehearsals took place. Conductors 1, 2 and 4 also used this reference to tradition. They described schools teaching “a choral tradition” (PC1, p. 399; PC4, p. 434); and a person who comes from “a tradition that sings” (PC2, p. 415). Conductor 3 did not use the actual term, but
highlighted the prevalence and ongoing nature of the country’s long, historical tradition saying, “There are boys’ choirs all over the country” (p. 432).

In addition to the explicit use of the term, tradition was discussed in terms of ethos. Conductor 2, when discussing a particular school’s tradition of having boys’ choirs, said they had “retained the ethos of the idea that boys sang” (p. 408). Because the role of Conductor 4 is steeped in history, his discussion was full of references to traditional and historical terminology and practices. For example, he described the term used for his title and role, Organist:

I’m called the organist, which actually means, I don’t play the organ very often. It’s historic. It’s a term, in English cathedrals for the choir director (p. 434).

This conductor also believed that part of the importance of his role was to contribute to the survival of a choir tradition. Conductor 1 echoes this by implying he, and others in a comparable position, have a responsibility to maintain this tradition and he provides the following summation of his perspective:

On one level it’s a very important part of this country’s heritage. Boys and men singing in ancient colleges and cathedrals and foundations, that’s a very important part of English culture and composers of music have been nurtured through that over the years. But if you think back, all of the composers were employed by the Chapel Royal - Purcell and all his colleagues before and after. So there’s that tradition and I think it’s very important that we carry that on as long as we can” (p. 405).

Conductor 2 believes in taking “ordinary, keen musicians and turn[ing] them into something better than they would have been... [in order] to make a difference in their community” (p. 414). Conductor 3 communicated a similar belief commenting that creating a culture of boys singing involved “other boys doing it!” (p. 431). According to this conductor, the more prevalent the activity, the more natural it was to be involved. With reference to encouraging boys to sing, he commented:

They will have a better attitude to singing the more of them that do anyway. So, if you’re in a place where lots of people are musical, it’s far more likely to be acceptable (p. 431).

Conductor 2 suggested that “if it becomes part of everyday life” (p. 411) then it becomes a natural part of the culture. Conductor 5 confirmed a similar belief as
he related the fact that in his early career experience as a teacher, singing was an accepted, daily school activity. Both Conductor 2 and Conductor 3 were adamant that in order to create a culture where boys singing together was acceptable it was important to create something boys wanted to be part of in the first place and this partly involved making a choir “as good as possible” (PC 3, p. 424).

A discussion about the English choral tradition would be incomplete without a mention of its religious roots and Conductor 1 and Conductor 4 expressed a belief that the choir existed to serve the people in the congregation even though “there is no religious bar to membership of the choir” (PC 4, p. 439) and so despite being involved in a very “traditional liturgy” (p. 439) the choir members were not required to adhere to any particular faith. The most important element here was “communication with the congregation or audience” and was seen as a vital part of the “choir’s liturgical role” (p. 438). Conductor 1 communicated a very similar understanding of the choir’s role in his school and he made it clear to boys as they auditioned that the choir had an obligation to fulfil their role at Sunday evening chapel services and other school events. It was expected of them if they joined. In his view the music provided by the chapel choir was “important for the liturgical side [and for] lifting the spiritual side of chapel” (p. 400).

These ensembles remain strong, primarily because they are based on such a strong sense of tradition and “religious foundation” (PC 4, p. 441). Conductor 4 described it in the following way:

Much of what is going on is directly traceable back to the Oxford movement in the nineteenth century and then back to the Reformation and further back than that... and I’m sure that some of the choir take pleasure in the fact that they are doing something that’s been going on for a long time and is traditional (p. 441).

Being part of a longstanding tradition of church choirs has meant that a culture of singing already exists on which to base continued activity. It was believed that creating a desired culture was necessary to move forward and that, although working from a strong, religious foundation it was not without difficulties. Tradition, cultural heritage, and religious foundation played
significant roles in the creation of culture and the perpetuation of culture; one in which it was acceptable for boys to sing in choirs. Figure 6.1 depicts these ideas by showing a cycle of tradition.

**Figure 6.1 The cycle of tradition**

The English choral tradition was developed as a boys’ context, and therefore, provides a useful comparison to that experienced in Australian male culture, discussed in Chapter 2. Despite elements of contextual differences, both cultures demonstrate socialized constructions around gender and traditions, which can affect the development of an individual’s possible selves.

### 6.3 Success

The notion of Success was discussed in terms of achievement, performance, impact, excellence and the conductor. Excellence was a theme upon which the five conductors focused and they attributed the success of a choir in considerable part to aspects of excellence. The same applied to their beliefs.
regarding the role of the conductor, to whom they also largely attributed the success of an ensemble.

Success was firstly described in terms of achievement but particularly in terms of the achievement of personal goals. Conductor 1 was explicit, saying, success was “achieving goals that you’ve set yourself” (p. 402) in whatever capacity or manifestation of responsibility that was. Likewise, Conductor 3 said success was “setting yourself a goal and achieving it” (p. 428) and that, “success in your own eyes [was] more important than success in other people’s eyes” (p. 428). He correspondingly applied this definition to himself believing that he was a success because throughout his career he had “achieved what [he] wanted to achieve” (p. 429). From a somewhat different angle, Conductor 4 suggested that fulfilment was another way of considering achievement and this potentially determined whether an activity had been a success for an individual. For Conductor 5 success was “something you constantly work to achieve” (p. 443) and, with a more musical orientation success was manifested when an individual had “conquered a particular musical thing” (p. 444).

Performance, on the other hand, was commonly spoken of as an important expression of success, whether by implication or in a more explicit fashion. Each of the conductors recounted stories of performances and productions for which they were responsible, and all of which were essentially considered successful undertakings. In addition to weekly performances at college chapel services, Conductor 4 described the tours, radio broadcasts and CD recordings of which his chapel choir could boast and he added that whilst these things did not generate money for the group, they did help with instilling a sense of “satisfaction for the singers of knowing they’re in a choir with a certain profile” (p. 439). Conductor 1 explained that his choir enjoyed “a lot of tours to cathedrals and big churches in the area” (p. 402) as well as performances in places such as Trinity College in Stratford-Upon-Avon, Lichfield Cathedral and Windsor Castle. According to him, the performance of choral music, and this included the buildings associated with it, was an embodiment of tradition and, therefore, it was “only right that they get to sing in those places” (p. 402). Conductor 3 reiterated his belief that people felt satisfied when they were
admired and performing provided this sort of opportunity. When asked if performing was a measure of success, he responded:

In theory no, but in practice, yeah! Everybody likes performing and why not? Are we just doing this for ourselves? Well, yes, there are plenty of good choirs that do. Groups of people sing for themselves, but ultimately getting from eighty-five to a hundred per cent is very difficult indeed unless you’re going to give it to other people” (p. 429).

The implication here relates directly to impact and to the degree to which a choir influences others as well as themselves. There was consensus amongst the conductors that singing in a choir had many benefits for an individual, including the effective development of their musicality, the improvement of academic ability and results, and also the positive social ramifications of belonging to a group and working as a team. Although these aspects are important, their significance will not be discussed here except to say that these were all aspects used in depictions of success. The five conductors placed far more importance on the choir’s impact on their audience, whether that was a church congregation or listeners in a secular setting.

There were several reasons that Conductor 1 provided with regard to the impact of choir, most of which focused on the boys at a personal level. Conductor 1 believed singing in the choir improved students’ academic performance and progress; it developed self-discipline in the boys; and it certainly impacted their musical understanding. For some the experience of choir initiated their path to obtaining a choral scholarship for their university years. The choir provided an important avenue for the boys to express themselves, which was becoming increasingly difficult since it was “something a lot of people don’t have... because they’re not taught it” (p. 400). Choir also taught the boys to work as a team and because the ages of the boys varied from between 10 years and 17 years it required “them to think very carefully about how they fit into that team” (p. 401). Subsequently, the boys demonstrated support for each other, and the older boys became role models for the younger. Conductor 5 described this in adolescents as satisfying their need for belonging and Conductor 4 explained that choir was a “communal effort” (p. 440). As mentioned previously, Conductor 1 explained that an important part of his
choir’s role was providing music for chapel services at the school. This was an important view also held by Conductor 4 who said, “communication with the congregation or the audience” (p. 438) and to “sing in a musically inspiring and engaging way” (p. 438) was the responsibility of the choir.

Conductor 2 agreed that singing in choir assisted children in other areas of learning. He gave the example of the Boston Children’s Choir whose members were “achieving one hundred per cent graduation” (p. 409) at their various schools “because what they’ve taught them through music is concentration and commitment” (p. 409). Conductor 3 believed singing gave boys an “inner energy to do well and achieve” (p. 431). Conductor 5 proposed that for amateur singers, particularly those targeted in community projects, there were immense social and personal benefits, but for professional performers “achievement comes from the fact that they’ve communicated something to an audience” (p. 448).

6.3.1 The Conductor

There was a consensus amongst the five conductors interviewed that the leader was a crucial element for the development and success of a choir. There were varying degrees of emphasis placed on this but each one made reference to its significance. Conductor 1 confirmed the significance of the conductor through his description of his role. He talked about the challenge of “getting boys to sing” (p. 398), “persuading them to do it” (p. 400), “inspiring them through different music” (p. 400), and working on a piece of music until the boys are “singing it beautifully” (p. 400). He also mentioned having a “pastoral outlook” (p. 401) and supporting the boys in any way necessary.

Conductor 2 had a considerable amount to say about the impact of the leader. His interview was characterised by numerous references to the person in charge, indicating a strong belief that the success or failure of a group was primarily in the hands of the conductor. Later he stated that choir required a leader who was “sufficiently thrilling that kids want to sing for them” (p. 410). His position is quite succinctly summed up in the following statement:

Actually the problem is not resources... there’s plenty of music... it’s not rooms, it’s not pianos... it’s not buildings... it’s not public transport. All these things have a little
influence on them...what it comes down to is: Is the teacher any bloody good? If the teacher is really good then the kids will crowd round and do it. And that’s why the great choirs are in the most unlikely places. They’re just wherever the great choir director takes up shop (p. 414).

Conductor 3 described himself in this role by saying that he enjoyed being in the midst of something that the group was working to achieve and he liked being in charge of that process. He said, "I like getting things better... being the boss of people. I like conducting a group, and I suppose that’s something to do with power!" (p. 426).

Conductor 5 described his rehearsals saying, “you have to be in charge and I always run a rehearsal with the point of view that it’s not a democracy” (p. 448). Of course, this statement was tempered by his overall approach of trying to “empower” (p. 447) his performers, involving them in discussion at appropriate moments, giving “them a sense of responsibility for their own performances” (p. 447) and “putting the onus of the work on to them” (p. 447). Ultimately, though, he believed “they want leadership” (p. 448) and that the same applied to children in the context of the school classroom.

Another aspect of the conductor that became apparent was that of expertise. An aspect of which was choosing good repertoire. Conductor 3 suggested “you should always choose music that you love” (p. 426) and not feel limited by context, circumstances or people. Conductor 5 understood the importance of this in a similar way. He described a number of situations where colleagues suggested he would fail because the participants were not accustomed to the repertoire and yet the performances of the music proved successful. There were times, particularly as a teacher, when Conductor 5 used music that was familiar and accessible to his students, because they loved it and he “had no issue with that” (p. 445).

It was made clearly apparent that the conductor was a significant aspect in the successful running of a choir and that this consisted of a number of facets, which included the fact that the role was one of leadership; and that the selection of repertoire, whether exclusively the role of the conductor or collaboratively undertaken, remained in the hands of the leader.
6.3.2 Excellence

The nature of excellence, as expressed by all of the conductors questioned, was comprised of standard, pride and expectation. Overwhelmingly, there was an understanding that excellence was an essential ingredient for success and for persuading boys to participate. Experience had taught these conductors that boys wanted to be part of something good; therefore, a standard should be set and maintained, which in turn meant the activity gained a respected reputation, which generated a sense of pride in the members. Communicating expectations to these individuals was also seen as an essential ingredient to establishing and maintaining a standard.

Conductor 2 described a recent day of auditioning:

I auditioned a hundred students... The standard was very high but there were eighty-eight girls and twelve boys. Now, of the twelve boys, I took eleven of them... I was very surprised by how few there were but I was very surprised at how good the eleven were! (p. 408).

These conductors communicated that having such a standard also generated a sense of pride in the group. They understood that they belonged to something of good reputation and of which they could be proud. Conductor 3 suggested that “Everybody likes to do things well” (p. 424) and in his experience, boys had been “proud of the standard” (p. 423). He emphasised this point by reiterating, “We all want things to be well done, we all want excellence” (p. 2). Excellence was something he believed could always be achieved, especially with young people and particularly when this approach to singing began early, when children had been “introduced to it extremely well from an early age, and introduced to it really well, and shown how to do it well, and they aspire to doing it well,” (p. 423).

In a slightly different sense, but still demonstrative of establishing expectations, was the process described by Conductor 4 in his context. Because of the high standard and competitive nature of obtaining a choral scholarship, the undergraduates who receive one are expected to fulfil their weekly coaching, rehearsal and performance obligations as well as maintain a standard worthy of the scholarship. Part of this involved employing a very disciplined approach to
participation and punctuality. Conductor 3 echoed this disciplined approach and instilling a sense of pride in the choir saying, “I’m very strong on turning up on time” (p. 424) and, in his experience, the boys appreciated this discipline, often communicating “the only fair way is to all come at once” (p. 424). Conductor 1 offered a parallel argument, believing that belonging to the choir provided the boys with an added sense of discipline and taught them a standard of behaviour that was not necessarily present in those outside the choir. He said:

I think there is something very much about discipline. I do find that the boys in the choir... do carry themselves in a way that perhaps some other students don't and I think because there’s a discipline there... certainly there are standards there that are very good for people to learn (p. 405).

For these conductors, excellence was a significant and vital facet of running their choirs. They believed in establishing a high standard and working to maintain it; they believed this provided choir members with an important experience of pride; and they believed that setting expectations for the choir encouraged them to aspire to standards of excellence.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the opinions and expertise of five professional conductors from the UK and Australia about the UK choral tradition. Their input provides a comparison context for the Australian choirs participating in this research. The conductors reflected on the main research themes, adding their perspective. In particular they discussed vocal change and stereotypes as pertinent to the notion of masculinity. The possible selves theme was considered from the influence of culture and tradition, and success was articulated in terms performance, achievement, excellence and the conductor.

The following three chapters present findings associated with masculinity, possible selves and success.
To assert your masculinity in this culture is to assert something... brutish

(Choir 4: Community, Interview 1, p. 376)

Summary

This chapter engages with findings about Masculinity and attempts to make sense of a vast array of perceptions, beliefs, ingrained cultural norms and stereotypes, which are used to define what it is to be male. These perceptions, in conjunction with ideas surrounding success and personal identity, have enormous power to influence the decisions of males, particularly younger males, and particularly in the choral context. Findings demonstrate that although participants may not have experienced negativity associated with being a male singing in a choir, they nevertheless had an acute awareness that these attitudes exist.
This research challenges the view that masculinity can be described in narrow or singular terms. The very fact that expressions and representations of being male are as numerous as the individuals themselves, presents the music educator and choral conductor with the task of catering to a diverse group interacting in the close proximity of the group setting. Harrison’s (2001) continuum shows the range of perspectives on what constitutes a ‘male’ or ‘feminine’ activity, which supports the notion that cultures of thought and stereotypes exist. At the same time, however, it demonstrates scope of thought.

In a similar way the data extracted from Choir Members’ Survey (CMS) and Audience Members’ Survey (AMS) shows the difference of perspective. A number of CMS responses communicated that some peers continued to perceive choir as non-masculine, particularly amongst the younger aged males of Choir 1 and Choir 2. In contrast, audience members at Choir 4’s performance, as expressed in the AMS, did not perceive it difficult to be a male in a choir. The notion of a continuum (Harrison, 2001) reflects a general perception pervasive in Australian society that singing in choir continues to be defined by feminine attributes, and there is much anecdotal evidence to support this. This research opens this discussion and attempts to understand the individual perceptions as well as the collective, by considering the perspectives of insiders, such as conductors and choristers, and those of outsiders, such as members of an audience.

It seems to be an obvious statement but it soon became clear, that the boys and men involved in this research all considered themselves to be male and to them it was important that their masculinity was recognised, even though this took very different shapes. Interestingly, though, there were consistent threads of meaning and commonly accepted ways of thinking about masculinity expressed by those involved. This section seeks to address Research Question 1: What effect do notions of masculinity have on male participation in choir? It is divided into three main ideas: stereotypes, mateship and vocal change. The discussion in stereotypes considers the way in which choir is perceived and males are typecast. It also contemplates the expressions and understandings of
masculinity in the Australian culture and does this with particular reference to Choir 4, who embrace and challenge their own and accepted images of what it is to be male, and who openly express the significance of relationships with other men. Mateship emerged as a significant theme and is discussed in terms of the important social ramifications of choir. It was expressed through friendship and relationship with other men, and is also closely linked to the importance of collaboration, or working together as discussed in Chapter 8: Musical success. Findings demonstrate that choir provides men with a meaningful male context, one in which they can enjoy the freedom of communicating and relating in the unique language of men. The other aspect closely connected to images of masculinity is that of vocal change, which was found to be more overtly relevant to the younger males of Choir 1 and Choir 2. Participants described their personal experience of the physical difficulties associated with the process and the way it was managed.

7.1 Stereotypes

Asking boys to speculate on why boys might not want to be in choir, or what others may think of them because they do belong to the choir, is potentially confronting and uncomfortable. For some it highlights their own experience and for others it draws attention to something they prefer to be kept quiet and in either case there is the danger that the boys may be holding back. For the boys of Choir 1, however, this was a little different, which could be due, in part, to the prestige placed on choir, as mentioned in the discussion about achievement in public success. For Conductor 1 this was also about the culture created, in this case the school culture. She suggested that issues of stereotypes and bullying were rare because the school did not tolerate that kind of behaviour; rather it recognised and celebrated boys’ participation in artistic pursuits. The CMS reflected this with a number of boys saying that those who were not chosen for the choir were disappointed, and only one of the 40 responses indicated that they had experienced negativity from peers:
Chapter 7: Findings about Masculinity

My friends say that choirs are for girls. Yes, I do take a bit of ‘crash and bang’ about it (Choir 1, CMS, Question 9, p. 488)

Responses in the AMS were also a potential reflection of this culture. Sixty-seven of a total 136 responses indicated collectively that they ‘Strongly Disagreed’ and ‘Disagreed’ with the statement Being a boy in choir would be difficult; whereas, only 28 ‘Strongly Agreed’ and ‘Agreed’ that it would be difficult (Choir 1, AMS, Question 3). Further to this, Conductor 1 made the observation that in "a co-educational situation, you would never get this amount of boys" (Choir 1, Conductor 1, p. 232). In her opinion, being a boys' school made the situation very different and was a significantly influential factor. She maintained, however, that even amongst ‘boys only’ there would always be,

boys that still wouldn’t come, even if they can sing, because they're a bit worried about what people might think about it (Choir 1, Conductor 1, p. 232).

It was clear that stereotypes existed and Choir 1 boys described the attitude that choir was considered an activity for girls, but perhaps more damaging, was the belief of some that it was actually “unmanly” (Choir 1, Focus Group 1, p. 264). One boy said,

They think it's not that manly to sing (Choir 1, Focus Group 1, p. 264)

and another said,

They think it's gay and they think it's for girls (Choir 1, Focus Group 2, p. 276).

Yet another boy related a situation at his brother's school where a new boy “who loves to sing and do music at school, went to join the choir and no one wanted to be friends with him” (Choir 1, Focus Group 1, p. 265). Other depictions included the comparison with sport where boys might not want to sing in choir because “they might want to play rugby or soccer and be tough and cool,” (Choir 1, Focus Group 2, p. 277) and even for the boys involved in choir this posed problems related to time commitments and conflicting loyalties. They all agreed that if they had to choose between choir and sport they would always choose sport. They responded with conviction and strength, despite describing their love of singing and choir with just as much conviction, enthusiasm and passion. Within the choir setting observed, the expression of physicality was evident in the way
boys interacted with each other. For example, in Choir 1 a number of boys were seen acknowledging each other through elbowing and prodding; one boy took up a fighting pose; and there was constant movement, even if this was simply fidgeting. In Choir 2 there was also a constant display of physicality with stretching, cracking knuckles, and jostling each other. In particular, the basses always maintained some form of physical contact. There was also physical interaction within Choir 3, in particular mock fist fighting, and the self-identified gay student also engaged in this play. For Choir 4 physicality was expressed differently. The observed rehearsal saw the men get so absorbed in the song, ‘We are the Men’, that they began stamping their feet, clapping, and banging the table as they sang, and later in the rehearsal there was the suggestion of an arm wrestle to determine who would get the last chocolate biscuit. Physical movement was also an integral part of Choir 4’s performance routine, however, the choreography being a parody of dancing, suggesting that the stilted, awkward moves could not be misconstrued as actual dancing. This was made explicit in a sequence where one choir member started dancing freely, only to be met with the disdainful stare of the rest of the group. A similar sequence occurred when some of the men got carried away and started to sing in falsetto voices.

Boys in Choir 2 had a lot to say about this “stereotype around singing” (Choir 2, Interview 1, p. 292). They felt that boys were subjected to “peer pressure” and one boy commented that it was considered “a girlie thing; you’re not a man if you do that” (Choir 2, Interview 2, p. 297). They described common opinions of choir saying it was, “wimpy” (Choir 2, Interview 1, p. 292), “gay” (Choir 2, Focus Group, p. 324), a “no-no” (Choir 2, Focus Group, p. 324) and “uncool” (Choir 2, Focus Group, p. 310). The CMS for Choir 2 revealed similar sentiments with respondents suggesting that choir was seen as a feminine activity or “just for girls” (Choir 2, CMS, Question 11, p. 491). Even amongst the choir participants there was evidence of stereotypical thinking as one adolescent boy suggested that choirs for men “were those bald fifty-year-old male choirs” (Choir 2, Focus Group, p. 319). During the recorded rehearsal it was observed that a fifteen-year-old boy soprano was faced with the situation of having to stand with the
girls and sing the same part, however, he positioned himself so that he was
separate from them and closer to the conductor, facing the tenors and the
basses. The AMS revealed that respondents were quite evenly split in their
opinion as to whether or not Being a boy in a choir would be difficult. Forty-one
of 120 agreed it would be difficult and 49 disagreed (Choir 2, AMS, Question 3).

Conductor 2 suggested that males were motivated by stereotypes in other areas
of music too, saying,

We pick instruments like guitars, trumpets, saxophones because they're
masculine and they have a great reputation (Choir 2, Conductor 2, p. 287).

He also felt that the fame enjoyed by men in musical theatre off-set these
stereotypes and prejudices:

Within musical theatre, the glamour or the kudos associated with being a star,
overcomes the fact that you’re actually singing in a voice that other people don’t
want to admit to (Choir 2, Conductor 2, p. 283).

This is particularly interesting in light of the previous discussion surrounding
perceptions of success; the suggestion being that it is an acceptable activity
because it satisfies the criteria for success. For example, the individual had made
it a career, and had enjoyed recognition and wealth as a result.

The young men in Choir 3 identified all of these stereotypes and some even used
the same terms, such as “gay” and “a girl’s thing.” Whilst they understood and
expressed them in a more developed way, essentially they meant the same thing
as the younger boys:

There is a stigma about singing in a choir being feminine, but I guess when you
get older people get past that. Because it challenges the gender norm (Choir 3,
CMS, Question 11, p. 493).

Consistent with Adler and Harrison’s (2004) notion of “gender role rigidity”
(p.274) were the words of one 22 year-old male from Choir 3, who said that it
was difficult for boys to be involved in choir because “the gender role is broken
because singing is pretty” (Choir 3, Interview 1, p. 346). This same participant
spoke from his personal experience of being gay. He stated the widely held belief
that “if you sing in a choir or a vocal group you are gay. Full stop. That’s just it”
(Choir 3, Interview 1, p. 338). He also linked these reactions to culture, drawing
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on aspects related to the Australian male culture and on Australian society, which “prides itself on its sport, which is obviously ultra-masculine” (Choir 3, Interview 1, p. 338). Part of that culture, as he saw it, was a lack of acceptance surrounding the increasing normalization and prevalence of homosexuality, particularly from older generations. In his opinion, children struggled to make sense of associated stereotypes because their parents and society struggled with the issue in the first place. Video analysis of the rehearsal showed this gay student describing the fact that he ‘switches off’ when he is the subject of ridicule, saying, “It’s my immunity” (VA, Choir 3, p. 470). Having said this, though, throughout the rehearsal he mitigated neither his flamboyant hand gestures nor his melodramatic responses and he even engaged in very humorous exchanges at his own expense.

Conductor 4 reflected on this element, struggling to express it, but nevertheless recognizing the issue. He said of Choir 4 that it was important to be inclusive and represent all men, and rather than this being a major purpose, it was a natural part of challenging the way people think, especially the way men think:

> If it’s delivered in that really masculine way it’s sort of like a kind of homo-erotic humour, which suggests that... oh, what is it...? It suggests that the idea of being gay is laughable, but that we are sort of sanctioning it [the inclusion of all men] (Choir 4, Conductor 4, p. 363).

Another member of Choir 4 recognized the role of culture and said that what was considered acceptable for a male depended on the “male Australian stereotypes that are going” (Choir 4, Interview 2, p. 385). He felt that, “Australians will bloody hold back [and] the guys won’t put themselves out there unless there’s a reason” (Choir 4, Interview 2, p. 385). In a sport-obsessed society, where men are preoccupied with displaying their strength, anything outside this description, “anything that’s gentle or soft” (Choir 3, Interview 1, p. 348), is considered weak and non-masculine. Singing in a choir does not typically represent prowess and strength and so, inevitably, it is labeled ‘feminine’.

> Singing is pretty, it’s graceful, therefore it’s feminine, and it’s emotional so therefore it’s feminine (Choir 3, Interview 1, p. 346).
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The boys in Choir 1 showed how pervasive sport was in their lives and many of them described in detail how they played rugby, basketball, cricket, Australian Football League (Aussie Rules or AFL), golf and combinations of several, such as “AFL, tennis, golf” (Choir 1, Interview 3, p. 240). One 10-year-old proudly announced,

I have a real sporty background (Choir 1, Interview 1, p. 240).

One member of Choir 4 offered this explanation related to the power and acceptability of sport for men and boys:

they're just captured by the license to be muddy you know, knocked all over, crying, bleeding. That's what you do in that environment, it's sanctioned, you just do that there (p. 385).

The men of Choir 4 shared a glimpse into the complexity of what they do as a choir. They were acutely aware of the cultural norms and stereotypes that thrive in dictating the actions and choices of men and boys. One man put it this way:

To assert your masculinity in this culture in most normal ways is to assert something I think you don't want to, and these normal displays of maleness [are] brutish, sort of physically strong, assertive and all that stuff (Choir 4, Interview 1, p. 376).

Of particular interest here, however, is the fact that this participant went on to say that the choir gave these men “a chance to do that” (Choir 4, Interview 1, p. 377). Based on these discussions and based on popular culture, it would seem that men like the physicality of sport, and of course there is nothing inherently wrong with this. The problem arises when this single ideology becomes dominant. In fact there is the suggestion that certain male characteristics are innate and Conductor 4 implies that men are men in spite of imposed parameters,

The essence of what we're going for is an ancient sense of masculinity and so much so that if someone was to emerge from the depths of Croatia or South America [and] a bunch of men are doing a version of [a song], we would just meet them as brothers (Choir 4, Conductor 4, p. 360).

He was also of the opinion that a significant side of the appeal of sport for men was actually about the opportunity to be with other men:
Playing footy and showering together - it’s quite simple - and it’s not homo-erotic or anything like that; it’s homo-friendly. They’re actually trying to get close to each other (Choir 4, Conductor 4, p. 363).

In fact, the desire to be close and the desire for physical contact, as expressed here, aligns with the observation made previously of Choir 2 whose four basses stood shoulder to shoulder, displaying a strong and constant connection, throughout the rehearsal. Statements that label singing as feminine or homosexual are an attempt to make sense of such connections, but they fail to recognise the uniqueness of this interaction and again, they fail to concede that this is a natural and important expression of being male. Another member of Choir 4 also believed that there were parallels between choir and sport; however, he did not see these “in terms of physical contact” (Choir 4, Interview 1, p. 372) but rather that singing offered a different physical experience, including elements associated with breathing technique, using the diaphragm and the sensation of producing vocal sound.

I feel very strongly that singing together, male or female, is a real apotheosis of physical achievement… and that exquisite sense of it all coming together as a team there is that same thing in a choir… and it is physical… because singing is physical (Choir 4, Interview 1, p. 372).

The importance of physicality discussed here is consistent with research about “embodied interaction” (Hornecker, 2011, p. 21) and “embodied learning” (Somerville & Lloyd, 2006, p. 279), which emphasise the connection we have with our own bodies and how this relates to learning in various forms. This is also reflected in the work of Lyons et al. (2012) regarding the significance of effort in the learning process. Hornecker (2011) describes the emotional response associated with such physical experience:

Touch forms the permeable border between outside and inside, enabling primary experience of the world, and reassures us of our existence. But because touching something always means a close (and potentially dangerous) encounter, touch is responsive and dialogic and can be deeply emotional; the aesthetics of touch have immediate emotional responses (p. 21).

Such an experience, in the culture of the Australian male, represents instances of potentially confronting and uncomfortable interactions. Articulating overt connections with emotion is a phenomenon incongruent with the traditional image of the Australian man, or Aussie bloke, and yet, the men of Choir 4 boldly
attempt to challenge such understandings and therefore, they potentially represent a desirable possible self for some of the choirs that encompass younger males.

7.2 Mateship

The desire for meaningful contact with other males was intimated by a number of participants across the four choirs, indicating the importance of friendship and social interaction. In the Australian male culture the notion of mateship, an expression of male friendship, was discernible in the way participants described being together. The need for social satisfaction and the pleasure of the opportunity to be together could be seen in the comments of the young boys of Choir 1, who said that choir was important because it meant,

...being with my friends (Choir 1, Interview 3, p. 250)

The older boys of Choir 2 communicated a similar sentiment, saying it was,

...good to be part of a group (Choir 2, Interview 1, p. 288)

and that choir provided the opportunity to,

Be ’round my friends (Choir 2, Interview 2, p. 295).

Conductor 2 suggested that this social element was “just as important” (p. 287) as technical factors related to being part of a choir. He also hypothesized reasons for boys avoiding choir, and these were strongly related to social aspects. He wondered if it meant boys sacrificing their lunchtime with friends or if it was,

because they don’t know the other boys or they don’t know the other people in the group (Conductor 2, Choir 2, p. 279).

Regardless of the reasons for non-participation, it remains clear that the comfort and security of friendship plays a significant role in the decisions of young males. Members of Choir 3 acknowledged that choir, amongst other things, had “social elements to it as well, like whether we had fun or not” (Choir 3, Conductor 3, p. 332) and one participant recalled his school choir experience, saying,
I made lots of friends (Choir 3, Interview 2, p. 354).

Their reports of the social importance of choir demonstrated that the younger participants of Choir 1 and Choir 2 were unable to adequately verbalise or pinpoint the reasons why the experience gave them satisfaction. For the mature-aged men of Choir 4, however, it was clear, and their responses provide a means of interpreting the experiences of these younger participants. Conductor 4 openly acknowledged his own desire for the company of other men when he said,

I like being physically close to men. I like putting my arms around them, I like fighting them a little bit, and joking around (Choir 4, Conductor 4, p. 363).

He went on to defend the men in Choir 4, qualifying his comments regarding being physical by saying that it was “closeness” (p. 363) they desired rather than anything sexual. The relationship between the men in Choir 4 was observed in the recorded rehearsal. In particular, Conductor 4 welcomed the men with enthusiasm and warmth as they arrived. The men also showed support for one of group who had been in a car accident, attempting to improve his mood through humour; “So it was you who made us late that day!” (VA, Choir 4, p. 477). The CMS revealed a plethora of comments concerning reasons why the men joined the choir and these included wanting to be with “a good bunch of blokes” and the “relationships with other blokes – a big attraction” (Choir 4, CMS, Question 9). Other explanations included, “deep connection with music and other men,” “I genuinely enjoy the company of these men,” (Choir 4, CMS, Question 10) and “I’ve not done any male stuff, so there was this whole real pleasure in - as a middle aged guy - of just being part of a nice bunch of guys” (Choir 4, Interview 2, p. 381). Conductor 4 earnestly believed “that the language of men with each other can be expanded to express the fact that they mean something to each other” (Choir 4, Conductor 4, p. 363). He reflected on the Australian culture surrounding male relationship as well, saying,

In traditional Australian culture, the avenues for that [closeness] are not necessarily that many. You can’t actually just go, “Oh, mate, I really like you (Choir 4, Conductor 4, p. 363).

Choir 4 was “really celebrative of being ordinary good men” (Choir 4, Conductor 4, p. 362), which meant that the men were able to laugh at themselves and not
take themselves too seriously, and this was considered by the audience as an element of success (Choir 4, AMS, Question 2). One choir member said that people “can relate to many of the issues we address, all lovingly punctuated with plenty of self-deprecating humour (Choir 4, CMS, Question 11, p. 497). These men saw themselves as “uncovering a male archetype that’s there anyway” (Choir 4, Conductor 4, p. 360) and whilst these men acknowledged the stereotypical expressions of becoming a man or being male, they realistically recognised that these choices generally did not involve choir. Choir 4 consciously challenge the narrow and predominant view of masculinity largely through humour. As a composer and lyricist, Conductor 4 uses these typically male concepts as the basis to his songs, in a funny, clever and satirical manner. He said:

The beauty and stupidity were written into the DNA - both of them are as important as each other (Choir 4, Conductor 4, p. 359).

This comment gives rise to an important observation, worth noting briefly. Without the musicality of their performance, without the “beauty”, without the display of proficient technical skill, it is likely that the choir would not experience such enthusiastic audience reception as that which they do now, in spite of the humour, the satire and the spectacle. For the humour to work effectively, the musical and technical prowess must also be evident. The ‘beauty and stupidity’ are essential ingredients, both of which were observed in the recorded performance. Video analysis showed that during a song about a light pole the conductor approached the nervous soloist and held his hand in mock support. The song juxtaposes men and vulnerability, as well as silliness and seriousness. In another song, the choir sings about ‘satisfaction’ and that men only having one feeling, which was usually attached to food. These so-called masculine characteristics manifested themselves in the rehearsal, where each man enjoyed either a whiskey, a beer, or a coffee. At one point a vase of flowers was removed from the table, with the accompanying comment, “It’s lowering the tone” (VA, Choir 4, p. 477). The men frequently engage in crass humour and bad language; and the conductor announced the new song, ‘We are the Men’, in a big, deep voice. This song involved a very low note sung in unison at the end but one of the men was teased because he could not sing it: “You don’t have enough
balls” (VA, Choir 4, p. 477). Another member of Choir 4 suggested that, “you’re actually quite deliberately presenting vulnerability, stuff up... but [at the same time] strength... it’s real... realistic” (p. 389).

The opportunity to work together and communicate with each other was important to these men and it seems to be uniquely different to interactions in other contexts, such as mixed gender contexts. When I observed the rehearsal of Choir 2 there was a distinct difference in the social and interactive dynamics of the mixed group compared to that of the boys alone. The sopranos and altos (including the boy soprano) left the room to rehearse their parts separately to the tenors and basses. The remaining boys immediately became more animated and enthusiastic. They joked around a lot more but they also engaged in more focused rehearsing and demonstrated a tenacious desire to perfect their part. As a mixed group of boys and girls, the boys rarely asked for assistance or consolidation of their part. Instead they were seen to surreptitiously ask another boy, the confident Bass who would later conduct the group’s performance. It was a completely different picture when the boys rehearsed without the girls. They did not hesitate to ask to practise sections, or run though their part. One boy, who had not spoken at all prior to this, asked,

Can we run through the ‘Someday’ bit because I’m not sure of it? (VA, Choir 2, p. 461).

Conductor 2, also male, was strategic, showing his understanding of how to work effectively with this group of boys. He drilled them and challenged them to improve:

Stop, stop, stop. Tenors... what happened to you guys? (VA, Choir 2, p. 462).

“Over on” we’re still not getting, but that’s okay; we will (VA, Choir 2, p. 462).

He was able to manage changing levels of engagement and at one point, recognising their waning attention, suggested they break for a drink. Although Conductor 2 maintained a professional and equitable approach to the group as a whole, it became apparent that he, just like the boys, was comfortable in this all-male context. There were subtle changes in his approach to the boys. He allowed them to joke around, laugh and jostle each other. Perhaps more significant,
though, was the fact that he entered into these exchanges with the boys, appearing to enjoy them just as much. For example, they all indulged in laughter and joking at the double meaning associated with C-section when the conductor began describing the structure of the piece. A short time later he used a silly spoken voice to demonstrate a rhythm pattern, which the boys thought was particularly funny (VA, Choir 2, p. 461). There were also times when the conductor was more serious and demonstrated his regard for the boys in his praise of their efforts. The boys respond in a slightly dismissive or embarrassed manner, showing discomfort or an uncertainty of how to receive the conductor’s comments. One boy deflects the attention by asking to leave for a drink and another humorously says, “Oh shucks!” (VA, Choir 2, p. 462).

It is difficult to identify specific occasions where the language of men is especially obvious. It may simply exist as something virtually imperceptible, a sense of something intangible and elusive in meaning. It is clear, however, that interacting as an exclusive group of men holds significance for the participants, even though it was not necessarily verbalised. They alluded to its importance and implied it through their style of communication and the unique language of men with men. Such communication often involved humour, joking around with each other, good-natured ridiculing, and much laughter. They enjoyed making jokes and ‘roasting’ each other, an example of which was observed in Choir 4. During rehearsal comments included, “Stay the [expletive] out of that note!” and “Don’t worry; you’ll grow into it” (VA, Choir 4, p. 477). Choir 3 demonstrated similar expressions of this communication style, their rehearsal being characterised by a lot of laughter. At one stage they joke about kicking people out of the group for getting a section wrong and they use sexuality as a way of ridiculing one member who recognises the harmless fun and joins in,

Conductor: Out of my non-gay-men’s choir!
Member: The audacity! I’m bringing [power] to my people!
(VA, Choir 3, p. 469).

Choir provided these participants with an outlet, a context, where men and boys enjoyed a level of freedom and in this meaningful male context they experienced freedom to be male with other males. Working with a group of friends, being men, bound together by the collaborative ties of mateship, they confront cultural
expectations and challenge society’s labels. These choirs make people question norms; they foster relationships of significance between men; and they challenge those things that potentially damage any healthy expression of masculinity. The experience of vocal change can be one phenomenon that epitomises these destructive perspectives.

### 7.3 Vocal Change

Problems surrounding the process of voice change were not prolific, although they were mentioned, and it is suspected that some boys preferred not to discuss it. Choir 1 referred to vocal issues mainly in reference to the support they received from the conductor and this is discussed in musical success (Chapter 9). One 10-year-old boy explained that singing low was sometimes difficult and he felt that at these moments he was “a really bad singer” (Choir 1, Interview 1, p. 240). Another boy described that at times it was hard to sing high:

> Sometimes it’s really hard to push those extra high notes. I usually stop, take a minute to breathe, and start again. Just push myself (Choir 1, Focus Group 1, p. 259).

This was echoed by another boy who felt he “was squeaking a bit when [he] was trying to hit high” (Choir 1, Focus Group 2, p. 273). The CMS confirmed the issue for some with eight out of the 40 respondents writing a comment about the difficulty singing high or low at times. For example,

> Some notes are too high and it hurts my throat (Choir 1, CMS, Question 8, p. 487).

The adolescent boys of Choir 2 had personal experience of the process and provided some amusing vocal examples of what they sounded like when their voices were changing. One 15-year-old provided this summary:

> You just lose heaps in that period. However, I think you’re really missing out if you don’t sing... we all sang... through that crap time and then it’s alright. It’s just that you get testy pops! (Choir 2, Focus Group, p. 316).

Generally these boys did not communicate experiencing social exclusion or harassment from peers; however, one young man explained:
I used to sing by myself, when my voice was breaking (Choir 2, Interview 1, p. 291).

The words of another 15-year-old suggested the presence of stereotypical thought, when he described other people’s thinking,

A guy singing soprano, in a choir, they’re like, “Nah, that guy is definitely a girl,” (Choir 2, Interview 2, p. 299).

This boy, however, said he managed to work through the process himself, saying “I kind of worked through it, like it’s not a big deal” (Choir 2, Interview 2, p. 297). He simply changed which part he was singing based on whether or not he could reach the required notes anymore. While he refused to have this vocal change be seen as an emotional struggle, this adolescent also said, “technically it was pretty difficult” (Choir 2, Interview 2, p. 296).

Conductor 2 was aware that the voice change process was delicate and needed to be managed carefully, which was not always easy.

One of the hardest things is, knowing how to handle boys with unbroken voices in high school (Choir 2, Conductor 2, p. 283).

One member of Choir 3 talked about his own voice change experience and described that for him “it happened over two years” (Choir 3, Interview 2, p. 355). He also explained that at school his friends left the choir when their voices were changing and that “a few of them came back afterwards, but most of them never came back” (Choir 3, Interview 2, p. 355). A lack of support was identified as a significant factor that required attention:

I think that’s a really big thing. I know other people who have done choir and the support hasn’t been there and they’ve left and never done it again (Choir 3, Interview 2, p. 355).

Most of the boys thought positively about the process even though a number of them did struggle and it would seem that instead of viewing voice change as a negative process, boys approached it as a natural part of becoming a man and they even seemed to welcome it. A particularly good example of this was provided by one adolescent in Choir 2 who said:

I think when your voice is breaking, you actually lose some range and then you get it back. ‘Cos I can hit that note now and I couldn’t hit it when my voice was higher. What is cool, is when you’re singing and your voice is breaking, you’re singing this song and then you realise, ‘I can go two notes lower now,’ and this
just happens without you even noticing, so that’s cool (Choir 2, Focus Group, p. 317).

Another boy in Choir 2 captured this by saying, “It happens to everyone; proves I’m a man (Choir 2, Interview 2, p. 297). This revealing statement suggests that boys welcome voice change because it is a step in the development of their manhood. Other comments made by participants imply that the unchanged voice, especially as an adolescent, is a far worse ordeal. For example, “You’re not a man if you do that” (Choir 2, Interview 2, p. 297) and “you’re not really a guy if you sing too high (p. 299).

The voice represents something very personal and because “singing is an expression of yourself in action” (Choir 4, Interview 1, p. 373) it creates a vulnerability that can be uncomfortable for males, and this is particularly relevant during the period of vocal change. One member of Choir 4 described his own “piercing boy soprano” (Choir 4, Interview 1, p. 376) and the fact that he “really loved it” (p. 367). As an older man, he described the satisfaction of being a Bass, highlighting the persistence of thought that considers certain characteristics as ‘more male’ than others, or as essentially male:

Just speaking very personally, that’s a very wonderful thing to have as a male. I feel very good about having a bass voice (Choir 4, Interview 1, p. 376).

Contemplating masculinity was not a simple or straightforward task for the men and boys involved. It was evident that the concept encompassed a range of underlying personal beliefs as well as reflections of dominant ideologies. Choir presented itself as a phenomenon that did not align with the traditional traits of the Australian masculine individual; however, those involved had been able to overcome this, partly because the context allowed it and partly because, in the case of Choir 4, they were redefining the boundaries of masculinity and inspiring people, other men, to think differently about accepting narrow definitions.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has explored the physicality of singing, mateship and the social context of choir. Findings presented the way participants had experienced and
perceived masculinity and it demonstrated the significance of the voice change process in defining masculinity for these male participants. The ability to persevere despite the negative associations is an interesting factor in the discussion surrounding personal identity, and for the purposes of this research, the phenomenon is considered from the perspective of possible selves, the findings about which are presented in the next chapter, Chapter 8: Findings about Possible Selves.
8

Findings about Possible Selves

But when I’m older... I’m probably not going to be in a choir

(Choir 1: Junior School, Interview 3, p. 249)

Summary

This chapter presents the findings relevant to Possible Selves and includes elements of participants’ perceived past selves, present selves and future or projected selves. The Past covers facets of experience, such as prior musical experience. It also discusses the impact, if any, of participants’ positive or negative memories and experiences of singing, whether at school or in a different context. The Present considers participants’ self-perception, including self-belief and self-confidence. The role of purpose and criticism in shaping the choral experience is also explored, particularly in terms of the way possible selves are conceived, pursued or abandoned. The Future is a more difficult element of Possible Selves to explore; however, it is based on an individual’s notion of what they hope to be or hope to do, as well as that which they wish to avoid. It is the significance that these projections hold in relation to the present decisions made by participants that is of particular interest in this section, and for this reason the purpose of choir is also worth mentioning in The Future.
Exploring the intricacy of identity and understanding the motivations and choices of an individual can be approached from a Possible Selves standpoint. To do this requires the consideration of The Past, The Present, and The Future. Possible Selves suggests that individual identity is shaped by past experiences, the way the self is conceived or perceived in a current sense, as well as aspirations or apprehensions regarding the future. The prior and musical experience of participants, positive and negative, and family background, are all considered in the discussion on the past. The present looks at the way participants perceive themselves and their abilities and, therefore, discusses elements such as self-perception, self-confidence, and purpose of choir. The purpose of choir also forms part of the discussion about the future and the individual’s hoped-for self and feared self are features of this section.

8.1 The Past – Prior Experience

The boys in Choir 1 talked considerably about the extent of their involvement in music. For many of them it was a pastime enjoyed by their family and so naturally extended to include them. One boy described it like this:

It’s sort of in my blood because like my whole family, like my grandparents had eight kids and every one of them likes to sing. So I guess that sort of makes me want to sing (Choir 1, Focus Group 2, p. 274).

In response to Question 10: Why is the choir important to you? One boy said, “My family loves big choirs so I wanted to try one and I LOVED IT” (Choir 1, CMS, Question 10). A number of other boys explained that they came “from quite a musical background” (Choir 1, Focus Group 2, p. 268), that their mother or grandmother liked to sing and that their father belonged to a band. Of course, this also applied to involvement in sport, and one young boy indicated this when he said,

Lots of beach in my background; lots of AFL. Like my Grandpa played for Richmond (Choir 1, Interview 1, p. 240).
The boys in Choir 2 and the young men in Choir 3 reported a similar experience with family upbringing, with one Choir 2 adolescent saying,

Me, my brother, my dad - that is like what we do - that’s a big part of me (Choir 2, Focus Group, p. 308).

and a member of Choir 3 described his family experience:

Mum was a singer. Mum was a vocalist. Dad most certainly not (Choir 3, Conductor 3, p. 331).

Some of the men of Choir 4 talked about the role of family background in influencing their involvement. One member demonstrated the depth of this influence. Both his mother and father, in different ways, provided him with the basis for his musical pursuits throughout his life, and he attributed his immersion in the Folk music scene and the community choir movement to the influence of his parents.

My father wasn’t a musician at all, but he was a music lover. My mother was a music educator (Choir 4, Interview 1, p. 36).

and

I feel privileged to have had - particularly in early childhood - to have had what I got from my mother (Choir 4, Interview 1, p. 369).

This is consistent with Barrett (2012) who discusses the impact of positive family influence in early childhood years on the future musical pursuits of individuals. In addition to the influence of family and heritage, choir members described their musical experiences in formative years. School represented a large part of this. The boys in Choir 1 talked about the instrumental lessons offered at school. They said they were able to learn piano, guitar, drums and singing, and that these opportunities changed with each school term. They also reported being in the choir at their “old school” (Choir 1, Interview 1, p. 238) and were part of other creative activities such as going to the “Opera House [to] sing with other schools” (Choir 1, Interview 2, p. 243) and even dancing “in the Tap Pops” (Choir 1, Interview 1, p. 239).
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Being older, Choir 2 boys had more life and school experience upon which to draw. A 17-year-old described his experience of music when he was in Junior School, similar to that being enjoyed by boys from Choir 1:

I came from [Name of Public School] where the music program is quite ingrained into the school, so like, it was quite normal for everyone to join the band and the choir (Choir 2, Interview 1, p. 288).

He added later that he had always enjoyed singing and that “the foundations of how to sing were laid when I was in primary school” (p. 291). This seems to be a significant factor involved in influencing the future pursuits of boys. The boys in Choir 1 certainly enjoyed singing in the choir and other musical activities, but because of their age and stage of life it is speculative to say how these experiences will influence them later. Choir 2, however, provides a glimpse of the possibilities. For many of these boys, musical experience formed the basis of continuing and future musical experience, particularly when the experience is positive. A humorous interaction between the conductor and a 17-year-old boy, as observed in the rehearsal, demonstrated the rapport that had been built between the two and is an example of the impact of positive experiences and environments. It was clear that choir represented a safe and important space for these boys. They had fun together and they respected each other. The environment that had been created was positive and affirming, which had instilled a sense of belonging in the boys. The conductor reciprocated respect and demonstrated a genuine concern for their wellbeing and their music-making. Again, this is consistent with the work of Barrett (2012) mentioned previously but it also resonates with Strahan and Wilson (2006) who found that more specifically it was the way in which individuals remembered their past that had the greatest impact on their future. The emotion attached to a memory had the power to motivate future decisions.

Being older again, the young men of Choir 3 had a vast amount of experience to share, offering descriptions of that which they enjoyed at school in particular. One young man, who had decided to pursue choir as a career, provided this summary:
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I’ve been singing with choirs, particularly with the Arts unit\(^1\) since primary school, and that’s given me opportunities to sing - not just in Sydney, but overseas, in Canada, I’ve gone on tours. So I still do all stuff with choirs (Choir 3, Interview 2, p. 352).

Another member of Choir 3 “was in the concert choir in High School, [and was] also in chamber choir” (Choir 3, Conductor 3, p. 330). These men had substantial musical background, learning instruments and singing in choir at school and all from a reasonably early age. Older men from Choir 4 also related their school experience and, through the CMS, many of them revealed their participation in primary school choirs, university choirs, and community choirs in later years. It is significant that the men of Choir 4 all have experience of choir across a number of years. As boys they were at school and some at church; they were involved at university and then they stopped. It was not until much later, as much older men, mostly over the age of 50 years, that they revisited choir. One man offered a potential explanation for this when he said,

stopped singing in my early 20s as other typical activities were more important, e.g. Football, tennis and beer (Choir 4, CMS, Question 3, p. 494).

In Choir 4 one member of the group explained that through school he had very limited experience of choir, basically because such a thing did not exist at his school. He relates a school talent show experience at which he performed, describing it as, “just hideous - the experience was just hideous” (Choir 4, Interview 1, p. 367) but aside from this he did not experience choir until much later in life. He did, however, recollect the place of singing in his life from a very young age:

I do remember very clearly doing a lot of singing as an infant, you know, in bed; going to sleep; the top of my voice; very high; very in tune, I’m told (Choir 4, Interview 1, p. 366).

Another member of Choir 4 described his experience of singing at school as a natural part of everyday school life:

the school I went to was a boys’ school and it was just a natural thing that there was singing (Choir 4, Interview 2, p. 394).

\(^1\) The Arts Unit supports Arts education in NSW Government schools by offering programs in dance, drama, music and other arts. See https://www.artsunit.nsw.edu.au
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There is no doubt that elements common to many of these men and boys included a positive experience of music and singing; the opportunity to be musical in an environment that fostered this; and the existence of a musical family background or musical heritage. This is consistent with Erikson (2007) who says that the future is experienced at some level in the past or present. Creech, Hallam, Varvarigou, Gaunt, McQueen and Pincas (2013) explain this notion further suggesting that these elements of the past, as described by participants above, provide an actual experience of the future and when such an experience is remembered as good then it becomes a possibility for the future.

8.2 The Present – Self-Confidence and Self-Perception

Building upon the comments about self-confidence (discussed in Chapter 9: Personal success) it is important to note that the extent to which individuals feel confident to follow a desired path is a direct expression of identity as it relates to Possible Selves. Self-confidence and self-perception play an integral role in the choices of boys. Findings confirm the work of Freer (2009), Markus and Nurius (1986) and Cross and Markus (1994) who argue that possible selves are actively constructed and, therefore, have the power to modify behaviour in the direction of attainment or abandonment of possible futures. Present perceptions of their own abilities or inadequacies, partly based on past performance, have the power to determine the direction an individual will take. This includes negative or alternate expressions of this self-perception, and as Choir 1 boys suggested, some males may choose to avoid choir because they may think that they “have a bad voice” (Choir 1, Interview 1, p. 241) or that they are “not up to standard” (Choir 1, Interview 2, p. 244) or it could be that “maybe they don’t think they’re good enough; they’re probably embarrassed” (Choir 1, Interview 3, p. 249).

Research shows the key role of motivation in forging possible selves. When an individual’s self-belief aligns with the personal importance of an ability or activity, their motivation to pursue that path is increased. Likewise, when the self-belief is not present, possibly as a result of negative experience, then that
option or self is discarded (Martin, 2002; Simpkins, Vest, Dawes & Neuman, 2010; Strahan & Wilson, 2006).

Analysis of the recorded rehearsal indicated that self-confidence varied amongst the boys. Some appeared very confident, such as one boy in Choir 1 who had a quietly confident demeanour and who sat attentively for the duration of the rehearsal. Other boys, however, seemed shy and reticent, not opening their mouths and not producing much sound. Conductor 1 employed the strategy of asking the boys to indicate when they made a mistake, and whilst some were able to do this, others were not. For the boys in Choir 2 it was a similar situation. They expressed an understanding of their level of skill and how that compared to an unspoken standard and then suggested that this affected their success. One confident 15-year-old was happy with his vocal ability, saying,

I’ve got confidence, I really like my voice, I think I’m pretty happy with the tone, and my range is all right. I play and sing at a restaurant, so I’m confident, so... I’m good at it, that’s pretty successful (Choir 2, Focus Group, p. 310).

Conductor 2 affirmed one of the older boys, expressing that he was an integral part of the group: “When we didn’t have you, [name] we really missed that” (VA, Choir 2, p. 460). For Choir 3 it was slightly different. The leader of the group acknowledged his role was limited to this performance as a study-related assessment task and therefore, singing was not necessarily a pre-ordained focus, but knowing or deciding which path will not be followed, is just as significant as knowing desired direction. The leader of Choir 3 was happy to lead this group for this task but as far as the future was concerned he was “pretty confident [he was] not good enough” (Choir 3, Conductor 3, p. 334). He felt that the primary reason he procured this role was because the others in the group “were not confident in their ability to do it” (p. 329) and that he “was only just confident” (p. 329). The fact remains that his perception of his ability was such that he saw himself able to fulfil that role at that time and even though he did not view himself as a singer, his musicianship allowed him to proceed. He confirmed the role of self-perception in his belief that “if you were a bad singer in your mind, I would imagine that would be quite a daunting thing, to put yourself out there” (p. 334). This reflects the work of Simpkins et al. (2010) about the way self-perception affects motivation, mentioned previously. Other members of Choir 3
demonstrated confidence and an understanding of their ability, such as the piano player, who appeared to take his role very seriously, continually assisting individuals to perfect their part. The disparity of engagement amongst members of the group could also be accounted for in the varying levels of self-confidence and it was observed that a number of the group worked consistently to learn their part and others showed disconnection with the process. One of the basses in particular, exhibited a lack of self-confidence in that he sat himself away from the group when they were not singing, and only asked for the piano to go through his part when the rest of the group were preoccupied with their conversations and rehearsing.

Conductor 4 understood part of his role to be the provision of a fulfilling present experience. He saw this as having an impact on the personal futures of the men involved.

I’m looking for a nice movement within myself and nice movement from those guys in their journey towards whoever they are becoming (Choir 4, Conductor 4, p. 361).

It is interesting that whilst the quality of present experience was important, it was also strongly linked to preparation for the future. The focus on career, expressed by many of the participants, even the young boys of Choir 1, has been discussed in public success, indicating that a large proportion of those involved were future-focused or forward-looking. This attitude was also made manifest in their understanding of purpose. For many of them choir served a specific purpose, again related to something in their perceived future. For example, a boy in Choir 1 said that one purpose of choir was so that “you can improve your voice a bit” (Choir 1, Interview 2, p. 245) and another boy echoed this thought, saying,

For me, choir is important because I want to be an artist when I’m older, so being in a choir now, it can teach me how to sing (Choir 1, Focus Group 2, p. 277).

Choir 2 had similar ideas. One adolescent said he was in the choir because he could not afford the cost of singing lessons and yet because he wanted a solo singing career when he was older, choir was a preparatory step, the purpose of which was to “help develop my voice [and] get me better prepared for the
future” (Choir 2, Interview 2, p. 298). Responses to Why is belonging to the choir important to you? also revealed this way of thinking:

It is a place where I can improve my singing skills (Choir 2, CMS, Question 9).

I want to learn how to become a better singer (Choir 1, CMS, Question 10).

For one member of Choir 3, part of the value of the experience existed in what he gained from it,

I did love the fact that I had to pitch; it helped me actually sight read a lot. I've gained a lot out of it (Choir 3, Interview 1, p. 345).

and even as older men, Choir 4 communicated a sense that purpose of choir was partially linked to an ongoing aim:

To sing at a professional level. Honing of music skills (Choir 4, CMS, Question 10, p. 497).

The male participants demonstrated both a conscious and subconscious understanding that their experience in the past and their experience at present directly correlate with the path of the future.

8.3 The Future – Purpose and Preparation

In previous discussions of success, participants’ perceptions of the future have emerged, particularly a clear and single-minded focus on career. It has also been discussed that the purpose of choir, as it was currently or presently experienced, contributed to an individual’s perception of future pursuits. This reflects the facet of possible selves that describes the hoped-for self or feared self. The hoped-for self is that which a person seeks to become or wishes to be, and importantly, that which they actively pursue. The feared self, in much the same way, represents that which a person is afraid of becoming. Their choices, therefore, are active measures taken in order to avoid that possible fate. Strahan and Wilson (2006) discuss the function of self-regulation in possible selves, which supports findings in this research that participants were active in the development of their possible futures.
The role of the future was plain and in the recorded rehearsal it was very much connected to preparing for the next step. In the case of Choir 1, it was competition preparation. Conductor 1 refers to the possibilities to come and subsequently prepares for them:

In case we go through to the finals, instead of panicking at the last minute, I want to talk to you about an Australian song today (VA, Choir 1, p. 455).

The boys in Choir 1 generally described futures that involved becoming a reputable sportsman, and even though the realisation of this was distant, it remained a realistic goal in their minds. This was less the case with boys in Choir 2, although, a similar flavour was present in their wishes for the future. Their adult life was closer to them than the young Choir 1 boys and it could be argued therefore, that Choir 2 boys had more realistic visions of their own future. The same notion can be applied to the men in Choir 3, who were actively engaged in securing their future through tertiary education. Choir 3 demonstrated a group persona/identity during their rehearsal, as they took on a demeanour that was focused, professional and serious. Their decisions and choices reflected a future focus and a preoccupation with preparing for that. They knew their path and were actively pursuing it:

So that's actually a bit of an aim for me; to get choirs started again in Primary School. Music is a really important part of life, I think, and with that missing, you're missing out on a lot (Choir 3, Interview 2, p. 357).

Another member of Choir 3 mentioned the concept of resilience and in his experience this was invaluable. Resilience is relevant to this discussion because it points to striving for an identity, something sought after in the future of an individual’s existence. This young man described the way he believed that his attitude towards himself had been instrumental in changing the way other people perceived him. It also reflects the notion of avoiding an unwanted future or identity, consistent with a possible selves approach. After being harassed due to his sexuality he described turning the insults around and embracing them:

As soon as I did that in Year 11, people didn’t insult me; people actually liked me. They were like, ‘oh, my god, who is this kid, he’s awesome! He’s come out of his shell. He’s funny, he’s really witty...’ All because I took [something] that was deemed an insult - that I should persecute myself for - and removed the fact that it was an insult (Choir 3, Interview 1, p. 347).
The men of Choir 4 represented a very different age and stage of life and so their focus was also very different. For them the future involved establishing and cultivating friendships with “good blokes” and it provided them with the opportunity “to be ‘artistic’ and [let their] ‘creative’ juices flourish” (Choir 4, CMS, Question 10). One man said that if this group ceased to exist he would look elsewhere because,

I really enjoy the experience of singing, so I’d be looking for the community choir setting, I guess, because I find it so rewarding (Choir 4, Interview 2, p. 394).

The performance and rehearsal observed revealed another important element related to future for this group. The group persona was a tangible thing that the group planned and practised, and it was reflected in the facial expressions, hand gestures, ‘dance’ moves, and hat costumes involved in their songs. All of this confirmed a strong group identity and the men could project this image into the future, planning for it and practising it. Again Strahan and Wilson (2006) describe the temporal nature of possible selves reflected here by a number of participants. They argue that if the subjective attachment to a possible future is strong then that outcome remains close to an individual regardless of how distant the eventuation of that reality may be.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter discussed the way in which aspects of an individual’s past, present and future interacted to influence identity and potential identities. The past consisted specifically of family, school and musical experience. The present was defined in terms of self-confidence and self-perception and how these influenced decisions. Finally the future was conceived in terms related to purpose and preparation for future events and ideal life trajectories.

The next chapter presents findings surrounding success. The connections between success, masculinity, and possible selves are strong, and this strength makes the concepts difficult to separate. It would appear that perceptions of success are significantly linked to ideas surrounding masculinity and how men
and boys perceive themselves, in terms of who they are and who they want to be in the future. A focus on the future requires that present choices be selected purposefully, and in the case of the males involved in this research, these choices were very much linked to a desire for success, and success was also linked to the way masculinity was perceived. In a very real sense, these three themes were inseparably connected, and each defined and interpreted the others.
Chapter 9: Findings about Success

9

Findings about Success

Success is really when everyone opens their mouth and it sounds like one voice

(Choir 2: Secondary School, Interview 1, p. 288)

Summary

This chapter presents findings based on the theme, success and has been split into four main areas or descriptors: public, musical, private impact and personal. Public success includes elements related to recognition, career and wealth; performance, competition and achievement. Musical success covers features such as the sound of the choir, technical ability, the conductor and working together. Success described in terms of private impact relates to the impact of a choir performance on the listeners. This includes levels of audience enjoyment; being emotionally or musically moved by the performance; and spirituality. Personal success refers to those aspects that impact the individuals belonging to the choir. This sub-theme covers enjoyment, self-confidence, participation and the value of the experience, love of singing, and singing as a means of expression. Whilst a number of these aspects and sub-themes may apply in more than one place, efforts have been made to address them where they appear to be most relevant.
As explained in Chapter 4 success is a term with which most people are familiar. It is used extensively and it conjures up relatively similar images or ideas of meaning. The most common or popular usage describes success as a tangible outcome with public or overt significance. Participants initially used this definition to describe success but after considering the concept further, responses began to include elements that will be discussed in musical success, personal success and private impact. These ideas were consistent amongst participants across the age ranges although the responses demonstrated more conceptual maturity and development with increasing age.

### 9.1 Public Success

Participants were asked to describe their understanding of success which they discussed in both a general sense and as it specifically related to their own choir experience. Several recurring themes, which reflect the notion that success is a visible manifestation of ideal, expert or desired characteristics, emerged from survey and interview data, and observations from the analysis of recorded footage (rehearsal and performance). Interviews provided a small number of participants the opportunity to verbalise their experience and opinions about being in a choir. Some were confident to express themselves and others were less so. This meant that the written responses from the Choir Members’ Survey (CMS) became particularly useful because participants could voice their opinion candidly within the safety of anonymity. The Audience Members’ Survey offered a glimpse into the perspective of a different group. Audience opinion was integral to the consideration of a broader scope of perceptions. Although audience responses formed a small portion of the data, they confirmed the nature of ideas being expressed in literature, interviews, focus groups and what was observed during rehearsals. For example, 113 (n= 136) AMS responses indicated Choir 1 was ‘a success’ because “they sound good”; 51 (n=91) responses from Choir 4’s AMS said, “they present well”; and Choir 2’s AMS indicated 83 (n=120) responses to “they enjoy singing and performing” (AMS Question 2). Recognition, career, and wealth seemed closely connected; and
performance, competition, and achievement were also discussed in a relatively interchangeable manner.

Recognition, career and wealth were apparent in various forms and were, as previously stated, often linked in discussion. A typical scenario for the Junior School boys (Choir 1) involved becoming a famous sportsman or rock star, which became their career from which they made a lot of money. One boy suggested that “popularity” (Choir 1, Focus Group 2, p. 270) was a reasonable measure of success. For these choir boys (aged between 10 and 12 years) becoming famous and having the associated career and wealth, was equated with success. It was important to them and it was a reality, however, this was rarely seen as attainable in a choir setting. Instead it was seen to come from fame, being a sportsman or being a rock star.

I want to be an AFL player (Choir 1, Interview 3, p. 250).

Planning on making my own album (Choir 1, Interview 2, p. 245).

These boys demonstrated a single-minded approach to thinking about their future, as they described their career plans, or rather career plan. For some this did not involve being famous but it still revealed a desire to do something notable, such as being a pilot (Choir 1, Interview 1) or an IT engineer (Choir 1, Interview 4). One eleven-year-old had both in mind saying,

When I’m older I would like to be a top basketball player or a lawyer (Choir 1, Focus Group 1, p. 262).

There was also an implicit suggestion that their career-focused goal left little, if any, room for other things, such as choir. Having said that, though, the boys wanted to be in the choir during their school years, communicating a significant level of enjoyment (see personal success: love of singing) but in their minds they would not be able to continue this as an adult male; the two seemed mutually exclusive. At times the boys communicated this more explicitly. For example, one said that he was “happy to be in choir now” but “not after school” because he “want[ed] to take things as a career” (Choir 1, Interview 3, p. 250). Another boy communicated a similar sentiment:
In the future for High School, but not in the future after because I like more stuff than choirs, because I have a good career ahead of me. I’ve already thought out my career (Choir 1, Interview 4, p. 253).

And yet another said:

I’m probably going to be in it next year but when I’m older I’m probably not going to be in a choir (Choir 1, Interview 3, p. 249).

Some of the boys even expressed concern that committing to the choir throughout High School could jeopardise their academic progress and so they would not remain in choir during Senior High School years (Choir 1, Focus Group 1). The idea that these young boys had such a clear picture of their future and the fact that this picture, primarily, had a singular goal, is particularly interesting, not just from the perspective of understanding success as it is perceived by these boys, but also from the perspective of Possible Selves, which will be discussed in more detail later.

Most of the findings surrounding success measured by recognition, career and wealth came in the form of more general discussion. The majority of ideas related specifically to their own choir’s level of success did not refer to these measures; rather, the boys found other descriptors to justify why they believed their choir to be a success. There was one comment, however, that used recognition as a feature of their choir’s success:

I think it’s popular in the whole world of singing music... we’re a well-known school. We’re pretty big... (Choir 1, Interview 1, p. 239).

This boy believed that his school and choir was known around the community and he went on to link this reputation to their history of performances at Eisteddfods, saying,

We’ve won for the last fifteen years (Choir 1, Interview 1, p. 239).

A similar sense of history was implied by Conductor 2 who described the school as having had, and still having, a good culture of males and singing, with both students and staff. Members of the choir also described memories of Eisteddfod results and performances in their time with the choir.

Choir 1 were also excited by the amount of money they had won recently through competition and described in detail how First, Second and Third Place
received $2000, $1500, and $1000 respectively and that their choir won $850 in total.

B3: We got eight hundred and fifty because we won three hundred...
B2: (interrupting) We came first on Friday.
B3: We won three hundred and fifty on Friday (Choir 1, Focus Group 2, p. 267)

Whilst prize money was exciting to them, it was seen as specific to the competition and the idea of making money from participation in a choir, as a career, was not credible to them. Again, this reflects the underlying belief that unless it was to be a career, which satisfied criteria for success, then it was not an activity that would necessarily be pursued.

You wouldn’t be able to make money really out of choir (Choir 1, Focus Group 1, p. 262)

In a similar way, the Secondary School choir boys (Choir 2) talked about success in public terms making comments such as,

Eighteen million followers on Twitter (Choir 2, Interview 2, p. 295).

When you’re so good at it that you’re earning enough money to make a living for yourself (Choir 2, Interview 2, p. 295)

Whilst statements like these were spoken partially in jest they signify the persistence of this way of thinking. One significant difference between Choir 1 and Choir 2 was the fact that Choir 2, which consisted of 14 – 17 year-old boys, spoke far less about success in these public terms. This possibly implies that the Secondary School boys considered the idea of fame to be idealistic, a dream, and in reality it was unlikely to occur to them. This does not mean, however, that they did not intend to pursue their singing or their music-making. Like the boys from Choir 1, these adolescents communicated a more singular approach to the future of their music. They too had goals concerning their career and near future, but they expressed these in more realistic terms, such as going to university, getting a job and having a family. Once again, however, choir scarcely figured in these ‘after school’ plans. One boy was very clear, saying,

I don’t want to be part of a collective group my whole life; I actually want to go solo (Choir 2, Interview 2, p. 297).

Another boy discussed the issue alongside fellow choir mates as part of the Focus Group stating,
I’d like to keep doing it in school, like for the next couple of years but I’m not sure about out of school, just ’cos there’s stuff going on, I guess (Choir 2, Focus Group, p. 318).

Perhaps what becomes significant in this discussion is the apparent difference between singing and singing in a choir. Each of the males who participated in this research expressed that singing in some sort of capacity was something they would always do because it was important to them and it was an integral part of who they were. Singing in a choir, however, did not have such a response. In fact, the majority of participants indicated that they would not pursue choir in the future. A positive contrast is provided by Choir 4 (mainly aged 40 years and over) but this choir is another indication that men ‘come back’ to choir later in life as older adults and usually at a time when they are free of commitments that previously hindered their involvement. It is possible that beliefs surrounding how success is perceived by society, and how individuals subsequently perceive it, could play a significant role in influencing the decisions of males, particularly younger males.

The university choir (Choir 3) did not talk about recognition with the same emphasis as the younger choirs, which could be due to the fact that the group was formed for a specific course-related task. A funny interaction, which occurred during the observed rehearsal, demonstrated the pervasive ideal of fame, when one student turned to another and, in reference to the fact that the rehearsal was being recorded, said, “When you’re famous, I’ll put it on YouTube!” (VA, Choir 3, p. 469). An experienced choral singer and member of this ensemble offered an explanation that, in his experience, aptly portrayed popular perception,

“Oh, choir’s boring because I want to be a soloist. I want to be the star." And they don’t realise when you are in a choir you are a star, because you can see everyone in a choir, you’re not just a face in a crowd. In a choir of two thousand kids you can still spot out every single face... It’s not really talked about much on TV or news or anything. You never hear anything about choirs, you always hear about the soloists (Choir 3, Interview 2, p. 357).

One of the few references to money came from the leader of the group, who said that being a successful musician meant,

That you can do what you want to do and make a living from that [and] I have to consider it in terms of whether I am able to sustain anything (Choir 3, Conductor 3, p. 332).
Consistent with the two school choirs, career goals emerged as part of discussions, but Choir 3 talked about their goals with more confidence and certainty. These young men (aged between 20 and 24 years) had begun the process of securing a career, and for them this prospect was imminently attainable.

For most of the participants in this setting choir was a means to an end in a practical sense, and although they communicated enjoying the process and choosing to undertake the choir task, it was, nevertheless, a course requirement; consequently, Choir 3 related success predominantly to musical and technical considerations (see Chapter 8: Musical success). One of the few examples of an intention to have future involvement in choir came from one member of Choir 3 who stated his aim:

I want to go into teaching and I want to go into choral conducting (Choir 3, Interview 2, p. 357).

This participant illustrates the relationship between the possible selves of an individual as discussed by Strahan and Wilson (2006) and demonstrates that the strength of the future image provided the present motivation needed to attain his goal. His intent was so strong that the chronological distance of that goal was no impediment; rather it was psychologically close and, therefore, attainable.

Of the four participating groups, Choir 4 was the only choir to have enjoyed any public or popularly accepted form of commercial success in the form discussed. This is highlighted by revenue collected from the sale of several CD recordings and other merchandise; national and international tours; and regular performances and live shows. Experiencing this level of success, however, does not appear to be a preoccupation for the group, apart from one response in the Choir Members’ Survey (CMS), to Question 9: What are the main reasons you joined this choir? in which the participant said,

I liked their music and it looked like they were having lots of fun. Plus, they are kind of famous in certain circles so I guess they are my way to fame and stardom! (Choir 4, CMS, Question 9, p. 496).
In fact, only a small number of references to these things are made and all of them appear in the CMS for Choir 4. For example, in response to Question 11: *Would you describe this choir as successful? Why?* one participant wrote:

Yes; it tours, records, has a website and is reasonably well-known in choir circles (p. 497).

A couple of other responses suggested that the group was a success because it experienced popular and critical acclaim, and one participant described the group’s recognised success in the following way:

> I think in the most obvious and the face value way, [the choir is] successful as a phenomenon in the community. It’s much admired; much liked; received much adulation at places we’ve performed. So there’s that level of success - not quite commercial success, but it’s that sort of success (Choir 4, Interview 1, p. 371).

This same man, displaying a deep personal connection with singing and music, went on to communicate his displeasure for the commercial attitude toward success saying that it was a pity that,

> Music is seen as a chance to be rich and famous (Choir 4, Interview 2, p. 374).

With a wry grin, the leader communicated his regret that the group enjoyed this type of success sometimes at the expense of their families:

> The only thing about this that causes me disquiet is the fact that the men are off getting adulation, fame and success and the women are at home looking after the babies (Choir 4, Conductor 4, p. 362).

Another member of Choir 4 said,

> we've been able to pay our bills... and we've become more and more known so...on the international scene now we're kind of...as [Conductor] says, we're kind of at the bottom end of famous (Choir 4, Interview 2, p. 387).

All of the participants from Choir 4 offered thoughts about success that focused on the significance and satisfaction of strong relationships with other men; the enjoying of high quality music making; and the overall value of the experience, also expressed as “having fun”. One choir member suggested that what set it apart from many others was that the “primary objective is not to make money or to show-off... there is no agenda apart from that of music-making and having fun” (Choir 4, CMS, Question 10, p. 497). It is interesting to note that none of the respondents from any of the Audience Members’ Survey (AMS) provided answers reflecting commercial success.
As participants began to consider success in reference to their own choir, their ideas generally needed to be adjusted, particularly boys from Choir 1 and Choir 2. Aside from the experiences of Choir 4, success based on recognition, career and wealth, as discussed, was not something these choirs had experienced. Their perceptions of success had to be adjusted to reflect other, more relevant and representative elements. Performance, competition, and achievement were used to do this.

The opportunity to perform was considered by participants to be an important factor in the success of their choir and a natural part of being in such a group. The performance experiences of the four choirs included school events, competitions, community-based festivals and more professional shows and tours, in the case of Choir 4. The boys from Choir 2 discussed performing at school assemblies, end of year school concerts (such as the recorded performance), and other school events; they described taking part in Eisteddfod competitions; and they mentioned singing in the community at places such as nursing and old people’s homes. One member of this ensemble stated,

The goal of choir is to perform for other people as well. So I think if we weren’t doing that there would be a big part of it missing (Choir 2, Focus Group, p. 307).

Providing choirs with opportunities to perform was identified by conductors as an important factor in running a successful choir and observations from the video analysis show the conductors using the imminent performance as a motivator. For example, in response to some distracting behaviour amongst members of the choir, Conductor 2 reminds them, “This is the last time we are going to rehearse it before we perform it” (VA, Choir 2, p. 460). At another stage of the rehearsal, he prompts them with the words, “What will people remember? The beginning and the end” (VA, Choir 2, p. 460) and again, in an attempt to retain focus for the performance Conductor 2 gently interposes,

I actually really like you guys laughing and having fun, so make sure, when we do the performance, that you do that... Obviously, we don’t want it to affect your performance in the meantime (VA, Choir 2, p. 465).

The conductor of Choir 1 (Conductor 1) listed with pride the variety of events and occasions at which the boys regularly performed. These included school
functions, such as Masses and assemblies (the recorded performance was a whole school concert); community-based performances, such as singing Christmas carols at local shopping centres and nursing homes; and performing in competitions. The conductor suggested that performing was rewarding for the choir and described each chance as,

A big cherry on the cake for the boys, because they see themselves as representing the school (Choir 1, Conductor 1, p. 235).

This was evident in the observed performance. Choir 1 performed confidently in front of the entire school community (Year 5 – Year 12). The performance was formally presented and the boys were wearing full school uniform; they filed silently onto the stage and stood still with their hands by their side or behind their back and their eyes fixed on the conductor. The piece chosen was the same piece that won them first place in the recent Eisteddfod. This competition was used, during the observed rehearsal, by Conductor 1 as an incentive to work hard and as a reminder to the boys that they were preparing for the Eisteddfod. For example, “If we go really well in the Eisteddfod and we sing really well then we’re invited back for the finals” (VA, Choir 1, p. 454). At other times she suggests how the judges may react to their performance, saying, “If you do that, the judges will…” (VA, Choir 1, p. 454).

Similarly, the musical satisfaction potentially experienced in performance was believed by the conductor of Choir 2 (Conductor 2) to be an important aspect of choir, describing it in this way:

It’s fantastic to give students the opportunity to just make music together and to make really successful, polished music together (Choir 2, Conductor 2, p. 281).

The Eisteddfod experienced by Choir 1 has been mentioned already, but is worth revisiting simply on account of the immense excitement the boys exhibited as they described their recent “victory” and their subsequent fourth place in the larger Championship a few days later. Their sense of achievement was clear and obviously brought them great satisfaction.

The boys from Choir 1 saw themselves as successful because they had “done a lot of performances” (Choir 1, Focus Group 2, p. 272) and they saw success as “being able to win stuff, achieving a good goal” (Choir 1, Interview 4, p. 252).
number of responses to the CMS Question 11: Do you think your choir is a success? also indicated a similar attitude maintaining that they were successful because they “get chosen for out of school contests” and “because we win competitions.” The significance of using competition results as a benchmark was reflected by one boy who said, “I’m not sure yet because we haven’t been in any comps this year” (Choir 1, CMS, Question 11). Conductor 1 added that,

The choir more than anything shows me how far we’ve come and shows me every year that even though I don’t believe we can, we’ve taken little steps forward (Choir 1, Conductor 1, p. 235).

Reaching these goals, however small, was seen as an achievement and that was also considered an integral part of the choir’s progress to Conductor 2 who felt that the choir was successful “when we’ve set out to do something” (Choir 2, Conductor 2, p. 285). Boys in Choir 2 expressed a sense of achievement as well saying things like:

We’ve achieved great things (Choir 2, Interview 1, p. 289).

Competition wise, we’re pretty successful sometimes (Choir 2, Interview 2, p. 296).

Choir 3 represented a substantially different context where achievement could be considered written into the fabric of the situation. They performed in front of an audience consisting of other students and course peers, examiners, tutors, and friends. This performance and preparation was assessed as part of a course of study and so achieving a desired standard, grade or mark was foremost in participants’ minds and as a consequence, responses demonstrated this perspective. To them success was,

[attaining] certain marks, like, must get a HD in this (Choir 3, Interview 2, p. 353).

what you’ve achieved (Choir 3, Conductor 3, p. 332).

We are here because it is for uni; some people see it as a way to get marks (Choir 3, CMS, Question 10, p. 493).

The observed rehearsal showed Choir 3 excited by their achievement as they worked at learning the music and this sense of achievement was used throughout the rehearsal as motivation, representing an important dynamic for the group. After a particularly well-executed section of the piece the group, visibly pleased with themselves, turned to the camera, smiling, and the
conductor said, “Yes! Get that on tape!” (VA, Choir 3, p. 467). This desire to achieve was evident throughout the rehearsal and was seen in the group pushing themselves to attain a certain level or goal before moving on to a new section or before having a break: “From the top, all the way to bar 30” (VA, Choir 3, p. 467). Two of the guys demonstrated their satisfaction at finally learning their part accurately by signalling high-five and later, the conductor punched the air to get the group motivated.

Setting goals at a personal level was employed by one group member, who asked himself,

Did I achieve my goals that I set? No, I didn’t (Choir 3, Interview 1, p. 342).

Others in the choir also mentioned setting and achieving personal goals. For the members of Choir 3 the performance itself was discussed in relation to whether or not it could be considered as success, from the perspective of technical and musical characteristics, which will be discussed later in Chapter 9: Musical success. Again, this reflects the contextual fact that this group consisted of experienced musicians, who had a specifically music- and course-related goal. The definition of success, as it related to their choir’s performance, was directly linked to the level of expertise they were, or were not, able to demonstrate to the examiner on the day. The leader of the group was aware of the contextual parameters, saying,

The definition for success for an eight-man [university] level choir, you’d assume [would be] to be able to nail the piece... (Choir 3, Conductor 3, p. 332).

Coming from yet another perspective, and one of the few instances where achievement was even mentioned, one of the men from Choir 4 felt that singing together was the epitome of “physical achievement” (Choir 4, Interview 1, p. 378). He went on to argue against the accepted or popular perception that to be a success a group had to perform and he felt that this was another way in which the male preoccupation with sport somewhat permeated everything that they do.

[We] need to steer people away from thinking music is performance. I mean the rock star thing is interesting because it involves display... very much involves display and is very much a performance sort of thing. So it’s getting guys more into the sporting analogy... (Choir 4, Interview 1, p. 377).
The sporting analogy that so often emerges when talking to men also reflects the notion of working together and teamwork. These sentiments were also apparent in the words of younger participants and this is discussed later. It should be noted here that, although Choir 4 was not particularly involved in competitions, discussions and comments, such as the previous one demonstrated the competitive nature of men, which Choir 4 uses as material for their songs and with their music they essentially make fun of the stereotypical Australian male (discussed later in Masculinity). At the same time, however, Conductor 4 talked about performing being an important element of success and stated categorically that,

> It is successful, when you are going to perform for 200, 300 or 500 or a thousand people (Choir 4, Conductor 4, p. 358).

A number of the responses from the CMS also recognised the more public view of success, outlining features such as “[stability] over many years; consistent performance record; and high standards”, and being “big on the festival circuit and in the UK” (Choir 4, CMS, Question 11). Even in the early stages of the group learning a new song, performance was a significant consideration. This was observed in the recorded rehearsal as the group planned their stage moves and how they would lead into the song. For example, they discussed puffing out their chests as they sang, “Some of us are quite big,” and then as they looked at the person next to them they would nod, singing, “and we’ve got weapons ’n’ stuff” (VA, Choir 4, p. 476).

Public success was described by each of the four choirs in terms of recognition, career and wealth; and performance, achievement and competition. Although these factors were discussed in slightly different ways and with varying emphasis, they were all present to some degree. After considering more popular, visible or public notions of success, participants began to find other ways of defining success. They appeared to believe that their choir was successful despite the fact that they only aligned with public perceptions of success in primarily small and insignificant ways. They then turned to musical elements involved in the actual act of singing in a choir.
Chapter 9: Findings about Success

9.2 Musical Success

Describing success in musical terms was more prevalent in discussions with older choristers, in particular those from Choir 3 and Choir 4, but the younger boys, who firmly believed that their choir was successful, also referred to musical features to define success. Elements used to describe musical success include technical ability, sound quality, the conductor, and working together.

The most direct discussions surrounding technical ability and sound quality came from Choir 3, and as previously stated this can be attributed to their more advanced experience in music. The observed rehearsal demonstrated the preoccupation with technical aspects and even though this particular session was primarily concerned with the group learning the notes, it did not take long for this to expand to include other elements. After only twenty minutes the quality of the sound had improved dramatically; there were suggestions made regarding dynamic markings; and there were discussions in the top part about how to breathe effectively for the high notes. The group exhibited heightened musical understanding as they discussed what each part was doing against their own and as they assisted members of the group in perfecting their part. For example, in an attempt to help one member, another suggests, "You just need to carry that note over into the next bar" (VA, Choir 3, p. 469). Conductor 3 also displayed a determination to get it right by working on accuracy before continuing. On one occasion he said,

Okay, let's look at bar 20 onwards. I know the basses have it. Start from there; see how far we go (VA, Choir 3, p. 470).

In another instance he said, "Was that right? [pause] Let's do it again" (VA, Choir 3, p. 470). Consistent with this was when they were asked about whether their choir was successful and these young men immediately considered the technicalities of the performance, demonstrated by these words:

If I was to regard our performance just then as a success, regardless of how it was being marked - just as a performance - I would be thinking about it entirely on a musical level and a technical level, so that is still my consideration when we do the rehearsal (Choir 3, Conductor 3, p. 336).

Another young man was critical of their performance and felt that as a group they were not successful. This seemed to be due to his high standard of technical
concerns, such as breath control and timbre. In his opinion the choir had not reached an acceptable standard, his personal standard, of technical and musical performance. He notes his personal standard by saying,

I'm selfish in the sense that I was not happy with it, because I felt that I could give a little bit more or that it could have been a little bit more refined (Choir 3, Interview 1, p. 342).

At one point he states that the mere fact that they performed and it was “a good performance” (p. 342) meant it was a success of sorts and yet, only a little later he expresses the feeling that they were not successful as a group because,

Each facet we passed and failed in some regard. I think as a whole we did a good job, but like anything there's so much room for improvement (Choir 3, Interview 1, p. 343).

The quality of the sound emerged as another factor for concern and one young man felt that a successful performance was one in which they all “looked the part but also for the sound to be as close to perfect as possible (Choir 3, Interview 2, p. 353). He compared this performance with its “sour notes” (p. 354) to those of other choirs who “have it absolutely crisp” (p. 354). Conductor 3 also made references to the quality of sound produced by the group and suggested that controlling the harmonies, the dynamics and his own singing were all important in defining the success of the performance. It should be noted here that the role of the conductor in this context was slightly different to the more conventional role displayed in the other participating choirs. The role of Conductor 3 was as a leader of a collaborative effort for the express purposes prescribed by the course unit. In this way, each member of the group was responsible for the decisions related to the music and performance, however, the leader they appointed had the added responsibility of ensuring rehearsals ran efficiently and of being the final decision maker when necessary. During the observed rehearsal it was clear that whilst a collaborative task, there was one person in charge and he took this role seriously. He provided clear instructions in a relaxed manner and had the ability to re-focus the group when necessary: “Everyone got their note?” (VA, Choir 3, p. 470). It was also apparent that the conductor had a plan for the rehearsal, suggesting to the group that he wanted them to get through the entire piece by the end of that rehearsal and again he displayed his ability to realign the group’s focus in order to achieve that goal.
Conductor 4 described the role of technical considerations in the overall impact and significance of a performance:

Beautiful sound and humour make people either admiring or moved or disposed to think again about who they are... that's the power. I mean, every note serves that - the perfect chord, great; the perfect song, even better (Choir 4, Conductor 4, p. 361).

Other men in this group identified the sound of the choir as an element of success and also one of the reasons they enjoyed being part of it. Whilst comments of a technical nature were sparse with Choir 4, a large number of comments were made regarding the sound of the choir. The participants recognised a uniqueness of sound, both in terms of the harmonies they sung and the colour of the sound they made. “Without question, the ability to produce some beautiful sounds in performance is rewarding [and] emotionally satisfying” (Choir 4, Interview 2, p. 388). Another member of the group expressed a belief consistent with this, saying,

The sound that men make when they sing is unique, and it doesn't have a counterpart... There is something about the acoustic properties of men singing together that defies accurate description (Choir 4, Interview 1, p. 376).

The Audience Members’ Survey (AMS) revealed that 71 of the 91 listeners present at the performance believed the choir was successful because ‘it sounded good’ (Choir 4, AMS, Question 2). One listener added, “My ears are very happy” (Choir 4, AMS) and perhaps the most direct description was this man’s response:

We sound bloody good when everything clicks into place (Choir 4, CMS, Question 11, p. 497).

The observed rehearsal isolated sound quality as an important technical element and they spent time practising the pronunciation of words and vowel sounds or diphthongs. In addition, there were a number of times where the group tried to sing a section in a particular way because the conductor had said, “I just want to see if that ends up sounding good” (VA, Choir 4, p. 478). For Choir 1 and 2 success from the standpoint of technical ability was also considered an important aspect but they had a slightly different emphasis. They saw technical skill as something they needed to work at in order to improve and perform at an optimum. For one adolescent, success was “when everyone opens their mouth
and it sounds like one voice” (Choir 2, Interview 1, p. 288). Another member of Choir 2 highlighted technical considerations when he described his idea of success,

> If you have the right thing at the same time, and it’s all perfect, all polished, I think that’s a successful piece of music. Where like in the choir we practise it, we get every bit nailed and polished then that is a successful thing (Choir 2, Focus Group, p. 306).

The boys in Choir 2 displayed honesty or modesty or both in relation to their level of technical skill. They suggested they had a lot to learn and that there were many other choirs that were far better than them. One boy used “elementary” (Choir 2, Interview 1, p. 289) to describe the techniques the choir was working on and yet, there remained a sense that those involved were “pretty successful in their singing capability” (Choir 2, Interview 2, p. 296). Conductor 2, whilst he believed that the effort to improve technical skill was important, also suggested that there were other essential ingredients:

> Music works on more than just the level of perfect pitch, wonderful ensemble, and everything else...if you don’t have spirit with it then it can...it can be very dry (Choir 2, Conductor 2, p. 285).

The sound of the group was also an aspect that Choir 2 considered significant and was mentioned several times. The AMS completed at the performance of Choir 2 indicated that 76 of a total 120 responses believed it was a success because it ‘sounded good’ (Choir 2, AMS, Question 2). A similar picture was evident from the AMS administered at performance of Choir 1, with 113 of 136 also responding in this way and the CMS for Choir 1 showed that sound was important; however, expression of this was limited and was very simply communicated with statements such as, “It sounds great” (Choir 1, CMS, Question 11). References to the sound of the choir were also made in terms of what was difficult about being in the group. Some boys wrote that it was hard “trying to get the right sound out” and “if you’re off key it makes the choir sound bad” (Choir 1, CMS, Question 8). Choir 3 offered more developed opinions regarding the sound of choir. Success was seen in the fact that “We actually sound quite good together” (Choir 3, CMS, Question 10) and “It sounds beautiful” (Choir 3, Interview 1, p. 346). The same young man described his feelings about the choral sound:
The one thing I'll say about choral music, I have a real appreciation for it. You can never replicate through one voice... you can never do it. And the sounds and also the overtones - you can't replicate it in one voice (Choir 3, Interview 1, p. 345).

Although the audience at Choir 3’s performance was only 20 and comprised of fellow music students, the AMS showed that 100 percent of listeners rated “they sound good” (Choir 3, AMS, Question 2) as a criterion for success.

Conductor 1 felt that it was extremely important to ensure as good a performance as possible because boys “don’t want to stand up there and not sound good” (Choir 1, Conductor 1, p. 234). For these young boys technical elements were the concern of the conductor. The conductor provided the support they needed to improve their skills, such as learning how to breathe effectively and singing with pitch accuracy. One participant said “you get helped to be better” (Choir 1, Focus Group 2, p. 267) and another boy, when talking about his struggle to reach higher notes, described the way the conductor provided advice and assistance. The role of the conductor was conceivably something that these boys took for granted, which could be a consequence of their young age. Some of their responses implied an expectation that the conductor would teach them to do things correctly and there was an innocence demonstrated in summations such as,

She teaches it in a way that's like fun and makes you want to do it (Choir 1, Focus Group 2, p. 271).

The CMS also showed that a number of the boys felt that part of the choir’s success was because of the conductor. Some wrote, “We have a good teacher,” and “our teacher is extremely helpful when it comes to organising the choir” (Choir 1, CMS, Question 11). Likewise, some responses in the AMS provided some extra reasons to explain the choir’s success, which included “An excellent teacher,” “The conductor is very good,” and “Enthusiastic teacher” (Choir 1, AMS, Question 2).

Conductor 4 is well known as a choral conductor, and participants, both from the choir and the audience, appreciated his leadership. Many responses demonstrated a firm belief that the success of the group could largely be attributed to Conductor 4’s leadership in terms of his charisma, his musical and
song-writing skills, and his uniqueness. Written comments in the CMS included, “We have a good and talented leader” (Choir 4, CMS, Question 11) and many other answers identify the harmonies, the material, and the lyrics being clever and funny; for example, “We make beautiful, relevant, funny, edgy music” (Choir 4, CMS, Question 11). The AMS was inundated with extra comments, too many to communicate here, but all of them had that same flavour: that this choir was “clever, creative, imaginative,” “highly original, unexpected,” with “clever lyrics” and “comedic presence, charisma and voice,” and much of this atmosphere and ingenuity was attributed to the “great frontman” (Choir 4, AMS, Question 2).

This impression of Conductor 4 was confirmed in a number of ways in both the observed rehearsal and the observed performance. One member of the choir said,

that’s where the choir leader, the director, has to have a certain level of skill and of interpersonal awareness of the issues around managing a group of singers (Choir 4, Interview 2, p. 391).

During the rehearsal this conductor showed expertise in the way he taught new material and the way in which he maintained flow. He gave directions sparingly, choosing instead to start singing a warm-up exercise or a new section for the group to follow, echo or join in. He consistently made eye contact with every man in the room and did not practise unnecessarily. The video analysis showed him working on small elements, such as pronunciation and diphthongs, and stopping the group when he was satisfied. Conductor 4 also displayed a balance between criticism and encouragement. He would simply say, “Yeah, I’m liking that!” or “Very nice. Nice, nice, nice” (VA, Choir 4, p. 478) and at the end of the rehearsal he applauded the men for their efforts. Likewise, his criticism was constructive but straight to the point: “No; you’re flat on that note. Do it again” and “You’re stuffing up the bit that goes [sings]” (VA, Choir 4, p. 478). His comments were humorous at times, such as, “Of all the people to [expletive] it up!” (VA, Choir 4, p. 477), and at other times were serious and in earnest: “Lovely work, gentlemen” (VA, Choir 4, p. 478). In the observed performance the role of Conductor 4 could clearly be seen as leading the group, providing humorous stage antics and theatrics; involving the audience; and singing with the group as well.
Conductor 2 recognised the various facets of his responsibility to the group. He identified that professional development of skills; careful choice of repertoire; and his own musical involvement in rehearsals and performances were important elements of leadership. He also refers specifically to supporting boys in choir:

It's my role to be understanding of physical, emotional, social challenges that face boys and of course the thing about having a group means you do all that team stuff (Choir 2, Conductor 2, p. 283).

It was observed in the recorded rehearsal, however, that Conductor 2 demonstrated a range of important skills in leading his choir. For example, he provided encouragement and praise at opportune moments: “You guys are doing really well, by the way” (VA, Choir 2, p. 461). He also made the group work hard, sometimes singling out individuals and always insisting on accuracy: “Stop, stop, stop. Tenors... what happened to you?” (VA, Choir 2, p. 462) and “Now there were some rhythmic issues. Let’s go back to the B section” (VA, Choir 2, p. 462). Although the rehearsal was clearly run by Conductor 2, he allowed peer teaching, particularly between the boys, to continue and only when it began to get distracting did he appeal to the group for their attention. Part of the rehearsal was led by one of the basses, a Year 9 boy, and he too provided praise for the group, “There were some really great moments in that” (VA, Choir 2, p. 461). This student was the conductor for the performance recorded for analysis. He displayed a confident demeanour on stage and accurate gestures for the group to follow.

Conductor 1 demonstrated similar characteristics. She provided frequent praise and technical advice, although she did not drill the choir on these, possibly because they were not yet sufficiently familiar with the piece of music. Subsequently, there were times when the praise, “Excellent” or “very good” (VA, Choir 1, p. 456), did not necessarily match the boys’ execution of a particular part. The choir showed respect for her, responding consistently to her instructions, and she appealed to them through the use of humour and nonsense sounds, such as blowing raspberries and using funny voices.
Teamwork or working together was a theme that recurred frequently and was seen as an essential ingredient to the musical success of the choir. Conductor 1 implied a power inherent in the unity experienced in the group dynamic, saying,

“They’re not all the good kids, you know, there’s a real mixture. And I think that’s a success, because there are boys standing next to each other that would never stand next to each other anywhere else in their school life (Choir 1, Conductor 1, p. 230).

The social aspect identified here by Conductor 1 was also mentioned by Conductor 2 who said that students were happy in choir if their “friends are in it” and he added that this is “just as important; a social thing” (Choir 2, Conductor 2, p. 287). Choir 2 boys identified this as important too, saying choir was an opportunity to “be ‘round my friends” (Choir 2, Interview 2, p. 295). One boy added that “develop[ing] relationships with people in the choir (Choir 2, Interview 2, p. 298) was a welcome by-product of participation and this was certainly reflected in the attitudes of the men in Choir 4, which is discussed in more detail in Masculinity.

Boys in Choir 1 liked the security offered by being part of a large group. They felt more comfortable when they made mistakes because they did not “stand out” (Choir 1, Focus Group 1, p. 256) and a number of them said they enjoyed being in a group and being with their friends (Choir 1, CMS). Boys in Choir 2 reported the same thing (Choir 2, CMS). A 17-year-old boy in Choir 2, expressed strong feelings surrounding his belief that choir was all about working together as a group. He believed that “for a choir to work it can’t have any standouts” (Choir 2, Interview 1, p. 293) and part of that was about relationships:

People are more inclined to work with each other if they have a good relationship with each other (Choir 2, Interview 1, p. 289).

As Conductor 2 reflected on this aspect, his enjoyment and “sense of community” (Choir 2, Conductor 2, p. 280) from being part of the choir was clearly evident. Even in performances he felt that strong connection between himself and the group:

When you’re in front of a choir and you smile at them and they smile back at you, you instantly know that you have that engagement... You can be part of it by when you’re standing in front of it conducting or you can be part of it if you place yourself within the ensemble and you lead from within the ensemble. You
can be part of that performance, part of the music making, in a way that you don’t always with instrumentalists (Choir 2, Conductor 2, p. 280).

For Choir 3, working together was a vital part of their academic success or achievement. There were sentiments expressed by some that revealed disappointment with other members of the group who showed a lack of commitment. They felt that working with a group in any situation was difficult and that part of the solution to this was having a common goal or “making sure that everyone has the same intentions, and the same motivations” (Choir 3, Interview 1, p. 340). Even when personal conflict arose between himself and another member of the group, one participant suggested that,

You have to suck it up because you’re a team, and teams have to work together and stick together (Choir 3, Interview 1, p. 341).

In these situations, though, he gained support from the group saying,

What was good was knowing the difficulties were being overcome together... or half together as a collaborative (Choir 3, Interview 1, p. 342).

Observation of the rehearsal revealed a strong sense of working collaboratively and showed the group frequently splitting into pairs, helping each other learn their part. This was often done in conjunction with the piano player, who worked with each part whenever they asked him for assistance. The group supported each other in this way and made helpful suggestions throughout. One student even provided the conductor with some feedback, saying, “That was really helpful when you went [makes conducting gesture]” (VA, Choir 3, p. 471). A collaborative approach was also observed in the rehearsal of Choir 2 and a strong sense of working together was explicitly communicated through words such as, “Let’s try to bring things together as a group” (VA, Choir 2, p. 464) and “How do you guys think the best way to do it is?” (p. 464).

The attraction of working together as a unified group was perhaps most strongly welcomed amongst the men of Choir 4. The conductor talked about an unspoken element, or nature, unique to this group of men; something he did not experience with any other group. Other men echoed this, one of whom did not even view this group as a choir in the accepted sense because he felt that it was “something about this particular group, the actual people, the particular people” (Choir 4, Interview 1, p. 366). A vast number of related comments were
submitted in the CMS that primarily described that overarching sense of “camaraderie between members” and the pleasure of working with other “good blokes” (Choir 4, CMS, Question 10). So enamoured of this group were some that in response to Question 13: Is choir something you wish to do in the future? they answered that they would only be part of this choir or “one of the same standard” since they had “been spoilt” by being part of such a group (Choir 4, CMS, Question 13). Another participant wrote that he received a “great deal of enjoyment and satisfaction from singing this kind of material with this group of men” (Choir 4, CMS, Question 14, p. 498) and he would stop his involvement with the group if these elements were no longer present. The experience of working together was aptly described by one man using a sporting analogy:

The experience of playing in a team - it doesn’t matter how rough it is, or not rough - and that exquisite sense of it all coming together as a team; there is that same thing in a choir (Choir 4, Interview 1, p. 372).

In addition to overt expressions and understandings about success, as described by public success and musical success, is the meaning of the experience as it relates directly to the individual choral singer.

9.3 Personal Success

In a similar way to public success, personal meaning represented a large portion of participant responses regarding the individual significance of success; therefore, personal success covers elements directly related to the meaning of the choral experience to the individual in the choir. These elements include enjoyment and love of singing; participation and the value of the experience; self-confidence and singing as a means of expression.

I love singing; it's my favourite thing to do, anywhere any time (Choir 1, Interview 2, p. 243).

Statements like this epitomize the feeling that almost every participant in this study expressed in various forms. Even when it became clear that many boys imagined they would not be in a choir as they got older, this was not the case with singing. Instead they said that whatever they did in life they would continue...
to sing, even if that was simply in the shower, at home or in the car (Choir 1, CMS, Question 4). Out of the 40 surveys completed by members of Choir 1, 38 boys said, “Yes” they liked singing and 2 boys said, “Sometimes.” Many of these answers had additional information, such as, “Yes; I love it” or “Yes; I have always liked to sing” and two responses added that they liked to sing but “not like Justin Bieber” (Choir 1, CMS, Question 1). One boy was clear on his position saying that the only thing that could stop him singing was if he broke his neck or his spine. Another boy articulated it plainly, saying, “I just like singing” (Choir 1, Focus Group 1, p. 256) and a number of other boys disclosed the same sentiment. One 12-year-old associated enjoyment with success. He believed that,

You won’t have success unless you enjoy what you’re doing (Choir 1, Focus Group 2, p. 270)

Conductor 2 confirmed that a love of singing had magnitude and power, saying, “it can be like a drug” (Choir 2, Conductor 2, p. 280). This was echoed in the words of a boy who described singing as “the most amazing feeling” and one which gave him “goose bumps” (Choir 2, Focus Group, p. 327). Another 15-year-old implied that his love of singing was so immense that it did not matter what it sounded like,

And even if I’m singing like a dying cat, I enjoy it (Choir 2, Interview 2, p. 296).

These boys, even in their youth, were describing a profound sense of personal meaning when they tried to explain what singing meant to them. Choir 3 were no different in expressing their enjoyment of singing and one young man said this specifically about choir and that even though he said, “I’m not a choral singer” (Choir 3, Interview 1, p. 344) and described associated difficulties, he also admitted, “I love it, though” (p. 345). The leader of this group also had to admit his enjoyment, despite the fact that the experience was foremost an assessment task, and despite the fact that he too did not consider himself a singer, and even less a choral singer. He said,

I enjoy being in choirs; it’s fun, regardless of whether I was conducting or singing (Choir 3, Conductor 3, p. 334).

The observed rehearsal showed most of the group enjoying themselves, laughing and joking together throughout the practice, in a relaxed atmosphere. It was still
apparent that levels of engagement varied amongst individuals, with some
tenaciously perfected their part and others only singing when necessary. One
student, however, detached himself from the process and sat down, arms folded.
He only participated when required and rarely sought help to learn his part, but
it is possible that this reflected a lack of confidence rather than a dislike of the
activity. Likewise, a variety of reactions and levels of engagement were observed
in the recorded rehearsal. Some students displayed enthusiasm and energy
while others sat slouched and yawning.

For Choir 4 enjoyment was a key factor and, like the other choirs, it was
mentioned consistently. One participant did not discriminate between the
naturalness of talking and that of singing. He saw the two as equally relevant,
natural and an intrinsic part of being human. According to this man it was
“unthinkable not to [sing]. It’s as human as speaking” (Choir 4, Interview 1, p.
366) and despite his strong feelings against elements of commercial success to
which the choir was now accustomed, he conceded by saying “But I enjoy it
because of the total package” (Choir 4, Interview 1, p. 376). Other members of
Choir 4 gave enjoyment and love of singing as one of the reasons they joined the

As adult [singing] was the most for me.

The joy of singing, principally.

Simple joy of singing (Choir 4, CMS, Question 9, p. 497).

This atmosphere of enjoyment was clearly evident in the observed rehearsal.
The significance of enjoyment and a love of singing was depicted in the words of
an adolescent from Choir 2, who said that “if it sounds good and everyone’s
having fun then what more is there to achieve?” (Choir 2, Focus Group, p. 306).
This statement indicates that to some the simple act of participating in a choir
denoted a level of personal success.

In the opinion of Conductor 1 to an extent this was true and she celebrated the
feat of getting boys to participate in choir:

I think every time we get boys in a room to sing together, that’s success, because
a lot of schools can’t manage to do that (Choir 1, Conductor 1, p. 229).
Interestingly, though, the boys in Choir 1 went beyond that view. In fact, they believed that being part of the choir was an achievement and a privilege, implying that mere participation was not an option. Despite the previous words, Conductor 1 directed the choir with a similar view to excellence and creating “something that was a little bit special” (Choir 1, Conductor 1, p. 228). Having fun was also considered a feature of participation and one boy believed this was “the biggest part of it” (Choir 2, Focus Group, p. 306). “Just doing it is a success” (Choir 2, AMS, Question 2) was another expression of this and yet another came from a member of Choir 4 who felt that the value of the experience was more important than the performance side.

Enjoyment, love of singing, participation and experiencing the value imbued in choir, all have the potential to affect self-confidence positively as suggested by a number of participants, such as Conductor 1 who said of choir,

\[
\text{I think it affects their confidence in a positive way and their self-esteem in a positive way} \quad (\text{Choir 1, Conductor 1, p. 232}).
\]

This was echoed by a member of Choir 3 whose experience of teaching children in small vocal groups had shown “that each and every one of them has improved in confidence” (Choir 3, Interview 1, p. 350). One young boy acknowledged this with his response, “It gives me confidence” (Choir 1, CMS, Question 10) and “builds confidence in a group” was offered by a member of the audience (Choir 1, AMS, Question 2).

The last feature of personal success to which reference was made repeatedly was that of singing being a means of personal expression. This was made manifest in comments by the boys in Choir 1 who said things like,

\[
\text{If I’m angry I just sing and I feel better} \quad (\text{Choir 1, Focus Group 2, p. 275})
\]

\[
\text{You feel free, like you feel nothing can stop me now} \quad (\text{Choir 1, Focus Group 2, p. 277})
\]

Boys from Choir 2 agreed, saying, “it is an expression of yourself” (Choir 2, Focus Group, p. 328) and Conductor 2 described the opportunity that choir provides for emotional and personal expression:
Chapter 9: Findings about Success

There's that energy - that physical energy. Even with a mass choir you can feel the air move that they create. You can feel that physical energy that each one of them is putting in (Choir 2, Conductor 2, p. 280).

Public success, in terms of recognition, career and wealth; performance, achievement and competition; musical success, in terms of technical ability, sound quality, the conductor and working together; and personal success, defined by enjoyment and love of singing, participation and the value of the experience; self-confidence and singing as a means of expression, are all elements that focus on those within the choir. Another aspect of success, however, was also identified as the ability or inclination of a choir to impact its listeners.

9.4 Private Impact

Although not as widely discussed by participants, the impact of a choir on its audience, was, nevertheless, considered an important feature of success. For this reason, private impact has been included to consider the impact on listeners and the presence of spirituality. These elements were apparent in Choir 2 and Choir 4 and, therefore, these two choirs form the basis of this discussion.

Understanding and discerning the impact of musical, creative and artistic performances can be difficult. What makes it particularly interesting in this instance is the fact that the impact of each choir is primarily considered from the perspective of the performers. A glimpse of the way the audience received the performance was elicited from the AMS. The school to which Choir 2 belonged had religious affiliations and because the performance was a school event, this faith or spirituality was substantially represented in the audience. Some listeners suggested the choir was a success because they demonstrated a “love of God” through their music (Choir 2, AMS, Question 2). A 15-year-old boy communicated a comparable belief and felt that “it’s much more personal when you’re a Christian” (Choir 2, Focus Group, p. 327) and that there was something “deeply kind of spiritual” about singing (p. 327). For the majority of those in Choir 2 singing was something they did at school, both in choir and class, as well as something they did regularly at church.
The boys in Choir 2 showed maturity and benevolence in the things they said about their listeners. One boy felt that the choir “made a lot of, possibly lonely people feel better” and that “making people feel so much better about themselves is really a bit more valuable than winning a trophy (Choir 2, Interview 1, p. 289). Conductor 2 affirmed a similar sentiment saying,

We took the choir off to sing at nursing homes, and to touch an audience in that way, that’s another fantastic thing about it (Choir 2, Conductor 2, p. 281).

He also believed that if the “audience is moved” (Choir 2, Conductor 2, p. 285) by the choir then they had succeeded. In the observed rehearsal Conductor 2 encouraged the choir to communicate with their audience, saying, “Make sure you get into it. It’s about hope” (VA, Choir 2, p. 465). Video analysis revealed that Choir 2’s performance had a positive impact on the audience, which could be observed by the enthusiastic clapping, whistles and shouts for more, and the extended applause. From a slightly different perspective, although consistent, being moved by the choir was reflected in this young man’s description of success:

I guess it's success in that they liked it and they want us to come back again so that's always good so, because if you're going back for the second time it means that you've made an impact and you've made an impression (Choir 2, Interview 1, p. 289).

The impact on the audience was possibly the most significant aspect of success for those men in Choir 4. The conductor referred constantly to the way in which music affected listeners. At one point he describes success as “when you influence people, when you move people, make people laugh, make people cry, make people think” (Choir 4, Conductor 4, p. 361). He also describes a specific moment when the choir “could feel the response from the audience” (p. 359). There were other reflections of this from participants, some of whom wrote, “We make audiences happy” and “Audiences LOVE it” (Choir 4, CMS, Question 11). It can be seen from the AMS that 68 of the total 91 responses believed the choir was successful because ‘they connect with the audience’ and 64 out of 91 also indicated success because ‘the audience enjoyed the performance’ (Choir 4, AMS, Question 2). A more ambiguous expression of this spirituality, which is one that illustrates recognition of something outside the physicality of the situation, was suggested by one man who said that the choir was “greater than the sum of
Chapter 9: Findings about Success

its parts” (Choir 4, CMS, Question 11) and yet it remained grounded in humanity according to an audience member who philosophically described the group’s performance as “existential” (Choir 4, AMS, Question 2).

The significance of an audience’s reaction or level of enjoyment in the success of any performing group is rarely disputed and most would agree that a performance needs to connect with its listeners in some way, even though this can take many different forms. One member of Choir 4 had a lot to say about the impact of the choir’s performance on their audience. He said, “if it wasn’t a successful performance that resonated with audiences we wouldn’t be here still at twelve years” (Choir 4, Interview 2, p. 387) and he also believed that they had “an obligation … and people enjoy it, and we enjoy it, so why the hell wouldn’t we keep doing it” (p. 387).

Video analysis of Choir 4’s performance indicated a strong connection between the choir and the audience. Laughter was generated throughout the performance and the audience applauded with vigour after each song and at the end of the show. The conductor succeeded in strengthening this rapport by making references to local geography, thanking the audience for joining them on such a cold evening, and teaching them a couple of dance moves, encouraging participation. Even amongst the laughter, the joviality, and the burlesque, Conductor 4 crafted an atmosphere of harmony and accord. As audience and choir held hands, he celebrated “this wonderful cauldron of humanity” (VA, Choir 4, p. 481).

The vast array of ideas about the meaning of success makes it a challenging concept to explore, and yet it is this perplexity that makes it particularly thought provoking. The perceptions of success as experienced by the participants not only demonstrate anomalies of meaning and perspective, they highlight the importance of considering the context of individual experience as it influences perceptions and choices and attitudes. The fact that the boys and men involved viewed success in specific ways showed an interesting consistency of thought or attitude. This suggests that despite slight differences, perceptions of success were overwhelmingly similar across the age range and across various contexts.
Chapter Summary

This chapter explored the perceptions of public and private success. Public success showed the prevalence of thought that suggested success was interpreted via a significant level of recognition; through the pursuance of activities as a career; and the potential wealth associated with both of these factors. Performing regularly, achieving goals and winning competitions were clearly important as features of success. Musical success encompassed technical elements and the quality of the sound made by the choir. Participants believed that a choir must practise to become better and display a high standard of musical skill. This was, in part, the role of the conductor and many participants, including members of the audience, saw the conductor as playing a significant role in the success of the group. Working together also emerged as influential in the musical success of a choir and individuals gleaned much satisfaction from this. Private impact discussed how the choir affected the listener in terms of the way choir made them feel and the way in which they might experience a sense of spirituality, both religious and personal. Personal success dealt with effect of the choir experience on the individuals involved. Participants talked about their enjoyment and love of singing; participation and the value of the experience; self-confidence and singing as a means of expression. They believed that these features, as they related to each individual, were necessary ingredients for the choir to be considered a success. Overall, there was an implication that an activity was acceptable for males if it substantially satisfied the criteria for success.
Conclusions and Implications

Our work is uncovering a male archetype that’s there anyway

(Choir 4: Community, Conductor 4, p. 360)

Summary

The first purpose of this chapter is to provide a summary of the research study with an overview of the findings framed in response to the research questions. Following this, limitations of the study are considered and recommendations for further research are made. The second purpose is to discuss the implications of the research for boys and men singing in Australia. This discussion aims to highlight key findings, make connections, and interpret meaning. It considers the implications of these conclusions as they apply to choral contexts within schools and the wider community, and it considers the implications for broader educational contexts, such as music education, general education and boys’ education.
10.1 **Summary of Findings**

Chapters 7, 8 and 9 presented the research findings, extrapolated from data obtained through surveys, interviews, focus groups, and observational video analysis, as outlined in the methodology of Chapter 5. Each of these findings chapters was assigned a research question pertaining to one of the three main themes of the study: masculinity, possible selves, and success.

10.1.1 **Research Question 1: What effect do notions of masculinity have on male participation in choir?**

Participant responses demonstrated that notions of masculinity, specifically those prevalent within Australian society, have a significant effect on male participation in choir. Stereotypes perpetuated by existing ‘Aussie bloke’ ideologies have the potential to prevent initial decisions about participation but, as this research indicates, they can also influence the quality of the experience for those already involved in choir. A summary of the research findings regarding masculinity is provided in Table 10.1 (see next page).

The table highlights the key ideas that emerged around stereotypes, mateship and the language of men, and vocal change. Each column reflects the essence of the responses made by participants of the corresponding choir and each idea has a frequency rating, where (H) refers to a high rate of the response, (M) a medium level, and (L) a low rate. Table 10.1 clearly shows that participant responses were similar in nature across the range of ages, but it also shows the nuances of difference. These distinctions are discussed below and even though they may seem small they add depth and richness to the phenomenon of Australian males’ experiences of choir. The Choir Members’ Survey (CMS) and the Audience Members’ Survey (AMS) were efficient tools for extracting a number of opinions and expressions of personal experience or understandings. The CMS meant that males in choir could be open and yet remain anonymous and the AMS offered a glimpse of what the audience thought. Using a number of
different data sources contributed to the development of a more thorough understanding of phenomena as different people experience it.

Negative stereotypes were considered to be those that reflected feminine attributes or qualities, which substantiates the work of Adler and Harrison (2004), Ashley (2006), Freer (2008), Harrison (2001; 2007), Hawkins (2007), Summers (2013), Talbot (2010) and comments from the Professional Conductors also indicated this. Participants suggested that singing in a choir was considered a feminine activity and that a male in this context exhibited a ‘soft’ masculinity. Consequently, he was in danger of being labeled a homosexual and as Connell (2008) states boys will often avoid activities that place them in potential physical or psychological jeopardy. Choir 1: Junior School blatantly described such softness as ‘unmanly’ and other participants described characteristics that included being gentle, weak, expressive and showing emotion. This confirms the work of Ashley (2006; 2011) who describes the notion of ‘soft’ masculinity even within the English choral tradition.
**Table 10.1 Summary of Findings – Masculinity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stereotypes</th>
<th>Choir 1 Junior School</th>
<th>Choir 2 Secondary School</th>
<th>Choir 3 University</th>
<th>Choir 4 Community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feminine connotations</td>
<td>‘Girlie’ (H)</td>
<td>Gay (M) Old men (L)</td>
<td>Gay (H)</td>
<td>Homosexual (L)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Soft’ masculinity</td>
<td>Unmanly (M)</td>
<td>Weak (M)</td>
<td>Gentle (M)</td>
<td>Expressive (M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of Sport</td>
<td>Strong preference &amp; involvement (H)</td>
<td>Working together (M)</td>
<td>Sport is masculine (L)</td>
<td>About display (L)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>Being with friends (H)</td>
<td>Friendship (H)</td>
<td>Recall making friends (L)</td>
<td>Friendship (H) Brotherhood (H)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mateship (observed)</td>
<td>Constant movement (H)</td>
<td>Physical contact (H)</td>
<td>Physical interaction (M)</td>
<td>Deliberate contact (M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physicality (spoken)</td>
<td>Importance of sport (H)</td>
<td>Physical energy (L)</td>
<td>Importance of sport in Australian culture (L)</td>
<td>Desire for closeness (M) Singing a physical act (M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Joking (M) Laughter (M)</td>
<td>Joking (M) Laughter (H)</td>
<td>Humour (H) Joking (M) Roasting (M) Laughter (H)</td>
<td>Humour (H) Roasting (M) Laughter (H)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Inconsistent (M)</td>
<td>Lack of control &amp; difficult adjustment (H)</td>
<td>Big adjustment (L) Respect for male falsetto (L)</td>
<td>Difficult adjustment (M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocal Change</td>
<td>Conductor</td>
<td>Responsible for technical assistance (H)</td>
<td>Support &amp; advice (H)</td>
<td>Vocal stereotyping (L) Support (L)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td>Normal (L)</td>
<td>Natural part of becoming a man (H)</td>
<td>Friends left choir &amp; did not return (L)</td>
<td>Indication of manhood (M)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Key: Rate of response: (H) High (M) Moderate (L) Low*
In a similar way to that put forward by Connell (2008), Ashley (2006) notes the tendency of boys to avoid choral singing if they sound like a girl, because it is considered a deviation from acceptable masculinity. According to many participants in this research the process of vocal change was a phenomenon that engendered negative stereotypes, in particular those that linked the higher, unchanged voice with femininity or homosexuality. Professional Conductor 1 also expressed that the unchanged voice was particularly problematic for older boys. Findings from this research lead to a redefinition of what Australian society has traditionally or ideologically perceived as acceptable masculinity.

Expectations generated from ideologies of Australian masculinity had the power to affect males in choir even when participants did not have first-hand experience of negative stereotypes. This is a significant finding for boys both in primary school (aged up to 12 years) and high school (aged 13 – 18 years). The impact of stereotypes and ideology can be felt even when the experience is only witnessed. These findings were consistent with the pervasive image of the Australian male within school culture and across the broader community, as discussed by Harrison (2001; 2009a; 2012), Connell (2008) and Summers (2013). In addition, however, Lyons et al. (2012) discuss the role of effort in learning. This research confirms this by clearly showing the importance of effort, but more significantly, it was found that the choir members fully understood the need for effort in their activity of singing and that the physical exertion and satisfaction of their efforts was a major component in their enjoyment of choir. It is significant that the naturalness for males inherent in physical effort is present in choir by the very nature of singing, and yet ideologies, such as those described above by Harrison (2001; 2009a; 2012), Connell (2008) and Summers (2013), have neglected to recognize this aspect. This research, therefore, extends previous research and it strongly advocates that those within a choir understand what it offers. Contrary to popular stereotypes, male participants enjoy an experience that fulfils and satisfies naturally male characteristics and needs. A significant number of participants believed the male image was largely reflected in strength and physicality, especially expressed through sporting prowess and involvement. This is consistent with existing literature regarding the role of sport in society and
schools and the stereotypical effect this creates (Connell, 2008; Adler & Harrison, 2004; Talbot, 2010). The young boys of Choir 1: Junior School talked most about the importance of sport. They were heavily involved in sport at school and as an extracurricular activity and their responses indicated a sporting family background; a preference for sport over choir, despite their intense enjoyment of singing; and a large number of boys also communicated a desire to have a sporting career of their own, discussed in Chapter 8 Possible Selves. Sporting analogies and allusions were often used to describe other experiences, and it became clear that one of the attractions of choir, one which only those within could tangibly realize, was the inherent physicality of singing, particularly potent in an all-male setting. These men had all experienced the power of singing together with other men. It is important to recognize this as a crucial factor and that in such a setting they enjoyed the freedom to be themselves and interact in ways unique to men. The all-male setting was powerful and a significant influence on participation, and therefore an important consideration for educators and choral directors. The choirs breathed together and they congratulated each other with some form of contact, such as a slap on the back or a ‘high-five’. Choir 4: Community commented on the stamina required to sing a particular song and their performances demonstrated a strong physical component. Choir 2: Secondary School had a strong sporting program and these boys had weekly school commitments around sporting activities and physical education. Despite the fact that this was not discussed, they demonstrated constant physical action and interaction, such as cracking knuckles, stretching, jostling each other and perhaps most significant aspect was seen in the basses standing shoulder to shoulder and remaining in close proximity to each other throughout the rehearsal. The older participants of Choir 4: Community recognized the focus on the sporting context for Australian males, however, they identified that the significance of being physical with other men was a desire for closeness and relationship and that the theatricality made the physicality permissible. The social satisfaction derived from choir was acknowledged by the vast majority of participants and the expression of it developed along the age continuum from ‘being with friends’ through to ‘brotherhood’. The prevalence of physicality and its apparent significance to the
Perceptions of success influencing male participation in choir – S. Powell

Chapter 10: Conclusions and Implications

men and boys involved exemplifies the notion of embodiment and embodied learning, mentioned in Chapter 2. Also of significance is the facet of display, which adds potency to physical effort and the associated affective impact (Lyons, Slattery, Jimenez, Lopez & Moher, 2012). As stated, the physical nature of singing means that choir represents an embodied learning experience and, furthermore, the importance of physical learning for males reinforces the power of the choral experience. This research clearly demonstrates the physicality of choral singing for the participants and the potential influence and potency of this on other aspects of their lives. Embodiment, physicality and mateship are integral constituents in meaningful male contexts, and important considerations for choral directors and educators. This is discussed further in section 10.2.1.

The range of participant responses surrounding the period of change verified that it was an anticipated time, which often carried with it the potential for significant personal anxiety, especially for those in Junior and Secondary school. At the same time, however, the process was considered natural and a normal part of becoming a man. It was the unchanged voice that presented stereotypical problems. Participants from Choir 1: Junior School and Choir 2: Secondary reported difficulty adjusting to the inconsistencies of their immature or changing voice and the resultant lack of vocal control. Participants from Choir 3: University and Choir 4: Community recalled their own experiences of the transition, confirming the potential vulnerability as well as the need for support. Such support was overwhelmingly considered to be the responsibility of the conductor, particularly by Choir 1: Junior School and Choir 2: Secondary School.

The notion of embodied learning is also relevant here. Vocal change is a physical process and as an embodied approach indicates, this is associated with a potent emotional response. This potentially increases boys’ awareness of their bodies, and makes the process more emotionally charged, and because mind and body are inextricably linked (Hauge & Haarvind, 2011; Lyons et al., 2012; Standal & Engelsrud, 2013; Vaccaro, 2011), the physical experience of vocal change has immediate influence on the way boys perceive themselves and their vocal ability. It becomes extremely important, therefore, to assist boys in their understanding of the change process, that it is part of their journey to manhood, and that it requires effort. As previously discussed, effort has strong
implications for learning. The effort required in this context involves singing through vocal change and developing confidence that their ‘new’ or mature voice will emerge. A good understanding of the process will help foster a healthy attitude and reduce the likelihood of boys leaving singing behind with all its benefits. The professional conductors also described this as a natural process and they agreed that the expertise of the conductor was a necessary support factor during vocal transition. They recognized the importance of supporting boys with technical advice and guidance and ensuring a positive experience. Again, this is consistent with extensive research across a number of years by Callaghan, Hughes and Power (2009), Cooksey (1992), Freer (2009), Harrison, Welch and Adler (2012), Kennedy (2004), Killian (1999), Stupple (2007), and Trollinger (2007). The importance of the conductor will be discussed later as a key factor (section 10.2.2).

Despite stereotypical reactions and perceptions, this study clearly demonstrated that males want to belong to choirs because they love to sing, they love the mateship, they enjoy the challenge and the teamwork, believing it to be an enjoyable and beneficial personal investment. Responses also strongly suggested that choice is affected by socio-cultural context. The culture of a context shapes the opportunities available and the decisions an individual is persuaded to make, both in terms of that which they choose to do and that which they opt to avoid. This was also made evident in Chapter 6 by the professional conductors who talked about the importance of culture and tradition. The importance of generating acceptable contexts and a positive culture of males singing in Australia is discussed further in section 10.2.2.

10.1.2 Research Question 2: What is the role of possible selves in relation to male participation in choir?

Participant responses demonstrated that possible selves played a significant role in influencing male participation in choir. The interaction of past, present and future selves impacted decision-making, self-perception and aspirations for the future. A summary of the findings as they relate to possible selves is provided below in Table 10.2 (see next page).
Table 10.2 Summary of Findings – Possible Selves

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CHOIR 1</th>
<th>CHOIR 2</th>
<th>CHOIR 3</th>
<th>CHOIR 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PAST</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family influence</td>
<td>Parents &amp; grandparents sing or in band (H)</td>
<td>Parents sing or in band (M) Normal part of life (M)</td>
<td>Mum sings (L) Dad does not (L)</td>
<td>Musical parents (M) Normal part of life (L)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive experience of school music</td>
<td>Instrumental tuition, music teacher, other music activities (H)</td>
<td>Sing in class and junior school, play instrument (M)</td>
<td>Instrumental tuition, good junior school, teach own students (H)</td>
<td>Negative singing experience (L) Normal part of school (M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience of Choir</td>
<td>Enjoyment (H)</td>
<td>Enjoyment (H)</td>
<td>Enjoyed at school (H)</td>
<td>Enjoyed at school (M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Junior school choir (M)</td>
<td>Involved in other choirs &amp; musical companies (M)</td>
<td>Involved in other choirs (H)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PRESENT</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-perception</td>
<td>Level of ability (L)</td>
<td>Based on opinion of others (M)</td>
<td>Values ability &amp; sound (L)</td>
<td>Level of ability (L)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FUTURE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-confidence</td>
<td>Resilience (L)</td>
<td>Fear of criticism (M)</td>
<td>Based on ability &amp; identity (H)</td>
<td>Leading (L)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>Vocal improvement (L)</td>
<td>Vocal training (M)</td>
<td>Musical improvement (M)</td>
<td>Musically, socially &amp; personally fulfilling experience (H)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td>Concerts, competitions, school events (H)</td>
<td>Solo performance career (H)</td>
<td>Course completion, career (H)</td>
<td>Tours, CD recordings, performances (H)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Key:* Rate of response: (H) High (M) Moderate (L) Low
Participant comments regarding the past consistently demonstrated the integral role of family background, school music and prior choral experience. From the majority of participants there was an overwhelmingly positive indication that music had been a normal part of family life, with many suggesting that their grandparents and parents were either trained musicians or they sang in choirs or belonged to a band with their friends for fun. There were varying degrees of family involvement but it was presented as a positive fact and one that also provided participants with extra opportunities to be involved in musical activities and it provided an environment where music and singing was a normal part of everyday life. Barrett (2012) strongly advocates the vital function of family in relation to the musical development of children, and this was also reinforced by the views of the professional conductors in Chapter 6. In addition, the work of Welch, Saunders, Papageorgi and Himonides (2012) as part of the National Singing Programme (UK), Sing Up, advocates the integral role of music education in positively influencing boys’ “singing development” (p.41). The cycle of tradition (see Figure 6.1), derived from the professional conductor views, illustrated the way in which the English choral tradition had the power to influence those within it, further exemplifying the role of culture in cultivating possible selves. In Australia, the traditions have been different: early bush ballads, songs related to the wars in which Australia fought, and so on. This notion of creating a culture was repeatedly identified as a significant aspect influencing male participation in choir and, as previously mentioned, will be discussed in section 10.2. It is also an aspect consistent with the perspective provided by Collins (2012) and creating a culture of boys’ singing in Australian schools.

A positive experience of music at school was present in the majority of participant experiences and those whose school had a strong musical presence viewed their own involvement as commonplace. Across each of the choirs there were consistent references to instrumental tuition at school, singing in class and exposure to other musical activities or performances. Only one or two participants reported a negative experience at school, generally an isolated incident, but these participants also described having a strong and positive musical family background. Many participants indicated that they had been involved in a school choir or other community choirs in the past and this had
been an enjoyable experience. In keeping with Strahan and Wilson (2006) it appears that these participants had been able to sustain a positive memory of past choral experience, and had kept it psychologically ‘close’ (Stevenson & Clegg, 2011), which meant that choir was more likely to form part of their current and future selves (Freer, 2009).

Participant responses regarding the present or current selves were related to self-perception and self-confidence, both of which were also influenced by past selves. Comments suggested that the way they perceived their ability significantly affected participants’ confidence, which contributed to the formation of current identity as well as the pursuit of a future goal or self. It was interesting to note the difference of response from Choir 2: Secondary School. They formed an opinion of their ability based on the opinions of others and this meant that their self-confidence was expressed from a more negative perspective and a fear of being criticised. This reflects the work of Freer (2009; 2010) and many others (Dunkel & Anthis, 2001; Knox, Funk, Elliott & Greene Bush, 2000; Message, 2009; Sica, 2009) who discuss the fragility and vulnerability of the adolescent identity. The notion of ‘self-in-relation’ (Knox et al, 2000; Knox, 2006) offers an interpretation involving the social context of identity and the fact that adolescents tend to portray themselves, or begin constructing their identity, on the basis of how others see them. Participants suggested that the way they felt about their ability significantly affected their choices. Boys in Choir 1: Junior School believed that a boy would not join a choir if he perceived that he lacked sufficient vocal ability.

It was generally made apparent that participants were content with their vocal ability and sound of their voice, although they saw choir as an opportunity to improve thereby attaching future involvement to the present purpose of choir. Discussions about the future were characterised by purpose and preparation with purpose ranging from providing a fulfilling personal and social experience to preparing for a career. Participants showed an active engagement in pursuing or avoiding hoped for, expected or feared outcomes and as age increased the purpose and reason for preparation changed, highlighting the distance, perceived or actual, between present and future realities. For example, both
school groups (Choirs 1 and 2) thought that choir fulfilled an immediate context, such as preparing for a school concert performance, but at the same time it afforded them the opportunity to develop their voice and attain the ideal solo career and associated fame. It remains important for boys to see a purpose in choir whilst at school. They cannot predict whether or not their future self will include choir but fulfilling an immediate purpose means they can at least see it as a possibility in their future self. An example of this can be seen in Choir 4. One longstanding member of the group was a medical doctor and researcher, enjoying a successful career. As a boy he had been part of the school choir but it was not until after 40 years of age that he joined a choir. Since then he has been involved in a number of different groups both in his workplace and in the community. His early experience of choir meant that future involvement was a possibility and in his case this came to fruition (Choir 4, Interview 2). The future for Choir 3: University, however, was a closer reality and one for which they were deliberately preparing. The present for this choir was much more directly aligned with their prospective career in music and, therefore, the disparity between present and future was far less. In a similar way to the other three choirs, Choir 4: Community was involved in preparation for upcoming performance commitments such as tours, recordings and concerts. The purpose for this ensemble predominantly involved the provision of a fulfilling experience for its members and because this was an enduring purpose, the future for this choir had partially been realised and experienced in the present. One member of Choir 4 described involvement in this way:

> The ethos of the performance and the content of the performance and the type of music somehow is just personally reinforcing and it’s actually good for us (Choir 4, Interview 2, p. 388).

Members of Choir 4 believed that their lives were not diminished by their involvement in choir, but enriched. This was consistent across each of the four choirs.

According to Erikson (2007) experiencing the future in the present is an essential part of the realisation of potential futures, both desired and unwanted. This understanding is supported by Creech, Hallam, Varvarigou, Gaunt, McQueen and Pincas (2013) and Oyserman, Bybee, Terry and Hart-Johnson.
(2004) who add that such experience contributes to the construction of well-developed or detailed possible selves, which in turn develop stronger motivation for the pursuance of future-orientated ambitions. Additionally, temporal relationships between past, present and future selves are discussed by Strahan and Wilson (2006) who propose that a distant goal can remain an imminent reality if the motivation to achieve this end is strong.

The findings of this research strongly suggest that the past, the present and the future are intrinsically connected and that a positive experience of choir, both past and present, has a significant influence on future participation. It was also apparent that to varying degrees, largely dependent on age, participants had experienced the future in the present. When this factor is coupled with constructive musical background, provided by family and school, it reveals the way in which positive and detailed possible selves are developed. It also strongly advocates that the role of possible selves is substantial in directing the decisions of boys and men regarding participation in a choir. Having strong and positive possible selves - past, present and future – enables males to choose choir participation. A developed sense of identity, with all its possibilities, provides them with the strength to challenge and defy stereotypes and restrictive ideologies, and subsequently experience the musical and social stimulation unique to a choir.

10.1.3 Research Question 3: How do perceptions of success influence male participation in choir?

Participant comments illustrated that choir had to satisfy a number of criteria of success in order for males to consider participating, and whilst perceptions varied according to individuals, success simultaneously had elements of universal and consistent meaning across each of the choirs. An overview of how success was perceived across the four choirs is presented below in Table 10.3 (see next page).
### Table 10.3 Summary of Findings – Success

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CHOIR 1 Junior School</th>
<th>CHOIR 2 Secondary School</th>
<th>CHOIR 3 University</th>
<th>CHOIR 4 Community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recognition Career Wealth</strong></td>
<td>Famous sportsman (H)</td>
<td>Fame (M)</td>
<td>Earning money for a living (M)</td>
<td>Commercial (M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Performance Competition</strong></td>
<td>Solo performer (M)</td>
<td>Performing for others (M)</td>
<td>Achieving personal goals (M)</td>
<td>Performing for an audience (H)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Achievement</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conductor</strong></td>
<td>Responsible for everything (H)</td>
<td>Understand the group (L)</td>
<td>Responsible for cohesion (M)</td>
<td>Leadership (M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Technical skill</strong></td>
<td>Belief in ability (M)</td>
<td>Room to improve (M)</td>
<td>Primary focus (H)</td>
<td>Standard observed (L)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Working together</strong></td>
<td>Listening to each other (L)</td>
<td>Sense of supporting each other (M)</td>
<td>Collaborate for best results (M)</td>
<td>Teamwork (M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social</strong></td>
<td>Social (H)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Community (H)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sound quality</strong></td>
<td>Listen to others for pitch (L)</td>
<td>Important to sound good (H)</td>
<td>Strive for perfection (M)</td>
<td>Pride in unique sound (M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Love of singing</strong></td>
<td>Extremely important (H)</td>
<td>Important (M)</td>
<td>Part of being human (L)</td>
<td>Natural &amp; integral (H)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expression</strong></td>
<td>Improves mood (M)</td>
<td>Spirituality (M)</td>
<td>Comes from within (L)</td>
<td>Display of self (L)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enjoyment</strong></td>
<td>Fun (H)</td>
<td>Having fun (M)</td>
<td>Value of fun &amp; participation (L)</td>
<td>Meaningful interaction (M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Response</strong></td>
<td>Personal (L)</td>
<td>Make the audience feel good (M)</td>
<td>Results-based (L)</td>
<td>Engage with audience (H)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PRIVATE IMPACT</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Make an impression (L)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Influence an audience (M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Spirituality</strong></td>
<td>Liturgical role in school (M)</td>
<td>Faith-based connection (L)</td>
<td>Personal identity (M)</td>
<td>Challenge people to think (L)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal goals (L)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Key** Rate of response: (H) High (M) Moderate (L) Low
The choirs provided a range of definitions, rather than a single meaning, and their explanations showed that a number of criteria had to be present for boys and men to consider something successful. For example, choir had to be enjoyable at the same time as having a high technical standard. Likewise, choir was an avenue for performing as well as being an avenue for personal expression. Descriptions of public success were characterised by elements reflected in recognition, attainment of money, performance, and achievement. Musical success included technical aspects, collaboration and the role of the conductor. Love of singing, enjoyment and expression were indicative of personal success, whilst the audience response and the spiritual nature of the experience, were considered aspects of private impact.

Participants demonstrated that overt or public displays of success were important and that their decisions about choir were influenced by this definition. This echoes findings surrounding physicality, and is particularly interesting when considered in conjunction with previous references to embodiment and the power of “being watched by others” (Lyons et al., 2012, p. 80). Measures of success typically involved activities that elicited money, career opportunities and fame, and such views about success have been documented extensively in the literature, both in a music and arts context (Cooper, 2010; Ginsburgh, 2003; Moore, Burland & Davidson, 2003; Jarvin & Subotnik, 2010; Strobl & Tucker, 2000) and in a broader social context (Dyke & Murphy, 2006; Jones, 2004; Seibert, Kraimer and Liden, 2001; Wandersman, 2009).

The views of the five Professional Conductors in Chapter 6 also demonstrated the existence of these perceptions. For Choir 1: Junior School success was commonly expressed in terms of peak goals such as, winning competitions and being a famous sportsman or rock star. As the age of the groups increased, the focus changed somewhat. Choir 2: Secondary School focused on performing for others, the purpose of which was strongly linked to private impact. Being from a faith-based school, they saw their performing as a spiritual responsibility and a way of serving others less fortunate, for example, elderly people confined to nursing homes. Choir 4: Community also identified a spiritual aspect to their work. They liked to challenge and inspire their audiences to think differently about themselves and their world. Choir 3: University displayed a focus on the achievement of personal goals and results, which reflected their course-related context. For this group the response
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from listeners, described in private impact, was almost exclusively related to examiner impressions and subsequent results. Having said that, participants did assert the importance of reaching the goals they had set for themselves, regardless of external obligations, and this was reflected in the comments made by the professional conductors.

Musical success was described in terms of technical ability, sound quality, the conductor and working together, and formed a large part of participant conceptions about the success of their choir. Each ensemble communicated a desire for excellence and high standard, typically expressed through technical ability and quality of sound. This was an attitude emphatically communicated by the professional conductors, who believed that it was very important for boys to be part of something highly regarded. Talking specifically about choirs, Lanier (2007) and Sigman (2010) offer an equally strong argument for the place of technical excellence and maintenance of high standard, saying that nothing should ever compromise this crucial element. Although each choir presented slightly different shades of focus, they all believed technical ability and sound quality to be of great importance. Perhaps most striking, however, was the success attributed to the conductor. Responses clearly portrayed this as an integral role involving responsibility and expertise and one that directly influenced all aspects of the choir. The security, social satisfaction and support gained from working together also emerged as a significant element of musical success. Collaboration, excellence and the role of the conductor will be considered further in section 10.2 as vital components of meaningful male contexts and creating a culture of boys and men singing in Australia.

Participants described personal success in terms related to the individual gains they experienced from their involvement. They reported enjoyment, love of singing, and the opportunity for personal expression. Love of singing was consistently identified as important, with the older participants describing singing as a natural human activity. The enjoyment derived from choir was described as fun and Choir 1: Junior School also noted the appeal of being with friends. For Choir 3: University and Choir 4: Community expressions of enjoyment were more developed and included the personal value of being
involved and the benefit of meaningful interactions with other men. Rosevear (2010) identified enjoyment as a significant aspect of success. The opportunity for personal expression emerged as a phenomenon not experienced in any other context. Choir 1: Junior School stated simply that singing in the choir made them feel better, particularly if they were in a bad mood. The expression of self described by Choir 3 and Choir 4 was powerful, not simply because the opportunity was not presented elsewhere, but because it occurred in the social context of the group, highlighting the significance of collaboration and social satisfaction described previously.

As mentioned, private impact was a concept aligned with the intentions of Choir 2 and Choir 4, specifically in relation to spirituality. However, each choir had a desire to stimulate a personal reaction in their audience, and Choir 4: Community saw this as a definite aim, extending the idea to include engagement and interaction. Participants demonstrated a sense that their performance connected them with their audience and their audience with them so that the experience became something shared and one that reflected an entity larger than its separate parts.

### 10.2 Significance and Implications

This research demonstrated a strong interconnectedness between the three main themes. It was clear that notions of masculinity were dependant on individual identity formed through past and present constructions of self as well as future projections. Likewise, the ways in which success was conceptualised by the participants were inextricably linked to their experience of masculinity, both from a socio-cultural and contextual perspective and an individual perspective of identity formation and realisation. Masculinity, possible selves, and success exist in a reciprocal process of defining and being defined by each other. Findings consistently demonstrated that perceptions of success were, either consciously or subconsciously, informed by notions of masculinity, and equally informed by constructions of self. In a similar way, the possible selves of an individual could not be separated from their immediate context, which
involved considerations related to gender, culture, age and background, and the way participants perceived success.

This research provided new perspectives in the case studies of choirs with males across a range of ages. It also demonstrated that choir provided males of all ages with a meaningful opportunity to be with other men and one that offers participants the opportunity for personal development and social interaction outside the expectations of Australian male ideological mandates. It highlighted the need to generate a culture conducive to providing a healthy and fulfilling space for males to sing and socialise, in a way that goes beyond mere acceptance, but one which embeds it in normal, everyday, cultural practice. Creating such a culture specifically requires careful contemplation of that which is perceived by boys and men as successful and masculine.

This research adds to existing research, which has demonstrated that there are problems associated with being male in a choir (Harrison, 2001; 2005; 2007; 2009a; 2009b; 2010; 2012; Freer, 2006; 2007; 2008; 2009; 2010; Ashley, 2002; 2006; 2011). Researchers can continue to unpack the underlying beliefs that drive negative perceptions, and help educators better understand how to combat this in their own contexts. Research could contribute in such areas as psychology and identity; music performance and associated anxieties; the extent of family influence on musical choices; the impact of repertoire choice; the role of learning challenging repertoire; the impact of team work and working hard; and the role of education in providing positive and confirming experiences of activities that promote individual and group well-being.

Music educators have the opportunity to challenge perceptions of being male in a choir. Teachers can provide opportunities for singing in class and devise activities that make singing a normal part of music lessons. Developing individual students as experts in this area could also strengthen the status of being a boy who sings. This could also be approached on a whole-school level. The provision of public performances in order that choral singing can be acknowledged and validated as a legitimate male activity where boys can enjoy success is an important step. Schools and teachers can publicly recognise
student involvement and achievement in choral activities, thereby attributing it with status and presence.

Choral conductors continue to grapple with perceptions of males in choirs. This research has demonstrated the importance of the activity for boys and men. Conductors need to ensure that the technical aspects of choir are sufficiently challenging for boys, that they organise substantial opportunities to perform in public so that males feel a sense of achievement and recognition. Conductors can consider repertoire choice and the importance of physical interaction, expressed through warm-up activities and movement or choreography. Importantly they are at the forefront of retaining boys and men already belonging to a choir, ensuring they feel safe, successful and recognised for their abilities and expertise.

10.2.1 A Meaningful Male Context

This research focused on the perceptions and opinions of those belonging to a choir, which provided first-hand experience and insight into the phenomenon of males singing in choirs and it highlighted the power and meaning embedded in participation. The view of those who are outside choir is very different to the view from within, and although a seemingly obvious observation, a male must be inside to more fully appreciate and understand the benefits. The overwhelming response from participants was that choir was an important, satisfying and meaningful activity. This research argues, therefore, that choir offers males of various ages and stages of life the opportunity to experience meaningful relationships with other men, within a musical context, and without the restrictions imposed by ‘Aussie’ male culture.

A meaningful male context is not simply one that stipulates ‘boys only’. It is not merely men being with other men. Meaning is created through the provision of genuine spaces to interact with other males, whilst enjoying the unique language of men, and communicating through expressions of mateship. Creating a meaningful context where mateship is fostered involves collaboration and the opportunity to be personally and affectively expressive, in ways not always acceptable in other male contexts. In such a musically inspired environment
boys and men can share emotional responses, expressed through collaboration and trust, the enjoyment of jokes and a sense of freedom by being liberated from the imposition of socially constructed restrictions. Participants referred to such things as crucial elements of mateship, a fundamental aspect of Australian maleness, negating the stereotype of a ‘soft’ masculinity. Mateship is about interacting openly, enjoying a closeness of relationship or brotherhood and collaborating as a team. The satisfaction of working together is strongly connected to the physical satisfaction provided by singing in a choir and often likened to the satisfaction experienced through sport. The opportunity to be creative, expressive, musical, social and relational, all serve to lift the spirit, individually and collectively, but once again, it is significant that these ‘soft’ qualities have long been neglected in the Australian discourse of masculinity, despite the existence of choirs. This research highlights the naturalness of singing and, more specifically, males singing together and it advocates a redefinition of acceptable masculinity.

A substantial finding related to the satisfaction derived from choir was the physical component and it was often likened to the physical satisfaction induced by sport. The significance of physicality was an unexpected research outcome and yet, it became clear from observation and video analysis that physical interactions were commonplace and a natural means of male communication, language and discourse. As previously discussed (10.2.1) each of the four choirs interacted physically during rehearsals, whether that was mock-fighting, a slap on the back of a mate, a high-five to celebrate good work or an arm around the shoulders of a fellow singer, and most notable, the basses of Choir 2: Secondary School, who stood shoulder-to-shoulder throughout the rehearsal, signifying their collective achievement with the harmony. Connell (2008) discusses the importance of sport in Australian culture, particularly focusing on school culture, and findings from this research confirm its significance, however, this research broadens the perspective and redefines the conceptualisation of physicality. It advocates that physical satisfaction, similar to that enjoyed through sporting activities, can be derived from singing in a choir. Being physical, experienced through singing and interactive touch, was a natural
expression of being male, and therefore, an extremely important consideration for choral directors and music educators.

Embodied learning and the ideas surrounding embodiment provide some insight into the significance of physicality for males (Hauge & Haarvind, 2011; Hornecker, 2011; Somerville & Lloyd, 2006; Vaccaro, 2011). In particular, the work of Lyons, Slattery, Jimenez, Lopez and Moher (2012) identify the power of display. This element offers a potential explanation for the significance of performance for boys and men in the setting of choir and therefore, is an important consideration in the planning of learning experiences in this, and other, educational contexts. The significance of its link with physical exertion and emotional response, however, must not be overlooked. The effort made in an activity produces an emotional response and it is particularly potent when the act is performed in front of onlookers. Findings from this research study, when viewed from the perspective of embodied interaction and learning, strongly suggest that males experience an important affective or emotional response from the physical effort of singing, as well as the physical contact and collaboration experienced between members of the choir. This response is intensified by the additional element of display. Performance is a desired outcome of choir, and this is substantiated by findings from each participating choir, and it heightens the positive effect of the embodied interaction inherent in the collaborative, singing context. This has significant ramifications for educators and conductors because it indicates a new way of thinking about choir as a masculine activity. It demonstrates a desire in boys and men for an affective experience generated through the more masculine and acceptable avenue of physical exertion or effort, and it undeniably identifies performing for an audience as a key factor in the process. Embodied learning advocates an approach to learning that combines mind and body as inseparable and therefore integral components of learning experiences. Somerville and Lloyd (2006) advocate the power of a physical experience of concepts, saying that, “through the body new information is gathered and connected to conceptual knowledge” (p. 287). Atkinson, Watermeyer and Delamont (2013) support this as they discuss the physical interaction and embodied learning used in the context of an opera masterclass. Their work highlights the strong influence of physical touch
and interaction between expert and novice, as well the efficacy of physical demonstration by the teacher. This is also relevant in relation to the role of the conductor, who demonstrates expertise in a concrete way, interacts with the choir, and maintains a strong physical presence. The conductors participating in the present research study also used physical demonstrations in their interactions with the choirs. They constantly used hand gestures and eye contact to engage and guide their choirs, and in the case of Conductor 4, he sang with the choir and was part of the performance choreography. He stood with the group during rehearsal, sat down with them, sang with them, joked with them, leaned towards them, and at times put his arm around them. The response of the choirs can be summed up by Conductor 2, who said,

> When you’re in front of a choir and you smile at them and they smile back at you, you instantly know that you have that engagement… You can look around your choir and you can know that they’re involved and sometimes you see facial expressions you never see any other time in school, that… but at other times, you still know that that connection is happening for them as well… they’re letting you know that (Choir 2, Conductor 2, p. 280).

The choice of repertoire is one aspect that can potentially address the need for physicality and such cultures as those from the Pacific Islands demonstrate the inclusion of movement in their singing. Choir 4: Community employed simple choreography in their performances, satisfying the need for physical expression and simultaneously juxtaposing men and dancing. As Sigman (2010) and Lanier (2007) suggest, however, such aspects must not compromise the technical quality of a choir’s performance, which is consistent with findings from this research showing that boys and men want to enjoy and maintain a high technical standard. This is an important implication for conductors and educators. Understanding the significance associated with technical excellence in addition to providing opportunities to be physical are essential ingredients in the provision of a positive, satisfying and meaningful choral experience.

Unfortunately stereotypical thought has been used in genuine attempts to address the issue of boys singing in choir. Gaul (2006) talks about his school choir consisting, compulsorily, of boys from the rugby team, and such measures appear to be commonly used tactics. However, such a position has the potential to perpetuate stereotypes associated with accepted and desirable male activities. In the same way, boys of school age need to be given the opportunity...
to choose both sport and choir. These often occupy the same spaces on school timetables, rivalling for participants, and as Choir 1: Junior School stated, if faced with the choice they would choose sport above choir every time, despite their love of singing. Making boys choose between the two activities perpetuates stereotypes commonly associated with opposing forms of masculinity. It follows then that those without the requisite sporting ability have no other option than to join the choir.

Personal success has strong connections with the individual wellbeing of boys and men, and this emerged as a significant factor involved in providing a meaningful male context. Choir represented a safe environment in which to be personally expressive and emotionally vulnerable, providing the opportunity for important personal growth. The enjoyment derived from choir, the chance to do something they loved, the opportunity to express self through song, and the sheer delight of being enveloped by the beauty of the vocal sound, all effectively contributed to the establishment and maintenance of a meaningful male context.

Choir, therefore, is a meaningful context for boys and men. It satisfies their strong and natural desire for physicality. It fosters deep relationships and is a forum for healthy expressions of mateship. Choir provides men with the satisfaction of collaborating with other men and it encourages open communication. It offers a space of security in which participants can develop and explore personal identity within the freedom of that space. The exclusively male context is also an important consideration. Participants demonstrated that this contributed to their sense of freedom and security.

This research shows that it is important for boys to have the opportunity to sing with other boys, separate from girls, particularly when younger, an idea strongly advocated by Professional Conductor 3. He felt that in an all-male context boys were “more happy to be themselves” (PC 3, p. 422) and were not “constantly looking to see that they’re different from girls” (PC 3, p. 422). The opportunity to sing together can come later, or simultaneously, when boys and girls are or may be happier to be together and when the culture of boys singing had been established.


10.2.2 Creating a Culture

Creating a culture of male participation in choir involved a number of important elements. The choirs involved in this research came from contexts where choir was accepted and a normal part of school and community life. Choir 1: Junior School and Choir 2: Secondary School demonstrated a strong musical presence within their school and family experience. Choir 3: University and Choir 4: Community also indicated the significance of family and school background in their present participation. An interesting phenomenon emerged from observing Choir 4: Community. Being substantially older than all other participants their snapshot provided the chance to look retrospectively at experience and see the culmination of the ideas and themes explored within this research. Choir 4 showed men in a meaningful male context as described above. This group of men embodied relationship, mateship, collaboration, physicality and a high standard of technical excellence. This has exciting implications for educators and conductors. It issues a challenge to generate this ‘older male’ culture in the lives of younger males and particularly those within the school context. It provides the picture of an ideal, a goal, and it validates the consideration of the relationship between masculinity, possible selves and success in daily school and community practice.

Creating a strong presence, as experienced by the majority of participants, very simply involves being seen. At school this translates to performing at school functions on a regular basis. This could include school assemblies, concerts, awards and presentation nights, fundraising events, speech nights, open days and end of year celebrations. In the community, the possibilities are similar and may include town foundation day celebrations, Christmas events, community fundraising, as well as fetes or community fairs. In any context, a choir should have a strong presence and the more it is seen and heard the more it becomes an accepted and expected part of normal practice. At school particularly, choir should be celebrated alongside sport, with boys being encouraged to participate in each and without the two activities being at odds with each other. Breaking down the stereotypes that cling to such segregated thinking is an important step in generating a healthy choral culture, as mentioned earlier, even genuine.
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attempts to address boys’ issues in educational settings, can result in the perpetuation of unhelpful and restrictive approaches. It is, therefore, extremely important as educators, to have a student-centred approach. Every context is different and every choir consists of a range of individuals, each of whom learns differently and has a different lived experience. Even within a group context, such as choir, it is important to understand individual learning needs and styles rather than characterise all participants as a homogenous set.

This chapter has advanced the recommendation that conductor and choir together co-construct the context as a meaningful one for males. Participating conductors demonstrated an ability to manage the group as well as interact with the individuals within it. They used members’ names, they laughed and made jokes, they demonstrated rapport and showed respect for their singers. Conductor 1 of the Junior school choir showed an understanding of that which appealed to 10-12 year old boys. She used humour and nonsense consistently, she publicly identified individual boys who were excelling, and she incorporated physical action in a range of different ways. For example, the boys were frequently asked to change position from sitting to standing and use simple body percussion, such as snapping fingers. The conductor moved through repertoire quickly and she balanced praise with exhortation for improvement. The conductor of Choir 2: Secondary School possessed a strong ability to share responsibility running a democratic and interactive rehearsal. He too was able to balance criticism with encouragement. In a different context the Conductor 3 for the university choir acted as a facilitator, collaborating closely with the group, however, he also represented a role model to whom the group looked for leadership and direction. Conductor 4 was also a good role model for Choir 4: Community. He constantly interacted with his group of men, asking them what they thought, challenging them to improve, and accepting suggestions from individuals in the group. He recognised those with musical expertise, listening to their opinions and ideas, and relying on their support of those in the group who were less expert.

The role of the conductor transpired as integral to the success and enjoyment of choir. In addition to those elements identified above, choirs considered the
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The conductor was perceived to be a factor substantially involved in the success of the choir; however, that conductor factor did not exist in isolation. This research demonstrated that a number of different criteria for success had to present for participants to consider it successful. The implication for conductors and music educators is to understand what is important to their particular choir. For example, technical excellence was of paramount importance and yet it had to be accompanied by elements of personal success, especially enjoyment. If participants did not enjoy choir then technical excellence would not be enough to retain them. It could be argued that attention to technical excellence played a large role in making it enjoyable and again, the reciprocal nature and interdependency of these elements should be noted. Ensuring a high standard of technical ability has practical ramifications as well. Conductors need to be sensitive to how the choir perceives their ability, particularly in terms of whether or not they feel prepared to perform. One strategy may involve having a range of ‘favourite’ pieces that are considered performance ready and the choir is prepared to perform these at any time. It is important for boys and men to feel pride in their performance and for this to occur it must demonstrate the choir’s technical ability, including sound quality.

Establishing and maintaining a culture of boys singing is about creating a presence as well as creating a sense that choral activity and participation is a normal, accepted facet of male cultural practice.
10.3 Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

The research was conceptualized, and subsequently designed, within a set of planned parameters in order to manage the data efficiently and inside the prescribed timeframe. One such parameter was the sample size. The number of choirs selected was limited to four, making it possible to study each of the cases in more depth. The choirs provided a glimpse into a specific age group or life stage (outlined in section 1.2 and Figure 1.1) and they provided the opportunity to observe both the idiosyncrasies of each choir and the consistencies across various experience and age. Considering the nuances of difference and similarity meant that a deeper, more accurate representation of the Australian male choral experience could be constructed.

Another parameter built into the research design was the method of selection. Choirs were approached based on preconceived criteria for success, such as recognized community engagement or presence; reputation derived from community and Eisteddfod performances, CD recordings, and tours. The researcher’s personal knowledge of potential participants (based on the criteria) was also a factor and the availability of choirs was also a necessary consideration. The fact that the two school choirs both came from private schools was a direct result of availability and willingness to participate in the research. It also potentially reflected the higher prevalence of choirs in independent schools, particularly those with religious underpinnings.

The research sought to present a picture of the male choral experience as the participants perceived it, rather than construct a generalizable or prescriptive interpretation. Findings from the research do, however, provide valuable, and potentially generalizable, insight into this phenomenon. This can support music educators and choral directors in their understanding of male perceptions and experience, and can assist with the application of significant concepts, in the unique context of their own choir or group.

It is recommended that further research be undertaken to explore the experiences of older men in choir, tracking their family background, school music experience, choral experience and other significant factors that shaped
their choices and directed them. Following a particular group of male singers from a young age, for a substantial length of time, in the style of a longitudinal study, would also build a picture of the way males experience choir, the reasons why it is important to them, and the way in which it influences their development of identity and wellbeing.

Recommendations for further study also include the consideration of video analysis as a valuable tool in educational research, especially in researching aspects of musical performance. The presence of the camera placed the researcher in the research space, both of which provided the choirs with an audience, particularly in the rehearsal context. It could be argued that this altered the behaviour of participants and should, therefore, be considered a limitation. Instead the recording was a positive tool and participants were keen to perform well for the camera, knowing it would be watched. In fact, the process seemed to contribute to the choir’s experience of success. Video analysis provided the added opportunity to scrutinise the footage in more detail and at later times, potentially identifying aspects not perceived or noticed during previous viewings.

Findings from the research offer valuable insights into the way perceptions of success influence male participation in choir. It is intended that the research findings continue to be disseminated in research publications and journals such as the International Journal of Music Education, the Australian Journal of Music Education, the British Journal of Music Education, the Psychology of Music, and Research Studies in Music.

This research highlights a number of key issues in relation to approaching choir in Australia. It provides an element of comparison with the choral tradition of areas within England, demonstrating the power of culture and heritage in the establishment of a strong choral tradition. Findings from this research offer insight into the creation of a stronger culture within Australia of men singing in choirs, how to encourage this and how to sustain it with the Australian culture.
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B1 Data Collection Instruments

B.1.1 Audience Members’ Survey (AMS)

Audience Members’ Survey (AMS)

1. Do you know someone in the choir?
   - Son/Daughter
   - Friend
   - Relative
   - Other
   - No

2. This choir is a success because...
   - ...they sound good.
   - ...they present well.
   - ...they enjoy singing and performing.
   - ...they connect with the audience.
   - ...the audience enjoyed the performance.
   - ...other — please specify

   You may select more than one answer.

3. Being a boy in a choir would be difficult.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Neutral
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree
B.1.2 Choir Members’ Survey (CMS)

a) School aged

Please explain your responses in as much detail as possible. There are 13 questions.

1. Do you like to sing? ________________________________________________________________

2. Have you always liked to sing? _____________________________________________________

3. Why do you like (or dislike) to sing? ________________________________________________

4. Where do you sing? ________________________________________________________________

5. Do you feel more comfortable singing in certain places?

6. What music do you like to sing? __________________________________________________________

7. Do you ever get to choose what music the choir sings? _________________________________
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8. What do you find hard about singing in the choir? ______________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

9. What do your friends think of you being part of the choir? Does anyone tease you? __________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

10. Why is choir important to you? ______________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

11. Do you think your choir is a success? Why do you think this way? ______________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

12. Why do you think boys might not want to be in a choir? _________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

13. Do you want to be in a choir in the future? ____________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

Thank you for your contribution to this research.
b) Mature aged

*Please explain your responses in as much detail as possible.*

1. How long have you belonged to this choir?

__________________________________________________________________________________________

2. To which age group do you belong?

a. 18 – 25 years  
   b. 26 – 35 years  
   c. 36 – 45 years  
   d. 46 – 55 years  
   e. 56 – 65 years  
   f. Over 65 years

3. Have you belonged to other choirs in the past (or do you currently)? *Explain*

__________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________

4. Did you sing in a choir as a boy? What was this experience like?

__________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________

5. If applicable, why was choir something you did *not* do?

__________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________

6. Have you ever experienced difficulty associated with being a male in a choir? *Explain*

__________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________
7. Was singing in a choir always something you wanted to do? *Explain.*
____________________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________

8. Do you sing in any other context? *Describe.* ______________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________

9. What are the main reasons you joined this choir?
____________________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________

10. Why is the choir important to you? ______________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________

11. Would you describe this choir as successful? Why? _____________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________

12. Why do you think singing in a choir is (or could be) difficult for boys?
____________________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________

13. Is choir something you wish to continue doing into the future? ________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________

14. What would stop you belonging to choir? ________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________

*Thank you for your contribution to this research.*
B.1.3 Choir Member Interview and Focus Group Schedule

1. What are the things you enjoy most about singing in the choir?

2. Are there things about belonging to the choir that you do not enjoy?

3. How would you describe success in the choir setting?

4. Do you consider this choir successful?

5. Do you consider yourself a successful singer?

6. Have you experienced difficulties related to being a boy in a choir?

7. Why do you think more boys do not belong to choirs?

8. Is singing in a choir something you would like to continue doing in the future?

9. What would stop you from belonging to the choir?

10. Why is being part of the choir important to you?
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B.1.4 Conductor Interview Schedule

1. What are the things you enjoy most about conducting the choir?

2. Are there things about this role that you do not enjoy?

3. How would you describe success in the choir setting?

4. Do you consider this choir successful?

5. Do you consider yourself a successful conductor?

6. Have you noticed any of the choir members experiencing difficulties related to being a boy in this choir?

7. Why do you think more boys do not belong to choirs?

8. Is conducting a choir something you would like to continue doing in the future?

9. What are the most challenging aspects of conducting the choir?

10. Why is being part of the choir important to you?
B.1.5 Professional Conductor Interview Schedule

1. Can you describe what your role is presently and a bit about your past experience?

2. Did you sing as a boy and as you got older? What was this experience like?

3. Was conducting/teaching always something you wanted to do?

4. What do you enjoy most about conducting?

5. What do find most difficult or challenging?

6. Why do you think choir is so important? To you and for others?

7. How would you define success?

8. Are their particular elements that affect success?

9. Is your choir successful? Why?

10. Do you consider yourself a success? Why?

11. Have you seen changes in boys’ involvement in choirs?

12. Have you found it difficult to recruit boys to choir?

13. Does culture play a significant role in success of choir?

14. Have you seen choir impact the lives of the boys/people who belong?

15. Have you had to deal with the voice change process in your choir? How does this get dealt with?
Interview Transcripts

B.2.1 CHOIR 1: Junior School

a) Conductor 1

S: Basically, I've only got some questions in case you get stuck...
M: Okay.
S: I doubt you'll get stuck... but this can go wherever you want it to go... and you tell me whatever you'd like to tell me that you think is um... relevant to what I'm asking or whatever. Doesn't matter.
M: Okay.
S: I'll start by asking you what you enjoy most about being the choir conductor...
M: Okay... (Laughs)
S: Or what are the things you enjoy?
M: There are a lot. I started my teaching career as a senior school music teacher and after many years of HSC preparation, I was totally burned out. So I came to this 'little job' and that's how it was described to me. My boss at the time said, "Take the little job at Waverly,"... because I was looking for a new career. So I came here and I thought, Ah well, these kids, you know, they're primary school kids, they won't be able to do much, and I have been so surprised every day by what they do... because they don't... they're not at that stage where they have to be seen to be cool. I mean it's important to be cool... but... they will still have a go at most anything and one of the things that I've learnt particularly, through being involved with the Orff Committee is, you know, don't tell people how hard things are to do, just get on and do them., that sort of approach... and I have been floored by what they have actually been able to achieve.
S: Even singing that song...
M: Yes, well, yes...!
S: I was stunned last week when I heard... I'm like, You're not seriously going get them to sing that... and then they did it.
M: Yes, so I think... that's what I really enjoy is seeing those boundaries just go... and they're my boundaries, they're not the kids' boundaries. They're boundaries that I came with, to this job. And the other thing that I enjoy is particularly seeing a development of a change in the culture here, through the music that we do. Because when I first came, you know, they were singing little
pop songs and classical music wasn't touched. A bit of sacred stuff, just for
masses, in unison. Yes. So it was fairly light and I think I've enjoyed seeing that
culture shift to things that are more musically challenging. And the boys really
get proud of it, when they can... they know, when they're singing, that that
stuff's not easy. So, that sort of whole shift, I really enjoy as well.

S: How long have you been here? I think you said...
M: ...fifteen years. In summer it will be sixteen.
S: Wow. Was that... change of culture, which is a really interesting idea, how did
that happen? How did that work for you? How did you make that happen?
M: Yeah... well, it's a sort of whole school thing, which is nice to see...um...to give
an example: When I first came here, there was a boy and he danced with the
Australian Ballet Corps... the kid's corps... and he ended up leaving the school,
because he was bullied because he did ballet. Now that would never happen
now. So there's been this nurturing of... um... acceptance, if you like, on many,
many levels. Kids with disabilities, kids that like music, that play chess,
whatever it is. There's been that acceptance. And at the junior school level...
what happened a couple of years before I came... this campus used to be up on
the senior school. So you couldn't get away from this... you know... this, I'm
Year 12 so I'm more important that you! This down the line sort of bullying...
S: Pecking order...
M: ...pecking order, whatever you want to call it. That was very relevant in the
young boys' lives. But now, as I said, about two years before I came, they moved
down to this campus. And when they moved down here the music room was
down the bottom, small room, not even enough room for chairs and tables... no
instruments... there was a piano. So it was pretty much... something the boys
did when the teacher was getting their RFF. So when I first came, I thought,
Right, I won't change anything at first, I'll wait and have a look at how all this
works. I gradually moved things into the timetable, you know, so rehearsal is
part of the timetable. And my argument with the headmistress at that time was
that this must be seen as important, especially these days, as people choose
their schools by these extra things. We then started 'Wakakirri', which is the
arts and drama competition. I started with, I can't remember, it was about 23,
25, I had to bribe them with Minties every rehearsal... you know, now I have
over 200 boys audition to get in... so you know, this whole shift. And I think,
too... I mentioned to you last week... the first thing I did with the choir, even
though it was very, very small... and I had a look back and there were only 13
boys in the choir, when I came, because I had a look back... I had it written in
my diary. And I got rid of a couple of them, because they were such a
destructive influence. Not on just the music, but the wellbeing of the boys
around them. They were kids that thought they were a little bit tougher, a little
bit better, that sort of power play. So I actually was brave enough to say, No, I
don't have room for that in this group, and I got rid of them. That really started
to open up this idea that you didn't just automatically get in. So all of a sudden,
it became something that was a little bit special and then over the years as it's
grown, as the group's got bigger, and there's 56 of them now, as the group's got
bigger, the pool of kids that want to get in to the group has also got huge. So
now, approximately half the school would like to be in this group, but I keep it
to round about the fifty.

S: So do you audition?

M: I say trial, rather than audition, because it’s not really an audition. I just listen
to the voices that I think are going to blend, and boys that can sing reasonably
in tune, which most of them can. But yes, the more special it became... and
that’s been supported by the executive, you know, they stand them up in
assembly and we clap them... and tell them how good they are. They love that.

S: So it’s recognized as something important.

M: Absolutely... yes.

S: Are there things that you don’t particularly enjoy about the choir, or you know,
conducting the choir or anything that goes with that?

M: I can’t say that there’s anything particularly that I don’t enjoy about it. It is a
really nice part of my week, I must say. I think it gets frustrating because you
can never have them all there... that does mess with the... well you’re talking
about success... that does mess with the success bit. Because you think, for all
the good work that we did today, there were probably you know, about 20 boys
out today, so I’m going to have to re-do... but you never have to re-do
everything. But that would be probably the only frustration. The other
frustration that I had to work against um... and this is just personalities...
[name] our boss... lovely guy, but his immediate reaction to a music
performance is to criticize... you know?

S: Right.

M: There’s a lot of people like that. Some of the other teachers... so I took the tack
with them, you know, when we do a performance with the whole school choir...
and the brass ensemble and then... “oh, the brass was a bit loud,” and I
immediately just say, “but what did you like about it?” And I’m gradually getting
people to change that... response to it as well. I think that was a bit frustrating
too, because people were always first out with the... but now that’s basically
gone.

S: That’s good. That always seems to happen... I’ve had that experience, too.

M: Well, it does. Yeah, because... I always say to the boys, I don’t want anyone to
tell us we were ‘nice’, because nice is such a wishy-washy word. I said, We want
to be good, we want to be loud, we want to be enthusiastic. I said, I don’t care...
b ut it can’t be nice. And they’re... they joke with me now, was that ‘nice’? Not at
all!

S: Fantastic.

M: So you try to encourage that strength side of it, rather than the pretty side of
it... if you get what I mean?

S: Yeah, for sure. I mean, some of the things you’ve already said... sort of touch on
my next question... in terms of describing success in this setting, the choir
setting. How would you describe success in the choir setting?

M: I think every time we get boys in a room to sing together, that’s success,
because a lot of schools can’t manage to do that. Um... and I think the nice thing
about it, if you could get each boy to stand up and tell you the other things that
he does, you’d be surprised. I mean, they’re not all the meek, mild kids. If I got
them to stand up and tell you how many detentions they had in a year, they’re
not all the good kids, you know, there's a real mixture. And I think that's a success, because there are boys standing next to each other that would never stand next to each other anywhere else in their school life. Um... and I think another success is the appreciation that they have of this sort of singing now, because they really like singing like this...

S: They all just then said that to me.
M: Yes! And I think that's a real success... not playing to the lowest common denominator, you know, not doing the things that they might... They might love to sing Party Rock Anthem, but we're singing Bach! And they, you know, they like it! I think that's a success in itself as well.

S: Yeah.
M: And I mean, the success that they get from the accolades of the boys around them, and another nice thing about this changing culture and leading into the success... I'll often hear, when some boys leave the theatre, some boys will be passing, Wow that sounded good! And that's really nice... sort of...

S: Feedback.
M: ...you know, encouragement for them.
S: Fabulous. So you would obviously consider this choir a success?
M: I would think so.
S: Yes?
M: From a... but I can see where it's come from.
S: Yes.
M: You know... that's the thing. I'll tell you... another reason why it's been a success, I mentioned this to you when we were chatting last week... is that um... more and more every year of the boys that sang here, are singing in the senior school. So we now have a whole school choir, from Year 5 to 12, of a hundred boys.

S: Right. And so do all these boys...
M: ...they sing.
S: Are they all part of that?
M: We're part of that. So there'll be fifty from the junior school and fifty from the senior school. Whereas when I first came, the boys when they stepped through, something happens to boys when they step through the gate... and it's not always a good thing...! But, you know, this... they just wouldn't sing up there at all. And I know [name] was very frustrated trying to get kids to sing and um... she's still frustrated to an extent... because the culture sort of hasn't shifted quite through there yet... But it's getting there. I think last year, pretty much all the boys that sang here are now singing in the Year 7. So that's... each year she's going to get more and more, which is good.

S: I asked the boys just now, if they would do that in High School and they all went, "Yep".
M: Yeah, well, see, that's good. Good to know.
S: In terms of yourself as a conductor... it's always hard ask or to say why you think you're successful...if you do...but I'm going to ask, do you consider yourself a successful conductor...and then tell me why.
M: Well, I don't actually conduct much (laughing). I am actually very confident as a conductor because I've conducted choirs up to 800 voices of this age... and, you
see, that’s another thing, we get to do a lot of things with other independent schools, where we get together in big numbers and... but also, I can say, without ego entering into it, yes, I am a good conductor because I’ve seen so many bad conductors, because I came through the ranks as an orchestral player, and there are some shockers (laughs).

S: ...and you can say, I’m not one of those!

M: I had one once, we were doing Carmen and when he got um... lost he’d just go round in circles (waves arms around in circles).

S: [You’re] better than that!

M: But, I think too, it’s not just waving your arms around, as I said, I don’t do a lot of that out there. It’s the encouragement, and yeah, telling them how good they are all the time, within a constructive criticism type of framework. I’m not going to tell them something’s good if it’s not going to sound good, we’ll fix that... but you know...

S: Definitely. To hear what I hear out there, it’s got to be down to you as well, it’s not just them. I heard everyone, wow! wow! Just listen to these little angels sing, it was lovely!

M: I told you they’re not all angels...!

S: I know, that’s even better! Have you noticed anyone having difficulties or issues? I mean, whether that’s physical voice issues, or friendship, social kind of issues?

M: Absolutely. There’s a couple of people that I’ve moved... um... because of comments from other people. There’s a couple of people I’ve moved out of the door because of that. I always talk to the boys about it... you have a choice of being a destructive influence or a constructive influence... and there were a few people who were quite destructive at the beginning of the year, and... you know, it’s a matter of... I say, just say, Back to class, and if they come back to me and want to discuss it, I’ll discuss it and they have another go, but if they don’t came back, I just let them go.

S: Is that sort of destructive in terms of towards other boys? About...

M: Yes. About their singing. I’m not talking about behavioural issues, I can handle that... just a one-on-one handling, but um... there’s a couple of boys in particular... one’s away today... he’s a singer, with every fibre of his being, he’s a singer, and last year there were a couple of boys had a little niggle at him... and, you know... I moved them away from him. And they’re not bad kids that are doing that... but probably just a little jealous...

S: I was going to ask you what you thought it was...

M: ...probably a little jealous... and um... just a little bit of adjusting is all that that takes. There’s a couple of boys who have difficulties with the actual learning process... but the... I always, when I’m choosing the group, talk to the classroom teachers about these boys and almost unanimously they say, Put him in, because this might be the only thing he achieves during the year.

S: Are these specific learning difficulties?

M: These are specific learning difficulties. I mean, one of my best singers in the front centre row... beautiful, beautiful singer... is struggling, struggling, struggling... and unfortunately, as the teacher said, we might have to take him out, but he doesn’t want to, because really, the only success he’s going to have
in the year is in this room when he's singing. So I mean, the staff are aware of those sort of issues... um, the success issues of kids. Another little boy, [name], he's a great little singer, real little dynamo when it comes to singing, but he can't add two and two, you know, because he has real solid learning difficulties.

S: Does he struggle in the choir?
M: No, he doesn't seem to... I mean, your musical brain is a different brain to... you know... and I think there's... a choir in itself... gives you a lot of support. I mean, you're not just a person out there on the edge... and I don't... if I asked him to read the text, I don't think he could... but he's [points to her ears, to indicate he listens] obviously, an aural learner as well, so after we do it a few times, I notice him coming in... [name], a little boy in Year 5, same sort of learning difficulties. If I asked him to read the text I don't think he could... well, especially not the Latin... but even an English text... I really don't think he could, but he's just, you know, taken along with it, to the extent that it's then... “yeah, I can do that, I know how those words go”. Some songs are good for that, too, because there's usually a repeated text... so it's a good reinforcing of language anyway.

S: Do you have any feedback... slightly off topic, but I'm just interested... have you had feedback off teachers, when they go back into class, about improving in class... do you think being part of that music experience...?
M: Do you mean, um... ability wise?
S: Yes. Does it affect them in a positive way...?
M: I think it affects their confidence in a positive way and their self-esteem in a positive way, which is always a good thing. I don't think it affects the outcome of their learning much... but, you know, confidence. Confidence is a big thing, I think, once you've got that you're laughing.

S: Yes. Now, I just heard that bell, does that mean something?
M: Bells don't usually mean much. That's part way through lunch...
S: I've got a couple more questions, if you don't mind.
M: That's okay. That's fine.
S: Thinking about boys... I mean obviously here it's different because you've only got boys...
M: ...oh, absolutely!
S: Why, in your opinion, do you think boys would not be part of a choir?
M: Well, absolutely, what you were saying about a co-ed sort of situation, you would never get this amount of boys. In the Wakakirri that we do we're the only boys' school that competes.

S: Wow!
M: In the other items that we see, you'd be lucky maybe to see 10 boys up on stage... so there's a real difference being in an all-boys school. But within our boys' school, there are boys that still wouldn't come even if they can sing, because... I should say... they wouldn't come in Year 5, because they're a bit worried about what people might think about it. It's all a bit big and new being here, so there are all those sort of issues... but usually by Year 6, most of them would have a go. There'd still be one or two that think, “Ah, maybe someone will tease me if I do that,” and they just don't have the self-confidence to step past that. And that's fine, that's where they are, that's where they are, you can't do much about that, without them...
They've got to make that decision...

They've got to take that step, yeah, you can't force that, it doesn't work.

I mean... you mentioned earlier you'd asked a couple to leave for being that destructive influence... and they're probably those guys that you kind of...

Well, yes, actually, one of them... one of them I was so thrilled he came along to an audition, a trial and um... and he was good, and I thought, Wow, because that's a side of him I hadn't seen... because he's one of those kids that's a bit resistant in class, always does everything, I'm not saying he doesn't do the things, but just that little bit of resistance always, you know, had older brothers, I think I've taught three older brothers...

That might be the secret...

...and like there's always that... he is the cool dude of Year 6, and when he came I thought, This is just brilliant, but for all the wrong reasons, he was doing the things for all the wrong reasons... so...

So he's not part of the choir?

He's not part of the choir any more. I tried to keep him just because I think it might be good for him... you know, in saying that, he was also taken out of the rugby tour. He's been taken out of a lot of things. So the attitude, it's not just in music, there's an attitude...

Well thanks for that. That was really interesting. Obviously you're very experienced in what you do... is conducting this choir, any choir... I don't know if you do it elsewhere... but, is it something you're going to continue doing... or would like to continue doing?

Oh, yes. I sing in a choir myself, so I'm on the other side of the fence every week, which I think is good, because sometimes... like our conductor the other night, and it was after a really long day, said, "Right, all the back row sopranos, sing that," and I just sat there and thought... [mimes a swear word]... and I thought, I do this to the kids! And my whole, my whole body language was... it's been such a long day... don't do a top G, I was shocking but you know what I mean...

You get to see both sides, keeps you in touch, doesn't it... with what they're experiencing...

Oh, definitely... I do like conducting groups. I've done musical direction for um...

...I do enjoy conducting, I've been musical director for musicals, and I've conducted orchestras... I've conducted Sydney Symphony Orchestra!

Have you really!

I did that when I was fifteen years old.

Wow! Why, how did that happen?

Well, because I'm such a shy person... I grew up in Bathurst, and the Sydney Symphony was coming to do a students' concert... and they contacted the school and said, "Have you got a student who would be able to conduct this Mozart work?" And my music teacher said, "Yes I have!" So, I worked with her, and worked on Mozart, and it was a case of they were going to say, "Is there anybody here who's interesting in coming up and conducting," by which time I was to leap out of my chair, run forward, knocking out anyone else...! Anyway
they did the program... and they forgot to ask... and I was in my seat, and I was absolutely heart-broken. Anyway, then they got to this Dvorak work, and they said, "Is there anyone...?" So I still leapt out of my chair... and went up on stage... and it was a case of the conductor just... did the tempo changes with me... and it was great, because a couple of violin players stopped down in the street afterwards, and said, "You're a great conductor" and I thought that was... that was so much fun!

S: Great!
M: That was so much fun! So, that's... I've always had that... interest in doing that.
S: Yes. Wow! Very cool. What do you find the most challenging aspect of conducting... or directing the choir?
M: Oh, I think, there's always the, what I call, the [blood] crunch factor. Where you're thinking... you know... is it going to work... you know, in performance... we've got to the stage now where we're usually well enough prepared... but there's been a couple of things over the years that were a little bit... I've learnt to say, No. Only recently, but I've learnt to say, No. Because when I first came here, the RE department is the worse, because they'd say, "We've got Mass on next week" and you need to think this, this, this and this... um... and about four or five years ago, I just went, No! No, sorry we can't do that... because it's not going to be very good.
S: [...]
M: Yes! Senior school still say, yes, and [name] who conducts the senior school comes to me sometimes almost in tears and I say, [name] you've got to learn to say no. I say, We've got to train them... that they've got to let us know with enough time. So they're getting better. See down here, we prepare our Masses... the music for our Masses at the beginning of the year, so I know exactly what has got to be sung, when. So we're trying to train the senior school to do that as well.
S: So, I mean, it's a challenge to learn to say no as well, as you say, would you have... um, how would you say, is that coming from respect for the boys as well?
M: Oh, absolutely! And also understanding the boys as well, a little bit better. I joke with people and say, it's my...
[interruption]
M: ...I say to people as a joke, and it's really only partly a joke... I've been teaching for 28 years now and I've never taught a girl, and I almost know what boys are like... you know, because you do get to know them a bit and I think, just knowing what they can do in the time frame. But also as you say, being respectful. They don't want to stand up there and not sound good... because they've got a benchmark now, and that's... that's the expectation. They're expected to sound like this and if you don't get to that then people start that criticizing...
S: It's not fair...
M: No! No, so... we just have to say, well, you know, or... this is all we can do. We'll sing in the chorus for this one, and then the senior choir can do the verses... you know.
S: Yes. In terms of performance opportunities, I know you're preparing for an Eisteddfod... and there's a performance coming up...
M: Yes.
S: ...in the evening, which I’m going to come along to. And obviously you’ve just said you’ve got Mass performances... what else do you do? Do you do a lot of performing as a group?
M: Um... in first term, no, because that's all our building up, but we would do... it depends what comes along. We always do the Eisteddfod, because boys are competitive little things... they like to have a ...and it’s good to have a date to work towards. We sometimes go in the music festivals that all the independent schools get together... and they have massed choirs, which is quite fun. We don't do that all the time, just occasionally. We do all our Masses, which... there’s probably about four really big ones in the year. We've done things like sing at the nursing homes, and the shopping centres at Christmas time and that sort of thing... but if you add those up, that’s a couple of decent performances per term and that’s enough... because you do only get them for a certain amount of time.
S: And would you see performing at certain things, a significant part of what you achieve?
M: Oh, absolutely, and big cherry on the cake for the boys, because they see themselves as representing the school. School pride here is a big thing. There's a huge network... you can't go anywhere without someone saying, "I went to [school name], or my cousin went to [school name]... so that idea of school identity is huge for these kids. A lot of them here, their fathers went to this school or their grandfathers, or sometimes both. It's that real... and as I've said, I've taught, you know, maybe three or four boys in the same family... or cousins ... I've had the [family name]... probably about four different... families...
S: Strands!
M: There's one of them out there. But you know, I think ... that's important.
S: Part of that culture...
M: Absolutely. You've got to get culture first to where you want it, to be able to work. It's a jigsaw puzzle, but that culture is so important, otherwise it's just not going to work.
S: Hard to put your finger on too, I think, that culture, and how you create that.
M: Yeah, yeah. And sometimes you [speak in myths]... you need support to create it, that's the thing...
S: The final question I had... have here to ask you is about why being part of the choir, or conducting, directing, whatever you’d like to call it... why directing that choir is important to you?
M: Okay, well it’s important to me that... because... the choir more than anything shows me how far we’ve come and shows me every year that even though I don’t believe we can, we’ve taken little steps forward. So it’s been a real... I can look back at that little ensemble here and see that there’s been a progression... and... so that’s really important. Because I love to sing also, I think that’s why that’s important to me... because I like to see the boys singing properly... yeah, I think that’s the main thing. I mean, it never feels like work to do the choir, it’s always a bit of fun. [both laugh]
S: Um... they are all the questions I have, is there anything else you would like to mention... that you think might be...?
M: ...useful to you...!

S: ...significant... I know that we've talked... you mentioned it now that there's a little more deliberation in the sense... or deliberateness about the boys here then going into high school... and that transition into the choir there, do you think that that will eventually kind of... the culture there will change?

M: Oh, absolutely... absolutely. I've seen it already changing. It hasn't changed yet, but it's on the way to changing and I think... the conductor of the senior choir said to me, she said, "I can't run rehearsals like you do because I'm not game to throw people out yet,"... because she's really... she's basically come from nothing... she's still at that stage where she's hanging on to kids no matter what... and um... sometimes they come down here to do a rehearsal and I do a bit of a bellow at them... because to me respect is the number one thing and the boys... hopefully the boys here at the junior school have that respect and in music and drama we push that all the time... respect for a performer, respect as an audience member, all that sort of thing. I'm always going off at the senior boys that they have no respect for [teacher name] or each other, or my singers... and they see the whole... things go from this 'ah ah er' till it's very much more... you know, a bit more thoughtful.

S: So they respond to your no nonsense approach...?

M: Oh, they do. Yeah, absolutely. Because most of them know me anyway. I've always been... because I do this myself for my own rehearsals... I've always been, If you're here at rehearsal, you're here to work. I mean, if you want to clown around or muck about that's fine, do it at lunch time out in the playground... but rehearsal's not a time for that. Rehearsal ethic... I've encouraged with the boys and the... I suppose... it's hard to put it into words... but just that idea of... again, it comes back down to respect.

S: You're creating that expectation, too.

M: Yeah. Absolutely. Even... well, you saw the class beforehand... it was very, everybody's ideas were respected and heard and you know, that's been built up to be that sort of... and they were Year 5. I've only had them for a little over a term. So, you know, I don't think it's hard to get to that stage as long as you're consistent and encouraging and all that sort of stuff.

S: How do your group... when you all get together, and in those moments of trying to subdue the big boys... how does your group respond in that situation?

M: They're usually pretty good, because there's a mixture of respect... there's these giants have just appeared... some of our boys are huge... but there's also, part of the training that we do um... is that respect for the conductor... and they know that they have to do that, whether it's me or not... and that's... they take that on

[interruption]

S: Do you think that they're intimidated at all, in those situations?

M: By the senior school? I'm sure they probably are. Just by the size of them for a start.

S: Do you think that affects the way... have you noticed, the way they sing or anything like that?

M: I don't think it affects the way they sing, because [name] is always so impressed by the way they sing, and she makes a big thing because of it, and they then... you know, chest out!
They are very proud of what they do…

Oh, they are!

…that's nice, in a good way.

I hope so, because we spend a lot of time trying to get them to that, to really ... um... be proud of what they do. In everything, not just in singing. In everything across the board, you know. Whether it be sport or music or whatever. We always have... I mean I know we’re a Catholic school... but we always have this thing about talents that everyone has talent, about nurturing your talents... and that’s not necessarily a talent for music but it could be a talent for trying hard... to become good at music. We’re not just talking about an excellence as such, but a little bit different to that.

Do you think the tradition of the Catholic system and the Catholic Church, do you think that plays a role in the success of the choir in that... music has always been part of the Catholic church and school and system... do you think that plays a role?

I think it does in a minor way, only because of their involvement and preparation for Masses and it’s a different type of involvement... I mean, we talk about reverence, we talk about appropriateness, we talk about repertoire, what’s appropriate, what’s not... that sort of thing, so I think that’s where the influence comes in. Not Catholic as such, not Christian as such but that sense of occasion, maybe...

I had a question I just lost... I’m ready to finish... Is there anything else you’d like to say?

No, I think that’s given you a good overview of what the boys do.

Thank you, thank you very much.

End of Interview
b) Interview 1

S: First of all, tell me how old are you?
C: Ten.
S: Ten and that makes you in year...
C: Five.
S: Five.
C: I’m not turning eleven.
S: No? Ah. So... this group is called [choir name], is that correct?
C: I don’t know why it’s called that.
S: No, I don't know either. I think Mrs. R said it’s always been called that. Somebody a long time ago chose that name. So now, tell me, what do you like about singing in a choir?
C: Well, it's really good, like, to try new songs and all that.
S: Yeah? And is Year 5 the first time you've been in the choir at school?
C: Yeah. Well, last year I was in the choir... for my old school.
S: Okay. So this is a new school for you this year? Is that right?
C: Yeah. This is only five and six.
S: This choir is only for year five and six?
C: No, the new school's only five and six.
S: Oh, I see what you're saying, yes. So, you like singing in the choir, you like learning new songs?
C: Yes.
S: Anything else?
C: I like doing my own songs. Back... sixties, seventies and eighties, of Queen, Guns & Roses, ACDC...<br />
S: Yeah?
C: I can go on. Pink Floyd... um... Led Zeppelin.
S: Do you play an instrument, too?
C: Yes. Um, guitar.
S: Wow! Do you play and sing?
C: Yeah.
S: And do you do that at home?
C: No. I do it at... I do it here.
S: At school as well. And do you do that with some friends?
C: No. I just do it... well, I do guitar ensemble as well.
S: Yeah? Okay. So you get to do a lot of that in guitar ensemble.
C: Yes.
S: Fabulous. Can you tell me is there anything about choir that you don't really like, that you don't enjoy?
C: No.
S: No? You just like it all?
C: Yes.
S: Cool. Alright. If I said to you... and I think I had this question in the survey, the written survey... did you do that one, yeah?
C: Yes.
S: I asked a question about success, and if you thought your choir was successful.
C: Yes.
S: Do you think your choir is successful?
C: Yes. Yes.
S: And do you know why you think that?
C: Um... I don't know.
S: Is it... do you think it sounds good?
C: Yes I do. Like... [Points behind where the sound of the choir can be heard rehearsing].
S: I mean, I think it sounds good. When I heard you last week, I think it's very good. So... do you think it's successful because they sound good? And are there any other reasons that you can think of?
C: I think it's popular in the whole world of singing music. We're a well-known school.
S: Yeah... so people know about the choir from outside the school?
C: I think so. We're in.... I've forgotten what it's called.
S: Eisteddfods?
C: Yeah. We're pretty big... we're also big in Wakakirri [Points to poster on wall].
S: Ah... so you are!
C: We've won for the last fifteen years.
S: Wow! So your school's got lots of opportunities to perform?
C: Yes.
S: Okay. So have you had any experience of the Eisteddfod yet? Or are you practising for that, aren't you?
C: Practising! [Again points behind where the sound of the choir is heard].
S: So will this be the first time performing?
C: Yes.
S: Lovely...
C: Like performing... like on [...] music... Last year, I actually... you know the Carols in the Domain? I was actually in the Tap Pops.
S: Really?
C: But because I got a [...] I couldn't do Tap Pops...
S: So you're a very busy person...?
C: I do... swimming... um... [counts these off on his fingers as he lists them].
S: Guitar. Do you have lessons?
C: Yes. My guitar teacher's name is [name].
S: Yeah? Cool.
C: Oh, yeah, baseball.
S: So, lots of sport, and sometimes you get very busy and had to quit the Carols in the Domain thing?
C: No. I had to quit Tap Pops, but I think I'll go back.
S: Yeah?
C: I'm free on a Thursday.
S: And is that... that's tap dancing, is that what you're talking about?
C: Yeah. Have you heard of Dean Perry [?].
S: Yes.
C: He taught me.
S: Okay. So is that something you do... well, you don’t do it at the moment, but did you go for lessons, or get taught in a group.
C: Yes, lessons, and group.
S: Yes... So, tell me about your background, your family. Are they musical and dance people?
C: Not really. Like... Mum... you know Happy Feet, Mumble... he can’t sing... Mum thinks that’s what she’s like. But, I have a real sporty background in my family. Dad grew up at the beach Victoria. Lifeguard. Professional, he was once like Supervisor of all lifeguards around Victoria. Mum, softball, oh, she was a lifesaver.
S: So you’ve got lots of sport... in your background?
C: Lots of beach in my background... lots of AFL. Like my Grandpa played for Richmond.
S: Yeah!
C: Four games. My... he also played for Geelong. That same game. Ended his career.
S: Oh!
C: He dislocated his shoulder, and... there wasn’t a cure back then. He actually... he died now, my Nan as well.
S: Oh, okay.
C: But I have [...]
S: Good, good. So tell me. The music that you do, is that just at school now?
C: Um. Yes.
S: Except for guitar lessons, you still have guitar?
C: Yes... and I like singing in the car.
S: Right. So what made you come and audition for this choir?
C: Probably I was in the choir last year so I auditioned.
S: So it was something you already knew how to do, and you liked?
C: Yes.
S: Lovely. So have you had any trouble? Have you had any difficulty singing in the choir?
C: When I go really low, I’m a really bad singer.
S: You find it really difficult down low?
C: I’m good with middle, high...but really bad down really low.
S: Okay. And what do you do when that happens? When you have to go really low, what do you do?
C: Um... I sound really bad.
S: Okay. So do you just sing a bit more quietly?
C: Yeah. I go [makes a sound like someone singing low]. I can't finish it.
S: Okay. And you can sing high okay?
C: Yes.
S: Cool. If you could think about... it’s a little different for you... because you’re at a school that’s just got boys... but...
C: Last year I went to a school that was co-educational.
S: Okay. And there were boys and girls in that choir?
C: Yes.
S: Alright. Why do you think some boys might not want to be part of a choir? Or sing in a choir?
C: Waste of time... I would say...
S: Waste of time?
C: They may just have a bad voice...
S: ...and other things to be doing in terms of the waste of time? Yeah?
C: Yeah.
S: But you don’t think it’s a waste of time?
C: No.
S: Because it’s something you like?
C: Yes.
S: Great! Thinking about as you get older...
C: Yes...
S: ...is being part of a choir something you’d like to keep doing?
C: Well, I’d actually like to become a pilot. I’d like to focus on that.
S: Oh, okay.
C: Like, get better at it.
S: Yeah? So while you’re at school, because you’re in year five... when you go into High School for example, do you think you’ll go to the choir there?
C: Yeah.
S: Yeah? While you’re at school, definitely?
C: I’d like to [......]
S: Really? Well there you go, cool. So choir looks like something you’d like to do at school as you get older?
C: Yes.
S: And then... I know it’s a long time away... but when you finish school, and you’re grown up...
C: Finish... When I’m seventeen...
S: Seventeen or eighteen, whatever it is...
C: Seventeen!
S: You’ll be seventeen, you’re right, because you are ten now, aren’t you?
C: Yes.
S: Is choir something you think you’d like to do when you leave school?
C: Don’t know.
S: Don’t know? That’s fine. But you’d like to be a pilot
C: Yeah. A Pilot.
S: You’re going to focus on that? Excellent. Now, tell me, what would stop you from being part of this choir?
C: Um...
S: Is there anything that might happen or... whatever... that you might just go... 'no, don't want to be part of this anymore'?
C: Break my neck and then [grabs his throat]... If I broke my neck or my spine... then I wouldn’t sing.
S: Okay. So, it would have to be something very drastic to stop you?
C: Yeah.
S: Now tell me. Why is choir important to you?
C: Well, I don’t really know.
S: Don't know?
C: Yes, don't know.
S: Something that you like though, because you've already said you like it?
C: Yeah.
S: One last question. How do you find all the other boys in the choir, and how they interact with each other and treat each other as part of the choir? How does that work for you?
C: Well... [pause]
S: Do they get on well...?
C: A lot of them talk.
S: Yeah?
C: Yeah. I try not to talk.
S: Okay. But everyone's happy to be in the choir?
C: Yeah.
S: So no one gets teased? No one is mean to each other?
C: No... [shakes his head].
S: That's fabulous. Is there anything else you'd like to say about choir?
C: It's good!
S: Good! And what do you think of Mrs R?
C: Good. Really good teacher.
S: Yeah? You like her?
C: She's in a choir. You can hear her voice.
S: So she's got a good voice. Apart from that, what do you like about her? As the choir teacher?
C: She's really nice.
S: Good!

End of interview
c) Interview 2

S: Nice to meet you, [name]. I’m going to ask you a few questions about being part of this choir.

P: Yes.

S: And you can say anything you like, you know, you won’t get into trouble for anything you say. I won’t tell anybody what you’ve said. So tell me to start with, what are the things that you enjoy most about being part of this choir?

P: The singing mostly, like, I love singing, it’s my favourite thing to do, anywhere any time.

S: Yeah. Have you sung for a long time?

P: [nods] Ever since I started... like, ever since I got my voice.

S: Yeah. And you would have been at a different school before now. How old are you?

P: Twelve.

S: Okay, so you’re in Year 6?

P: Yes.

S: Have you always been in choirs at school?

P: Yes.

S: Excellent. Are there things... you said you enjoy singing, it’s your favourite thing in all the world, that’s why you like being part of the choir... is there anything else you like about being part of the choir?

P: Well, at other places, like my old school, we used to go to the Opera House, sing with other schools...

S: And you like performing?

P: Yes.

S: Okay. Are there things that you don’t like about being part of the choir?

P: No.

S: Nothing at all?

P: No. Like it all.

S: No? That’s a good answer! Um... I think... in the survey I did last time I was here... did you fill out that survey, yeah?

P: Yeah.

S: I asked a question about success, and if you thought your choir was successful.

P: Yes.

S: Do you think your choir is successful?

P: Yes, I do.

S: Yes? Why would you say that?

P: Because we all out there have a different, unique voice and Mrs. R will say, you can come here, and it blends in with each other’s voice.

S: Yes. And are there other reasons you think you’re successful?

P: Um...

S: What does success mean to you? What do you think success means?

P: I think, having a... being successful means to me, having a go, and if you come second you go... you deal with it with your head held high... yeah.

S: Okay. So would you say that going to different performances is part of being successful?
P: Sort of...
S: Sort of, yeah? Do you... I’m just picking up on something you said about having a go... is that part of being a success for you. Just being part of something and enjoying it?
P: Yes.
S: Okay... alright. So you think this choir is successful?
P: Yes.
S: And do you think you are a successful singer?
P: [nods]
S: Why would you say that?
P: Well, most of the kids in this school, in the years sixes now, sometimes they remember back [...], performing something called the W factor... instead of the X factor...
S: Oh, yes.
P: ...and took the [...]
S: Wow!
P: And [name]... forgotten what his last name was, he came first.
S: Wow! So, you think you’re quite a successful singer?
P: Yes.
S: And you had to sing in that competition did you?
P: I wanted to... so...
S: Excellent. So that was something you could choose to do?
P: Yes.
S: You could choose whatever you liked in that competition, could you? Okay. And how do you find singing with those guys out there?
P: Very exciting. Like... when they come up with a new song, I'm like, well I want to know what tune it’s going to have, like it’s going to have a groovy tune, or a blues tune... yeah.
S: Okay, so you like working at something new?
P: Yes.
S: Great. Are there things that you find difficult being part of a choir? Anything you find hard?
P: I don’t think so.
S: No?
P: No.
S: So even the new stuff you’re learning, you just get on with it? It’s fine?
P: Sometimes I’ll bring my diary, write down some of the notes so I can work on... practice at home.
S: Okay. Excellent. So you like to get it right. Do you think there are reasons some boys don’t want to be part of a choir?
P: I don’t know, I think some people might not be in a choir because the voice like hasn’t been approved, like, the sound. Or maybe singing isn’t their thing. Maybe just don’t like music...
S: Okay. So they might not like singing. Now when you said their voice hasn’t been approved, what do you mean by that?
P: Like... it’s not up to standard.
S: Okay.
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P: Like if they wanted to get up to the higher notes, like soprano, and they had a voice that was like really low and they got into alto, the second... I think... part... but yeah, that's what I mean... have a try... if you don't make it, and you want to try it again... yeah.

S: Okay, so maybe... if they don't get into the choir as you say, because they're maybe not quite good enough... or doesn't fit with the part....

P: Or maybe it doesn't blend in...

S: Okay... I think I know the answer to this question based on some of the things you've said already... Is singing, and singing in a choir, something you would like to keep doing... and through High School?

P: Yes.

S: And what about when you leave school? I know that's a long time away, but do you think it's something that you'd like to do?

P: Yeah. Basically planning on, like, making my own album, something like that.

S: Okay. And would that be as a solo singer or as part of a group?

P: I'm still thinking on that. I don't know if I could be in a group... or as a solo singer.

S: Okay, so, would that be... being part of choir, through school, do you see that as something that would help you in the future to do...?

P: Um... yes because the [choir name] out there, it's not actually... so you go out and play at places, and like, sing, it's also so you can improve your voice a bit...

S: Okay.

P: So last year I was taking private music lessons down at [name], that was just a bit more extra that improved my...

S: Okay. So you joined the choir because you love to sing, and you want to... you want to sing as much as you can, and you like to improve your voice?

P: Yes.

S: Did you join so you could perform as well?

P: Um... yes.

S: Yes? So you liked that idea? Yeah? Excellent. Now is there anything that would stop you from being part of the choir?

P: [emphatically shaking head] No!

S: Nothing at all?

P: No.

S: What happens if someone was a bit mean to you and teased you about being part of the choir? Would that stop you?

P: No. I would just tell the teacher. Even though I've never told on anyone in my life... I'd still tell the teacher.

S: Okay. So it's important enough to you for nothing to stop you.

P: [Nods]

S: That's really good. Have you experienced any difficulties like teasing or anything like that?

P: No. Sometimes they go a bit like, crazy, and get kicked out. That's a bit of a downside for them, but...

S: But it's not to do with you? People are not picking on you or anything like that? They're maybe just being a bit naughty?

P: Yeah.
S: Alright. Is there anything else you’d like to say to me about why choir is important to you? Or do you think you’ve said everything you want to say?

P: Um… I’d say choir is important to me because well, I really like singing… um… my mum’s a pretty good singer, yeah… and also my grandmother was also a good singer.

S: Okay, so it’s been in your family?

P: Yes.

S: Okay, great. And I think you already said you grew up singing, from the moment you could open your mouth you were singing?

P: Yeah, the first song I think I ever learnt was ‘Wake me up before you go’ by Wham.

S: Yeah? I know that song! [Both laugh]. And did your background, your parents or your mother you said, she’s a singer…

P: Um… she likes to sing, like…

S: So she encourages you, does she?

P: Yeah.

S: And did you say that you had singing lessons outside school?

P: Yes. Used to.

S: You used to, but you don’t now?

P: Not outside school, just down in front of my house… next to this room.

S: Okay. So somebody comes to the school… great! And is that something you’re doing right now?

P: Um… right now I’m doing piano.

S: Okay.

P: Next term I’ll be learning guitar.

S: Right! So you just change around?

P: Yeah.

S: But you sing all the time?

P: Yeah.

S: Stay part of the choir?

P: Yes.

S: Okay. Is there anything… you say you love singing… and choir is important to you… one of the reasons being because you love to sing… do you know why you love to sing? What is it about singing you just love?

P: So… I just love the beat, tune, cover, music works… yeah.

S: How does it make you feel?

P: Um… like my own personal space…

S: Okay, so is it a way of being able to express yourself?

P: Yeah.

S: And you just like being part of music…?

P: Yes.

S: Because it makes you feel happy?

P: Yes. Feel good.

S: Great. Is there anything else you want to tell me?

P: No. I don’t think so.

S: No? And you like Mrs. R.?

P: [Shrugs] Yeah…
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S: What do you think of her as a teacher?
P: Pretty good...
S: Teaching choir?
P: She's pretty good. She tells you if you're a bit low or a bit high... in our group, so... if you're in the alto and you sing like a soprano, she doesn't know what to do, so she might move you up to soprano, or just tell you to lower your voice a bit.
S: Okay, so she supports you all the way through and helps you get it right? Great... fabulous.... which is what she's doing right now.
P: Yeah. And also if we're going a bit overboard, like if we supposed to hold for three beats and we hold it for five, she tells you to stop, and we'll redo it, so we can get it perfect.
S: So you practise it till it's right.
P: Yeah.
S: Is there anything else you'd like to say?
P: No.
S: Thank you...
P: Thank you for letting me...
S: My pleasure. Very good to hear what you had to say.

End of Interview
d) Interview 3

S: [Name], tell me, how old are you?
C: Eleven.
S: Eleven? Does that put you in Year 5 or Year 6?
C: Yes... Year 5.
S: And does that mean you were at a different school before this one?
C: Yeah. [School name].
S: Last year? Now tell me what do you enjoy most about being part of [choir name]... part of the choir?
C: I don’t know. I like... I really like having a good teacher.
S: Yeah? You like Mrs. R.?
C: Yeah. I like that (indicating the sound of the singing from the other room). Being included.
S: Being included?
C: Yeah... good...
S: Having a good time?
C: Yeah.
S: Okay, so you like Mrs. R.?
C: Yeah.
S: You like having a good time? And you like learning those sorts of songs that they’re singing?
C: Yeah.
S: Is there anything else you enjoy?
C: Um... sport.
S: You enjoy sport, yeah? Tell me, do you do sport outside of school as well?
C: Yeah, I do AFL and um... yeah. Tennis... golf.
S: Golf! Oh, so you do like sport. My two little boys play tennis as well. They love tennis. Now... do you do music outside of school as well? Singing?
C: Um... I do drums in school and just sing.
S: Do you like to sing wherever you are?
C: Yeah.
S: Is there anything about belonging to the choir that you don’t really like?
C: No.
S: Anything that annoys you or anything like that?
C: No.
S: Nothing? Cool. In the survey that we did last week... did you write on the survey for me? Did you do that one?
C: Yeah.
S: I asked a question about success, and I asked if you thought your choir was successful. Do you think your choir is successful?
C: Yeah. I think we are...we have a good teacher and she teaches us a lot.
S: So you think you’re successful because you have a good teacher and she teaches you a lot?
C: Yeah. And [...]
S: Are there other reasons that they’re a successful choir?
C: Well... I haven't been in a lot... like, I don't know how successful we are, but, we have a good time, have fun. That we're pretty successful.
S: Good, good. Is this the first choir that you've been part of?
C: Um... yeah.
S: Do you think that you're a successful singer?
C: Um... probably in my own mind. [laughs].
S: Probably in your own mind! And why would you say that?
C: I don't know. I usually just sing in the car when there's a good song.
S: So do you think that in your head that success is about enjoying?
C: Pretty much, yeah.
S: So, you would say, well I enjoy it, so that means I'm successful?
C: Yeah.
S: That's good. If I asked you what you thought success meant... what do you think you might say?
C: Well, we've been practising and... the more you practise the better you get.
S: Yeah? So, the better you sound?
C: Yeah.
S: ...the more you can do?
C: Yeah. I think I learn one thing every lesson.
S: That is good! Very good. I'll have to tell Mrs R that!
C: Like... I've already learnt one just then.
S: There you go. You guys are sounding very good on that song. Have you had any trouble being part of this choir? Any difficulties, anything you find hard?
C: Not really. At the start I couldn't really breathe properly when I sang.
S: So did you find it hard to hold your breath for a long time?
C: Yeah.
S: But now you've practised and that gets better?
C: Yeah.
S: Very good! Why do you think some boys mightn't like to be part of choir?
C: Well, maybe they don't think they're good enough, they're probably embarrassed...
S: Why do you think they might be embarrassed?
C: I don't know... maybe they just um.... don't want to be weird or anything. I don't know...
S: So they may think singing is a bit weird... or being part of a choir is weird?
C: Yeah.
S: Right. Anything else?
C: Um... no... well I was thinking that... if someone bullies you that you're in a choir or anything [drowned out by singing]
S: Okay. So they might not want to be part of that anymore?
C: Yeah.
S: Fair enough! Um... Do you think that you'd like to be in a choir in the future?
C: [shaking his head] No. Well... sounds a bit bad, but yeah, I just um...
S: Not for much longer? You're obviously part of...
C: Oh, I'll... I'm probably going to be in it next year... but when I'm older... I...
S: What about High School?
C: I'm probably not going to be in a choir.
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S: Any reason?
C: I’d be in a band...
S: A band, oh!
C: Or try to. I’m just... I don't know...
S: So you're happy to be in choir now, and next year...
C: Yeah. But I want to take things as a career...
S: No particular reason... just because you don’t want to do it as a career?
C: Well... I want to be an AFL player.
S: Okay... so you're going to focus on that?
C: Yeah.
S: So you don’t want to be part of choir in high school?
C: Yeah. Probably.
S: And not after school?
C: No.
S: Not when you’re grown up? No? Is there anything... apart from the things you’ve just said... about now and next year, being part of the choir... is there anything that would stop you from being part of the choir?
C: Um... not really.
S: No? Anything happen that you’d go, No... not going to be in the choir anymore?
C: No... nothing bad's happened yet.
S: No? You can’t think of anything that might happen... or if something happened you’d go... don’t want to do it.
C: If I injured myself and I couldn’t come to school, then...
S: That’s the only reason. All right. One last question... why is choir important to you?
C: Um... just because I love singing...
S: Yeah? Is that all?
C: Important to me because... it’s not that it's not important... but...
S: Just because you like singing?
C: And being with my friends...
S: Okay... so you’ve got friends in the choir, too? And they enjoy it?
C: Yeah.
S: Excellent. Is there anything else you’d like to tell me?
C: Not really. Thank you!
S: Thank you very much for talking to me!

End of Interview
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e) Interview 4

S: Tell me, how old are you?
P: I am twelve years old.
S: Twelve. So does that mean you’re in Year 6?
P: Yes.
S: Yes? Lovely, and were you at this school last year as well?
P: Yes.
S: But you would have been at a different school before then, is that right?
P: Yes.
S: Because this is just five and six?
P: Yes.
S: Have you been part of … were you part of the choir last year?
P: Yes I was.
S: And at your old school?
P: Yes, I was, yes.
S: Okay, good. Tell me then, what do you enjoy most about singing in a choir?
P: Expressing my ability to sing.
S: Yeah? That’s the best thing about being in a choir?
P: Yes.
S: What else do you like about being in choir?
P: Sometimes my friends are in other maths groups, so I can catch up with them.
S: Yeah? Cool… um, is there anything else you like about being part of choir?
P: I like missing class.
S: That’s always good, isn’t it? Tell me, do you… have you had much experience performing with this choir?
P: Oh, yes. We’ve had some performances.
S: And do you like doing that?
P: Yes, it’s fun.
S: Cool. So you like coming to rehearsals. Have you got friends in the choir?
P: Yes I do.
S: And you like being with your mates?
P: Yes.
S: Fabulous. Tell me, you just said that sometimes you miss out on… you’ve got to catch up with stuff in class that you miss. Are there any other things that you don’t like about being in choir?
P: No. Nothing.
S: No? You love it? Everything about it?
P: Yes.
S: But sometimes it’s a bit tricky because you’ve got to catch up on a few things you’ve missed?
P: Yeah.
S: But that’s not really a problem?
P: Not a problem.
S: All right. I asked a question in the survey about success. Did you do the written survey for me last week?
P: Yes.
S: Great. And I asked, first of all, What do you think success means?
P: Being able to win stuff, achieving a good goal.
S: Anything else?
P: [Shakes his head].
S: Do you think this choir, [choir name], is a successful choir?
P: Yes.
S: Why would you say that?
P: Because we've got lots of good singers, and Mrs. R is a really good teacher, and she expresses us, she sometimes makes us laugh. We know what to do in the choir.
S: Great. And do you like the music that you sing?
P: Yeah.
S: And do you find it difficult?
P: Um... a few times, because sometimes I miss a few lessons when I'm away and I need to catch up, and I have to memorise all sorts of things.
S: Is the music hard sometimes?
P: No.
S: No? You find it pretty easy? Straightforward?
P: Yeah.
S: So, you think this choir is successful, because you enjoy it, because everyone enjoys it, Mrs R is a good teacher and what else did you say?
P: Songs are good.
S: Songs are good, yes. Would you say that you, yourself, were a successful singer?
P: Yes.
S: Yeah? Tell me why. Why do you say that?
P: Because normally when my mum's in the shower I just put some music and I sing, you know.
S: Okay, so you say you're successful because you can sing and you practise?
P: I practise, yeah.
S: And you like it? Yeah?
P: Yes.
S: Is there any other reason why you're successful?
P: No. They're the reasons.
S: Do you think you're a good singer?
P: Yes!
S: What is it about your voice that you like?
P: Every bit.
S: So you sound good?
P: Yeah!
S: Fabulous. Have you had trouble... I mean it's a bit different at this school because you're all boys... but being a boy and being in choir, do you have any trouble with that?
P: [Shakes his head].
S: Do you have any trouble with your voice?
P: [Shakes his head]. Except if I lose it.
S: Except if you're a bit sick?
P: Yeah.
S: Yeah? I've got a bit of a funny voice at the moment.
P: [laughs] Yes.
S: Why do you think some boys might not want to be part of a choir?
P: Because sometimes they might not be able to sing... sing better.
S: Okay. So they might be a bit embarrassed because they don't think they're very good?
P: Not a good singer, so they don't try out. They may be shy.
S: Yeah. Any other reasons, you think?
P: [Shakes his head]
S: Is singing in a choir something you'd like to do in the future?
P: Um... in the future for High School, but not in the future after.
S: So when you're a grown up, and you've left school you're not going to be part of a choir?
P: Maybe. I might.
S: Why would you not be part of a choir?
P: Because I like more stuff than choirs, because I have a good career ahead of me. I've already thought out my career.
S: And what is your career going to be?
P: I want to be an IT Engineer.
S: Wow! So you're going to focus on that?
P: Yeah.
S: Fantastic. Thinking right now... I mean just in the near future, while you're still at school, is there anything that would stop you being part of the choir?
P: No.
S: No? So if you were finding things difficult or if someone was teasing you, would that stop you?
P: No.
S: No? Why not?
P: Because I'm a very um... how do you say the word? Can't think of the word...
S: Confident?
P: Yes... confident boy. I wouldn't take those things very seriously.
S: So it would matter to you?
P: Wouldn't matter.
S: Good! That's very encouraging to hear. Tell me... last question... why is choir important to you?
P: Like I said before, it expresses my ability to sing, so I can get better. And I figure if IT doesn't work, I might become a singer.
S: Okay. Does... is expressing yourself part of singing for you?
P: Yes.
S: You like being able to express yourself, and that's important to you.
P: [Nodding] Yes.
S: How do you feel when you sing?
P: I feel very confident that I can do the songs.
S: Good. Excellent. Is there anything else you'd like to say?
P: No.
S: You've already said Mrs. R is a good teacher... and you've learnt a lot from her...
P: Yes.
S: Do you think that's part of why it's successful?
P: Yes.
S: Fantastic! If there's nothing else you'd like to say...
P: No.
S: We're finished.
P: Okay.
S: Thank you very much [name], lovely!

End of Interview
f) **Focus Group 1**

S: I’m going to ask you a few questions and the idea is that you guys can talk freely. You can say what you like – I won’t tell anybody! Because you’re in a group the only thing that I would ask is that if someone is talking, don’t just start talking over the top of them. Obviously in normal conversation, sometimes that happens. So Mrs. R has just shown me a plaque from an Eisteddfod that you did yesterday? Is that correct?

Boys: Yes.

S: Tell me about that... Who’s going to start talking?

[Boys all look at one boy] [name], you’re it!

B1: Okay.

S: What's that? What happened!

B1: Well, we went to um... our first eisteddfod, which was last Friday, wasn't it?

B2: Yes.

B1: We went really well... it was really fun.

S: Yeah?

B1: We had a bit of a... victory dance on the bus!

S: Did you!

B1: Yeah... so we had to come back on Sunday and perform again. Unfortunately we came last, but we got [...]

S: Okay. So, you came first, so what did you have to do again?

B1: You had to sing the same... one same song that you sing best, and the next song had to be um... Australian based... but we did a Torres Strait Islander one.

S: So tell me, was that part of the assessment as well... the second thing?

B2: Championship...

S: Okay... and the one where you came first, what did you sing?

B3: We sung *Gloria Deo* and *Alleluia*.

S: Right. I heard you practising those in your rehearsals.

B3: Yes.

S: Excellent. So what was that like? How did you feel singing those and coming first? Bit shaky?

[Boys nod]

B3: Butterflies in your belly to start off with, then...’cos like what you’re basically doing is looking at your conductor, so you don’t see the audience... so it’s okay, like you don’t get stage fright.

S: And were there lots of people there?

B2: Not really. There were a couple of schools watching us, and there was a bit more people at the championship.

S: And were they also performers?

B2: Yes. Um... the kids were the performers.

S: And did you get the... the judges, did they say much to you, afterwards?

B4: They said that they couldn’t say much about our *Gloria Deo* that’s how good it was...

S: Oh!

B4: They said everything was perfect. She just wanted to sit and watch and not write comments.
S: What a nice thing to say!
B4: Yeah, and um... for Alleluia same comment, she just wanted to sit and watch.
S: That's why you came first! And tell me, then... would you see that as successful?
B2: Yes. [others nod]
S: Why? Tell me why that was a successful experience?
B3: Especially because like there was this other school and they were wearing like these [great] clothes... I'm not sure what school it was, and they actually sort of did better than us, but then when they got to the higher notes, they came down a pitch but we didn't.
S: There you go! But did you think they looked really good?
B2: Yes. When we came first on the Friday, we beat them, they came third, I think, and then on the Championship they [drowned out by background noise].
S: And that was a different song?
R: Oh, no, the same song... they were both Australian.
S: Alright, let me go back to talking about the choir, and tell me... let's start with [name]. What are the things you like about singing in a choir?
B3: Well it's just enjoyable... like... yeah you can just sing...
S: Is that the main thing?
B4: I like [...] just 'cos we're singing ... we really get our lungs working
S: A bit of a warm up?
B4: I like the surprise of Mrs R telling us, "Oh, we're going to try for an Eisteddfod," and then going there, and like we won it.
S: Yeah?
B4: So that's a great feeling as well.
S: Yes... lovely. Okay, and [name] what about you?
B2: I just like to sing... but I don't... I like singing in choir because it's a group of people and you just don't stand out, like... I don't really like to sing by myself.
S: So, if somebody said to you, go and stand up and sing on your own, you'd go, Nope! [nod agreement]... but you're happy in a choir? Great! Now, [name]?
B1: I like singing in choirs because you're kind of like working all day and then you get like a forty-five minute period instead of like working for all day, get a short time to do what you like and soft things and... depends on what you're singing. It's good to get a break from everything.
S: Okay. So it's a nice break in the day... a nice change of pace, yeah?
B1: Yeah.
S: And you're saying it was soft, do you mean the type of song?
B1: Yeah, it depends on what song you're singing. If it's Alleluia, for example, you kind of relax and slow down for a bit, but if you're singing ACDC then...
S: Do you do ACDC in the choir?
B1: No!
S: Not yet!
B1: Not yet. Hopefully not ever! That might lose us some marks!
S: So tell me then, guys, what sort of music do you like? Particularly in the choir. I notice from your survey, you don't get a choice in the songs, but you obviously enjoy singing them.
B3: Yes... just some songs we don't really... like some parts of songs I don't personally enjoy singing. It's like just not my type, yeah.
S: But you're still happy enough to?
B3: Yeah, but the songs I like to listen to aren't the songs I like to sing.
S: Yes.
B3: So, like... I like listening to songs by [...] and all that, the songs I like singing are like Bruno Mars and that sort of stuff.
S: Right. What about you guys?
B4: I think in our... like the youth of today listen to [...] Countdown, but I reckon um... songs that we sing in [choir name] are songs you've never heard of, but once you've got used to them... like sometimes I go home and I start singing them...
S: That's what you're singing.
B4: ...like it gets catchy...
S: Yes, I know one of those you were singing, I think Alleluia ... was that a Bach? The composer was Bach?
Boys: yes.
B3: ...and the other one like Gloria Deo.
S: So, really old music, but you've enjoyed it. [All nod agreement] So tell me, starting with [name]...are there things about choir you don’t particularly like?
B2: Not really... no.
S: Good! Anybody else? Anything that you don’t particularly like?
B4: Not at the moment. Like it's only the start of Term 2.
S: That's true. You've got a whole other six months to find out things you don't like!
B1: And also um... no complaints at the moment... none at all. I reckon later when you go on to High School you have to start like... practising for three hours at home and come to after school rehearsal out of school hours. It's just going to become a pain.
S: So, that's just... that's in High School?
B1: That's in High School. So that's like when there's... like altos, sopranos and guys in the middle there's so many things and you have to practise your part...
S: Okay...
B3: There is one thing I don't like... staying on Sunday... if... the things... like the things that happen after school time and on the weekend, because you know, like my brother 'll be outside having fun... and sometimes you've got to go and do something for the school.
S: Yes, okay.
B2: Like this Sunday I was going to have Rugby or something on, but luckily that got cancelled when we did the... and like on Saturday it wouldn’t be my favourite thing to have to go to... at weekends... like in school days... [...] but not at weekends. It gets... you get a lot of things on at the weekend. That's basically a time to do what you want.
S: That's right. So that would be hard... I can understand that. So if you were given a choice on a weekend... do you all play sport on the weekend?
Boys: Yes. Compulsory.
B3: That's only on Saturday, though.
Okay. So some of you do extra, do you? [All nod, and say yes]

Yes, I do rugby league...

[...] Rugby Union...

Is that on Sunday?

Depends on the day.

Rugby League is on Sunday and usually Union is on Saturday.

And there’s basketball...

Okay... so if you had a choice between playing sport on the weekend or doing the choir, what would you choose?

Sport.

Sport.

Like well, if I could play half a game of sport and then go to [name of choir] I’d do that.

Right.

Well I chose to... last week I chose to miss my Basketball game... and um...

Was that hard?

It’s not really. I just know I made a commitment and all that, but I’ve been doing [...] in the games for two years now, and I know I’ve never missed a training or a game, and I think it’s alright just this one day.

Yeah... because that wouldn’t normally happen... choir?

That’s right.

[...] now you’re not allowed to say anything terrible because Mrs R has just walked in...!!

...they’ve all been telling me about their wonderful success at the Eisteddfod.

It was pretty cool, eh...

That’s exciting.

But you guys know that you sang really well, don’t you? Did you feel that?

[Boys all nod]

They were saying that very thing, that yes, they did.

Miss F that conducted it, she came off, she was shaking... she said, “That was so good!” And I said, Wasn’t it! And you know, she’s a musician [...] doing that...

Well [name] was saying that the judges said they didn’t want to write, they just wanted to sit and listen, that’s how good it was. How good is that! Good job!

While we’re talking about, not negative things, but things that you might have difficulty with or struggle with or whatever... or you don’t like... have you had any trouble, or difficulty or find anything hard about being in choir?

Yes.

What do you find difficult?

Like... sometimes... because I don’t really enjoy... well I can, but sometimes it’s really hard for me to get up to the high notes.

Okay...

That’s sometimes difficult.

Yeah? When you’re struggling to get up to high notes, what do you do?
Appendices

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Perceptions of success influencing male participation in choir – S. Powell

B3: Well, like basically you try and get up there, but if you don't Miss will just say like… do something that will help you fix it.
S: So she'll give you a different option, maybe?
B3: Yes.
B4: Um... same reasons. Sometimes it's really hard to push those extra high notes. I usually stop, take a minute to breathe and start again. Just push myself.
S: Right. Okay.
B2: Exactly the same.
S: The same sort of thing... So you guys would generally just stop and wait...
B2: Yeah, and just wait and try and listen to those, and try and get it into my head and then try again.
S: Okay. What about you [name]?
B1: I don't have too many troubles except the fact that sometimes, where... like for example this Friday we're going out for a game of sport... on the last day... I'm on the basketball field there... and say it wasn't this Friday... and we got called to [name of choir] you're a bit like... not angry... just a bit frustrated. Just a bit... but then um...
S: Because you'd like to do both?
B1: Yeah, you'd like to do both, but you just wish they were at different times. Not one or the other. Try to do both.
S: Yeah. So, do you find the music difficult to learn? [shakes his head] Or is it straightforward?
B3: Well, you start off with the words on the blackboard so you can just read it, then it gets into your head, and then it's pretty easy because you've got like a couple of months to practise all of them.
S: And you learn them from memory?
B3: Yes.
B4: I think, yes, it's pretty easy to learn.
S: Because they're not easy songs, you know.
B4: They're not...
S: Not very easy... I was very impressed the day that you were learning those.
B4: Sometimes if you're away it catches up with you. You have to really work harder than everyone else to catch up.
S: Catch up... fair enough.
B4: Some of the Latin words in songs... we have to really memorise those.
S: So if you miss a rehearsal you're going to fall behind? Okay. Tell me... do you think... do you consider... [loud bang] That's a very interesting play going on next door... Do you think of yourselves as successful singers? Just on your own... do you see yourself as a successful singer?
B3: Well... I don't think it would be my career as a singer. It's just something I like doing... like I wouldn't be, you know, Bruno Mars or people that are right up there.
S: So, for you, success is about if it's a career.
B3: Yes.
S: Okay, so in that sense you're not successful... you wouldn't consider yourself as a success?
B3: I’m successful at singing, but like I just won’t go through with it, because I’ve got other jobs that I would really like to do.

S: [name]?

B4: Um... at the moment I think I’m pretty successful... and I must alright being selected and that. Winning an Eisteddfod is pretty big... considering I hadn’t been in a choir before... it’s a pretty good experience.

S: Yeah! Very exciting. So you’d say you are a successful singer at the moment?

B4: At the moment, yeah, I would.

S: Why would you say that... apart from being in an Eisteddfod with the choir? What about just you on your own? Why would you say you are successful?

B4: I think that choir’s a great thing to do. I think if you have fun and you enjoy everything... you can think of yourself as successful.

S: Okay. So you’re enjoying it... do you think you sound good?

B4: Yeah. I think just because it’s a group... and choir you sort of... if you’re a bit low you can adjust to the same so you never get left behind...

S: So you find it good... I mean, this is a question for all of you... is that helpful to have people around you...?

All: Yes.

S: ...to hear that you’re doing the right thing?

All: Yes.

S: And you all do that?

All: Yes.

B4: Because... one of the reasons is that we have singers in our choir that actually want to be singers... like [name] and if we’re a note behind, we just have to wait... listen to what he’s doing...

S: Listen to him?

B4: ...and then go ahead.

S: And there’s a few people like that in the choir, is there?

B3: Yes. There’s about three or four...

B2: Yes... [names]

S: It’s always good to have those strong people in the choir, isn’t it? Listen to him, he knows what he’s doing! Good... okay. [Name]... successful singer... are you a successful singer?

B2: [pause] Don’t know.

S: If I said to you, Tell me what success means... what would you say?

B2: Making a living out of it.

S: Okay.

B2: But I wouldn’t.

S: So, because you don’t make a living out of singing in the choir...?

B2: Well... I wouldn’t want to anyway... like... I’ve got other things... I probably prefer to do... but... I still enjoy singing... but just....

S: Okay. Right. [name], are you successful?

B1: At the moment, mostly, yes. When I’m older I’ve got my eyes on being a vet at the moment. So um...

S: Not a singing vet?

B1: [laughs] That’s what I was going to say! Like... I don’t want to be known as the singer who’s a vet. I want to be known as a vet, who can sing really good. So...
so I do my job... and like help animals and all that... but at the same time I can sing if I need to... or something like that.

S: Okay. So you've said you consider yourself, at the moment, mostly successful... why would you say that?

B1: Because we've just come first and won a medal at an Eisteddfod and to come first in one of these Eisteddfods is pretty good out of all the schools in New South Wales... and... I'm pretty proud of that... and that we've done really good in the past... the last like four years. And also this Thursday we're performing at the performing arts centre at the High School.

S: Yes! And I'm going to come to that.

B1: Yes... and that... we... the [name of choir] have only been there for four years now... so... we've really lived up to that reputation.

S: So, for you, is success kind of tied in with winning competitions, performing at different places...?

B1: ...those sorts of things?

S: More like... not being popular... just um... being known.

B1: Okay.

S: Like, have you heard [school name] sing? Have you heard [school name] sing, instead of the [school name]!

B1: Okay, so a bit of a name for yourself. Now, if I asked you as an individual like I asked the other guys... would you say you were a successful singer?

B1: Kind of... in the middle at the moment.

S: Okay. Can I ask why?

B1: Um...

S: You can say, 'I don't know'.

B1: I'm not entirely sure. It's just um... we're kind of successful, and we're kind of not. Sometimes we do, sometimes we don't... like sometimes there's [...].

S: And when you're singing in the choir, do you like your voice?

B1: I'm pretty happy with my voice... at the moment... just... after I've played a game of dodge ball, and screaming and shouting... I kind of lose my voice and it's all [demonstrates tired voice]

S: Okay, that's very interesting. I should keep an eye on the time... a couple of other things. Now, you've kind of answered this. You've sort of answered by saying you'd like to still sing in the future... tell me, is singing in a choir, something you will do in the future?

B2: No.

S: No?

B2: I would but... it sounds like people who sing in choirs do it... like really often... practising heaps... and I wouldn't really like to do that all the time.

S: You don't want to do that?

B2: ...like I want to do other things.

B3: Same... because, like if you've got children and if you're in a choir, basically you don't get to see them as much as you would like to.

S: Right. That's because of all the rehearsing and...

B3: Yeah.
B2: You wouldn’t be able to make money really... out of choir... and so if you do that and a job and say, like [name] said, if you have kids... you’d be doing lots of stuff... too much...
B1: You got to take care of them... and if they get sick [
B3: Like if you’ve got twins, you wouldn’t want to leave them just with the mum till... you know...
S: She might be tired...!
B3: Yeah...
S: Good! I’m glad you’re thinking like that! What about you, [name]
B4: Um... I haven’t really considered this. When I’m older I would like to be a top basketball player or a lawyer.
S: Okay.
B4: My mum always sings in the car with the radio. Sometimes I join in with her... I think a choir for me will just be something you would do just to relax... or just in your spare time.
S: Like a hobby?
B4: Yes. Like [name] said, you can’t make much of a living... but if you were up there with opera and everything... that’s good...
S: Right. What about choir in High School? Because you go to High School next year... are you Year 6?
All: Yeah.
S: And do you go up the road... will you all go up the road?
R: Yeah... looking forward to the long pants...!
B3: But especially I don’t like the socks. You know you have to keep them up and usually I’m used to socks down at the ankles.
S: You need to start a fashion of it... start wearing long socks at the weekend. You probably do with all your sport, don’t you?
B3: Yeah, with the high school choir... like I would probably be doing it till Year 8 or 9 and then I’ll like want to just stop just because of like workwise, because you know, I want to get a heaps good mark in my HSC... if I want to do that you going to have to study a lot more... so, you never know like... the choir in High School might take two periods out every eight days... but we only take one out now.
S: Okay.
B2: And I wouldn’t really go in Year 7 because we’re just learning about high school and all the new classes... and everything, [background noise drowns out the words]... if you do that you might just get mixed up...
S: Confused and too overwhelmed? Okay.
B1: In Year 8 you have to... in Year 7 you just go in and you’re just learning how things work, but in Year 8, it’s compulsory to join the Cadets... so the um... Cadets is you go on camps like every two weeks and you have to have your shoes like mirror polished.
B3: Not in Year 8 though...
R: Not in Year 8... Year 8 is compulsory, from there on it’s optional... so... you’re not sure if you can do Cadets and choir.
S: I see.
R: It’s like [name] says, it’s a bit mixed up... confusing...
S: Okay... anything else?
B3: I’d like to just go back to the thing on Thursday... you know how we’ve been in it for four years now...? But it’s actually quite hard to get in. They only choose like the best... so that’s pretty good for an achievement as well.
S: Absolutely. And tell me... do you sing with the high school choir sometimes?
B3: Yes.
B2: At the big school [...] and the whole school and high school came down...[...]
S: So singing events you do?
B2: ...and when the whole school is coming to...
S: And what’s that like? Like with the older guys there?
B3: It’s like... very loud, because Miss [...] our conductor at the Eisteddfod, she’s like... she’s like Miss R, but for the high school... and so she likes everyone to be loud.
B2: Yeah, and like having all those deeper voices...[...] and we’re like trying to get high and like they’re down low...
S: And are you happy enough in that situation? You like to sing in that situation?
All: Yeah.
S: You like the sound?
B3: Yeah, it’s fun [...] with[...]
B2: It’s like relevant... because we’re small...like a lot smaller, so they have their practises where they just have a little section, and then they’ve got a big thing[...]
S: Yeah. That would be intimidating?
B2: Not really.
S: Not too bad?
B4: I just think it would be a great experience... I didn’t know that you had like really low voices like the bass and then different all the way up... but I think the choir in the high school... I would honestly join it, because I think... I’m only in Year 6 now... something could happen [...] up there or... but I think just joining could give me another option in life. Maybe I could be a singer or in a choir. So, I would go for choir in the senior school.
S: Okay. Good. So to finish up with, I might ask you... and you’ve sort of touched on it throughout this conversation... why is it important for you to be in the choir?
B3: Well... it’s like not important for me... it’s just like something I like to do. Particularly, like if I didn’t get accepted I wouldn’t be that upset... because basically the only place I sing is here... in the car and in the shower.
S: Yeah, [name], same for you?
B2: Yeah. Same for me... I wouldn’t go singing round in the streets and doing all that stuff. I wouldn’t be all depressed or...
S: If you didn’t get in?
B4: I play [...] basketball...and um...I try my best to get into the teams and squads and so on... and yeah, as they were saying, if I didn't get into the choir I wouldn't be too upset about it. I would think, next time try better... try harder... to get in, because it's what I like doing, but yeah, I... it's important, but not in the biggest way. If I didn't make a rep team, I'd be pretty upset.
S: But not so much with choir?
B4: Yeah.
S: Right. [name]?
B1: I think it’s pretty important to be in the choir, because like... like... without all those strong singers that really keep the choir together... if they were to just go, “no, it’s not important,” it would sound like a broken record... just going round and round. But um... you’ve got to have those extra people joining... to make it sound good... and win these Eisteddfods and do these things... so you can just kind of realise and tell people we’re here.
S: So it’s important to you in terms of keeping that tradition going?
B1: [nods] Yes.
S: Okay, that’s really interesting. And... you all enjoy it?
All: Yes.
B4: Good experience.
S: So it’s important at one level because you all enjoy it? But it’s not the most important thing in your life?
All: No...
S: Fair enough! Right. Is there... no I won’t ask that because you’ve answered that already. If I was to ask... and I know I said that was going to be the last question... If I was to ask you why you think some boys don’t want to become part of a choir, or aren’t part of a choir... what would you say?
B3: I would probably say that it’s because they think it’s not that manly to sing... probably.
S: Okay.
B4: I think because the junior school invited...[...] what the choir will turn out being in it...and I think from recent primary school, I’m getting all the girls being in it... sort of thing, and it’s a bit weird if only two or three boys are in it... and they get a bad impression of it next year when you’re at a junior primary school.
S: You think they might not be part of it because they don’t want to be one of just one or two with a bunch of girls?
B4: Yeah.
B2: At my primary school there was a choir and there were only two... there could have been two or three boys in it from the whole school. It wasn’t a big school, but still, there was only two or three and the rest were all girls. And you’d have to be a [...] boy to be in that, because [...] 
B3: It’s like at the Eisteddfod on Friday... there was this Jewish school and basically there were seven or eight boys and... I don’t know... about twenty or thirty girls...
S: Really? The girls well and truly outnumber the boys? What do you think, [name]?
B1: I think that most people would... like the Year 5ers... they’re just starting to know each other... and they... kind of touches on [name’s] point that... they want to become popular, they want people to like them... and they think if I go to choir, it’s unmanly... they’re going to grow up being like... reserved basically. But it’s not so... it’s not really that bad because you do all these things and I mean on the Eisteddfod we got to go out of school, we got to go to Maccas... we had lots of fun singing... and close to... on that day we missed out on [...] day thing... we got to do it on Tuesday. And on that day we got to do lots of games...
and all, and all those kids that didn't go on [name of choir] like... had to wait fifteen minutes for a go... while on our day we only had to wait like a minute... which was really good, so there are advantages and disadvantages.

B3: And I'd say like being on [name of choir] like [name] says, "It's like there are advantages... because on Friday they got basically we were out singing and competing for our school, but they were just like doing no work, watching movies [...] and that sort of stuff, basically we basically got a day off school and they thought because we... to start off with we weren't going to get mufti but then like Miss talked [Deputy Headmaster] into letting us have it.

S: Very cool!

B2: We basically got the day off school and mufti...

S: So you didn't really miss out.

B2: They only got one day we got two.

B3: The only thing we missed out on was some movies and activities... and they said the movie wasn't really that good anyway... so basically...

B4: I think... I haven't seen it yet, but I think it's a shame that because some [...] aren't for boys just for girls [...] different... the fact that they join and pretend they're doing it for another reason like... getting out of school yet they're really good singers... they just don't want to get hassled by their mates.

S: So they might say... like they're in the choir... but they say they're just in it so they can miss out on stuff even though they really actually like it? They don't want to say they like it. Okay, that's very interesting. Anything else?

B4: My brother's still at the Primary School I went to... and a boy loved to sing and [...] music school, and came and went to join the choir and no one wanted to be friends with him [...] S: Oh... do you find it then, easier... you're all boys at this school, does that make it easier to be part of the choir?

All: Yes.

S: So if you... were you all in a school with girls and boys?

All: Yes...

S: Were you all in choirs then?

B2, B3, B4: No

B1: Yes...

B2: Well we didn't have choir, but in Year 4, our school, we entered into this 'Splash' contest... well not competition... like this 'Splash' thing and the school came together and we did a big performance. I joined that and basically that's why I came into [school name]. Like, I liked singing before that and there wasn't anything to join... and when the school did that, and I encouraged all my friends to come and join... and they enjoyed it.

S: Excellent...

[Interruption]

S: And [name] you said you were in choir at your last school?

B1: Yes.

S: And that was okay?
B1: No, no. It was me and two other boys... and twenty girls and I wasn't... like a geek or anything like that. I just um... we were actually really successful with our... choir...
S: So it wasn't a problem?
B1: Yes, some of the guys were thinking, “Should have joined”...
S: So you think that once people are in the choir they realise that...
B2: You've actually got to have the courage and join and then... get other people to join...[...]
B3: There is a good thing about this choir, because when we've all got PE or something on... Miss lets us go and you get to lose out...
S: Cool.
B4: I think that some schools don’t really do choirs...[...] I think our school didn’t [...] so I’ve come to [school name]... not doing much extra curricula and in Year 6 now, I started doing guitar, [choir name]... as much as I could... just to get the experience.
S: Great.
B2: This year... last year, I didn't want to join extra-curricular... I was doing [choir name], but this year I joined [....]...
S: Great... okay, I'd better finish up now and let you get some lunch. It was so good to talk to you... thank you very, very much.

End of Interview
g) Focus Group 2

S: So. You all filled out a survey for me, I believe, so you know the types of questions I’m going to ask you. They’re based around the same kinds of things, alright?
B: Yep.
S: Now, I believe you had a win the other day?!
B1: Yes, we came fourth on Sunday.
B2: First on Friday...
S: And Sunday was the Championships, is that correct?
B1: Yeah, the Final.
B3: We've never been into the Championships.
B2: It’s pretty good, because that’s fourth out of all of Sydney.
S: Yes, and I hear you still got a prize?
All: Yeah, five hundred dollars.
B3: Five hundred big ones! Five hundred big ones!
B1: Third place got a thousand... second got...
B2: No, first place got two thousand...
B1: I said third place...
B2: Oh.
S: So, first place got what?
All: Two thousand.
B1: Second got fifteen hundred.
B3: One thousand five hundred.
B1: And third got a thousand, and we got five hundred.
B3: We got eight hundred and fifty because we won three hundred...
B2: [interrupting] We came first on Friday.
B3: We won three hundred and fifty on Friday.
B1: Oh yes, that’s true.
[brief interruption from PA announcement]
S: Okay, well let’s get started. What I was going to say to you is that you are allowed to say whatever you like. You will not get into trouble for saying anything.
B3: [whispers something cheeky]
S: Except for those kinds of things!! The other thing I would ask is if you would just take it in turns to talk. So, if someone is talking, just don’t talk over the top of them. Obviously in a conversation it’s normal to put your little bit in, but just be aware that someone might be finishing their sentence, okay?
[Boys all nod]
S: So tell me, first of all... Let me start with [name] because you haven’t got a mouthful... what do you enjoy most about singing in the choir?
B2: The best thing I enjoy about choir is when we make a mistake, she tells us how to do it, and she always tells us that it’s good, and she tells us how to work on it.
S: Okay.
B2: Like she tells us what to do to like...
S: So how to make it better?
B2: Yes.
S: So you don't get in trouble for doing something wrong...
B2: No.
S: You get helped to be better. And you like that?
S: Good. What about you [name]?
B1: What I like best is if you make a mistake... it's kind of an echo of what B2 said...
it's kind of like hidden in the choir... if you make a mistake.
S: Aaah... because there's lots of people?
B1: Yeah... it's kind of the same effect in a band, and ah... I just like the sound of the
choir altogether because normally I listen to solo people.
S: Right... and it's quite a different sound, the choir sound.
B1: Yes.
S: So you like being with a number of other people so that if you do make a
mistake it doesn't really show up as much?
B1: Yes, because it's basically hidden.
S: It's basically hidden. Okay... and [forgetting name] [name]... I should have
remembered that! So, [name] what do you think? What do you like best?
B3: I like it because I do listen to a lot of music, but I come from quite a musical
background, and then... like... some of the songs I've never heard before. It's
very interesting to hear a variety of music.
S: And you get to sing a great variety, don't you?
B3: Yes. Ancient to pop to... yeah!
S: And you get to choose the music in choir”...
B2: No.
B3: As much as we want to...
S: Does that matter?
B2: Nah.
S: Still pretty happy with the stuff you sing?
All: Yeah...
S: You hesitated B3! What did you want to say?
B3: I find it... I thought when I was going to join, it was like... going to be a bit more,
you know... groovy... and it’s just a bit...
S: It's not “groovy”.
B3: Yeah.
S: Is that because the type of music is older style music?
B3: Yes. Like I’ve never heard before. The only thing close to pop music is Three
Blind Mice! That was like the first song we ever sung and we've never heard of
it again.
[Other boys singing Three Blind Mice in the background]
S: There you go. Okay. Tell me, are there things... well you've just said you'd like to
do some groovier songs... Are there other things that you don't particularly like
about being in the choir? B2 do you have anything?
B2: Other than that it’s pretty good.
S: B3 anything?
B3: No, not really. Just that.
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B2: The only other way you could get in trouble and that is if you don’t choose to come. Like, you’re at school and, say like you’re in Music or something and you don’t want to come there, but you have to come. So you really don’t want to be in trouble...

S: So when you should be there but you don’t turn up?

All: Yeah.

B1: Ah… when we first started doing a couple of rehearsals for choir at the beginning of the year, she started… when people were talking and doing something silly, she started kicking people out!

S: Oooh!

B1: And I was like, “Oh, my gosh, I better not do anything rude!” But there’s around 50 people now so I don’t think she’s going to do that...

B2: …forty-nine...

S: So that was a bit scary, was it, watching her kick people out?

B1: Yeah!

S: So did that make you… make sure you were well-behaved?

B1: Well, I usually am!

[Other boys quietly laugh]

S: These boys laughed about that!

B1: Hmm. I can hear that!

S: So you knew that to be in the choir… and this goes for you guys too… you knew being in the choir, you had to behave yourself?

All: Yes.

B3: Like, I’ve never been in a choir before, and I’ve always wanted to be in a choir...

B2: Me and B3’s dads used to be in a band together!

S: Oh, did they?!

B3: Yeah! At my old school there was this choir, and an announcement came, “Anyone who would like to try out for choir...” and I was like, “Yeah? Yeah?” “...girls only.” [Shakes his head; hands out] Why?

S: Wow. Did they give you a reason?

B3: No... I was like... and they hardly did anything. They practised and did like, one assembly.

S: Right.

B3: Cos’ like, you need boys.

S: Yeah! That is interesting. B1?

B1: Yes, well, back at my old school in [suburb], I wasn’t really interested in the choir, but when I started getting into music, which was like, last year, I started listening to music, like Set It Off, Goodnight... ah, I started getting into to singing, so when I came here I decided to join the choir. And now when I say I’m in [choir name] to Mum and Dad, “What’s [choir name]?” So I have to explain to them, “Choir.”

S: And how do they feel about that? Are they happy?

B1: Um... they feel pretty good.

S: Yeah?

B3: It’s really nerve-racking when you try out.

S: Yeah?
B1: Ahh... normally singers would watch singing shows like The Voice or the X-Factor, but I think The Voice is the best one out of all of them.

B3: [whispers] Go Karise!

S: That was a pretty good show, wasn’t it? I was watching that!

B1: And there’s entries open for Season 2.

S: Are you going to audition?!

B1: [loudly] Yeah, I’m going to audition!!!

B3: There is... a um... in America... they started The Voice for teenagers and [...] and Justin Bieber and someone else is a judge.

S: Wow! Similar thing to The Voice in Australia?

B1: And plus it’s not just first place winners that get the album... the runner up gets it as well. Like on the X-Factor last year... although [...] won and Andrew Wisher was the runner up, he still got an album... but it was released from a long time after... round about two... three weeks ago.

S: Yeah.

B1: It [...] Britain’s Got Talent, Susan Boyle was runner up...

S: Yes, and she’s very successful...

B2: She should have won.

S: Yes. Okay so that gets us actually on to the whole question of success. That was a nice lead in. How would you describe success? Just in any kind of situation... if I said to you, What does success mean, B3 what would you say?

B3: Well, popularity.

S: Popularity, yes. What about you, B2?

B2: Yes, popularity and to have success you also need to like enjoy it. You won't have success unless you enjoy what you’re doing.

S: Okay so we’ve got...

B3: ...popularity...

S: ...popularity... enjoyment... what did you whisper?

B3: Talent.

S: Talent... you’ve got to have some talent. What about you? What do you think?

B1: Um... kind of the echo of what the boys said... popularity, enjoyment, talent and... yeah, there you go, what they said.

S: Yeah, you don't have anything else in your head about what success is? Or what it means?

B1: Well, no.

S: No? That’s fine. Now tell me, your choir, [choir name], would you call it successful?

All: Yes.

B2: Fourth out of all of Sydney, that's pretty good. I'd never [...] 

B1: I’d say we could work on um...

B3: Monkey Turtle...

B1: Yes.

S: That’s the one you did on Sunday, is it?

B1: Well, we had a few rehearsals, so...

B2: We had one.

B1: One? We had a rehearsal outside and a rehearsal [...] 

S: So you felt that that could have been better?
B3: And *Gloria Deo* could have like... we didn't do it as well... [...] 
B1: Not as well. We could have done it a bit better... 
B3: Heaps better. 
B1: We kind of got like third or something... 
B3: Because like... Mrs B smiles when we hit the high notes and hardly ever smiled... 
S: Were you a bit nervous? Because it's a pretty big moment, isn't it? 
B3: And we were like really... 
B1: And... 
B3: ...it's really nerve racking. 
B1: And the crowd were larger than... Friday. 
S: Right. 
B2: There was no crowd on Friday. 
B1: Barely. 
S: Just the people waiting to perform? 
B1: There were a few people up there. 
S: Right. You said you felt that your choir was successful... and one of the reasons you gave you came fourth out of NSW, is that correct? 
All: Yes. 
S: Are there other reasons that you think it's successful... apart from that? 
B2: Because everyone like loves doing it because she teaches it in a way that's like fun and like make you want to do it. 
S: Okay, that's a very good reason. 
B3: And we... we've had some very good gigs, like we've done Mother's Day... we had honour assemblies... we've done... 
B1: Honour assemblies? 
B3: Yeah... we do [...] 
B1: Oh, yeah. 
B3: We did that big assembly when we did the whole... 
S: So um... 
B3: ...we've done a lot of performances. 
S: So... successful for you is also about performing? 
B3: Yes. 
S: You've obviously got to do that a lot. B1, anything to add? 
B1: Um... 
S: Is your choir successful and why? 
B1: Maybe there's a 0.4 things we need to work on... so I'd say we're 99.6 successful. Maybe the 0.4 things we might need to work on... 
S: And what sort of things are they? 
B1: Maybe we need more confidence... maybe more enjoyment... possibly. 
S: And is it also to do with singing a song really well? Is that the sort of thing you're talking about? 
B1: Kind of. 
S: Yeah...? Because I know you said you didn't think you sang *Gloria Deo* as well on Sunday. 
B2: I think we need to spend more time as a choir together... 
S: Okay.
B2: Like we only do it once or twice a week, but we should be doing it maybe three times.
B3: We've been doing it three times.
S: But most weeks you don't?
B3: Yeah.
S: So it's normally once a week?
B1: It's normally on Wednesday.
S: Okay. So you would say that success is also about practice and how much you practice together?
B1: Practise makes perfect... and perfect makes successful!
B2: It's about putting in the hard yards.
S: Good! Very grown up thing to say [as the others laugh]. It's true too!
B2: My dad says it.
S: Is that a Dad statement, is it?
B2: [nods]
S: That's very cute. Okay, think about yourself... as an individual, being a singer... do you think, B3 that you are a successful singer?
B3: That depends.
S: Depends? Tell me about that.
B3: I've done a lot of performances in the past...
S: Okay... on your own?
B3: Yes... and as... together. Well...hmmm... I'm not sure.
S: You're not sure? I'll come back to you. Have a think about it. What about you, B2, would you call yourself successful?
B2: I can't really tell because I haven't done many songs by myself... like performances by myself. But in a choir, I think, yeah, I am doing a very good job.
S: And can I ask why you think that?
B2: Well, sometimes I like make a couple of mistakes... but then I get them right the very next time I try it... so I think that I'm learning from what I'm doing and that makes me a lot better.
S: Yeah? That's good. So you learn quite quickly and you like the sound of your voice?
B2: Yes.
S: Right. And it's obviously working with everybody around you?
B2: Yeah.
S: Yeah... good. B1?
B1: Well, when I first started getting interested in music and singing... kind of at the end of Year 3... I made up this stupid song... dah! Out of a movie song. It was so stupid. I thought, I can do better than that. So, the next talent quest in Year 4 I sang Party Rock Anthem with two of my friends dancing behind me.
S: Yeah, how did that go?
B1: Oh, it went good. I was meant to sing... sing good notes but we didn't get to do all the performances... and me as an individual singer... I do want to get a music career as myself... but I don't think I'm quite there yet. I do make some mistakes with the lyrics, the melody and stuff.
S: Is that just a memory thing?
B1: Yeah.
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S: Sometimes you forget?
B1: Sometimes I forget a few of the lyrics, but sometimes I nail them... so yeah...
S: So in the choir... singing in the choir, do you think you're a successful singer?
B1: Well, it is good to have some...

[interruption]
S: So in the choir?
B1: In the choir it's good to have other singers around me, because if you make a mistake you can fix it up because you have other people singing the right things. So you can just... if you make a mistake, just forget about it, put it behind you and carry on with the lyrics like the rest of the choir.
S: And do you like the way you sing?
B1: Y...y...yes, at the moment.
S: Okay... Is there... have you had any trouble in choir? Anything you find difficult?
B1: Um... a few things but I kind of forget them now.
S: Okay...so sometimes the little mistakes? That's because you haven't learnt the melody quite yet...like you were just saying?
B1: Yes.
B3: We get these songs and we don't quite know them...
S: A bit unfamiliar.
B1: Yes. Like almost all the songs we've sung, I've never heard.
S: Okay, so they're brand new... you've never heard them before? So that can be...
B1: Well, they might be brand new to you, but they might be a very old song.
B2: I've heard all of them, because my brother did this last year.
S: There you go! Okay. Do you find anything tricky, anything hard?
B2: Um... at the start of Term 1 the finishing note on Alleluia I found a bit hard... like I felt that I was squeaking a bit when I was trying to hit high.
S: That was the high note, was it?
B2: Yeah, because I'm in the lower group...[...] the lower part. Part 2? [to B3]
B3: Part 2. [Do Hi-5 together].
S: What about you, you're Part 1?
S: So the Part 2 sing a bit lower normally than the Part 1?
B1: Miss [...] says, "We're the violins, they're the double bass".
S: Oh...
B3: No, we're the cellos.
S: So you were saying... B2 you were saying that... that high note in particular that was difficult for you?
B2: Yeah.
S: Yes? Do you have that trouble sometimes?
B3: When we're singing Three Blind Mice. [sings a phrase of Three Blind Mice] [...] was holding 'mice', and I did it once and I got real scared because she said, "Who's that guy? Don't [...] Three Blind Mice". And I never did it ever again. I just got so scared. Come ventilate me!
S: It was nerve racking!
B3: I gave a [...] to my mum, and she wrote in... it was so silly. I had to give it to Miss R and like, B1 it's okay!
B1: I was a bit scared about that bit as well, because um...
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S: Perceptions of success influencing male participation in choir – S. Powell

B3: Somebody got kicked out...
B1: I kind of started thinking it was me.
B3: Yeah, same here... and I couldn't...
S: Aah...
B1: But luckily it wasn't.
S: Oh, so somebody was just being silly, was it?
B3: Yeah, it was [...]...
S: ...Okay, so... some high notes have been a bit difficult to cope with? Can I ask you then, is there anything that would stop you being part of the choir?
B3: Well [...] saying I'll give you a million bucks if you quit the choir.
S: So, if you were paid not to be in it? A million dollars?
B3: Only if it was a million dollars.
S: A million dollars or more... okay.
B2: The only reason I wouldn't go in it... is if I had something else on at the time... like piano lesson or I was away. I really like the choir, so I really like to be there.
S: Okay... B1?
B1: For me? If there was anything that stopped me... I'd say there wouldn't, unless something really bad happened... like say... break my leg, I lose my voice... that'd be bad.
S: But physically if you couldn't sing any more... that means you wouldn't be in the choir?
B1: Yeah, that would probably stop me if I lose my voice, I couldn't talk any more... that... being in the choir would be hopeless.
S: Yes. So you all really like singing? Right?
All: Yeah.
B3: A lot.
S: Yeah?
B3: Like three iPods.
S: So can you tell me, do you know why you really like to sing? Do you just think it's fun?

[interruption]

S: So, enjoying singing... what is it about singing that you... like you just really enjoy it? It's really fun?
B3: Yeah, I just go home and I put my apple in the dock...[...]
S: Okay.
B2: It's sort of in my blood because like my whole family... like my grandparents had eight kids and like every one of them likes to sing. So I guess that sort of makes me want to sing.
S: It's just part of who you are?
B3: My mum... solo, band, solo, band... and my dad was a drummer...
S: So, musical families, it's a bit of a tradition? Kind of something you do anyway, but luckily you enjoy it. Nathaniel, what about you?
B1: Me? Well...
S: What is it about singing you like?
B1: I like to sing because um... ever since I was born I've been finding out a talent of mine... I think singing was the answer.
S: Oh? So you've been kind of searching?
B1: Yes.
S: And what was it about singing... that you went, That's it!
B1: Well, at first, I hated singing. And then when I got used to the radio, it kind of entertained me... um... so I started singing myself.
S: The enjoyment factor...
B1: Yes.
S: How do you feel when you sing?
B3: Well,
S: How do you feel?
B3: It makes me breathless... it makes me just feel cool. Calm me down.
S: Calms you down...
B3: If I'm angry I just sing and I feel better.
B2: It sort of makes me feel free... like... no one can tell me what to do...[...]
S: Do what you like? So a bit of freedom, wow! So do you feel like then that it's a way you can express how you're feeling?
B2: Yes.
S: Okay... what about you, B1?
B1: Me? It kind of frees myself. It makes me breathless sometimes... but I really enjoy it.
S: So you kind of just let yourself go a bit?
B1: Yeah.
B3: It takes you somewhere else...
S: Takes you somewhere else...?
B3: Just like reading, takes you somewhere else...
B1: It depends on what you sing.
S: True, yeah.
B3: If you're singing ...Good Night [B1 and B3 muck around dancing]...
S: Okay... like you say, a bit like a book, when you're absorbed in that story.
B3: [...]
S: Yes. Is singing something you'll do in future?
All: Mmmm....
B3: It depends... I'll either get an author's job...[...]
S: So you want to be an author, do you?
B3: An author, and I'd like to sing.
S: Okay. You're a very creative person...? Creative performer, yeah?
B3: I love instruments.
S: Okay, so choir could quite possibly be there?
B3: Yes.
S: Okay, what about you?
B2: If the door stays open for me like it is now, yes, I'll be in choir.
S: Yes? And is that something like... after school? Like you know, when you're an adult?
B2: Um... yes...[...] do ...
B3: She's in a choir...
S: She is, isn't she?
B3: She...
B2: She came and [...] Miss R to [...]

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B3: ...conductor...
S: Yeah? Nathaniel, will you be in a choir in the future?
B1: Probably not... because I like singing in... single... because I... you get all the entertainment... to yourself...
S: Okay.
B1: ...when you're performing.
S: So you want to be a solo performer? Okay.
B1: Yes.
B3: If I don't become a singer then I'll become an actor or an author.
B1: I'd like to see you become an actor.
S: But you'll be in a choir...
B3: Yes.
S: ...if you're something else, as a job? Yeah? Okay, and what about High School? Will you go to the High School choir?
B3: Yes.
B2: Yes.
S: Yes?
B1: Probably.
S: Probably?
B2: High School yes, you do a lot more.
S: Okay.
B2: Like go to more concerts...
B3: [...]
B2: Yes.
S: You perform together sometimes, don't you?
B2: Sometimes we...
S: Have you had that opportunity yet?
B2: Not yet.
B1: Not yet.
B2: Sometimes in the senior school you get to go out [...] like you get time [...] 
S: So you like the whole performance opportunity?
B1: Where did you get that information?
B2: It's true.
B3: It's true.
B1: Cool...
S: Yes, the Year 6s were telling me about all the stuff that you get to do. Okay! Now tell me, think about um... boys being in choir, and obviously you're boys... why do you think that some boys might not want to become part of the choir?
B3: Because they think it's gay and they think it's for girls.
S: They think it's gay and they think it's for girls.
B3: And they think they're, you know, [puffing his chest out, and flexing his muscles] one of those rugby union, [...] people...
S: Okay.
B3: You know? They think it's girls, they're better...
S: I do know what you mean.
B2: Well, it's because like if you're a conductor, your job is to like make people fit... and if you're a rugby player your job is to take options like if there's a gap there,
you like to get through or run good... but [...] what they used to be in like not knowing what they're supposed to do.

S: I see, so it's like a very different situation... like they might not like what to be told to do? That's one of your answers...?

B2: Yes. I'm a rugby player but my dad used to be a coach, not used to being told...

S: ... used to being told. What about you, Nathaniel? Why do you think boys might not want to be...

B1: Oh, me? Here's a little bit of an echo of what B2 said... some boys might think it's for girls and they might think...[uses a silly girlish voice] Ooo...that's not cool... just using the voice... and they might want to play rugby or soccer and be tough and cool, instead of the trying that you might be cool at... so they just ignore it.

S: Okay, so you think they might be afraid a little bit that they may not be good at it?

B1: Yes, because every... I know this... every person that thinks they're cool, they have something humiliating to tell.

B2: Like in a book I read... it was called Nerds and there was like a pack of cool kids and like one of them he was like... told everyone what to do... and they found out that he couldn't run... all he could do is skip instead of run.

B3: Yeah! Is that book in the library?

B2: Yes...

S: That's interesting... so in a sense, not trying out for something is a cover up for not being able to, or thinking they may not be able to. Or being scared they might not be any good.

B1: Well, as I said, they always have something humiliating to tell.

S: Okay. That's interesting...um... Tell me, why is choir important to you? B3?

B3: Because it gets your feelings...[...] you feel free... like you feel nothing can stop me now...

S: Oh, nice. What about you, B2?

B2: I like choir because it lets you think of what you're going to do... like because when I sing, I don't have anyone tell me what to do, I just keep singing on that note and I don't stop.

S: And it feels good?


B1: For me, choir is important to me because I want to be an artist when I'm older... so being in a choir now, it can teach me how to sing... like how to sing properly, not just remembering the lyrics, but the melody, the tune, the rhythm...

S: So it's kind of bit of practise?

B1: Yes.

S: Good.

B3: Had this dream once about choir...[...] I like rap, I love rap... I had a dream once about performing in the choir... like all 'rappy'!

S: Oh, you'll have to ask Mrs. R to do a rap one!

B3: I want to do that, it'd be fun.

S: So... look I'm going to finish up and let you guys go... is there anything else that you want to say that you haven't had a chance to say?
B1: Um... I also had a dream once... when the sun started singing Reece Mastin's *Goodnight*... while it was going down...

S: Oh, wow!

B1 starts singing that song

S: I have got one last question, actually before I let you go... you were talking about your career, whatever that might be... writer, an artist or something... and you actually said that it doesn't matter what you do, you'll still be in choir...

Is that the same for you? [to B2]

B2: Yes.

S: So no matter what you do for a career, you'll also be in a choir?

B2: Yes... might not be like with other people, perhaps with my like family... my family we always go out for Christmas Carols and that... so...

S: So you all sing together?

B2: Yes.

B3: And my grandma, when she’s in hospital, she goes, *sings* 'Help, I need somebody'. She just sings all the time.

S: That’s cute! Nathaniel you were a bit different, though, you want to be a solo artist, don’t you?

B1: Yep.

S: And is that what you want to do for a career?

B1: Yes.

S: So choir wouldn't... isn't part of that. Would you do it as well?

B1: Probably not.

S: Probably not, you’d focus on the solo thing?

B1: Yes.

S: That’s really interesting. Well, thank you, guys. Anything else? Said everything you want to say?

[boys nod]

End of Interview
Appendices

B.2.2 CHOIR 2: Secondary School

a) Conductor 2

C: There are lots of ways of running choir programs. [name of another school] run choir as an elective.

S: Yes, [School Name] used to do that, too.

C: Right. You go to um… chapel schools, like Trinity, who are advertising for a Master of Choral Music, and I’d like… that would be a great job, you know… to do that, and that’s very much their choir emphasis. Ours, for a long time, has arisen out of… our class work. So that, particularly in the Senior Choir, Junior is a bit more of a separate entity, but in the Senior school choir arises out of the singing that we do… the part singing that we do in class, and that will go right through from seven to twelve… and so we’ve done it in various ways, it allows us to bring all those little groups together into one big group when we want to do that for special occasions, or they can be self-contained units. And there are all sorts of logistical things where you have students that will sing with their class but they won’t sing with choir, because that’s extra time commitment, but you can sometimes… if it’s an at school thing you can put together a really big bunch of people that will sound really good, a la, you know, the Gateway Café… the Gateway salvation or you can have a small group of very um… well trained, well-honed group of students if you want to do that. One of the interesting things about choir as it is now that is different from choir as it has been in the past, is that it’s become a mixed group again, those year groups being combined. There have been times when we’ve only had a group with each year, and that’s been because… if you’re talking about boys… boys have felt more comfortable singing with their own year group.

S: Okay.

C: Rather than sing with a whole lot of other people.

S: Right.

C: And that’s… whether we promoted it that way and it went that way or whether we did that out of an understanding of those needs and those needs have changed... all I know is that we’ve gone back to combine the groups into one big group for particular performances and that’s been good, but then there are certain people... boys that won’t sing in the big group and I don’t know... I have to confess to you... because I’ve not been one that’s... sat down and asked them why.

S: Yes.

C: Is it because it’s a lunch time away from your friends, away from kicking the football around, or is it because they don’t know the other boys or they don’t know the other people in the group... okay?

S: Yeah.

C: Not quite sure about that.
S: Fair enough. Can I just go... I'll go back to that first question there, which is about your enjoyment of conducting choirs, or the choir, or choirs in the past... your experience, what is it you enjoy about it?

C: Lots of things. Choir is... choir is a very immediate way of making music and singing is. It's a most natural and the most immediate thing, and... when you're in front of a choir and you smile at them and they smile back at you, you instantly know that you have that engagement. Instrumentalists tend to put their faces in their books, you know, professional instrumentalists do that. With a choir it's communication, and there's that energy... that physical energy, because... again you just, even with a mass choir you can feel the air move that they create... you can feel that physical energy that each one of them is putting in... and it's interesting when you watch choirs... there are choirs that are a group of individuals in a way, and they all move around feeling the music, there are other choirs where they're all very restrained and whether that's the role of the conductor or the role of the musicians in the choir... or whether it's a combination of both, it's an interesting thing, it doesn't matter, whether they're very straight or you know, rocking around, there is this immediate contact and immediate energy that you get in doing that.

S: Yeah.

C: Um... you can sing along with them if you want to... not everybody does, but you can't do that with an orchestra in a performance very often. You can do it in a rehearsal, but you can be part of it... and you can be part of it by... when you're standing in front of it conducting... or you can be part of it if you place yourself within the ensemble and you lead from within the ensemble... you can be part of that performance... part of the music making, in a way that you don't always with um... with instrumentalists, and... instrumentalists will go with you and they'll be on your wavelength and they'll be very precise in what they do and they'll do all the right things that um... adjudicators like and audiences appreciate, but there's an even in some ways stronger sense of community with a choir than there is with... an instrumentalist. And some of that comes from, we know, that you can be in a choir without any musical training. You can be in a choir if you haven't, you know, got a great voice provided you can sing in tune. You can be part of that whole, that synergy that arises out of that is, you know... it's just infectious, isn't it?

S: Yes.

C: You know... it... it can be like a drug. And even if we do something as simple as in class you might add some harmony parts to a song that people are playing guitars and stuff to, and instantly you know the music comes alive. And then you take those away and you sing in two or three part harmony, and the buzz of doing that is amazing and that's one of the reasons we do a lot of a capella singing. There are things that you need to be accompanied and things that... you know, there are tour de force [...] pieces that we've done here, like Vivaldi Gloria where the accompaniment is such an integral part to that energy... but... it comes back to that impact of the voice you know. The boys sing, Gloria, Gloria... it... everything that's gone before has been interesting but that's just... it grabs you by the shirt collars and says, Listen to me I'm going to take you somewhere... really interesting. And the other thing, that is that... because it's
that community thing and that thing that everybody can be involved... you can look around your choir and you can know that they're involved and that whether that person's facial expression is... sometimes you see facial expressions you never see any other time in school, that... Gee I'm enjoying this, it's the best thing... but at other times, you still know that that connection is happening... for them as well. They're letting you know that. And in this day and age where community is being lost to be able to make music together is such a... a gift, and it's such a... a gift that we share... and when you know... this isn't really important, this is off the track...

S: No... no.

C: ... but last year we took the choir off to sing at nursing homes and some places like that.

S: The guys were saying something about that.

C: And when this lady comes up... or her friend comes up and says... now this lady was singing along who can't remember anything from the last, you know... ten, twenty years... these were songs that have been with her since she was a child and she sings them... and she normally shows no emotional connection with anything and, you know, she's shedding tears for the memories that that music is bringing out... that's just such a fantastic feeling. It... it places on the shoulders of very young children, such a responsibility and such a... not power but... such a facility... um... to be able to do that. And to touch an audience in that way. And... so that's another fantastic thing about it. And it's fantastic to give students the opportunity to just make music together, and to make really successful, polished music together. To know that you're giving them skills and a repertoire that they will take with them, and that comes from my experience of knowing that ten years, twenty years down the track people come to me and they say, um... I'm still doing this, I'm still singing and I'm doing something else... and um... I suppose that thing I said before about the big groups and the small groups. One of the things about the small groups is that they will often continue... not forever, but for a certain time... they will have a life of their own and that's a very thrilling thing, too... that you sort of had a part in the birth of this little ensemble that then goes off and shares all that joy and everything else... um... so there's all those things. So, there's a general thing about which is... and I say this often... I think it's an amazing thing. It puts you in touch with the minds of... you know, with the great minds of... history.

S: Mmm...

C: So when you sing Beethoven's Ode to Joy, or when you sing a Bach chorale, or when you sing something as simple as the Tallis Canon, you're in touch with people who thought deeply and meaningfully about the world around them and expressed those thoughts in a way that you can connect with those... and you can't always get that with students. I'd love to be able to do that when you're listening to music but performance for most of them is music and if you get them to perform repertoire that puts them in touch with that... or puts them in touch with, you know, the black culture of America, through spirituals... um, that enables them to feel in some way what those people felt. That's the sort of empathy we need in our world I think [...]

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S: Now... not to put a damper on those wonderful things you've just said but are there things about being in choir or conducting a choir that you don't overly enjoy?

C: Umm...

S: You find frustrating... or...

C: Frustrating, yes... I mean, it's terribly disappointing when you know they can sing brilliantly and at a performance they don't... And you think you know, Did I not warm them up well enough... what are the other... because we all bring whatever is happening in the world around us to the performance and it's very hard in a group to know each individual thing... or to know why the leader of a section is not with it today and the rest of it... and... and that is a frustrating thing. You would like all of them to be the very best they can and yet you know that they sort of rely on particular people... um... so that's frustrating. It's frustrating when they don't want... they don't want to be involved and they make it known that today, I just don't want to do this. Or... they don't like a piece of music because it's in a... it's in another language.

S: Okay.

C: Or they think that there's something odd about it, and it's the most beautiful thing you've ever performed... and why can't they see that... and why... yeah, and that happens a lot. Things... and... we were talking before about modern music, and it is a problem because um... when you have a certain repertoire that you want to keep using because it... you know it works and it's good for you and they want to do something completely different and they let you know that because they just won't come to the party with it... you've got to... you've got to come to terms with that and...

S: So what would you do in that situation then? What do you do?

C: Okay. Well I just dig into my box of goodies and find something else... and think about the reasons why... and it is a little bit frustrating because we don't have a lot of new music to buy which is one reason why I'm using black gospel and stuff, because it's easy, and it sounds trendy sort of but it's not that hard to... to get hold of the music... um, so I do try and be aware of what's around the place. And I love Glee. I'm a Glee fan, you know... I hate the... I hate the sexuality of it...

S: Okay.

C: ... and I can't work out why it's on at seven o'clock at night. It should be on at least... you know... my children... I won't let my children watch it but...

S: I've never even seen it!

C: The choral numbers in it are just fantastic... you think, well, we could do that. The repertoire... and of course it's very helpful to the kids... it makes eighties music sound really, really hip. Um... so you don't have to do all... all modern stuff. If I were a [shrugs shoulders] well, I'll use better... if I were a better, more dedicated choral conductor, I would be going to workshops and finding out what other music is around. I tend to do that second and third hand through festivals and things like that. I listen to what other people are doing and I pick out what I think is good and that. I go with that rather than going to a choir reading day, and I think that's fair enough... but in some ways, if you're expecting the dedication from your singers, then you need to be showing a
similar level of dedication, but I have to just stick with the practicalities of everything else one has to do [laughs].

S: Part of school!
C: But that's what I try and do... and there are things for example... I like doing SAB things with changing voices, but when you have people who have... whose voices have already been singing in a bass register for two years, you've got to be aware that they're not going to want to be singing 'up there'... that's uncomfortable for them and... you go into SATB and I've got all these tenors and I've got all these basses so let's go with that and do a four part harmony. So there are tricks like that that you go with. One of the... not frustrating... one of the hardest things is knowing how to handle boys with unbroken voices in high school.

S: Yes. Yes.
C: Do you put them with the girls, do you let them sing alto or tenor. Do you encourage them to do that? Because then they're with the other fellows... um... do you... do you lose the joy of singing with that. I have boys in mind... you've interviewed at least one boy...

S: Yes, I've got one in mind. Quite fascinating.
C: ...who was quite happy singing everything at practices, and then at the performance said, "I'm not going to perform with you".

S: Oh, wow!
C: And I worked out that despite all his love of singing and everything else someone had said something to him and he just wasn't going to get over that... and I think I was going to say... in the [...] before performance... was going to change his mind, now... it's my role to be understanding of physical, emotional, social... um, challenges that face boys and of course the thing about having a group means you do all that team stuff... means you can overcome that a lot... if you're doing that, which is easier than asking a treble to sing... something on his own in front of the school, much as you might want to do that. You know, at our school we've overcome that sometimes by, within a theatre context, but within a musical theatre the glamour or the kudos... might be a better word... associated with being a star, overcomes the fact that you're actually singing in a voice that, you know, that other people... don't want to admit to or something.

S: I see. Yes.
C: And boys are very funny about that, very funny about it in all sorts of ways, much more than they ever used to be. You know, we don't wear speedos and we don't do all sorts of things once upon a time people just took for granted as being a bloke thing... which... we have become more self-conscious. Justin Bieber can do nothing to overcome that, I'm afraid.

S: [laughs] Yes! Do you think that um... the culture of this school is supportive of all of those things? Because I know the boys that I talked to the other day...

C: I...

S: ...were really positive.
C: I think it is... I mean I know, I can name you, you know, at least half a dozen boys in the middle school who sing wonderfully, but don't come to singing in any form. They're expressing their musical... their musicality in a different way... and we probably, well no, we have talked about how to address that, and
what we will do in years seven and eight music to address that. Now... the person who had that as his passion and vision is no longer with us... and it will probably need another twelve months to be confident to come back to that. Um... so that can be a thing. Then you have... when you do carol singing, you know, we had a lovely group of trebles last year, and we gave them some of the blokey bits to do, but we then had to encourage them they would do the blokey bits better in their own register, rather than singing in their boots trying to match the other blokes... and that was just a learning thing, it's a learning thing... it's... so coming back to the school culture, I think we have a pretty good school culture when it comes to... to males and singing. I think we've had it better in the past... I'll explain why I think that in a minute... but because we have plenty... of male teachers and senior males who sing regularly in public in a fairly um... um... leadership is the word I'm looking for, there should be a proper word for that I'm sorry... just escaped me... but in a very up-front, on-stage presenting, performing sort of way... that gives it a lot of credibility. Now, some of that is with rock band-y stuff, some of that is with worship music in the school. I personally dislike that term, but when, if you for example go back to our school captains, nearly all of our male school captains have been musicians, and they've been musicians who've sung and who've led singing.

S: Ah!

C: In the junior school... even though we don't have many male teachers in our junior school any more... we still have, for example, a language teacher who does a lot of singing as part of his language teaching.

S: Yes...

C: Um... we have... the other male teachers that we have are all quite musical and happy to sing. So there is an example set there, and when the choir sings, they're part of it. We don't have an older male group any more... we've had... we've dabbled with that from time to time. At the moment people feel comfortable with the mixed... with the mixed group to a large extent. And so that's the way... that's the way I think... that we encourage that culture...

S: You were going to come back to something...

C: Yes. I was coming back to... from time to time, we've had more teachers that did that. We've probably had... we've had more of a singing culture in terms of devotional singing... and when we did devotional singing...

S: Is that among staff that you're talking about?

C: ...well, the whole school... students and staff. When we did devotional singing with students we tend... we moved from mixed groups to single year groups. Now it's interesting that single year groups work much better, much easier to get everybody singing... the girls as much as the boys. When it was mixed groups it was um... more difficult to get the younger people to sing in front of the older people and vice versa... even though they probably go off to their churches and sing with people of all ages... to get them to do it at school. Now those... the structures and programmes that supported that don't exist in the school any more.

S: Oh, okay.

C: We don't do musicals any more, we haven't done musicals for quite a while... so we don't have that either. So that's why, as I said, we went back to very tried
and tested methods of having parts as part of our elective program, and part of our seven and eight program...and that... has worked in terms of reigniting things...

S: Okay.

C: ...with... some changes in repertoire...[says this smiling]

S: [Laughs] Yep. If I can get you to think about success and what that means... and if I can get you to think about it in terms of, say, the choir we're looking at right now in the school... um, first of all, what is success for you? I mean, you've mentioned a few things already... but...

C: I think success first of all is... the choir members feeling good about what they do, and the audience feeling good about what they do... and that can happen even if we're not the very best choir in the world. I... talking about frustrations before... I mean, I will wince at things that aren't well done, whether I'm doing it, or whether somebody else is doing it... and I'll try and make things the very best they can be. I believe in excellence. But if I feel good about it and you feel good about it, something's happened there... something's happening... because music works on more than just the level of perfect pitch, wonderful ensemble, and everything else... if you don't have spirit with it then it can... it can be very dry. Where there's a whole question there of performance, of how people... people believe, you know... Sting says he doesn't think about the song because if he did that, he wouldn't be able to sing it... so he just performs it. They all believe he believes it! And Jimmy Barnes, you know, he sings songs we all believe his life depends on singing that song and what it means. It isn't really true, it's just a way of getting money... not quite, but there is that thing there... about performers that work in different ways. So a choir is successful if we feel we have succeeded. When we've set out to do something then that's successful. If the audience is moved by what we do then that's successful. If we can take ourselves to another level where we attain a level of technical skill and we attain a level of understanding of what the music is about, then that is going to obviously increase both those other things. And so, the... the rigour, and the discipline, and the technical skills that you give students do count towards the success... and should lift the level of success... um... that the students enjoy and the audience enjoy. As I said before, is it successful if we go away and we keep singing and music becomes an important part of our lives then... then what we do here at the school has been a success. If you go off and you feel confident being a song leader or a choir leader or a something in your church, that you contribute somewhere else... then we've been a success.

S: Okay.

C: If you... as a choir member, an ex-student go off and sing in the Sydney Philharmonia or go and join the Australian Opera, or you know, something else... you know, then we've been a success. But one of our very best singers who now lives in a country town in New South Wales and is a mum, is she any less a success than someone who is going off somewhere, you know, appeared on Australian Idol or something else like that... um... it comes down to, in the end we measure success by you know... how much this impacts your life as a human being and how it [serves] others, and somewhere in the bottom of all that music will play a part somewhere, and that's what I think is successful.
S: That’s the most important... And so would you consider this choir here successful?
C: Is this choir successful? Yes I think it is because the audience like it for all sorts of reasons. They usually like it because boys and girls are in it together, they like the songs, they like that it’s part singing... particularly because with the younger children they tend to sing with backing tracks... they... some parents don’t think that’s real singing and I think it is, of course it is. Um... but um... in terms of technical success I think they’ve got a long way to go... I think in some ways wisdom and understanding has been demonstrated in the... in the um... the way that the different boys and their voices have been handled. In other ways I think I would have made more modifications with some of the songs they sing. Getting boys whose voices aren’t settled yet to start on a low G is a pretty big ask! And that song was a great song... but it just... everything that’s supposed to happen in that song doesn't happen, and that’s a knowledge thing and that’s an experience thing. I don’t say that as a criticism, because I talked to a particular conductor about that... before that performance.
S: Yes.
C: Um... so, they’ve got... you know they’re very young, they’re only nine and ten most of them. When you hear our older people who didn’t get to sing with them last year sing with them, you hear this whole other sound that you didn’t hear, which is what we’d like everyone to hear all the time, there’s a frustration, and the way the school operates and what people come to etcetera, etcetera. So yes, I think they’re successful and because they understand and they want to do... they want to sing more... they want to understand... and know how to do things better. Then we are creating a musical hunger in there, which is you know a wonderful thing as um... for them as musicians and using this particular medium to play in.
S: I’ll ask you quickly... do you have a time limit here... do you...
C: [Nods]
S: How long do you have left?
C: Well, I probably should go and have a class right now.
S: Okay!
C: Do you want to ask me all those other questions?
S: I mainly wanted to ask you... just to wrap it up if you like... um, because you’ve touched on a lot of those other things that I was going to ask you anyway... I will ask you why you think boys in some cases don’t belong to choirs or don’t want to be part of choirs... in the short space that you’ve got.
C: There’s two things... but they both come wrapped up in image and perception, okay? [Student name], who is a fantastic musician, said to me one time... “I sound like a girl Mr C,” when his voice hadn’t changed. He was in Year ten. I said, It’s a fantastic thing... not be... because I know because I’m old, if you... Glen Winslow, you know, who is Australian Opera's shining tenors... his voice didn't change till the end of year ten, okay. My voice didn't change till you know, during year ten. I love those boys, I understand those boys... but I also understand, you have to come back to... you were asking a bit about how to handle change in voices... do I do an Aled Jones, and I don’t sing for four years... or do I sing, and what does that do... if I don’t know what I’m doing and my
teacher doesn't know what I'm doing and it kills my voice... um... and when I come back again I've got this thing I can't control [makes sound of broken voice trying to sing]... can't pitch a voice [makes a deeper sound], I don't have a bass... beautiful bass voice, but I can't pitch a note... I haven't been exercising control... with the muscles that do all that, you know... and I have to relearn all that. How do I do that? Do I do that in a supportive environment, and do I know it's a supportive environment... or are there expectations I don't know about... and that's one of the reasons why I'm scared of what's going to come out and if I'm in control of it. What people will think of it? Okay? I can be scared of what people think of me depending on my environment. I'm just thinking... we don't really have here... 'Oh you're in the choir... you're a... all those words, you know... I don't have to... good! Um...and um...you know Mary Lopez overcame that by having 'boys' football choir'.

S: Yes.
C: They sang butchy stuff and they fell in love with her and that was all okay. And I like that guy on the television. He runs all those choir things and he gets them to do, you know, quite... all those amazing things. Quite impressed with him in some ways, but... he does pick... you know, the repertoire that he likes [pulls a face] but he does seem to jolly them around, you know, um... does come down to what other people think of me... and um... a lot of it's the same with instruments, you know. We pick instruments like guitars, trumpets, saxophones because they're... they're masculine and they have a great reputation...you know. Why don't we pick up those things because they don't have the same image? They have an image problem... or I won't play music at all, you know... or I only want to play drums because they're... yeah, a masculine thing. There is that thing, you know. But if my friends are in it, it's just as important... a social thing. It's funny... girls... they say music is a great way to meet girls, but boys at school never make that connection.

S: [Laughing] No!
C: I don't know, but it never occurs to them! But if I'm in the choir there's all these good looking girls, you know. They just don't do that. Sometimes in a musical they finally work it out. Most of the time it's the same people. "I don't have... do I have to hold her hand... you know, this is Grease... we don't hold hands in Grease! We just sing about it". So there is that thing, that social thing, but if their friends are in it and they're into it... but that happens with the band, the orchestra... with anything else. If I'm... and it's a pretty strong person, pretty committed, dedicated to my art... to go and be in something if my friends aren't. If they're there, we'll come as a friend's group, I'll come too. Okay. It's just a matter of persuading your friends. If you've got someone who's really good and you want them, you know... you've got to persuade them to work on their friends.

S: Thank you so much... thank you [name].

End of Interview
b) **Interview 1**

S: I’m going to start with the question, what are the things you enjoy most about singing in the choir?

E: Um... well... I enjoy singing, basically, ever since... ‘cos I came from [Suburb] Public School where the music program is quite ingrained into the school, so like, it was quite normal for everyone to join the band and the choir. So, I’ve always enjoyed singing, so I guess, the main reason I enjoy singing in the choir is that, when we kind of started we were looking for just people who could, you know, who were willing to do it. And so it’s part of the whole thing of like, I’m kind of helping others get into it as well.

S: And things at the moment, like when you’re singing in the choir at a performance or even a rehearsal, what do you like about doing that?

E: It sounds good.

S: Yeah?

E: Like it’s... you can... it’s hard by yourself to sing a melody and a harmony. It’s impossible, but when you’re part of a big group you can really get that whole sound and it’s a bigger sound... and it’s, like... it’s just good to be part of a group and you can sing and it just sounds really good listen to.

S: So you particularly like voices in harmony?

E: Yeah... voices in harmony. Just different parts making a cohesive whole and it just makes everything sound good. That’s part of why I like it. It’s because we can come together and... at the start, we could sound really crap! Like there are performances where we have just been *absolutely* shocking and to go from that, to going to like when we perform at an Eisteddfod, which is so much better, it’s quite amazing really.

S: Yes... great! Are there things about being part of the choir that you don’t particularly enjoy?

E: Ah... *[thoughtful]*...sometimes. I don’t like people trying to put themselves above... like... and I see that... and I could be guilty of it at certain times as well but... when the choir’s about them, when it’s not actually. It’s about everyone else and so people would see it as, this is the chance, you know, for me to sing really well as a solo performer. Choir’s not about that. The parts are written for chorus and for multiple people and so... it’s like... *[throwing his arms out wide, dramatizing]*..."I’m the star. Everyone’s here to support me." That kind of thing. That kind of mentality. It’s just for like... it’s not... it’s kind of about everyone here to do it together.

S: That’s really interesting. How would you describe success in the choir setting? Any choir, your choir, whatever you think.

E: Umm...

S: What does success mean to you in this context?

E: *[laughing]* Winning Eisteddfods.

S: Yeah? Okay so winning competition-style things?

E: Yeah... but not entirely. It’s basically... it comes back to everyone gel-ling. So even like at the stage we were at last year, there’s still things we go, “we need to sound...”... there’s still parts of the choir that stand out and so we need to gel as a choir. Success is really when everyone opens their mouth and it sounds like
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one voice, of multiple parts not multiple singing one... you know... thing. So it needs to be, the choir is one instrument not different people [nervously biting fingernails]

S: So it clicks... it just works...?
E: Yeah... it just clicks, you know? All the parts are where they should be. All the... everyone's... I think everyone's... it just needs to gel together.
S: Does that include things like the relationships between people and how people are feeling or is it just more of a technical thing that you're talking about?
E: Ah... probably more of a technical thing but I guess people are more inclined to work with each other if they have a good relationship with each other. I think it comes back down a bit to that "I'm a star... I don't really like that person so I'm going to be better than them." I think we just kind of need to be "well I'm supporting them, they're supporting me, we're supporting everyone" and so that's where it comes into where relationships kind of do matter.
S: Yes... the group mentality like you were talking about before.
E: Yeah. You need to have a group mentality that we're here... everyone kind of needs to have the same mind-set that we're here to sing as a group.
S: Great, great! Would you consider your choir successful?
E: [moving head side to side, weighing this up] Um... yes and no.
S: Okay. Why 'yes' and why 'no'?
E: Well, 'yes' because in the short time we've been going, we've achieved great things. But, in saying that, we're still working on elementary, you know, techniques and things like that, about singing as a choir. It's just, you know, we're very young as a choir, and so, you know, that we've had great success in what we've tried to do, but as the stretch of what a choir can achieve, we've done quite little.
S: So what are some of the things... when you talk about the great things you've achieved in a short space of time, firstly, how long have you been together and secondly, what are some of those things? I know you mentioned Eisteddfods...
E: Well, we started... I think it was about Year 9 when we started, when I was in Year 9, but that was kind of an on and off thing and it only started really... [interrupted by door opening]... so we only started really coming together and gaining momentum from about last year. So great things that we've done are probably, um... it wasn't all of us, there were a select few, because we couldn't take everyone, because we didn't have um... in the time constraints... we went and we've sung for nursing homes and we've done things for charities and things like that, which really... I think when you hear the feedback you get from those kinds of things you think "whoa, we've really been making a difference to people and our singing is not just about the Eisteddfods". Like it's good to go and get, you know, second place, or whatever we did, but at the end of the day going to a nursing home and making people feel so much better about themselves is really a bit more valuable than winning a trophy.
S: So in terms of success, like we were talking a moment ago, I guess one of those things is what you can give to other people, and if you feel like you've done that, like in the nursing home, that's a form of success to you.
E: Yeah. It's, you know, I guess it's success in that they liked it and they want us to come back again so... that's always good so... Because if you're going back for
the second time it means that you've made an impact and you've made an impression.

S: And does that make you feel good?
E: Yeah. I remember on the way back up last year, it was all the way from here to [Place name], on a wet bus, which was really hot, and, you know, there were only a few older students and there were little kids yammering, yammering, but, at the end of the day, we went there and we made a lot of, possibly lonely people feel better.

S: Mmmm... excellent. Now in terms of yourself as a singer, do you consider yourself a successful singer?
E: Ah... [A long thought time here]
S: I guess I'm asking what that means.
E: Well... sometimes I would say 'yes' and sometimes I would say 'no'.... [laughing]... again!
S: Okay.
E: Well I think that in terms I've had some parts of success like I've been asked to kind of perform on assemblies as a solo thing and, you know, when I do those things people have said, "Oh, you sounded really good", which, you know, I like to hear because it's kind of like, well it's good that I sounded good because... I mean I can be a judge of myself but what do other people think is kind of what really matters. But when I look at other people in the choir like... examples of [Girl's name] and [Girl's name]... their technique and their... just what they're able to do, it's so far out of range of what I can do. They can... they're the type of people who can look at a piece... like a page of music and go, "Oh yeah, that's what it sounds like". I'll kind of have to go, "Alright, just give me a play through and I'll work on it" but I guess that came... I think I used to be able to do that to some sense like when I was in primary school but because it was like at the end of Year 6 to the start of Year 9 when we actually started doing a bit more choir that I... I'm just a bit rusty, I guess.

S: Okay. In terms of being a boy in a choir, have you experienced any difficulties? I know you just mentioned maybe being a little bit rusty reading music and those sorts of things... can you think of other things that have been difficult at all?
E: Ah...
S: ...particularly in relation to being a boy.
E: Alright. For a boy, I think, it's a bit... I think you'd expect boys not to be so self-conscious but they are when it comes to... you know... because singing is quite an intimate thing. You're revealing a lot about who you are in a sense. And I think as boys, especially in a high school choir... because when you go to like a primary school choir all the boys and all the girls sound exactly the same but, in high school there's this period of change for a boy, which, you know... their voice breaks and they get [vocalises here to demonstrate the voice going all over the place] you know, that kind of thing, and you're left with something completely different to what you were before. So some things I've struggled with, you know, is trying to sing really deep [spoken in really deep voice] when I can't really do it and trying to hit the high parts, which, you know, seven years ago I probably could've. But it's just that thing about you've kind of just got to fit into what you can do. It's trying to find where you are again. Because, I guess
for a girl their voice doesn’t change too much. Like, it matures but there’s no kind of drastic change. It kind of matures of the age and it’s a slow, gradual process so they’re always in tune to what they kind of are but for guys it’s just this rapid change and so everything before, I have to kind of find what I can do again. So I think that’s kind of why it’s a bit harder for boys.

S: And did you struggle with that quite considerably? Or did you sort of work it through alright?

E: Um... I guess sometimes when I was finding parts from... I guess when I used to sing by myself, when my voice was breaking, things like that.... When I was in Year 6 in our primary school choir, I was singing an octave below most guys [laughs] but it’s just kind of finding... I guess I found it pretty well. I have a pretty good understanding of what my voice can do but I guess I sometimes struggle with the fact that I can sing... in a song there will be a range [motioning with hands] from here to here, and my voice is from here to here [motioning again but lower positioning]. So I’ll be singing the right notes but when it gets to the high notes where I have to go down an octave lower, which to me, I really wish I could hit those high notes because that’s the contour of the song, that’s how it goes [demonstrates what he means here by singing an example]. I don’t know... for me it’s just a bit annoying sometimes because I want to be able to hit it. I think it would have a better effect for the song, like, personally as a singer, but at the end of the day, you know, it’s just the songs you sing, you’ve got to sing them however you can.

S: Did you have much technical support through that voice change period or did you just work it out yourself?

E: I kind of worked it out myself. So basically the foundations of how to sing were laid when I was in... ‘cos like infants and primary school, that’s where I was singing and we learnt how to sing and, you know, opening your mouths and things like that. But when I wasn’t it was just singing for how it feels comfortable, and so I figured out what my voice could do in that sense where it was comfortable. You don’t want to strain your voice, which is not good, so I didn’t really have too much technical support. Um... my brother and sister did singing, especially my brother. He had singing lessons for about... a few years when he was about 20. He’s 7 years older than me so there were parts when I wasn’t in any choir and he’d say, “You need to open your mouth.” Because when I sing by myself, I kind of have that airy... like... [Demonstrates the airy sound he uses]...that kind of airy, earthy sound. But he was saying, you know, “You need to open your voice” so you’re like... [Demonstrates singing in open style]... which isn’t the same thing. Because I sing for myself... when I sing by myself, I’m usually playing on guitar and, you know, it sounds a bit better but it’s how... it’s how I think it would sound good and for me it sounded better if sung like that, which was more comfortable but technically it wasn’t probably the best thing to do. So I guess, ‘no’ I didn’t have much technical support. I just kind of found my feet and just went with what felt right.

S: Great. Thinking about boys and choir again, why do you think... I mean we’ve talked about the voice change element... why do you think boys might not belong to a choir, aside from maybe voice change issues?
E: I think... ah... again, it's quite... singing is... I guess there's a stereotype around singing that it's, for want of a better word, it's a wimpy kind of thing to do.
S: Yeah... okay.
E: You know, like, the famous singers of, you know, times past, were guys who had been, you know, castrated and things like that so I think there's this dogma around guys singing that it's a bit of a thing, you know, it's a wimpy thing to do, it's a girly thing to do because singing... it's a show of emotion, which for guys... guys, I think, don't show emotion very well and so that's why I think boys find it a bit harder and that's why I think boys tend not to gravitate into choir. And like, even when we do choir now, you can see, like... “Alright I want the guys to... all the guys, I want you to sing this part just so we can get it,” and half of them will be like... [Demonstrates singing in mumbled, quiet nervous way – 'I still call Australia home'].
S: [Laughs] So they're still quite shy...
E: Yeah, it's this sense of shy and, you know, I guess they don't want to open up.
S: Holding back?
E: Yeah, which is something that I find... I don't know, maybe because I sing differently in the choir to when I sing by myself because when I sing in the choir I don't really have that breathy thing which would work for a solo performance but I think because I've sung songs, which, to people, I wrote, I know what it means to put myself out there and so when I'm in a group it's not so bad because I'm in a group and, you know, I'm blending in and so I see my voice as part of the whole. So I guess for myself I'm not so self-conscious because I know what it's like to put yourself out there.
S: That's really interesting. So different contexts will change the way you feel about that and you don't hold back as much as somebody else might in choir.
E: Yeah.
S: Okay, that's really good. Tell me, is singing in a choir something you would like to continue doing into the future?
E: Ah...
S: You're in Year 12 now, aren't you?
E: Year 12, yeah.
S: So you'll be finishing school soon. What will happen after that?
E: Well... I definitely want to keep on singing. So whether that comes in the form of a choir, I'd do that, but for me it's like I want to keep... music is kind of like a passion for me. I recently dropped HSC Music because I was doing 14 units which was way too much work, but when I dropped it I had to tell myself that it's not because I don't like it, it's because... it's for these other reasons but music is always going to be a passion for me. I'm always going to want to play guitar, I'm always going to want to sing, so whatever shape and form that comes in I'll take it.
S: Okay. So is choir something you will actively pursue or will it just be if that presents itself as an opportunity you'll do it?
E: Yeah, if it presents itself I'll probably grab the opportunity and take it, but... I don't know... for me I tend to like singing by myself a little bit more than singing in choir just because I can choose the songs, and I tend to like the songs
that I’m singing that I choose because, you know, I chose them... [*Camera falls over.*]

S: I’ll just put you back up there!!!
E: Yeah, because as a solo thing, when you’re by yourself you get to choose and you tend to like it because... you know it’s that sense of it’s about me or it’s me singing. It’s me pouring out, it’s me showing myself, but as a choir it’s like... you know... we’re a group and I like that and I really do appreciate that in choir, but I think that into the future singing by myself will probably be a bit easier to do. So like, if the chance comes, if someone goes... if I’m at uni, if I get into uni, all this kind of stuff, if I get into uni and if there’s a person saying, “You should come join the choir,” I’ll do it. But unless there’s this kind of... I’m not going to go out of my way to pursue it because, at the end of the day, it’s going to be a little something extra I’m going to have to worry about and... when I can just go home, jam on my guitar and things like that. But, that said, if the opportunity presents itself I’ll probably jump at it.

S: Mmmm... that’s really interesting. You’ve kind of answered the next question in some ways, which is what would stop you belonging to a choir. So you mentioned if the opportunity was not there after school, that’s one thing that would stop you. Is there anything else you can think of?
E: Ah, coming back to that... I think for a choir to work it can’t have any standouts. If I joined a choir and it was obviously all about someone, then I don’t think I could do it because, you know, I don’t think it’s fair to everyone else. To be honest, I think I can a little bit in our choir. Sometimes it is about certain people and it’s just kind of like, well I feel we need to pull it back and look at the big picture and not just, “you’re the star and we’re all your support”.

S: Do you do anything in that situation? It’s obviously a frustration because you’ve mentioned it a couple of times. Is there anything you do about that?
E: Um... [*Long pause*]
S: Not really?
E: No... there’s not. For me I don’t feel there’s much I can do. I might be a bit scare... [*Does not finish the word, laughs nervously*]... it’s a bit... you know if I said, “It’s not all about you,” I guess there’d be that argument back saying, “Well, you’re just jealous.”
S: Right.
E: Which, for me, I guess it’s that little thing that’s like well yes I’d probably be a bit jealous, but because I’m jealous that it’s not spread equally.
S: Yes, okay.
E: It’s not the fact that I’m not getting my part. It’s the fact that everyone else isn’t getting their time to shine as well.
S: So it comes back to what you were saying before about it being the group.
E: It needs to be a group. It needs to be a group and it needs to gel cohesively and I think people need to want to be there. I don’t think choirs work if people join it for the wrong reasons.
S: Okay. In terms of the importance of choir for you, you’ve mentioned your love of singing, your love of music. That’s obviously one reason why choir is important to you. Is there anything else you want to mention?
E: Choir was kind of important to me, especially for... well for primary school, for starters, it was important because that was what you did. That was how you fitted in. I think, to be honest, a lot of the people did... because what we did in primary school was we went to the... we were part of the Opera House choir.

S: Oh, okay.

E: So each year... we prided ourselves that we were good enough to get into the Opera House choir, 'cos they only selected a few schools. That's what they said [laughing] but I reckon they selected most of them! But ah... It was really cool because we got to go to this night out and all that kind of stuff and it was really fun and it was a highlight of the year but I guess what makes choir important is... I totally forgot the question! [Laughs].

S: It was simply if there were any other reasons apart from the things you’d mentioned, for why it was important to you.

E: Oh yeah! Ah... sorry.

S: That’s alright!

E: For this choir, I think it’s also a bit of a thing about leadership. As time went on... because as I said we had the kind of Year 9... when we started in Year 9 it didn’t carry over. Like each year we’d get together and sing something but last year was the first time that we’re going, “this is our choir.” Because... there weren’t any year 12’s in it and I found myself being the oldest boy singing in the choir. There was only a few out of the Music class... there was about 4 of us from the Music class that sung in the choir and the other three were girls. So there was this thing about... I have to take a bit of this leadership on...

S: A bit like a role model.

E: Yeah, yeah, things like that and so...[Name of Conductor] would say to me, “I want you to stand in the middle of this group of boys so you can... [mimes singing]. Sometimes I think people... sometimes I think it’s hard for them to get the melody and sometimes it’s just hard for them to open up and sing but if they can see someone doing what, you know, I hate to toot my horn in this sense, but if they saw me singing loud, like as I should be and as people should be...

S: ...with some confidence...

E: ...with some confidence, they’d kind of drift towards that and start opening up and singing right and things like that.

S: Mmm... fabulous. Now I am more than aware that you have an excursion to go to, but is there anything you want to say before we finish? Anything you haven’t said that you want to?

E: Ah... no, I think I’m pretty good.

S: It was fantastic. Thank you very, very much.

E: No worries.

End of Interview
c) **Interview 2**

S: So tell me what are the... What are the things you enjoy most about singing in a choir?

J: Right [...] It’s a place where I can express my musical talent in choir and be able to you know, just sing and have fun.

S: Yes.

J: Be 'round my friends.

S: Yeah, okay. So, the things you enjoy are obviously singing, being able to express yourself, being with friends and...

J: [Nods and smiles] Yes.

S: Now tell me are there things about belonging to a choir that you don’t like, that you don’t enjoy?

J: Well, ooh... some people can be a little authoritarian sometimes [laughs], like, “No! Stop, you’re doing it wrong...”

S: Okay [laughing].

J: ... “just shush!”

S: Are they other people in the choir?

J: Um, yeah. Maybe one or two.

S: Yeah. Okay.

J: But it’s not too much of an issue. Overall it’s just great.


S: Okay. And do you... obviously they do it to other people, not just to you?

J: Yeah, truly.

S: And do other people... is it okay with them as well?

J: Yeah, usually, but if they’re doing it right they kind of go, “No, I’m doing this right”. Sing again.

S: Right, so, as you said, it’s not really a huge issue.

J: No, not a big issue, just irritating sometimes.

S: And just a [...] J: [...] to everyone. [Laughs] Just okay...

S: Alright. Thinking about success then, how would you describe success, particularly in the choir setting? Doesn’t have to be yours, but it can be just choir in general. What does success mean?

J: Eighteen million followers on twitter [laughs]. Ah, success, um... that’s a tricky one. Maybe... when you’re so good at it that you’re earning enough money to make a living for yourself.

S: Yes.

J: And it’s... that’s pretty much successful, and if you get beyond that then... that’s great!

S: Yes. Okay. So making money out of what you do, you see as success?

J: Yes.

S: Great. So thinking about your choir now, would you call your choir successful?

J: [Laughs] No!

S: Because you don’t earn money?

J: No. Not just because of that, because we’re pretty... just like rookies at it. I mean, I’ve heard other choirs and they’re like amazing, and we’re just like, yeah... [head in hands and laughs].

S: Okay. And so do you see any... anything about your choir that you would call successful? Even if it’s not...?
J: The people... the people in it. They're pretty successful in their singing capability.
S: Yes?
J: Um...
S: Because they sing well?
J: Yeah. They can sing pretty well, actually. Pretty good.
S: Yes? So you see that as success?
J: Yeah.
S: Alright. Anything else?
J: Well, um... We've been successful at um... we go and sing at places and we've got fourth out of like heaps of schools, so I don't know. That's pretty successful... in like...
S: Yep. In like a competition?
J: Yeah, competition wise, we're pretty successful sometimes.
S: Yeah?
J: Usually [laughs].
S: Right, so, if I think about what you've just said, success has different elements. So, the money was one thing, for a big choir...
J: [...] S: Yeah? And performing at different places? And maybe winning or doing well in a competition? And even if it's not winning, but you came fourth. So those things?
J: Yes.
S: Great. And the good singers? Would you... do you describe yourself as a successful singer?
J: [Laughs] Um... I don't know really.
S: Nobody else will hear this. I won't tell anyone else, you can tell whatever you like.
J: I... I honestly don't know, because people have said I'm great, and I'm just like, cool.
S: Okay.
J: Not really that much of a success. So...
S: So, if you didn't have people saying to you, "You're really good," do you think that you would sing?
J: Probably. Because I enjoy it.
S: Okay.
J: And even if I'm singing like, I dunno, a dying cat, I enjoy it! [both laugh].
S: Good! Okay, cool. Have you experienced any difficulties, being part of a choir? Or singing in a choir?
J: Yeah...
S: Yeah? You said that with a smile.
J: My voice. You know, when you reach a certain age? Sounds... it kind of broke and I'm like, "oooo" [does this in a deep funny voice].
S: Right. So did you have like a boy soprano voice to start with?
J: Yes. I did. I was very boy soprano. Now I'm down to tenor.
S: Yeah? And how did you cope with that?
J: Well. Just singing in different places. So like, I'm definitely not soprano now, I'll go to alto. I'll try that out, and I was good at that and then it like came right through, and I thought, right, I'm not... can't do this... [...] S: Okay. And how did you... was that difficult from a technical point of view? Like you say you were just trying to find where you could sing?
J: Yeah, technically it was pretty difficult.
S: And was that the only difficulty? Did you have... how does everybody else respond when you're going through that?
J: "Ha, Ha [Laughing]. Your voice is cracking!"
S: Yeah. And how did that... was that okay with you?
J: I was fine. Like... "Shhh! It happens to everyone, proves I'm a man".
S: Good. So you weren't too stressed about it?
J: No. Not really.
S: It was just a bit annoying?
J: Yeah.
S: Okay.
J: Like [pulls on his throat].
S: And in terms of... oh, how would you put it? Um... technical support, like say from [conductor] who was leading the choir, did he help in any way, or did other people help you get through that?
J: He was excellent. He was always doing the notes on the guitar. He'd say, "Can you hit this note? Can you hit that note?" And you would try that note, he was... and [Boy's name] he knows music very well, and he's an extraordinary guitar player, so they have great understanding of what needs to be done.
S: Okay, you had a lot of good support around you?
J: Yes.
S: Excellent.
J: And my sister... my big sister, she um... she used to take singing lessons since she was like ten, and she's eighteen now, and she's... she's a good singer, she knows if I'm not doing it right.
S: Yes, so when your voice was going through that change... did those people help you through that in terms of giving you tips on how to like manage that? Or did you just kind of...?
J: Not really, I kind of worked through it, like it's not a big deal.
S: Yeah? Oh, good, you knew it would end at some point?
J: Yes.
S: Okay. Why do you think... I'm asking you to speculate here... why do you think boys don't belong to choirs? Obviously you do, and obviously there are other people, other boys in your choir, but thinking about boys generally not being part of a choir.
J: Okay.
S: Why do you think that might be?
J: That might be because of peer pressure. Obviously because they'll say that's like a girlie thing. You're not a man if you do that, or something like that. So there's that... definitely a big part is peer pressure.
S: And have you experienced anything like that, here?
J: Not really, like everyone's like quite supportive round here. So...
S: And you don't know of anybody else who's gone through anything like that?
J: Not really.
S: No? Cool. That's the feedback I'm getting at this school, that everyone's really, Yeah, no we're singers, that's what we do. It's nice.
J: Yeah, like in Year 9 we used to sit in the corner and like [Boy's name] used to be on guitar and we'd all sing, and if people knew the song they'd join in.
S: Like out in the playground?
J: Yeah. We'd just... Yeah.
S: Very cool. Awesome. Okay, thinking about the future, your future, is choir something you'd like to do? You'd like to keep singing in a choir...?
J: No.
S: ...in the future, no?
J: I'm wanting to go solo. I'm not going to... I don't want to be part of a collective group my whole life. I'm actually wanting to go solo.
S: You...? Yep. Can you tell me... can you tell me why that choice? Why the difference?
J: Um... it's easier. So, like you don’t really see a lot of like famous choirs, I mean, you don’t go, “I know that choir!” Like who the hell are they? [Laughs]
S: Okay. So you’d like to be a solo artist?
J: Yes.
S: Can you tell me a little bit about that? How do you sing, what do you sing? What style? What do you want to do?
J: What do I want to do? Oh, well probably like more modern type of singing, you know.
S: And do you play guitar?
J: No. I used to play the piano. Just voice, you know. That's all.
S: Yeah, part of a band or...?
J: Possibly, possibly a band, like three, four, five people. I’m cool with that so...
S: Yeah, yeah. So, can I ask you in light of that, what is it about choir... why are you in the choir?
J: Help develop my voice.
S: Okay. Interesting.
J: So if this can help me now, it'll get me better prepared for the future... going, breaking away and going solo.
S: Yes.
J: I've known bands that have done that before they've all broken apart and had solo careers.
S: Yes. Yes. So it's kind of a preparation thing?
J: Pretty much, pretty much.
S: Train your voice a bit?
J: Yeah. I can’t afford singing lessons. I’ll just go to choir.
S: Why not! Good. And do you think that is helping?
J: Yeah, I think it is. I think I’ve gotten better over time. Being in the choir, yeah.
S: So even if you had a wonderfully successful, I’m now a famous solo artist, is choir anywhere in the future?
J: No. No.
S: Very interesting, cool. I’m going to finish by asking you why being part of the choir is important. You’ve kind of just answered that. I’ll give you a moment to elaborate on that.
J: Sorry... what?
S: Why is it important to you? Being part of a choir, why is it important to you? We've just talked about it being a chance for you to...
J: ...develop.
S: ...develop your voice. Is there anything else?
J: Um... I enjoy fun. I mean it’s fun. It helps me with the future. It’s yeah, I don’t know, that’s basically it, really.

[conductor walks in and interjects]
P: What do you get out of choir? [leaves]
S: Yeah, what do you get out of choir?
J: Um... friendships. Friendship.
S: Okay.
J: You can develop relationships with people in the choir. What do I get out of it?
S: And are your mates part of the choir? Those boys in the choir and the girls, are they your...
J: Yeah.
S: School friends?
J: Not particularly. I’m kind of a free floater. I kind of float around to... you know how schools have like the cool kids, the geeky kids...
And then the guy that just fits with all of them...

[laughing] Yeah... Kind of!!!

So in terms of what you get out of choir, you’ve got the whole friendship thing happening, you get the... sort of technical training, that opportunity to do that.

Definitely.

Obviously you get the chance to sing and you like to do that.

Yeah, that’s definitely part of it.

Anything else in terms of why it’s important? [pause]. You’re allowed to say ‘no’. I just want to give you the opportunity.

Ah... No.

Alright. I’ve come to the end of my questions here but is there anything that you, in terms of choir, any thoughts that you have that you haven’t said and you’d like to?

Not that comes to mind straight away. What do you mean?

Like I’m thinking... some of the things you said were interesting about some of the difficulties related to being a boy in a choir. You mentioned the peer pressure idea. Can you elaborate on that? Tell me a little bit more about what you think on that one.

I think because guys aren’t usually part of like a choir. Like... most choirs do have guys but if someone sees a guy singing like, say soprano in... a guy singing soprano, in a choir, they’re like, “Nah, that guy is definitely a girl,” or something like that. It’s kind of like this idea that you’re not really a guy if you sing too high. It’s strange. I don’t know why. Society these days [joking, sighs and laughs].

Now you said that you used to sing boy soprano... or soprano. Was that with this choir?

Yes. That was with this choir.

Okay, and how was that for you? In light of what you’ve just said, did you experience any trouble with that?

Um... I didn't sing anywhere other than choir and at home because it was so, you know, up there [gestures high].

But the choir was okay with it?

Yes. The choir was okay with it and they all tell everyone that I’m an amazing singer. They go, “[name] sing,” and I’m like, “No, don’t feel like it. I’ve got a sore throat, you know” [laughs].

So you sang at home and you sang at choir...

...at choir.

... but you wouldn’t sing anywhere else?

No.

And was that because you feared what people would think or what they would say?

Yes. Yep, definitely.

Okay. So the way around that was just not to sing in those kinds of places.

[laughing] Yeah. ‘How do I get around this? Just shut up’ [laughs again].

That’s really interesting. Do you think that there are other people in your choir like that, who’ve had a similar experience?

Um...

I know that there’s one who sings soprano at the moment and he’s a Year 10 person.

Yeah, he doesn’t sing outside of choir, that I’ve seen, at all. He... he’s a pretty good soprano singer, yeah. He’s great but he goes, “I don’t like to sing in front of people” and I’m like, “Yeah, same here, I just hate it” you know, stage fright sometimes, but um... I’m pretty good in front of like a big audience... but like just with your friends... it’s kind of like, “Umm... not really.”
S: Yeah that's interesting... Thank you for saying all that... I was particularly interested in the difficulty thing and the voice change. You didn't have anything else to add?

J: No, not really.

End of Interview
d) Focus Group

S: I'll start over here... Can you tell me a little bit about when you started the choir?

[interruption]

J: Well, when I first joined it was like last year and I only joined 'cos my friends did and I'd never really sung at all before, except for like in class stuff and then, yeah, after I did join I did start to enjoy it.

S: Going round the circle...

C: Yeah... um... Last year I joined as well like these guys and before that singing never really went beyond the shower.

S: Great! Everyone sounds good in the shower! What about you?

L: I did a bit of singing because my dad was into it and playing guitar but I definitely got more confident this year in singing and I guess I only really joined it... We were actually made to go to it at the start [laughs]. A few people had a problem with that so um... he made it fun. 'Cos I put time into it, I guess I just kept at it.

S: Is that the Music teacher who made you go?

L: Yeah, Mr S.

M: Mr S. Just wanted to get his name in there!

L: Make sure you write that down!

[All laugh – funny interactions saying the teacher's name to the camera!]

S: Ah... [name]?

M: So yeah, I started at the beginning of Year 9 like everyone else. In terms of singing... I've kind of always been interested in music from a young age so I'd always kind of sung a bit but when I was a bit younger. The times that I had sung out loud, I had been criticised a fair bit. I had a bit of a shaky voice.

L: [whispers another choir member’s name].

M: Yeah, [name]. Um... So I stopped singing publicly.

S: What sort of age were you then?

M: Ah well, the main one that comes to mind was kind of in Year 6 or something where I did a little performance or something and yeah, I was pretty criticised. So that was... for a year 6 kid pretty... even for an outgoing kid... I was pretty outgoing then but still pretty traumatic at that point.

S: Can ask who criticised you?

M: Ah... you know [name]?

S: Not really.

L: [mouths this name to the camera].

M: He's in the choir. I can't... you know like it was Year 6...

S: You're not scarred for life!

M: No [laughing]. I don't even really remember what happened. I did manage to ram a chair into his leg after the performance and the teacher didn't even see it.

[All the boys laugh about this]

M: But after that in Year 8, in Growth Groups, which is like a thing we have after recess...

C: Yeah that was really fantastic.
M: Yeah, I started playing guitar and like, lead singing. This thing where we do
songs, like Christian songs in Growth Groups, and throughout Year 8 in that my
[voice] like became so much louder and I just... as a singer I just grew in so
much confidence and I realised as I was singing that, “Oh yeah, I’m actually
sounding pretty good.” So singing out loud, but singing with other people was a
really good way for me to build confidence for that.

S: Great. [referring to C] Now I heard you just say, “That was fantastic,” when he
mentioned Growth Groups. Tell me about that. Why was it fantastic?

C: Well, it was just really fun singing in Growth Groups. Like every week, one day
we would just have a little sing. It was good.

S: Okay. You guys agree?

[all agree]

L: I wasn’t in that group.

S: Oh, you weren’t in that group?

L: I was a solo artist before I met these guys!

J: That was the only singing I’d done before I joined choir, was in that, so...

M: We sounded pretty good too... I remember you... [interrupted]

J: We actually did a performance at one point...

M & L: Yeah.

J: ...and we went up on stage...

M: Yeah, we got up on assembly and...

L: A lot of people did a lot more music stuff during Year 8. Like I remember... ‘cos
they had [school name] Got Talent and I remember you guys doing a little item
[laughs] with Mr W and Mrs H like with the hats [gestures] and stuff.

M: Oh yeah! In Year 8, at the end of Year 8 or was it Year 9? It was Year 8 though
wasn’t it?

C: [unsure] Yeah...

L: I think it was the end of Year 8.

M: At the end of Year 8 we had like a little a capella thing run by Mr W and we
were the bass part and it was um... yeah it was really fun.

S: Was this an item for something?

M: Yeah, but it was like... some of the younger girls and then the guys doing the
bass part, but that was real big... ‘cos that was before choir. So that was kind of
the first taste of harmonies and having a bass part but it was full of character,
like kind of that classic...

C: Wearing... [hats]

L: Remember [School name's] Got Talent ... remember ah... I think you were the
judge [pointing at M] and [name] was going to sing. He’s in the choir as well. He
was singing and I was going do backing vocals for that but I was too nervous
and um... anyway, I got up there, did the song, without backing vocals, did the
guitar bit as best I could and M [moves head towards M] criticised me bad! Gave
me a six out of ten [looking crushed].

M: [laughing] Well, I mean...

L: I out staged him... that’s the problem!

S: It’s because he’d been criticised by the other guy!!!

M: Exactly. I was bullied, I bully! That’s the way it goes...

L: [arm around M, joking] I feel your pain, man!
S: Alright. So you obviously all enjoy singing and you said some of you have a little more experience than others. You also mentioned a little bit about your voice [gestures toward M] and that Year 6 thing where your voice was a little bit shaky and then coming into Year 8 it got stronger.

M: Yeah, yeah.

S: [to the other boys] Do you guys have a similar experience of anything like that?

L: Ah, yeah, 'cos Year 8 was like... that was kind of like when singing kind of started for me and then... and Year 9... 'cos you guys had already done a bit of singing... I guess it kind of hit me 'cos everyone else was doing it so I kind of had to do it quickly and learn quickly. Yeah, but um...

S: And what was your voice... how did you feel about your voice at that stage?

L: Well, I felt pretty... like the first time I sung on stage was with M so I felt kind of confident 'cos I knew he had ah... already...

M: When was this?

L: This was our leadership song. Remember that?

M: Oh yeah...

J: That was good.

M: Yeah [nodding].

L: And I had [name] as well. I wasn’t... I think I wasn’t shaky because I had these other guys with me, I guess, which helped my confidence as well.

S: Right, okay.

J: That’s the same with me, like, ‘cos I don’t sing a whole lot I’m not heaps confident and stuff but... so when I sing I need another singer that’s really confident singing the same part otherwise I wouldn’t be able to do it.

S: And is that true even now?

J: Yeah.

S: Even after a couple of years in the choir?

J: Well, it’s only been like one year.

S: Oh, one year. Sorry I’ve lost track of time. Are you Year 10?

ALL: Yeah, Year 10.

S: So, you started last year in Year 9? Yes? Cool. [to C] What about you?

C: That Year 8 and 9 period, that’s like... in junior school you do all this singing and stuff but Year 8 and 9 was when I actually started to realise that I could sing... and it didn't sound bad.

S: Yeah... okay. [Boys agree and nod].

C: So that was when my confidence... so like, Year 9 was really when my confidence came up.

S: And was that something that you realised yourself, or did people sort of say stuff to you after hearing you, or you just went, “Oh actually, I can sing!”

C: [a little embarrassed] Kind of both.

L: I remember I commented in front of this girl that you really like, I said "He’s a really good singer!"

[Everybody laughs]

M: “... and he’s single!”

[more laughter]
Appendices

C: Yeah.... I guess it was like... There was one time in Explorers (Gifted class) we were doing a music type thing and then I was in a group with these people and I said, "Why don’t we do this," and sang a little idea and it’s like, "Chris can sing!"

L: Yeah, Mr S was pretty excited about that, ‘cos the girls um... I think it’s surprising that, ‘cos we’re pretty confident singers.

C: I know, it’s like...

M: It’s so weird!

L: Like the girls... are so quiet.

C: In the Music class the boys dominate.

M: The Music class sopranos are like “Ah” [demonstrates very quiet singing].

L: And with the worship band, we had lots of those girls in there and like Mr O, he was pretty annoyed at us ‘cos he thought that we were really loud... like our instruments, but the girls sing so quiet [said in a whisper].

M: It’s just that they’re singing so softly.

L: And he made sure we were like turned down so softly.

M: And then whenever I’d sing, he’d tell me to stop being the centre because you couldn’t hear anyone else... like I could hear you [motions to C] but...

J: Don’t worry, he sounds like a girl anyway...

[laughter]

L: Mr S was really sad about Chris being such a high-pitched singer ‘cos the girls were like... so quiet...

[lots of talking at the same time here]

S: [to C] Can you tell me about that? ‘Cos that’s... so you sing a high part?

C: [Smiling] Yeah.

S: I thought I had picked that up in rehearsal. Can you tell me a bit about that? What’s that like?

C: It’s really fun. I just love belting it out, the high parts and the guys are like, if they do that they’re like... “Aah!” [mimics trying to sing high and screeching]. So yeah...

[L and M start singing in high, falsetto voice].

S: So you haven’t copped any flack or anything for singing the high part?

C: No serious flack.

L: Oh yeah!!

M: Nah, we respect him.

L: Just joking stuff. In fact, I think we’re just a little bit jealous!

S: A little bit jealous! So what parts do you guys sing?

L: Oh... bass... baritone.

C: J sings a... [girls]... part with me!

J: [pointing to himself then the others] Alto, Soprano, Tenor, Bass.

M: I’m actually technically more of a baritone ‘cos I can go lower than Tenor can, but I just usually sing up in Tenor ‘cos... ‘Cos our choir is smallish it tends to work that it’s like which part is most easy. For example, like C, whilst probably more confident, or comfortable, in Alto, would sing Soprano just because our Sopranos need more confidence and so like... I’ll sing Tenor just because the Basses are a bit stronger.

L: There’s generally like a key person in each group. Like E will do Bass and M will do Tenor.
Yeah, so it's just good being able to fill the gaps, which is what we do.

Okay, cool… and the girls… how do the girls respond to you in choir?

So jealous!!!

They like the guys who can sing, so I think that's why we're all confident.

I think it's probably... I don't know... Do you think they're like encouraged by it or intimidated?

Like which...? There's like the choir and then there's the Music class and they kind of blend but they're also different.

Yeah. So in choir the girls are much stronger 'cos we've got like A, N, the older girls. Just in our Year 9 Music class, though, apart from K, I'd say there may be... they might be able to sing but you might not really know about it because they're just so quiet.

You can't hear them.

Which is confidence, but like, it's where we all used to be maybe a couple of years ago so you have to not... you can't really get frustrated but... yeah... it's just kind of annoying.

Okay. Well thinking about the choir context then, how do you find the girls respond to you?

Yeah... fine...

No problem?

A bit of yes, no. I don't think they 'dis' us or anything. I think maybe they're...

They're pretty encouraging. They're like, "That sounds really nice."

Oh, cool. What about, do you have friends outside the choir that you sort of hang with and stuff?

Yep.

And how do they... what do they think of the choir and you guys in the choir?

I don't think anybody really... it's not like a sex thing like they think the choir's for girls. It's not really like that at [school name] at all. It's like a pretty musical school. Like a lot of people play instruments...

I found it pretty interesting, though, 'cos at first, some of the guys in our grade, it was... I found it kind of hard that kind of stigma of a bit... gay choir. It's kind of understandable. You think choir and you think like... [vocalises high] you know so...

Which in my case is true!

[Everyone laughs]

Unfortunately!

So... I think those thoughts were nullified when they did hear that we were actually good and like now... I love getting to the point where I actually know that I can sing, so I don't care what you think. I think that's the hardest part about a guy singing is that... I think most guys at a young age just have the mentality that they cannot sing. So like I'm sure most of us did, so I'm saying like... as soon as someone goes... as soon as someone who can't sing looks at you and goes, "Oh, you can't sing" or something, you know, as soon as someone says that, it's really hard to get past that and it's really hard to get the
confidence that you can sing when in fact you can so... [shrugs]. The best thing
about choir is just being able to, in a safe environment, explore your voice,
establish that you can sing and grow in the confidence that you can.

S: And then you can get better and better in that context?
M: Yeah.
S: Ah... I had a question in my head and it's gone... can't remember!
L: You are smart, though.

[Laughter]
S: I'll hold onto that!!! Um... You've touched on this a little bit already in terms of
knowing that you're quite good... if you think about success and the meaning of
success, what does success mean to you? And this can be in any context or the
choir context, whichever you like, because I will ask you about the choir and
success but any thoughts about success and what it means?
L: I don't think it, in the choir context, is being famous. I think it's actually... I
remember having a band and I had to get everybody doing the right thing. And
if you have the right thing at the same time, and it's all perfect, all polished, I
think that's a successful piece of music. Where like in the choir we practise it,
we get every bit nailed and polished then that is a successful thing.
S: Okay. So it's like as a group working really well together?
L: Yeah, that's successful.
C: And presenting something that's enjoyable to hear.

[General agreement]
S: From an audience's point of view?
C: Yeah and having fun.

[General agreement]
J: I think like... I'm being completely honest I think that having fun is the biggest
part of it. Like if I wasn't having fun, I would have quit ages ago. So, I mean
that's the largest part.
L: Yeah... [...]... got to look forward to it.
M: I think, as well, like if... it wouldn't be success if I got my part but the Sopranos
didn't have their part. So, like L was saying, if it doesn't sound good as a piece or
it's uneven, I don't think that's a success. I care about the whole piece sounding
good as well. And as well the fun, 'cos I just have fun when I sing so...
S: Yeah, okay. So, you talk about enjoying yourselves and having fun, working
really well as a group [boys nodding – “yeah”] and part of that is knowing your
own part but in the context of everyone else knowing their part, and also it
being enjoyed by listeners? [All nod] Anything else? [pause] It doesn't matter if
there's not!
L: Umm... success...
S: And you talked about not having to be famous. That wasn't success to you guys?

[all thinking]
M: I mean, if it sounds good and everyone's having fun then what more is there to
achieve, I guess.
S: Okay. Do you guys perform a lot?
M: As in... what do you mean? In the choir context?
S: In the choir context. Apart from rehearsal, do you go off and... I mean I saw you
at an end of year concert.
We did some retirement homes but that was only like, I think... we only really do stuff at like the end of Term 2 and the end of Term 4 'cos that's when like a lot of things are happening such as like, you know Christmas and stuff like that, but, I don't know... I don't think we perform much as a choir unless there are events we're looking forward to.

Assemblies and stuff.

I think we do. 'Cos we did end of year assembly, retirement villages, we did that competition...

WOW Day.

I think we've done... we did WOW Day. We've done probably a fair few assemblies...

They're all Term 2 stuff, and 4.

So at certain times of the year... school functions...

Yeah, there's like peeks and then...

Yeah, it just depends on when there's things on. But as well there was another retirement village thing that I did with some of the other choir people, but that was kind of at the beginning of choir so it was really just a small thing.

Okay. You mentioned a competition?

Yeah...

And there was... also there was... these guys didn't go to it...

[to M] Oh, the Eisteddfod.

Yeah the Eisteddfod.

That was like half way through the year or something.

There was also this like... Seventh Day Adventist Church...

Oh, the thing on the Saturday.

Yeah, yeah... that we ah... sort of to raise money for something.

There was only six of us that did that, which was me, E...

That was like the retirement village thing I did.

So just a small group of you.

Yeah, so I think Mr S was pretty good in organising events for us. It's like, I didn't feel like we were just learning songs for the sake of it, like there was always kind of like a goal or a ... Sorry [to C for talking over him].

Do you find that useful, having something to work towards?

[All nod]

Definitely.

I just like performing, so yeah!

What about you? [to J] Because you were in it for fun, as you said before, would it matter to you if you didn't do any performing?

Well I think like fun is a big part of it but I think the goal of choir is to perform for other people as well. So I think if we weren't doing that there would be a big part of it missing.

So that's part of the fun as well, going and performing?

Yeah, it is fun going to places and performing. Like when we went to the retirement village that was fun and we were just singing carols and stuff with the old people. That was good.
S: And did you get a good response?
M: Always.
L: Yeah, we did. J: Yeah, it was good.
S: They love it, don't they!
L: And we talked to some of them too, even though you had to shout at some of them that were deaf, but it was good! [Laughter]... but it was nice talking to them.
M: I just think, like, when we sound good the logical next step... like I want to show that to people. I'd be disappointed if we didn't get to show our work to people 'cos I think it's really good.
S: Alright, so why is that? Can you explore that a little bit for me? [to the others] You might like to help him. If it's good you're saying you want to show that to other people. What's that about? [all looking at each other] Why do you feel that?
L: To show people we do stuff!
M: [joking manner] A desire to be accepted!
L: [thinking] I don't know...
[All start talking at once]
S: So you obviously want other people to hear that you...
L: Yeah, I want people to notice that I am musical. I hate um... I hate it like when someone goes, "I'm looking for a guitarist," and I'm like, "You're looking at one!" You know like, I... if I can do anything musical or something like that I will... I'll go out of my way to do it.
S: Okay. You enjoy people knowing your good at something? Good at music?
L: Yeah. 'Cos like that is like... me, my brother, my dad, that is like what we do. That's a big part of me. I don't think... if I didn't have that I'd be one of those people who's not really good at anything, who's just kind of floating their way through.
S: You mentioned it's part of you... is that a similar kind of feeling... is that why you've got to express it? And have other people hear it?
L: Yes.
J: But also I guess because we've put so much effort into it. If we didn't do it, it would feel like it's just gone to waste... sort of...
S: Okay. [to C] What about you?
C: [awkward] I don't really know... I guess like, what's the point of having a formally organised choir if you're not going to perform anything? 'Cos like if you just want to get together and sing some stuff you can just do that anyway, but if you're going to have a choir you may as well perform things. And it's great fun performing and it's good experience as well.
S: Good.
M: I think as well... it probably stems back to... I think choir is much less of an individual thing as well so like... when I go I don't really feel like I'm saying, "I am musical," because they probably can't even individually hear me so I think... I remember the first time when choir kind of like got together... or maybe a couple of times in... and we sang I Still Call Australia Home and like for the first time all the harmonies worked and it was like he first time I'd ever heard something like that, and like we finished and I'm like, "That was insane!!" And
then, it’s just such a unique form of music that you really don’t hear a lot of these days, so to have contemporary songs like that just sound beautiful… and I love the voice. I’m just like, “well I want to show this to people because it sounds really good”. That’s probably the main reason.

S: Excellent. Anything else you want to add before we move on?

[S: shake their heads]

S: Alright. Can I ask you about… [to L] you’ve mentioned that you do music as an individual or soloist. What’s that like and how is it different to choir? [pause] I mean M has touched on it a little bit by saying that the whole group thing is quite different… can you compare them for me?

L: Well I find it… I remember being in a band and I had to like get everybody else to do things… [interruption]... and it was kind of hard to like teach everyone what they’re meant to do and the only person who could just do it straight away… just listen to the song and be able to do it… was my friend T who played drums, and I got really sick of it and just totally ditched them before… like we were meant to play at this fundraiser and I was like [head in hands], "I can’t do this!" So I gave up on them. I just find it so much easier if I can… like it’s nice to work with other people and perform in a group, but like it’s just so much easier if I can sit down and write my own song by myself without other people trying to influence it and do something like go a different direction and not going ah… I’m just singing a song and I don’t have to worry about somebody else messing it up ‘cos like it’s mine.

S: So how does that compare with you singing in the choir? How is that different? Does it cause the same sort of stress you were just talking about?

L: [hesitant] Yeah… ‘cos I remember when we went to the Eisteddfod, the Altos missed their cue and it was like… there’s this pause and they were meant to be on it and then they like kept… they kind of started… and it was like… [head in hands] you know, I was just a bit annoyed about that.

[S: Laughter]

L: It’s just so much easier.

M: [joking to C, a soprano] It’s ok! [more laughter]

L: [says something to J…?] …hate you! No just joking [reaches out toward J; laughter]

J: You owe me five dollars!

L: I do! Um… It’s just so much easier when I’m by myself and I don’t have to worry about what other people are doing. It’s just like I have to work it out myself.

C: At the same I reckon if your singing as a group, if you stuff it then the other people are still singing. They’ve got your back.

M: They’ve got your back, yeah.

[General agreement]

S: So people can cover it up!!

M: Unless all the altos and all the sopranos stuff up… [lots of laughter]

J: I guess it also easier to learn in a group. Like if I was by myself I would not be able to learn the pieces.

S: Like you were saying before. You need that other person to listen to.

J: Yeah.
L: That’s the thing in choir. ‘Cos like sometimes we have three harmonies and if I don’t have E or M to listen to, yeah, I’m bound to stuff it up sometime, but when I’m by myself it’s fine with the main harmony of the song, you know. Like, I can get that straight away. Or if it’s one of Blink’s songs where they don’t really have much...

M: Like the melody!

[Laughter]

S: So in terms of... and this goes for any of you... as an individual performer in the context of choir, does it feel different? You mentioned a couple of things. Does it feel different performing as a group as opposed to just you? Is that harder? Easier?

L: I’ve never really actually done anything or performed by myself. I guess in a group if I’m like singing and playing in front of a few people, but that’s not like an official thing...

M: Yeah... I, for my job, I play and sing in a restaurant. Play guitar and sing at the [restaurant name].

S: Oh right!

M: Actually [name] has come a couple of times, but um... I really love that. It’s just a really different kind of performance. It’s much more dynamic when you’re by yourself because you just have, obviously, control, way more control, and it’s kind of more improvised. Yeah, that’s really good, but one of the things I really enjoy about choir is that... I previously... in all of my previous attempts to be in a band or something I just kind of get frustrated ‘cos... especially in Year 7 Music, for example, it was very much like I’ll write every part. Like bass, drums, everything and then like, “Can you guys try and play this?” So it was... I felt like, you know, it was almost all me anyway. But then, one of my most profound experiences with choir was when we did the smaller group of singing at the retirement village and I realised, “I am supremely out classed here and it’s so good, because I don’t even have to watch anyone’s back. I just have to concentrate on what I’m doing.” And it was so great to be around people who were like heaps better than me and I was just like totally amateur. It was really good, so...

L: I know the feeling!

M: It’s really weird, isn’t it?

L: It’s like my Dad’s friends. A few weekends ago we were just jamming and they’re like insane! They can do... like me and my Dad are like [demonstrates slow playing with his hands]... my Dad sucks, I’m pretty good and then they’re like [hands up in the air] guitar gods! And I’m like, “Oh man,” and they’re like, “You can solo now” and I’m like, “Okay... da na la [vocalises pretending to play guitar].” It’s like, “Oh that’s a nice hammer on. I can do this...” Awwwhhh... [laughs]. It’s just like... so I just had to focus on my bit. I didn’t have to... I remember being with like other people... I was with um... my brother used to play bass for the band but he dropped it ‘cos it was uncool to be with Year 9ers or whatever and then I had this guy [name]... something. I can’t remember his last name... he just like, filled in a bit. It was hard ‘cos he’d only been learning for a little bit so we had to try and teach him. And then I was like with my Dad’s
friends, which was easy ‘cos they knew what they were doing. I didn’t have to show them how to play it or anything.

S: Mmm... A similar thing to what you were saying [to M].
M: Mmm...
S: What about you guys? [to C and J]. Do you do anything as soloists at all? Or is choir your kind of, thing?
C: Not really, other than just singing randomly.
S: In the shower?
C: Around the house, with my sister, washing up - best thing ever!
M: I bet! I always sing round the house. I get home and just... I realised the other day how easily my neighbours can probably hear me!

[Much laughter]
M: ’Cos like when I’m at home, I always just go for my highest notes, so I’m just like, belting it out, and I can just imagine them saying, “He’s not even singing a song”.
L: Well I live on acreage so I can get out the mics with all my amps and... actually my neighbour tried to come over and sing Elvis with me and I was like... [eyes to the ground, embarrassed, shaking his head]... he’s like an old English guy [laughter].
S: Okay. You’ve also touched on this a little bit but I’ll ask it more specifically about difficulties. Have you experienced any difficulties being part of the choir? I mean you talked a little bit about frustration with people maybe not knowing their parts. Anything else? Any frustrations?
J: I suck at harmonies!
S: You suck at harmonies! And how do you combat that? The person next to you?
J: Oh, I sort of... yeah. That’s what I saying, I need that confident singer.
S: Yep. Is the main thing that frustrates you or that you find difficult?
J: Yeah, I think so.
C: I don’t know. Sometimes it’s a little bit annoying like in the Music class where I’m pretty much the loudest high part, so... especially in People Get Ready, I’m pretty much soloing but not soloing!
M: [girl’s name] really sings in that, though.
C: Yeah. She’s getting a lot better now. But like that’s not really frustrating. It’s just a bit, “C’mon you guys, you should... sing.”
S: “You can do better than that.”
C: Yeah. But it’s also really fun! [All laugh]
S: [to L] Anything else for you that you find difficult?
L: Um... I’d really like to do my own soloing bit. ’Cos I know M gets to do a lot of that and I’d like to do that but I never really get the chance to and I’m not really recognised much as a singer so it’d be nice to ah... have that opportunity. Then again... [smiling]... I’m probably not as good as I think I am! Yeah but I’d really like to do that. I remember, I think it was the other day we were at J’s and I tried to ah... it was at my place... anyway, it was somewhere... and we were just singing along and I did my own bit, then M was like, “That was crap!”
M: I said, “Nice!” ’cos...
L: He was sarcastic about it, I remember that!!
M: It just... [head in hands]... [laughter]
Appendices

Perceptions of success influencing male participation in choir – S. Powell

It was a Blink song so...

The song sounds bad in the first place!

Yeah exactly.

No, it was a [...] song, but anyway... yeah... um...!!!

Once, when we were on holidays, we were just mucking around with recording

M drops head to the table at this; laughter throughout] and I'd never done any

kind of solo or anything before and M was convincing me to do it and he was

recording it, and it was terrible!!

There was just this one note. It was like, "Wah," [lots of laughter].

Do you set it up for us to look bad?!

No, no... [lots of laughter and talking over each other].

We just are!

It's really hard, soloing. When we were singing last year, like one of the last

times, you were like, "Chris, solo," and I was like, "what?" [terrified expression].

[to M] I remember when you had to solo and you were like really nervous.

Oh my gosh, yes... I know, I...

It's just like, so... [pulls a stressed face]

I've gotten better at soloing, but I think the first time I soloed, I probably hit

about fifty per cent of the notes I tried to get [laughs]... It's just... it is an

advantage playing guitar and being able to solo on guitar...

Yeah, 'cos like you have the visual of it... [general agreement]

Do you find that easier on an instrument rather than vocally?

Oh yeah!

Ahh... yeah, probably till now, but I've gotten heaps better at soloing, just

because... especially... I've always kind of been able to sing little bits at home.

Now when I hear music I just always sing to it. So it's mainly practise but as

well you just don't get the kind of pressure you get in soloing unless you're

soloing, you know? Like in a choir space, even at home if you're singing, you

only really get that feeling when you're doing it and like even now, I think,

when I solo I always go... I get goose bumps all over me... like it's not like I'm

even that nervous or anything or embarrassed anymore, it's just like the most

amazing feeling. It's amazing.

The adrenaline...

You just know that you are not singing as part of a group anymore. You're really

going for it.

And are you, when you're talking about soloing, are you talking about, in the

context of the choir, and you've got that little section where...

Yeah... So that they might still sing their part and then you go louder and you

sing... yeah...

Is that generally improvised?

Yeah. Like pretty much always, so that's pretty hard. Like I have a loud enough

voice that you can hear me soloing, um... It's just a lot of pressure 'cos

improvisation plus more embarrassment for me if you fail, like... awww, it's

crazy but it's also awesome. It's really good.

And C, do you have those opportunities as well?

Not so much the improvising [seems uncomfortable] but I don't mind. It's really

stressful.
M: So stressful!
S: But you were saying as well that when you sing the soprano part, that’s usually up there and out there, isn’t it? Everyone can hear you.
C: Yeah. But then I’ve got a set pattern. Like I know the song. Like, *People Get Ready*, I love that song and so I can just sing that, but when you’re improvising you don’t have it mapped out, what you’re going to do. It’s like, “Ah, what do I do next?”
S: Yes, it’s quite confronting.
M: Yeah.
S: And as you say, if you get it ‘wrong’ everyone hears it!
M: Yeah, ‘cos you’re not going to... yeah!!!!
S: So what do you do at the point when you think you’ve got it ‘wrong’? I mean, improvisation... anything goes, right?!
M: Yeah. I just kind of laugh and then just try again.
L: Smile...
M: Then try and help everyone get over their laughing at me by doing something really good and then they’re like, “Oh, that’s really good.” Move on. So you’ve just got to keep going. If you stop, that’s worse, I reckon, ‘cos then it’s like, “Oh, he can’t solo.”
S: Okay, like, “He did something wrong!” *to L* Do you get those opportunities?
L: Well only... Not with singing, but guitar I do ‘cos that’s what I mainly do on guitar.
S: You find that quite easy to do?
L: Um... I remember I didn’t really find it easy until, I think we were at a church meeting and M was like... all I was doing was playing chords... and like I wasn’t really that confident, and then M was like, ”Just try and play more,” and I thought I’d try and do what he does where he does little solo bits and melodies... nice melodies... and I guess that’s what got me into doing solos.
S: Great! *to J* What about you? Do you do any little solo bits?
J: Nah. But I don't want to! *[Laughing]*
S: Oh, that was going to be my question. If somebody asked you to, would you do it?
J: Nah.
M: When you guys listen to music do you kind of just solo and stuff over it?
J: No.
C: Depends on the music.
M: Yeah, I always do that, so...
S: Make something up over the top?
M: Yeah. Or make up a harmony or something. ‘Cos you get over singing the melody so I just always harmonise now.
C: Depending on the song and the songs you get up the [location]...!
M: No way!
S: So, in terms of the repertoire or the choice of the types of music you sing in choir, do you get to choose that or is it imposed on you?
L: Umm...
S: Do you like it, hate it, wish you could do other stuff?
At the start, Mr C recommended songs to Mr S. and then he told me, after we went to the Eisteddfod and stuff, "Oh, okay," and then he chose songs he wanted to do. Mr S, you know, I think, in mind he had something he thought, there’s the stuff we wanted to do... and yeah, I think we... I guess we didn’t really have a say in the first. But I mean, he didn’t really say after we’d done the Eisteddfod, but it was stuff we would have enjoyed anyway.... Oh we did...

I think, in choir... it’s like, either the older people or the teacher or whatever, chooses the songs, but in our Music class, it’s like, we all just like... we’ve done Bohemian Rhapsody, we’ve done things like that... Yeah, we’ve tried [laughs]. We, like, make our own choices in choir... I mean in our Music class.

L: At the start, Mr C recommended songs to Mr S. and then he told me, after we went to the Eisteddfod and stuff, "Oh, okay," and then he chose songs he wanted to do. Mr S, you know, I think, in mind he had something he thought, there’s the stuff we wanted to do... and yeah, I think we... I guess we didn’t really have a say in the first. But I mean, he didn’t really say after we’d done the Eisteddfod, but it was stuff we would have enjoyed anyway.... Oh we did...

J: I think, in choir... it’s like, either the older people or the teacher or whatever, chooses the songs, but in our Music class, it’s like, we all just like... we’ve done Bohemian Rhapsody, we’ve done things like that... Yeah, we’ve tried [laughs]. We, like, make our own choices in choir... I mean in our Music class.

M: I think in choir we had a fair...

L: Yeah, we did...

M: Mad World was pretty...

C: Oh yeah, that was mad...

J: Like they’re good songs. I just wouldn’t pick them.

M: Maybe you did not, but I’m pretty sure I like, suggested Mad World. Ah well I definitely said, "Yeah, let’s do Mad World."

C: It’s not like we say, "We’re doing this," but it’s also not like the teacher says we are.

M: Yeah.

C: It’s more like, "Would you guys be keen for this?"

M: And if we said, "Mr S, we don’t like this," he’d be like, “Okay, let’s not do this then." It’s good, though, because if we only did contemporary songs, we’d miss out on stuff. Like, Gonna Reach My Heavenly Home, for example. I mean, I don’t know if you guys really like that, but I love it. I think that’s so much fun to sing.

[general agreement]

J: I like it.

M: And ‘cos I get to conduct it!

J: That song was the first song that I had to do without another confident singer as well.

M: I could hear the tenor parts and you were doing pretty well, seriously. And the tenor part is hard. I struggle with that too.

S: And People Get Ready... That Negro Spiritual style or gospel...

M: Yeah, the gospel style...

S: So you guys like that style?

M: Oh... it’s just kind of fun to sing.

L: Um... yeah... fun...

S: Sounds good in a choir.

M: Yeah, it really does. I mean it’d be kind of boring to do them all the time, but they were just kind of... really nice...

C: Fun little... they’re all kind of short and sweet.

M: Yeah, oh except for Gonna Reach my Heavenly Home. It’s SO long! It’s so hard to conduct. So, yeah, you know I was conducting?

S: Yeah.

C: Sections everywhere.

L: And you always have to point to us for the bass bit, like... there’s like this gap and then we start... and we don’t really know where to start!
S: That’s hard… So how did that come about, you conducting that song?
M: So… um… I’m pretty sure from the beginning of the year, in Year 9, like whenever we’d done stuff in Music… you know… we got through more than half of Bohemian Rhapsody. We definitely got to the a cappella bit, and we had that pretty good, but anyway…
S: That’s pretty hard work!
M: Incredibly hard!!
L: That’s the first song we pretty much tried to do, and it’s like...
C: One of the hardest!
M: And like Mr S let us do that, too. So I was kind of conducting that out the front and then in choir, I didn’t conduct a lot but I would kind of like, in a way, lead the part… I guess… that I was in. Just help people if they needed it. So then, yeah… Gonna Reach my Heavenly Home was… he asked me to conduct it for the event ’cos he wasn’t going to be there and then he saw me do it and he was like, “Oh, you can do it anyway.” That was just really hard because I had to sing the bass part and take a solo in it and conduct the whole time! So because the bass part was really low it was like… [demonstrates having difficulty singing really low]… oh… really hard to do it all.
S: That’s really interesting. It is hard to do! Thinking about boys in choir, now you’ve already said about this school… it’s quite supportive of singing and music and all those sorts of things, so just thinking hypothetically, why do you think boys might not be part of choir?
J: ’Cos singing kind of like a girl thing, I guess, generally.
C: It’s generally associated with that.
L: A lot of girls, I guess… I don’t know… I kind of find that a lot of girls don’t play an instrument, but they sing… They ‘sing’ [motions inverted commas with fingers and laughs].
[M now imitates a girl singing – laughter]
S: Explain that [copies the “inverted commas” motion]
M: “I sing at home… very quietly, but I’m not going to sing now!”
L: I’m not saying they’re bad singers, I’m just saying that they… it’s kind of… It’s almost like an excuse to be… part of the music thing. Like, “I sing” and then you try to get them to sing and you can’t hear them, and it’s like, “I thought you sung!!” “Yeah, I sing.” Oh, you “sing.”
J: It’s like, with Worship Band we’re like musicians and a couple of singers and then a whole bunch of girls came along and were like, “we sing,” and then… So we have nearly a choir of girl singers and then when we go up on stage you can only hear M and like one or two of the girls…
C: This is M we’re talking about!
L: Yeah, and when you do hear them… I remember, where was it…?
M: Ohh… so shy!!!
[Laughter, loud groans, heads in hands!]
L: We wrote this song and we had it like awesome and then…
M: Then there’s this one… one voice… I think it was [girl’s name]
J: I’m pretty sure it was S…
M: … and it was so sharp and we were like [crying and groaning from all]
L: 'Cos we had it recorded and we had all the stuff we did that night, like Blood and our leadership song...

M: [shaking his head] It was just so sharp! It's just... um... it annoys me when... I don't get annoyed at other people if they're not confident with singing. I get annoyed at people, though, if they're in Music and it's like, "What do you want to do?" 'Cos they sing, and yet they don't sing, and they don't play an instrument. They don't have to play an instrument but I just wish they'd do something so I can put them in my group and give them a part, other than just like... [mimes the girls 'singing'].

L: It's like A. She's confident at singing and she actually...

M: ...plays the piano...

L: She's really... plays piano...

M: She could be more confident singing. She doesn't really sing with the soprans.

L: If she wanted to she could be one of the best.

M: She's not really that confident...

L: But she's... she's... I don't know...

M: Well, think about... Can you hear her singing when you sing with her? 'Cos I can't.

C: Not really... but I'm normally belting it out, so...

M: Nah... nah... I'm pretty sure... I think she has a nice voice but she doesn't really sing that much, but she plays piano.

L: At east she's confident in other areas, yeah.

S: So M, I'm just going to duck back to the question about boys and being part of choir. Why do you think they might not be? We've talked about it sort of seen as a 'girl thing'... any other ideas?

M: Boys... um... let's see... Boys' voices just naturally do something different than girls' voices. So like, boys in choir, their voices are either high or kind of in that breaking stage, which is pretty hard to handle, or low and it's really...

L: And I can show a few moments [to testify to that]!!!

M: Yeah, I know! So it's really, I mean, it's hard, as well, for a choirmaster to get... to put them in the right place. For example, it's hard to say, you know, "J, you go with the altos." Or do you put everyone with the tenors and just know that people aren't going to be able to sing their part. So it can be really hard for someone whose voice hasn't broken as much as someone else's, to be able to say, "I'm not going to go with the basses because I can't sing that low." And as well, especially when you're voice is breaking you just have less control. Like I get more control every month because my voice is just getting... you know... so... you just lose heaps in that period. However, I think you're really missing out if you don't sing then because I mean we all sang. [to L)... You and me sang through that crap time and then it's alright. It's just you get teste pops!

S: So the "crap" time is the...

M: Voice breaking time, yeah. It happens worse for some people. Mainly it's just that, you just heaps of THESE things [demonstrates voice jumping high on 'THESE'] which is so annoying!

L: I remember...

S: So did you sing through it? You sang through all of that?

M & L: Yeah.
Appendices

Perceptions of success influencing male participation in choir – S. Powell

L: I remember we like... we were practising for the Seventh Day Adventist Church thingy, anyway, and M... Everybody else was there, and it was just me with A and N and Mr S and there was just me singing and she was just like... 'cos I had to be as loud as I could, and when I had them... my testes popped and it was just like... and they kept laughing... and we stopped half way through the song... [All laughing].

J: Do you remember in Year 8... when you brought a guitar? We were singing the song you wrote in the courtyard...

M: Oh yeah...

J: ... and it went like just too high for you and... you had a massive testes pop!

M: But, but, yeah... but what's weird is when we were singing that song, right, and I couldn't quite get that note, even though my voice has broken more since then, you actually... I think when your voice is breaking, you actually lose some range and then you get it back. 'Cos I can hit that note now and I couldn't hit it when my voice was higher. What is cool, is when you're singing and your voice is breaking... you're singing this song and then you realise, "I can go two notes lower now," and this just happens without you even noticing, so that's cool.

S: Did you get any support through that time? Like technical support?

L: We never really worked out our ranges or anything.

M: I just did that 'cos I was interested in it, but apart from that...

S: So you just pushed through it on your own?

M: Yeah, I guess. I mean it was pretty obvious where everyone should have been singing like, it wasn't... Everyone just kind of knew and I guess... it would have been nice to have some help but like, I didn't. For example, I kind of wanted singing lessons but then I was like, "I'll just wait till my voice breaks a bit more 'cos I don't want to learn all these things like singing really high and then lose like an octave and then, you know...

S: Yeah. Have you guys [to C & J] had any trouble with voices breaking?

J: Not yet [bit embarrassed].

C: No.

L: You will soon [laughs].

M: Your voice is pretty low... [to C].

C: I just, like I naturally speak pretty much at the lowest point in my range.

M: At your lowest... Yeah, that's weird, hey!

C: Like, I just... speak like this...

L: That'd be like me speaking like this [speaks in lowest voice possible].

M: [Also in lowest voice] Like me speaking like this...

S: So do you still use, when you sing, if you don't mind me asking, do you use a boy soprano voice? That full head voice sound?

C: Actually, I sing in chest voice.

S: Ahhh...

C: So like, it's pretty funny 'cos my chest voice can go higher than my sister's chest voice.

S: Wow!

L: Really?!

C: But my sister is mainly a head voice singer. But there are bits in songs where she like... her chest voice is a bit... eerrrrr! But I can... do it in chest.
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Appendices

M: Yeah... I just thought that all of us have like pretty much an identical range.
C: Like two octaves.
M: Like we all have two octaves in chest voice or just like all at different parts. So there's no... it's just really interesting.
J: And also, for me... like my range hasn't really changed much but my comfortable range has gone from the high part to the lower part.
S: So you've sort of strengthened it in certain areas?
J: Yeah. 'Cos like I used to be a lot more comfortable singing a lot higher, but now I prefer singing alto or tenor. Like tenor kind of area... yeah.
C: It is a muscle, so... the more you sing in one way, the better you get.
M: Yeah, so for me, I've gotten... yeah I can go... 'cos it's really amazing with C 'cos even though we have pretty much an identical chest voice range, he can just access his part... like my head voice, or falsetto or whatever goes really high but in terms of chest voice, he can access the top of his chest voice really easily. Well, compared to me. And I used to have to really, like be fully warmed up to even get there, but now, as I'm constantly singing higher, I can access it much more easily now. So I've gotten much better at hitting... 'cos it's annoying when you know, like here's a note I can hit but I can't hit it right now. That's really annoying. But now I've gotten much better at that.
S: And that goes back to what you were saying about it being a muscle.
C: Yeah. It's very much about practise.
S: Very interesting. Now, thinking about the future... I know you're only in Year 10... is choir, and specifically choir at this point, is choir something you want to continue into the future? Obviously immediate future but also thinking outside of school.
L: Um... [Hesitant]... I would like to, but the thing is I know it's... we never really do anything musical together unless it's a church or in school or unless we're just having a fun jam sess. There's nothing we really work on to polish to perform in front of anyone.
M: Yeah, we're not like a band.
S: So it's very much based at school. So being at school means you do it. Or at church.
L: I just can't imagine anything outside those areas where we do something like that, unless I try to organise other people... which is just hell!
S: Yeah. Okay. What about you guys? Is it something you want to keep doing?
J: I'd like to keep doing it in school, like for the next couple of years but I'm not sure about out of school. Just 'cos... there's stuff going on, I guess.
C: I'd be keen to but it's going to be harder because there won't be like school choirs. Here's the school choir, just come at lunch time. It'll be more like I've got to search for something or build something up myself or like... the music thing with you guys [to M & L]. I'd be heaps keen to do something after school finished.
M: It'd be so good.
L: It's just like... school's a community and it's easy 'cos we kind of all have like base times and we're all together. Whereas when we come out, we're all going to have to be like in our own different worlds and stuff and we're going to have to make time from out of that.
S: It's harder to organise, like what you're saying?
L: Yeah. I'd really like to but I can just see it being a big hassle. I remember like having a band, I had to like... I'm not sure if the guys were just lazy or if they were just forgetful, but I remember I said to them, “Okay guys, every Saturday, at one, be here, you know. I shouldn't have to tell you every week.” Then Saturday, like, they're not there. What do you know! Yeah, I remember that, I posted a message on Facebook. I didn't have to tell them anymore. Oh, really, yeah, I just... [puts his head in his hands] [...] 
S: What about you, Miles?
M: Yeah, like, I think once you leave school like C said, I mean there's less immediate options for being in a choir. There's not like... school choir's pretty common, and then you get like those kind of bald fifty year old male choirs, but then there's not, commonly available, it doesn't appear there's a lot of middle ground choirs. Um... but at this point it's not really looking like I could give up on music... so I mean... I'm definitely recording my own stuff. I'll definitely keep playing and doing stuff. In terms of choir, I really like harmonies and things like that and I'd definitely do something with harmonies um... whether that would be via a ah... choir, like whether that would be available or not, I can't know, but... 
S: So is it fair for me to say that if something was organised already, close by, after school has finished, obviously you're a bit older... would you go?
M: Yes.
C: Yes. I'd go.
L: Definitely... yeah, I'd go so long as... didn't have to organise it.
S: As long as you didn't have to organise it? And... if it was the bald fifty year olds, would you go?
M: Am I a bald fifty year old at this point?
S: No.
M & L Oh, actually...
S: Maybe, university. Look, you've finished school.
M: I'd probably do it, because I just... it's so much fun and fifty year olds can sound pretty good, so... I think, um... yeah [with emphasis]. I just really like singing in a group. It's just such fun, because it's so... it's just so different to sing by yourself, because it's really like just about you, which is really refreshing in music... when it's equal um... especially with... um... if it was just other guys... there's not even like a... because in our experience it's very much like guys in choir and [everything else is] just quieter, so it would just be more even.
S: Yeah. So do you like the idea of an all-male choir?
L: That'd be cool, like [...] 
M: You'd need to have different ages... like you need to have tenors...
C: A whole choir of basses...
M: That would be sick!
[All laugh]
S: That would be pretty cool... [to Chris] So do you like the idea of an all-male choir?
C: I don't mind...
L: I wouldn't mind it.
You'd get less range, though. Like when the... I do love it when all the... all our choir with the girls when they're all singing, sounds really good.

I can just...

I just think... the problem with a whole choir is like the girl part, apart from the... the tenor part is usually big, but even that is often really, because there's just the girls often there's heaps of them as well, so it's very much like the guys are providing the support for them... and in an all-male choir... I just I think I naturally prefer a male voice... I don't know... I just like it a bit lower. Like I prefer an alto to a soprano... that's what I prefer.

You like that sound?

Yep. I don't know [shrugs].

Any other comments about that?

I reckon... um... a girl's voice is different and does add to it...

Oh, definitely, definitely it does.

Because, even... I know I noticed... I could, obviously when I heard your choir sing, I could hear your voice, and I'm aware of the male voice um... as opposed to a female singing a soprano. Because, like you say, that colour, it's quite different.

Yeah.

That would also be kind of because I'm doing that in my chest voice.

Yes.

Yeah, in falsetto it's quite... like... yeah. It'd be really good to... I think if I could do one thing it would be to get my falsetto... because I've got this, like I can go as high as a lot of girls can in their head voice... with my falsetto, so if I could use that... so do like you know Jeff Buckley, like, or even Tom York or something... and um, be able to fully access that as strong as my chest voice, that would give me like such a good range [agreement from others] because when you go in...

Hard to control though, isn't it?

Yes.

I can control it... because I sing in it all the time. It's just that it's not as much strength as my chest voice, which is really loud. It's like [waves his arms]...[talking between L and C]

...[...] you sometimes miss, like really wonky edges...

I think for me, because I'm always singing chest voice, even in the high bits, I'm still singing in my chest voice... I'm like... I'm not good in my head voice... you know?

Because you don't use it all that much.

Yeah. [...] getting a little bit better because I've got this [...] routine and all that...

That any good?

Yeah, it's great... [all laugh]...but um, like a lot of what he does is in head voice, and so it sounds very different if I sing in chest voice and so I sing along and do it in head voice, get the same sound...[...]

Um... yeah, like I think, I guess hard for kids music wise, the bits where you often want to go in falsetto are like really high climaxes, so it's alright in a burst if you have like a nice falsetto, but it's really hard when you build up that like...
melodically and you’re like [half sings ‘Aaaa’] and you go into falsetto and it’s way down here... so...

L: Can’t think of many head voice singers besides that guy, and the guy from Passion Pit like...
M: Yeah, but Jeff Buckley’s a falsetto... amazing!
L: But do you guys know anyone, like personally, like that?
M: N [...] only sings in head voice.
L: No, but guys?
C: Just guys.
M: No... there’s heaps, they...
C: Have you heard of a counter tenor?
M: But that’s not...that’s not falsetto, is it?
S: Yes. That’s like fully trained falsetto.
C: They go, like that opera sound.
S: Yeah.
C: Falsetto.
M: Yeah... but in terms of like contemporary music...um...
S: Or people in your class, is that what you were asking?
L: Oh, anybody you know personally.
M: I don’t think... oh, R has some pretty sick voices.
L: I remember asking...
M: [...] You can get it there. You can train it to the point I reckon... can you train your falsetto to the point where it’s as strong as your chest?
S: Yes.
M: That’s crazy!
S: But it’s like C has been talking about, the quality of sound is very, very different obviously. Like the difference between a pop song and an opera, kind of thing.
M: Yeah, still but like to be able to use that. It’d be like usually... we have all these guns round here not loaded, like we have all this range but we can’t even use it. We can use it a bit [...] but it’s so annoying ...
L: It’s like having memory on a computer, but you just can’t access. I remember [...].
S: Yes?
M: We need more analogies.
S: Yes? No that’s good. That’s interesting.
C: Like [Indecipherable – everyone laughs and talks at the same time]
L: It’s something about music. It’s just like you can’t [...] you can’t choose a part [...] and you want that bit, and that bit...
[indecipherable...all talking at the same time]
L: and I felt like I should know and... I just thought it was something that singers would know...like...some of them probably know...
M: I’m always like... I’m always trying to go for... I’m like, “Can I get to A sharp”...
S: Like a mission.
M: [Sings a note in a funny voice – all laugh] Yeah, got to it!
S: Can I ask you... we’ll finish up in a moment... but um, just going back to the idea of success. Think about yourselves personally, you know, whether that’s as a soloist or in the choir... do you consider yourselves as successful singers? And
what does that really mean? You were just talking about range, M. That’s part of it. [Pause]. Who wants to start that one?

L: J!
All: J!
S: [...] because you’re so laid back I’m going to make you do it [laughing]. Do you consider yourself a successful singer?
J: Well, I do enjoy it.
S: Okay.
J: I don’t think I have the best voice, but I do enjoy it.
S: And you get the job done?
J: Yes.
S: Yes? In that view would you say that’s successful?
J: Could be better.
S: Could be better, okay. Does that matter to you?
J: I really would like to have a good voice, so...
S: Okay. Do you kind of actively look for ways of getting better?
J: I just… just sing along with the others, and stuff, I guess.
S: Cool. Thank you.
C: Well, I really enjoy myself, and I don’t [...] that as success… [...failures...] [all laugh].
S: I reckon it sounds pretty good. No one throws anything at me. So...[shrugs] J: [...] [laugh]
C: [Hands to cheeks in mock horror] [...]
S: So you would consider yourself successful?
C: Think so...most of the time...
S: Because you enjoy it and you [...] you believe that other people at least... at the very least don’t hate the sound?
C: [laughing] Yes.
S: Okay. What about you... I forgot your name...!
L: [says his name]
S: Didn’t want to say it, just didn’t want to get it wrong...! [...] I will, imprinted. [all laugh] What about you, do you see yourself as a successful singer?
L: Um... I kind of have this goal where I want to be... like I want to be able to play guitar and sing, in front of people or in the church service... okay if I’m not going to do that I [...] with M, that’s when I consider myself a successful singer. When I’m at that point... like, I think I could do that now, but I just think it’s like a lack of confidence with myself and I just don’t really get... like I do get out there... like, show myself, but I don’t really um go out of my way... like, I... just band stuff with other people... solo person. I just wish... I wish I was doing something like that... I would consider myself successful...
S: What are the reasons that you don’t...how did you put it...don’t feel so confident? Do you feel that you’re not good enough? I don’t want to put words in your mouth, but...just trying to get to the bottom of it.
L: I just wish I had more opportunities and more chances to be able to do stuff like that. I don’t really know, like I, how can I...
S: ...get into it....
Like, ask somebody like, to sing in their café. I remember my guitar teacher left for Queensland, and like he organises students to play at like restaurants and stuff [...] when he came back [...] who’s going to get me to do that and it kind of stopped and I was like, Oh, man and [...] I would really like [...] and now he’s back I’m hoping to do something like that, but I don’t really know how [...] any other way to [...] yeah, play stuff like that, you know.

Okay. You might have to talk to M.

He doesn’t really share things with me. He doesn’t like sharing.

[laughs]

[laughing] I did take his [...] I took his Friday night at the club [...] 

[...] but anyway. Um [...] Yeah, I...

Yes. Success? Are you successful... a successful singer?

Yes.

Tell me why.

Again I can...

You’re good looking...

...fair enough! I think... I can get, I reckon, I have the potential to be heaps better, right now, but, I think success is not based on full reaching, you know, your potential. So um, as I’m really confident within, so I’ll sing like just randomly on the bus or something... So, I don’t know how much more confident it really gets than just randomly like... to the point of even annoying people... singing in front of people.

Oh, like... I remember I had my guitar and I had like these three chords and I just started singing to random people. I remember I went up to Mrs Kemp ... she’s a pretty grumpy teacher, not sure if you’ve met her...?

I know Mrs Kemp very well!

She’s not grumpy.

[...] going to say something nice... no you [...] suck up to her...

Yeah, so I think... um...

So it’s not about knowing everything?

Yeah, no, because I think then, that would be successful. I think, I’ve got confidence. I really like my voice, I think I’m pretty happy with the tone, and my range is like all right, um... I play and sing like at a restaurant, so... that’s a really good way for me to use that [...]. Like every afternoon like I’m singing pretty much as much as I could and I’m confident, so... yeah I play and... [shrugs shoulders] and I’m good at it, that’s pretty successful.

Good. And back to the future, very quickly... back to the future [derisive tone]?

Very good!

[...] 

It feels to me as though singing is something that is very important to you at some level in life. Is it something that you think will always be part of who you are and what you do?

Right, everyone answer on three! One... two... three...

[loud and emphatic] Yes! [All laugh and make comments]
Thank you all so much. Does anyone... do you have anything else that you want to say? Do you have a burning desire to say and we didn’t get to?

Yes... [leans over to shake S’s hand] I’d like you to come again.

Anybody else?

Um... [thinking deeply]

Doesn’t matter if you don’t. I just thought sometimes people just think, “Oh I wanted to say that...”

I do... um...

You do?

I think um, I think maybe the choir could be seen as gay because of like Justin Bieber because... I mean, this is serious, he does a lot of pop songs and he’s seen as gay, and guys are seen as singing being seen as gay. I remember... I was reading some post on a site like ten songs or whatever, yeah... and it put, like Indy, Pop... any Indi or pop songs so I guess that...

So it’s kind of is reflected in terms of whatever is popular in the charts maybe or... in the culture...?

Yeah...

I mean...

...and has a big effect on what’s happening?

If you think... in terms of difficulty of... not so much difficulty of singing itself physically, but it’s in more kind of stigma wise and um... socially, do you think that teenage boys would be the hardest spot to be?

Yeah, I think so. Having been a teacher and having taught people in those kind of years, it seems to be an issue. Not everywhere I go though. Here it seems to be something very accepted in the school culture.

Yeah...

...and I think that plays a huge part.

Yeah it is... weird...

You guys have said that... that very thing.

Yeah, but it wasn’t always, so it’s weird.

Yeah?

Maybe it’s... we’re good so everyone’s like...

And it helps to have confidence. You’re obviously quite an outgoing person who can... I don’t know, is it... correct me if I’m wrong... that personality that encourages other people to stick with it and so it generates that sense...

I don’t know... I think... I guess I’m a bit more confident, because I’ve been hanging out with M... and I wasn’t like.... I remember singing and playing in front of other people was like a no-no... I won’t go there, and [...] oh, okay... And he didn’t care.

And he didn’t care, and I’m like well, I might be like that. I might stick out my neck a bit.

Yeah. It’s interesting why some people do care and then some people don’t care.

Well I think that Miles didn’t care that much because...[turning to Miles] you’re an outgoing person and people wouldn’t do somebody that popular I think... you are popular... but you’re not like an idiot popular...
M: [...] *All laugh*.

L: But yeah...

S: So personality has something to do with it?

L: Definitely.

S: And like you say maybe social status of some [...] What you’re saying? Were you going to say something before?

C: Yeah... um... having a group of... or only one confident, skilled person to um rally around, can be really good. A lot of the stigma stuff you’re talking about... if our school wasn't so accepting and supportive that would be like... times ten for me.

M: Yeah, that would be really hard. Yeah, you do... it is really hard. It’s pretty amazing that you haven’t received any genuine flack. Like I mean we probably even go a bit far and joke around like, like, yeah...

S: So it seems to be an understanding...

C: Yeah.

M: Yeah, you're really good, so...

C: ...no one cares or... yeah...

M: That's what C is singing. He'll lose it all in like a [...] but anyway... like the other day me and L we were singing a song about [...] and the whole point...
L: ...he actually doesn’t [...]. I can imagine him being a good soloist, but he [...]
S: So he’s part of the choir this guy?
M: Yeah.
S: Isn’t that interesting.
M: It’s so weird. So maybe it stems from a need to... maybe it stems from a lack of confidence in his own voice.
S: Mmm. Interesting.
M: That’s just me being a bit deep, you know.

[muttering together, indecipherable]

S: Were you going to say something, J?

[more indecipherable talk together]

L: We had this mad... like we bounce off each other great, but as people we don’t get on as well... but in... sometimes in Music and Drama we can bounce great ideas off each other, and that’s when we enjoy talking, whereas when we’re like socialising it’s like...”I don’t think I really like you”. The fact is yeah, we have great ideas together.
M: [Name] [...] is really... I don’t think in singing he bothers me very much but that’s because he likes my voice or something... so...
J: [Name’s] like a bit of a kind of... a bully, because it’s kind of in our year... it’s not just the singing [...]
S: So it’s just about who he is, just everything?
M: It’s just... Yeah, he wouldn’t bully everyone, like I don’t get bullied by him at all... but it’s just kind of some people [...]. I guess when he speaks to you he can be really mean, eh? [referring to Jayden].

L: I think he tries to bring authority over you, but I mean, and I remember... I remember like when S was talking about something that happened with one of her friends and she was talking about like “Oh, that sucks” and [name’s] like “Shut up, you have no idea what it’s about” and like... “It does, she’s my friend!” So [name] sort of puts down... he doesn’t realise like...

M: [to Jayden and Chris] So how does it make you feel... when [name] like, says something about your singing or [...]? How much do you take it? Like it’s pretty hard not to take it to heart... it is like he has [fears?] so... you know...
C: He doesn’t really say stuff about my voice.
J: He never says much to me.
L: He made a comment the other day... so that was like the first time ever.

[starts singing and pretending to play a guitar, laughing]

M: But like as well, because he has... he’s one of the guys in our choir who has one of the higher voices, so he tends to sing with J and C or something. It’s unlikely that he’d criticise them for being... because I mean they’d probably be more vulnerable, you could say, just in where they sing because that’s more out of the ordinary, but it would be unlikely he’d criticise that because that’s where he sings and that’s like “You’re like that too”.

S: That’s part of his cover-up.
M: But I don’t really have an issue with it, you know...
S: Cool!
C: He does get to some people more than others.
M: Yeah, I guess. It comes down to how much confidence you have yourself.
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Perceptions of success influencing male participation in choir – S. Powell

C: Anyway...
M: Yeah, anyway...

[All talking and laughing at once, indecipherable]
S: Thank you, guys. I’ve really enjoyed listening to you. You’ve said some really good stuff, really useful stuff. So thank you for that... um... you can go. Unless you...?
L: Can we just stay and talk? I’m really enjoying this.
M: It's lunchtime so soon...
S: Is it?

[Talking all at once about the lesson they should be in, indecipherable]
S: How do you think...? This was the question I was going to ask before... because you've all talked about singing being something you... like... it's part of who you are, um... can you explore that a little bit for me? I know for me that when I sing it feels very personal as opposed to when I play my flute. It's not the same. Do you have a similar experience?
J: Well, I guess because I’m a Christian I love singing like at church to God and stuff. It’s like a different view on singing than in choir... because it’s like even if you sound crap there it doesn’t really matter.
C: […] Would that... like at worship yesterday, when we were singing No chains on me I just felt like energy... like a burst... I felt like exploding. [...] ...that energy in singing just like belting it out.
L: It’s so much... It's much more personal I guess when you're a Christian. I remember the first time... like it was a big group of people singing and worshipping and I was there, and I was like belting it out and it was really good because I could sing without being judged on it. It's like great... a great experience and I guess that's why... it's definitely one of the reasons why I like singing now. I do it... because I’ve got a personal relationship with God. I guess that’s why I enjoy it now rather than just... it’s just because it’s like another [...] it’s not like that... wasn't always like... it started... it wouldn't have started off like that but it has become sort of that.
C: Something that God's made part of you. Like, what you were talking about being more personal. If it’s an instrument, you’re influencing something that’s making the noise, but if it’s you doing it... like it’s you... you’re being vulnerable with your voice.
M: Yeah. I think... it’s actually shocked me because I play um... I play a lot of instruments... I tend... my main one would be guitar. That's like... it probably goes even for guitar like if you look at the instruments, including vocals, vocals is musically probably the most inferior because you get least range, least control and um...you get some really nice tone to it, but still, like realistically in a piece of music like apart from the lyrics you know you may as well have your [...] free.
S: Okay.
M: Um... but what I think is really amazing is like what C said, is you’re personally producing the sound. Like solo I get those goose bumps it’s like it’s coming from inside you and I think there’s something deeply kind of spiritual... I don’t know, something about that, and it’s really, it’s just really amazing and to have that I think to not be able to sing is so horrible, more so than not being able to play an
instrument because you'd be... It's this gift that's just... I just can't get my head around it... that we can just sing... like we all have an instrument within ourselves. It's so... it's so cool.

J:  It's like there's no rules with singing. With guitar you have to play this... and it's this. Singing it's just like you know... just go...

L:  I think it's just the visual look of it. You can't tell what you're doing. You can you know you're singing and you get the notes, but you don't have the same effect as playing guitar whereas [...] it's... like I've got a banjo, a six string banjo [...]. I got it for my birthday and it's just like a guitar now. I can play it pretty much... anyway... I got the... I played it and it's like Oh, okay I enjoyed it as soon as I got it and I was playing it and after a while it was pretty much the same as playing guitar or any other string instrument and you just feel like it's just like... another thing... whereas singing it's something you always have with you and there's... not like you have to spend time working on it. You carry it with you and use it when you need it and it's something that you never really lose... unless you've lost your voice... anyway.

M:  Unless your voice breaks really badly.

S:  You're talking about the importance of being able to express yourself.

M:  Yeah. Because it is... it's almost like yeah... It is an expression of yourself. Like rather than just playing something... So it is very different like... and as well... even though in that sense, just for instance I really enjoy playing drums... because you get... it's very physical... like you're moving your whole body and you're physically pushing the sound... and on guitar you get that a bit when you're really going for it but a lot of it isn't like that... so I think with singing as well you actually become exhausted by it because you just sing for so long and you're really concentrating or stuff like that. So because it's physical like drums as well... I think that it connects you to the music physically... in a way that some other instruments don't.

S:  Right.

L:  I still feel like... like when I'm playing guitar and people are worshipping, like I'm playing the second guitar and I'm solo, I still kind of feel... I don't know about you, but I get really into it.

M:  Yeah, yeah. In extreme senses, yeah. It's just the [...]

L:  It's not as um... much... It's not as expressive as singing or doing something physical... There are some... someone post on YouTube the other day [...] It was some guy... It was just a twelve string and it was really it was just an acoustic, and it was very physical for him and you could tell he wasn't just strumming you know... and he was like he was all over the place [...]

S:  Tommy Emmanuel Initiation...!

L:  Oh, he has some weird stuff...[....]

[all talking as recording come to a close]

End of Interview
B.2.3 CHOIR 3: University

a) Conductor 3

S: I know that your choir situation just then is very different to what I’ve been looking at...
C: Yes...
S: ...in terms of, it’s not an established choir, it was for an assessment and what have you, H was telling me about that. So I don’t need to ask you about that. What I would like to ask you about is how you... you were obviously ‘the conductor’ for that session there, can you tell me a little bit about that? How that came about... and how you felt about that?
C: Um... The way it came about was, if I remember correctly, very early on we just had a… we’re going to need a conductor. This was on the first task, this wasn’t the more recent...
S: Okay.
C: ...and... it was, Okay who wants to conduct? I know we had M, who was the other guy. He’s quite well versed in choirs and things. He’s conducted himself. I think his intention was, “I don’t want to do it”. I don’t know if he was just tired of it or not... either way, he wanted to just give it a rest. Someone else can do it... and I think it really just came down to whoever was sort of... I think a lot of them were not confident in their ability to do it.
S: Okay.
C: And I was only just confident... but not really. And I was... I sort of know sort of what I’m doing. I’ll give it a go. I’d been in choirs at high school... so yeah.
S: So you kind of just had a bit more willingness than the others?
C: Pretty much, yes. It’s... I don’t know if you’ve ever conducted but it was daunting for me.
S: Yes!
C: Particularly with the [...] looking at me so much... that’s a bit off topic but...
S: No, not at all.
C: I recall it was particularly hard for me to think about controlling the dynamics and things like that, because it moves a lot and...
S: ...and all the different entries.
C: Exactly! And we’re so small, I have to sing as well... and I had to think about my part, and I had to think about performing my part, whilst performing as a conductor... and trying to control... and monitoring all that.
S: So... you’ve kind of answered what you find most difficult about...
C: Yes...
S: ...that process. How did you find people responding to you? How did they go?
C: Within the... as in rehearsal wise?
S: Yeah, I mean, both the performance and the rehearsal. It's obviously... I mean, you're all kind of peers, aren't you? You're in the same course...?
C: Yes. It's a weird sort of dynamic, because... it would be different if it was like an older teacher...
S: Yes.
C: ...and just younger people... but...
S: Suddenly you become the boss.
C: We get thrown into this inherent professionalism about it all, and we have to...
we control each other, we mediate each other... um... I don't think anyone... I
don't think I act as any sort of... leader, in that regard. Maybe I do. I think there
were times when... I was like, All right, it's been four minutes, let's bring it
round, let's do it again, and sure I was directing it musically... but um... for the
most part we control ourselves.
S: Okay.
C: It's [...] the performance.
S: And... how did you find you were working together?
C: For the... um...
S: Any difficulties?
C: Attendance was an issue for some people. I'm willing to bet H probably talked
about that.
S: Yes. He did say you had sort of a good half of them all the time.
C: Yeah, half of us... or maybe a bit more... for pretty much every week... and there
was literally one guy who came to that just then.
S: Yes, well there were a few I thought I hadn't seen before.
C: Yeah, him. He'd been here once and since then he hasn't been here, so... that
had difficulties, but I think we sort of overcame them a little bit. I knew he knew
the song a little bit, but I was sort of, play it down and just come in the parts
where you know. But I ran it with him at the end. I said, this is what we're
doing, this is what you missed out on... and hoped he'd catch on... hopefully he
got it right. I can't really tell.
S: Cool!
C: I mean there was... there were slight arguments between myself and H and J,
one of the older, [mature-aged] students, as to what we were going to do...[like]
perform without him.
S: Right. That guy who didn't come along much?
C: There were some issues about if he didn't know it, it may cause some issues
with the performance, but I think you would sort of agree that if you keep it
down it will be all right... but...
S: I heard before the performance the way it was going to be marked was as a
group as well as individually. Is that correct?
C: It's a little confusing because they sort of said the same things last time... but
everyone got the same mark last time...
S: It's very hard.
C: I got one pass because I was conducting [...] I don't really understand how
they're judging that...
S: Very difficult in that situation to pick out separate ones, and it... the success of it
would be that you can't!
C: I mean, [...] made it [...] clear who it was for the judges...
S: Okay. Now you talked a little bit about you've had some experience in choirs
and stuff... tell me a little bit about that. Was that in High School?
C: Nothing in a leadership role. I was in the concert choir in High School, which
was just the collective school choir. And I was also in chamber choir, which was
Appendices

a sort of more refined male singers. Like concert choir was a group of fifty or sixty... and chamber was about eight.

S: Eight! And did you audition for that?
C: It wasn’t... like there was no audition. It was the choir teacher at that time just sort of... like hand-picked people. He said, “I think you should like... join us for this”.

S: And how did you find that? Did you like it?
C: That was really good. I... it’s a little hard with... like with concert choir. You have a huge depth of people because it’s from 7 to 12, but with chamber choir everyone’s more or less on the same level... at least vocally... maybe not musically because there are different year groups going on there. But for performing skills everyone’s very much on the same page. And they’re of a pretty high calibre as well. So, it was enjoyable from a musical standpoint...

S: And that was just guys?
C: That was just guys.
S: Interesting. Is your background in voice? Your musical background?
C: No.
S: Tell me a bit abo...
C: I... I’m focusing on guitar... but to be perfectly honest I ... collectively I’m focusing on doing production, but that’s a different thing altogether. Within performance I’m focusing on guitar. I consider voice as like a complement to guitar. It’s a reason I enjoy playing guitar as well. My first instrument was... I started learning clarinet and piano at the same time... and then I moved to saxophone... flute as well... but saxophone mainly. I didn’t do much flute... and eventually moved to guitar about Year 9, but I picked it up really rapidly, so I stuck with that, but I enjoy... like clarinet’s great but it’s like one melody... one... which is why I enjoy guitar.

S: Obviously you have a lot of musical background... are your parents musical? How did you get into music?
C: Mum was a singer. Mum was a vocalist. Dad most certainly not, but um...
S: So it’s been there?
C: It’s been there, but it was never like... that sort of archetypal... like let’s gather around the piano. That never happened in the history of my family. It’s always been me in my room, more or less...
S: Okay...
C: ...performing to my wardrobe.
S: But always support for the things you wanted to do?
C: Oh, yes. More or less. I mean, there’s been fights, but that’s you know...
S: ...normal...?
C: Exactly.
S: All right. Thinking about your performance just a moment ago... and I know it was an assessment so it was slightly different circumstances, as I said... if you can think about success, would you describe that performance as successful? I probably should have asked you what you thought of success first... your definition of success.
C: Well, if we’re talking in relation to choirs...
S: Well, anything. Let’s go back... sorry I’ve just confused you.
C: [...] If we're going to be talking about choirs... I think it's even contextual with that. If you're talking about a kid's choir then a definition of success may be very different. The definition for success for an eight-man [university] level choir, you'd assume to be able to nail the piece. If it's kids, it may be let's get through the piece and have fun.

S: Yes.

C: Would... um... would... my definition for success for what we just did... would have been that the key criteria, being that the harmonies were controlled and all that and um... that our dynamics... our dynamic range and we had good control over our dynamics and stuff like that...

S: So you're saying technical...?

C: At a technical or musical level. It has social elements to it as well, like whether we had fun or not, like more or less, or not entirely because of the choir we're in, but more or less it's entirely musical.

S: Okay. And in terms of say, thinking of a more general idea of success... and I understand your point about it being more contextual... and I would agree with you. If you were asked to say what does success mean... in any situation, any context... life, whatever... what are some of the things that come to mind when you think of something being successful?

C: I still can't be that general about it.

S: Okay. That's fine.

C: Because, if I think about it as a musician... in the broad spectrum of things... that you can do what you want to do and make a living from that... but just success in general...[...] it's what you've achieved.

S: Okay... so you would still say, obviously contextual... has personal aspects?

C: When I judge myself... as a success, as a musician... I can't take being a musician out of living in society. I have to consider it in terms of whether I am able to sustain anything. But whether I have successfully lived... I don't think that...[...]] but whether I think I have lived it right, I suppose you can say whether you're pleased with what you've done.

S: Okay, so if I said to you, as a vocalist, as a musician... would you consider yourself successful... what would you say?

C: I don't treat myself as a vocalist in the same regard that I would treat myself as a musician, because I don't consider any vocal talent I may have as a predominant, sorry, dominant talent of mine and therefore I would not say, Oh, I'm a successful vocalist.

S: Okay.

C: But under the assumption, I know I'm sort of losing it here but...

S: No, seriously not at all.

C: ...in terms of definitions of success... if... um...

S: So, you're not a vocalist...? You don't see that as a part of your success...?

C: No. See, I see myself foremost as a... as a... guitarist, after that as a singer-songwriter, and after that a producer and then after that [...] 

S: Okay. So as a guitarist, are you successful?

C: I believe so.

S: Why?
C: On... okay, um... well maybe not at this present time, but I have taught and I have gigged... and I have received feedback that supports any personal view that I may have... so from any physical and any social aspect... I see myself in successful terms.

S: Okay. An...

C: And I’m pleased...

S: Oh, good! So there’s a personal aspect as well as the feedback you’re getting from people?

C: Yes.

S: And the fact that you’ve been able to teach...

C: More of it’s me, than other people, I have to say. It’s more my own thing than other’s feedback.

S: Okay. And how do you... my question, how do I frame it... Your point of view about yourself, what are the things that kind of drive you in a sense to say, Yes, I did that well, or no, I didn’t do that well? When you are looking back on a performance for example. What is that you go, Yeah, that was good, nailed it!

C: Personally...? Not from that choir?

S: No, just personally.

C: Personally. I... it depends exactly what I’m talking about. I suppose sometimes I would be making comparisons... to existing performances... or... context... I suppose sometimes... I consider that I have a good ear. I suppose my aural marks would confirm that, but I consider that I have a good ear... so I think I can sort of internally earmark that as well.

S: So you can sort of go, Yes, I played that well?

C: Yes.

S: I heard it... it’s exactly how it was supposed to sound... or not?

C: Yeah. Like when I’ve gone into a studio to do sound takes, it doesn’t take too many takes to [...] 

S: Okay.

C: So... and like you... I suppose another version of it would be like... you know thirty seconds into a take... so even if I have played everything correctly, if something was wrong as to how it was being perceived... in terms of how I was playing or some sort of feel about it... so I feel as though I’m good enough with my ear to be able to reflect that.

S: It sounds to me what you’re describing is a combination of your ear and that sense of feeling it about something...

C: Yeah. I guess it’s just that I have a good like sort of reference dictionary in my head.

S: Like intuition?

C: Yeah, which says like, I know what this should sound like if this person was to play it... this person who I regard to be a good... blues guitarist...

S: Yes.

C: I know what his would sound like... so...

S: Like a benchmark?

C: Exactly.

S: Okay. Now, thinking back to the choir situation, and also just considering choirs generally... and you’ve got some experience, particularly in a boys choir as well,
which is great... thinking about boys, men being in choirs, why do you think they might not be part of a choir?

C: Just boys being in...?

S: Yes, why would boys choose not to be in a choir... in your opinion?

C: Is it because they’re already musicians, or musically interested...?

S: Yeah, so you know, they’ve got the opportunity to sing in a choir...

C: Okay... I know a few that didn't go in choir... Some of it is just that they have other interests... that just take preference, but... there’s probably... singing is such a personal thing... it comes from within, which everyone knows but it’s like, you feel like you almost... like if I was to play piano, and I was to sing I’d feel like I'd made something, more when I sing, than when I play the piano... even though that's a stupid thing to say...

S: No, I don’t think it's stupid at all.

C: There's a concept of almost production when you’re singing and it personally reflects on you as... a person and... as physiologically... and if you were a bad singer in your mind, I would imagine that would be quite a daunting thing... to put yourself out there... so that's probably one thing.

S: So boys might not want to be part of it, because it’s such a personal thing, and they’re not prepared to express themselves like that?

C: Yes. I daresay that most people would hold singing in high regard. I think you'll find that even someone who didn’t go into the choir straightaway, I dare say you'll find they have a high regard for singing. It's probably that respect that generates such a fear for it.

S: Because they don't think they can ever reach that?

C: It's like... though I want to sing... I know... I'm pretty confident I'm not good enough.

S: Okay. That’s really interesting... yeah. As you say, it's connected to... because it's personal, to not quite reach that standard would be quite devastating.

C: Yes. So they disregard it.

S: Yes. Now, I know you’ve got the guitar focus and a production focus, so choir for you is not... is just an assessment task, is that correct?

C: Yes.

S: It wouldn’t be something you're pursuing?

C: No, I’m not currently in any choirs, and I’ve got no intention of getting into choirs.

S: No?

C: I enjoy being in choirs. It’s fun, regardless of whether I was conducting or singing or whatever.

S: Yes?

C: Or whatever it may be.

S: Did you have any struggles with this? I know there were... you touched on a couple of things with people not turning up.

C: Yes. With conducting, yes. With the piece itself, no, not really. My sight reading is relatively good, you know. There aren’t many guys in this group who can sight read...

S: Like you do?
Appendices

C: In fact, there’d only be one or two who can actually sight read at all, so a lot of it, it took quite a while to actually get through the pieces... to be perfectly honest...
S: Was that frustrating for you?
C: It was, but only by virtue of being... used to a certain extent... like I mean it would take us twenty minutes to get through a song [...]. Like depending on how long it was obviously... but [...] we could probably have done it in thirty minutes... with that group. But that’s because we were pushed at that level... far so...
S: Okay.
C: And like other things annoyed me because a lot of them could... Like obviously had issues with getting comfortable with the score. A lot of them would maintain eyes on the score a lot, and not actually look at me or [...] and it was quite obvious... like half of them would and I’d be able, like trying to control the dynamics as well... and the ones who weren’t it was like der, you know what I mean? Yes it took a while for some of them to get used to how the song 'went'... inorder to be able to look up at me because... you know.
S: Yes... I’ll finish off with this question if you like... you’re obviously a guy... [C gives thumbs up] You’ve obviously had experience singing in choirs with other guys. Have you experienced any difficulty? Or any trouble, or frustration, or anything, being a guy singing in choir situations?
C: Have I personally? No.
S: Have you seen it happen?
C: Have I seen... just by virtue of being a guy? No. I haven't actually had anything happen.
S: And did you... has anything in your situation just now with this assessment... did you experience anything... just from being a guy in a group? I mean it’s different when you are all guys... and you’re a little bit older.
C: I’m sort of a little confused. So you’re saying if...
S: For example. I know people have said to me... other people I’ve interviewed, teenage boys, little boys... some of them have sort of said, Well, singing’s like a girly thing to do. So there’s an example. So, in your experience, I’m simply asking you...
C: So that’s not... within the confines of the group?
S: Not necessarily... but some of them have said so, though, that’s what is interesting. So I wondered if you’d experienced anything like that.
C: No. I don’t see it that way. Maybe, once again, it may be because I’m working at the university level, and like... Let’s take falsetto. You couldn’t get more girly... but anyone who can control falsetto really well, I hold in high regard and I did pretty well with his falsetto in this performance and I know the other guys respected it as well. So, I can’t imagine that being the case, and I didn’t see it... so.
S: No, and I didn’t either to be honest. Okay. And even when you were at school in your group?
C: Even when I was at school. In fact, I think, there may have been a bit of jostling for someone who perhaps like couldn’t reach a lower note, which could be the case sometimes, but when you get up to high school you start to look at more developed pieces. The parts become much lower as well, and also that may be
the case, but nothing that like held any weight. Like nothing was ever said that actually really meant anything.

S: That’s really interesting. And what was your conductor, your leader in that situation, like the chamber choir, for example, at school, what was that person like?

C: She was… focused within the confines of the choir… but as soon as it was over it was like happy, whatever… she was well respected…

S: She obviously ran it well?

C: Yes. She expected a certain level of behaviour and professionalism from everyone involved… but that wasn’t to say like that she was like a Nazi…

S: No.

C: Like, it was there, we were doing it for the sake of having fun… you know, singing well, it is a joy, but yeah, she was…

S: And you guys…

C: …stern… there was a firmness about it… control…

S: And you guys obviously went along with that…? Respect for that group. Is that the atmosphere that was generated?

C: No.

S: In your school group actually?

C: Oh, yeah.

S: Would you say that about them?

C: I’d say, we had a common goal. I think some people’s abilities held us back… but in terms of behaviour wise, like I said before, we were self-regulating…

S: And that worked well?

C: Yeah. I think the fact that it’s a university really changes things. It changes the dynamic.

S: Like that context?

C: If you were to take those guys… because chamber choir we still had the same teacher… if you were just to take eight guys just shit would not get done in the same time… but in uni, like this has to happen before… like let’s get it done. Sure we’ll have fun but […]

S: And if it wasn’t an assessment, would you have functioned in a similar way? So say you all had to do that performance, just for the sake of doing a performance…

C: I personally would have, but some of them wouldn’t have… um…

S: So there’s a sense in you to do something well anyway?

C: Exactly. Like I said before, if I was to regard our performance just then as a success regardless of how it was being marked… just as a performance, I would be thinking about it entirely on a musical level and a technical level, so that is still my consideration when we do the…rehearsal.

S: And based on those technical things, just for my memory’s sake, and that performance you just did would you describe it as successful? Regarding all those technical things that you just said?

C: Yes.

S: Excellent. Is there anything else you want to tell me?

C: […]

S: Thank you so much for talking to me.
C: Not at all.
S: It is wonderful to hear people’s perspectives.

End of Interview
b) Interview 1

H: I teach two students... um, four students in the morning, then we have recess, then I do a vocal ensemble now, then I do... I do [another eight kids], but in the end, like the vocal group is the same thing. So like we've got... it's great and it helps to break that down by making it really mainstream as much as you can, but you notice those so you know a certain quality of a person, like a quality of guy that comes in.

S: Yeah. But it's hard... it's hard not to stereotype yourself. But when that's what you're seeing it's really very interesting. So I mean, my experience has been guys who are confident enough but they're, you know, they're the really good kids, they never get in trouble, then once in a while you'll have that kind of guy that is... a bit of a rat bag at school, you know, but it's very, very rare. So, and then of course there's the whole um... if you sing in a choir or a vocal group you are gay. Full stop. That's just it.

H: Yep.

S: Now, for some guys they don't want to be called that... and why does that matter!

H: I think it's interesting as well that it's used as a derogatory comment. I think that's really interesting.

S: It is!

H: But... it's also because of how, and this is I think where the whole... the gay movement is trying to change a lot of stuff. Because it's because of how older generations see it, it influences the fact that it can be used... it's like the 'n' word they used on black people, you know, so hopefully, hopefully, with social progression...

S: Things will change. I mean, even in my lifetime [jokingly] I've seen things change a little bit, particularly over the last few years.

H: Yes... I think so.

S: But it is really quite fascinating, and I've been looking at it particularly from the Aussie bloke, that kind of image, and not many people really kind of fit that Aussie image kind of thing, but... you know...

[Interruption]

H: And that's interesting as well, because Australia doesn't have a culture. It doesn't!

S: It's very, doesn't know where it stands...?

H: But its sport. It prides itself on its sport...

S: Yes.

H: ...which is obviously ultra-masculine.

S: And that whole idea of starting from the convict... and the harshness of that, and the bloke had to be tough, really tough, no weakness, otherwise you crash and burn... you basically perish.

H: That's I think's quite interesting. My dad has that mentality, even though he's like intelligent. I don't understand that. He's supposed to be well read. They pride [themselves] on their intelligence but they hold a lot of these societal discourse and paradigms. What's interesting as well with that is that they see
emotion as a weakness, that it's actually quantified. Duality – that is strong, that is weak.

S: Yeah.

H: I think that's very interesting.

S: It's that or that, nothing in between.

H: Yeah. There's no grey, and so they... This is what I'm finding with my dad at the moment. We're having issues with the fact that I'm grey, everything is grey. So that when he kind of asks a question, he wants a yes or a no, but it's never that way. It can never be that way... and I go into this platitude of like all of the possible reasons of why something could occur and like... he just can't handle that.

S: He'll um... he'll grow, hopefully. Having known you [laughs].

H: I push him! I push him!

S: Yeah! Good for you. We need people like you. Okay, now look, I've been recording our little chat so far already... I hope that was alright.

H: [humorously] Like, No, it's not!

S: I can always cut it out! But it was very interesting what you were saying. So, look, you know what my research is about, and you don't have to answer these questions. These are just basically prompts for me to remember if I get sort of totally absorbed in what you are talking about and lose the plot. I can come back to something. So... can you tell me a little bit about the background... this is a different situation the choir you've just sung in, as opposed to the things I've been looking at which are very established choirs and what have you. Can you tell me a little bit about the context?

H: So you want... in terms of... this? Okay. Obviously it's an assessment so we have to do it. To be honest, it was funny, as to how I got into the choir, was by sheer coincidence. Like... I didn't know that there was even going to be a choir and so I just got popped into it. So it was a process where they basically just picked musicians who had vocal ability of sorts. Some don't. Some of them in the choir don't. At least, they didn't think they did. And they just popped them, and it was really random selection.

S: Okay. So this is part of um... your Music degree, Bachelor of Music Performance?

H: Yes.

S: So this assessment... I know you said you didn't have much choice, but obviously in there, there's a different ensemble playing now... so what's the deal with that, you weren't all a choir?

H: Well, to be honest... I don't know. I um... didn't know if I could actually do this unit. I applied late and so they put me in it... but they said that you could write in what you... I think you wrote in to [staff member]...wrote in what your instruments were. Obviously mine being only vocals, that's what I got put in. And so you...say [name] may have put in vocal and drums or vocals and bass, whatever. They then could say, okay he has vocals we'll put him in this vocal group.

S: Okay. That makes sense. So you obviously enjoyed it. Tell me about that...

H: [hesitating] Yeah...

S: Was it good? Bad? Hard?
H: Okay. Working with people in general is difficult. Not for... It’s only difficult for me because I know people are unreliable. When it comes to things like this it’s important to me, so I think the hard thing... I’ll go through this first then... [...] The hard thing is that you are relying heavily on other people to get their stuff sorted so that when you come to perform it’s all together. Also one thing that we did have trouble with is overcoming differences. So, with me it’s being gay with [name] you know, it was the fact that he had red hair, and those kinds of things. We had certain members of the group who felt that satire, that critical humour was appropriate. Yeah? A lot of the time it wasn’t, and it was inappropriate, and you don’t want to have a conflict. You try to avoid it. That was difficult. Being... getting boundaries set was difficult. Um...

S: Did that take long?

H: It did. It did. Because at the end of the day, like certain people are non-confrontational. I myself am not! So I kind of had to set the boundaries. And [name] did as well...

S: Can I ask how you did that? Did you just come out and say it?

H: It was pretty direct. You need to be direct. Because I think obviously it’s um... circumstantial, you have to deal with certain people will be different types of abusive, and you’ve got to then react to that in that way, and so to be honest the way I handled this particular person who was doing it was just being really blunt and direct and saying that’s an inappropriate joke and no more. That was difficult, but we overcame it and as a result though, there’s more cohesion. A difficult thing as well, just on the working... is making sure that everyone has the same intentions and the same motivations. Extremely difficult in any group work you do, because people get unmotivated really quickly. So as soon as things kind of don’t go the way they want it to, they just kind of go... oh, well, that’s it, I’m not fussed.

S: And would you see that... um I noticed that the conductor in inverted commas, was one of your singers as well... Do you think that’s partly to do with how that was run? There wasn’t a...

H: Yeah, it was. Like, M was a great conductor, and he did a good job of time. The rest of the stuff... no. Like you have to be authoritarian... I don’t like being authoritarian... but one thing that I’ve learnt, especially with kids and like some people in the group we’re dealing with you know, and they’re run in a similar way, you have to be prepared to say, We’re doing it now. You know. There’s time for having a joke, there’s time for... but you know, a thirty-minute assessment is not the time for it. And so I felt that, if I was to be constructively criticizing it was to be more... more...

S: ...in charge...?

H: Yeah! Own it. And to not feel that you’re... even though you’re a part of the choir, you’ve also got an extra responsibility. Which is, to keep everyone unanimous, and uniform and so forth. Yeah, so that’s what I would say. I think the running was okay, but obviously there’s a lot of room for improvement. But in saying that, credit where’s it’s due, it’s a very hard job, particularly when you’re not used to it you know.

S: Yes, and I thought you sounded great. I hadn’t heard you for a couple of weeks.

H: Yeah.
S: So, the difference between when I heard you and today was fantastic. It was really a huge improvement. And I liked it when I first heard it!

H: The good thing... just quickly, because I feel I just touched on the negative...

S: No! Before you get on to that, I wanted to, before I forget, go back to a comment you made. You were talking about you confronted someone quite directly. How did they respond, I mean, I know you said it was eventually okay...?

H: Well, the thing was I've had issues with this person before and... the problem is... [pause]... he's the dominant type and with a dominant person the only way you... you basically have to put them in their place, and the only way you can do that is basically by overpowering them... overpower [...] showing stiff resistance, you know what I mean?

S: Yeah.

H: Um... a lot of the time people like that generally, in my experience, they generally don’t understand that that’s what they’re doing. They don’t. They’re not aware, they don’t recognize it... that they’re being dominant and domineering, and so you just have to be really sharp. Now how he reacted was at first he went into a really bad mood, and we had one... like one whole rehearsal where he just didn’t kind of talk or do anything... and that’s fine, because he was in the doghouse.

S: Yes, yes.

H: I can understand that.

S: It was a bit like just a sulk?

H: Yeah! It was a sulk, that’s exactly... and he’s moody and inconsistent and so that’s fine, that’s fine. Like I was prepared to let him sulk. Because like you know what, people like that... bullies generally feel sorry for themselves, and that’s fine. Like if they want to feel like a victim they can do that all they like, but we still had to do the job we set out... and we just, you know, encouraged him.

S: Yes. And just connecting it to what you said before, those comments from him, or his behavior towards you, was that related towards your sexuality?

H: Yes, most of the time, and this is the thing as well, like you have to give them the benefit of the doubt. So I gave him a few times, where I thought, Oh, ok, he must think it’s ok because we’re friends, for him to make that joke. And generally it doesn’t offend me. I’m so blasé it doesn’t matter... but at the end of the day when it becomes disrespectful, that’s where the line needed to be drawn.

S: Yes.

H: So yes, he responded with a sulk, essentially, um... You just have to keep on top of it. It’s like a kid, you know... or a dog, you have to be really consistent, and people are the same, you know, when you have relationships with people you have to be consistent, or people don’t know what ‘s going on. He did respond with a sulk and yeah, it was...
S: It ended up okay? Eventually...
H: Yeah, it was okay. It’s just that, people like that, they get ahead of themselves...
They lose sight of that they actually have to show decorum and manners and what not... Everyone’s guilty of it.
S: And do you think there was... My experience of those situations has been that there’s a sense of embarrassment then for that person in front of the rest of the group so they find it difficult to come back.
H: It’s hard though, because the defense mechanism that was put up from that though, is flat denial.
S: Yes, okay.
H: So when this person, this particular person, what I’ve noticed is that they feel that they’re not winning, or when they’re not in charge the first thing they do is resort to apathy. So, they get apathetic about everything. And that was when the sulk occurred and so I recognized it for what it was... just a sulk you know.
S: Oh, wow. There it is. Now you were going to tell me about some positive things.
H: Positive things! It was really, really good. Look, it was hard because half the people didn’t show up for rehearsals... and half of the group was not prepared, but that’s fine. For the positive of those is the half that did, it was really, really good, like it brought us all together and we kind of really did... and it was, it’s great... like it’s great when you have the team thing and you’re like, Oh, we did it, and everyone’s really excited and what was good was knowing the difficulties were being overcome together... or half together as a collaborative. So that was really, really great and it was really positive to see as well, and it reaffirmed that there were people in it actually a hundred percent... you know... they weren’t people who were kind of like...
S: ...half-hearted...?
H: Yeah! That was really good and it helped balance out the times when things weren’t that great.
S: Yeah. Fabulous. Now, you’ve just done a performance for an assessment... I’m going to ask you a question about success. First of all, what do you see as success? So, the choir aside, what would you see as a description of success?
H: Oh, a very hard one, as I don’t like quantifying.
S: Yes? That’s good!
H: I really don’t like quantifying.
S: Great, we’ll get on very well then, fabulous!
H: I don’t think you could class it as success or failure because... if you take success, you have to take failure... and I don’t really embody that. It’s not really a good kind of perspective in my opinion. My spin on that would be... [laughs and shakes his head] I’m selfish... I’m selfish in the sense that I was not happy with it, because I knew that... I felt that I could do... give a little bit more or that it could have been a little bit more refined. So I wouldn’t say that it was a failure because I still was in key and still... but personally, did I achieve my goals that I set? No, I didn’t.
S: Okay.
H: As a group, did we achieve... achieve? Whatever that means. I think we performed and we did a good performance, so if that was classed as success in this situation, then yes. Do I think that we succeeded at... were we successful as
a group, no we weren’t. And were we successful as an ensemble, no we weren’t. Each facet we passed and failed in some regard. I think as a whole we did a good job... but like anything there’s so much room for improvement.

S: Definitely. So the description of success for the purpose of today and I can absolutely describe that as non-quantifiable... that’s fine because I would do the same... so success, the things where you did well um... things you didn’t do well, they were things like technical aspects?

H: Yes.

S: You’ve already said you worked well together, that would have more to do with rehearsal. Obviously it has its culmination in that performance. Some of the other things that you said were not quite good in the performance... that you weren’t happy with... what were those things?

H: Um...

S: Things that you could have done better?

H: Things that I [emphasizes ‘I’] could have done better? When I started off... because of the audience, there were certain people in the audience that I don’t personally feel comfortable with... and that’s really important because it makes a difference as a performer. It shouldn’t, but it does.

S: You’re only human.

H: Yeah, and so that was really nerve-racking... So it made me begin really quiet, and I just... I wasn’t in it! Like at the end of the day... the thing with me is when it comes to these kinds of ensembles things, is if people aren’t in it the same hundred percent as I am, then I don’t really... then I’m over it... like I try and I try and I try, but when it comes to the point where it’s not, like so, that’s what I felt. I felt that ... had it been, had I relaxed a little bit as well, had I just gone with it and said it doesn’t matter, which I never can do, I would probably have performed a little bit better technically, as well as, you know with strength. Or if I didn’t have all these thoughts around in my head... I would have been focused more on the music.

S: Okay...

H: And that would have been... the effect ...like help me create a better atmosphere and better... do you know what I mean?

S: Yes, absolutely. So some of the things you’ve said that would describe a performance as successful were actually personal things as well...

H: [Nod]

S: ...the way that you were feeling at the time, the audience members, some of those things that you’ve gone through already ...

H: I think it’s...

S: ...actually affect all that.

H: ...human nature and this is something as well that isn’t taken into account academically I don’t think enough [...] is individual experience. It’s so important. So how I experienced the piece directly reflects how I perceive the performance... how I perceive how it all went. So... because I said that to the guys, because they were like oh you know we did so well. And I was like... yeah, but... and I said to them, Don’t mind me I’m just upset about how I went... and that’s going to reflect my mood on the piece, you know... um, yeah.

S: Okay.
H: Yeah, in terms of the technical and all that sort of stuff... it could be improved by just alleviating all those [pressures].

S: You've probably forgotten the response of the audience by now, but did you think that they responded well?

H: To be honest, I wasn't really concerned about that. I really wasn't... and like because there were certain people in that audience... I just completely disregard them. My main focus in performing was looking at the conductor, trying to raise my eye level at points so that I looked as though I was connecting with them, but to be honest, yes, it was really hard... it was a hard performance for me.

S: Yes. And is it, kind of, is it made really... are you really aware of the fact that it's an assessment task when you're performing? Was that another thing that you just forget?

H: I was. But to be honest, by that point, I was so over it. I was over that point... over that thinking about that, because at the end of the day, that big thing... coming back to the conductor, just to kind of tie it all in... I didn't feel that we had enough direction and that was really frustrating, because easily, I could have filled that role. But the problem is... and also people don't respond well to direction, you know, because it's that ego thing, and the problem is people can't... for me... I can suck it up and say, okay just do what they say. Just do what they say. That's what you've got to do, that's what you're here for, just do it. A lot of people can't do that. And then that causes conflict and power struggles... and that's exactly what it was, because M who was the conductor and J who was M's friend, there was this constant power struggle, and J was the kind of antagonist in all these different situations. And subliminally, where the... and M is a great guy, he's really soft and gentle but he's also quite firm here and there... it just felt as though, because we were all friends, because we were all quite close, there was that conflict of interest, like that I can't elevate myself because of that... because you've also got social you know, quotas to fill.

S: Yes, it gets quite complex, doesn't it?

H: [Nods]

S: I had a question in my head then, it's gone... I might come back...

H: Sorry...

S: No, no... it's me! I've got about thirty things going on at once. Okay, so in terms of yourself... would you see yourself as a... I'm going to use 'successful' just for the purposes... I know how you're thinking of success now, so you can use that word, you can use it however you like, but I know what you're talking about when you're talking about success. Do you see yourself as a successful or good singer? And why?

H: Yes, I do.

S: Yes?

H: I know that though. I think knowing and thinking are two different things. So... here I go again... testing the rules [laughing]. I know that I'm a good singer and I know that, through and through. Do I think that that was displayed in this situation? No, I don't, because I'm not... I hate saying it, I'm not a choral singer. Yeah, you're a singer, can you sing everything? Are you a singer or... do you know what I mean? Like... and so because I value myself as a vocalist that
means I can sing all different genres, I felt that it was difficult. So, successful? Do I think the audience is aware of my intention, do I think that got carried across? Did my insecurity get carried across? No. So in that regard I would say, yes. Do I feel successful? No.

S: Okay. Based on that performance, there?
H: Yes.
S: But as an individual singer, just generally, absolutely?
H: Just fabulous [laughing] Yeah.
S: Can I ask you why... you're so very confident that you're fabulous? Can you say why?
H: Because I know what I can do that others can. And I've worked my arse off. One thing about my singing... that's the one thing in my life I've really stuck to... and completely nailed... and to be honest, the quality... I... this sounds really bad, but you compare yourself, we all compare ourselves, and when you compare me to a lot of other singers when it comes to like technicality, when it comes to breath control... when it comes to all these different things... it's also about timbre which you can't replicate you can’t change... I love my voice, so that gives me that solidarity, that knowing.

S: That is really good to hear... really good to hear. Okay, so you've just talked about the choir not being your genre... or sort of outlet really, not your preferred outlet...
H: But I love it though.
S: Yeah...? Okay.
H: But it was one of those things, it was challenging, and I love a good challenge. And I did love the fact that I had to pitch, I had to... it helped me actually sight read a lot, like it was really helpful in those regards. Like... I've gained a lot out of it. It's just that, like things like 'lux'... when you're supposed to... control pitch and dynamics and that... that's a hard phonic to sing over ... it's a hard kind of sound. And so that was difficult...
S: It's not an easy piece.
H: It's not. And if you think about it as well, any piece, like any note that you have to hold from the first, the very beginning when you're shaking and trembling... yeah, it's hard, it's tough work... yeah... sorry what was the question again?
S: Um... I think you actually answered it... I've actually forgotten it as well, but I think you actually answered it.
H: Was it like a choir thing?
S: Yes that's right. I was saying that it wasn't your preferred... kind of format... for want of a better word, but you obviously liked it...
H: It's funny though, but because I love jazz and it's really broken up and like all over the place and scattered, I don't like following notes on a page, it feels like really restrictive, but in saying that I appreciate it and respect it... and that kind of... it was really kind of against the grain, but I loved it. And also the sound is just beautiful...
S: Yes.
H: The one thing I'll say about choral music, I have a real appreciation for it. You can never replicate through one voice, 100 or 50, you can never do it. And the sounds... and also the overtones... you know... you can’t replicate it in one voice.
S: Even that physicality of your voice next to someone else’s...
H: ...and you can hear that you are in pitch and so like with me and T, when we did the [...] we were on exactly the same notes, and then around they were all hitting the same notes and it sounds beautiful. It felt beautiful anyway.
S: Yes. I think it’s a very physical thing, too.
S: [laughs] I’m going to let you go in a minute, you’ve been really interesting. We’ve already briefly touched on why... how it might be difficult for a boy to be in a choir... but we haven’t spoken specifically, so I’m going to ask you specifically now, about boys singing in a choir, or men or guys... whatever age group, why you think they might have difficulties singing in a choir.
H: I think it’s because it breaks that gendered mould. So... the gender role is broken because singing is pretty, it’s graceful therefore it’s feminine... and it’s emotional so therefore it’s feminine. I think it’s really interesting that musicians still cop flak, even if you’re a musician, you’re deemed gay or whatever they want to call you, but it’s... I just think that that’s fascinating... or... also it’s the opposite. One thing I want to comment on... I’ve experienced is homophobia within music.
S: That’s the bit I don’t get.
H: I’m like that’s a complete [paradox]... why would you... I just don’t understand... it exists... it’s really, really strong...
S: And do you... I know you say you don’t understand but do you have any idea, any theory?
H: Well... yeah. I think it’s a few different things. I think it’s environmental, so because... people as a group, right? You take someone slightly out of a group ... just slightly. They’re obviously insecure. The reason they’re in a group is that generally they want that security. Like a family that travels with them... do you know what I mean?
S: Yes.
H: All through their life and because we are obviously pack animals we don’t like that... we don’t like being on our own. It’s confronting... and so when you give a person the opportunity... a voice is a powerful thing, people don’t like to voice their opinions, leave alone get up and sing. Even if it is, you know, when they’re slotted in with a hundred people, they’re still having to exert themselves... still having to put themselves out there, and they know that that basically equates to... as soon as someone doesn’t like it, they’re very, very exposed and unprotected.
S: Under attack.
H: Exactly! And it occurs... I believe that it occurs because straight, Australian men have fostered in... and women do it just as bad... mums are really, really bad. I mean not to be... oh, bad, bad, what does that even mean... they’re very, very involved in this... and they gender their children so much because they were gendered. One thing I know with my parents, in terms of... you know, in terms of the whole [interruption]... in terms of like my experience with it... oh, I keep on coming back to myself, don’t I?
S: No! That’s the whole idea... go for it.
H: My experience with it is that... like it was very confronting for my parents... like I was never a straight boy, never ever. Like when we played dress-ups, I would dress up as [...]... or an angel [...]. Do you know what I mean? Or when we did music, like I was not a trumpet player or a bassoonist, I was a flautist, do you know what I mean? Like I was the pretty thing, and I always valued grace and dignity and all those kind of things that I see within those. But that directly made me different, and because you’re removing yourself from that gendered role, people go, no, we can’t have that. Because I feel uncomfortable, like why am I in this gendered role... while he’s flouncing around in like a little [pansy] because people aren’t aware that they exist within a... a construct... and so when someone’s outside that construct they... because there’s discourse surrounding the adverse resistance to their construct, they go... this can’t be, this has to be attacked, you know what I mean? And so... [interruption]... yeah, and so, because there’s... all those prejudice... and that discourse... even the word ‘gay’, the discourse around ‘gay’... is just ridiculous. Like, paedophile is attached to it. Taboo! You know, all these interesting things. Like we’re obviously slowly changing, but like my experience, bullied all through primary school and high school until Year 10, because I was told... I mean I didn’t even know what gay was, and I was persecuted for it. Relentlessly. And then it came to the point where I... like I loved choir, I loved instrumental lessons... I did everything. You name it... Science... I did Science for God’s sake! All of these things that were deemed abnormal, that were deemed not desirable, for instance, even intelligence is not valued in Australia, it’s not valued at all. Academics... “oh, tax payers are paying for these people who talk about things that don’t matter”... and I’m quoting my father! So, do you know what I mean... When it comes to all of this, I firmly believe, one thing that I have experienced is that it’s behavioural, because if a kid showed that in their family, say if a bully showed that in their family, they’d be persecuted. So they feel the need to offload that persecution... on to someone else.

S: It challenges their own thinking, doesn’t it?

H: Yeah!

S: And they’re not quite sure why.

H: Yeah, yeah. And because it’s well... a lot of the time, it’s the parents. It’s not just the parents. Some kids come from amazing homes. Amazing in the sense they’re not persecuted you know. The parents are just pissing all over them, and they just like dominance. There’s just bazillion reasons for it. I think though that’s not as relevant as trying to look at how to remove the stigma. So like with me... as soon as I came out in Year 11, gay stopped being an insult. So when people would say, Oh, Harrison, you know, you faggot... well... [gestures as if to indicate, ‘well yes!’].

S: [Laughing] Yes!

H: Yes, really. As soon as that happened though, I tell you, and this is important, it kind of demonstrates how that can be changed... as soon as I did that in Year 11, people didn’t insult me, people actually liked me. They were like, oh, my god, who is this kid, he’s awesome! He’s come out of his shell. He’s funny, he’s really witty... all my [...] came through, all because I took an insult... that was
deemed an insult… that I should persecute myself for, and removed the fact that it was an insult.

S: Do you think, as well, that that was to do with… as I would see it… a real self-confidence?

H: Yeah…

S: At that point, you go, yeah, I’m embracing who I am… and people kind of respect that.

H: Yep! They do. And as soon as you… you’re powerful then… and that’s the thing is, they see weakness in gentle… like anything that’s gentle or soft or…

S: […]

H: Exactly! Or has the ability to question itself… they manipulate and take advantage of that. I think as well you know, they don’t even know they’re doing it. And so in regard to that kind of… and there’s some people are just born bullies. I firmly believe some people that just are so dominant, they crave it. They need that dominance, that’s just how they are. In terms of kids, one thing that I found with my ensemble group, because that was an issue I actually faced… it was like, I just want guys in a choir, I don’t want girls, you know what I mean, and so one thing that we had that was really um… confronting, was the fact that we would only have a few guys show up… like a few of my students, they’re very flamboyant… like, very flamboyant… but that doesn’t mean they’re gay either, you know what I mean, doesn’t mean anything…

S: And why does it matter?

H: Right! Since when… do I ask guys in the playground if they’re straight?

S: [laughing] Yes!

H: Do you know what I mean! It’s so… and it’s… I think it’s interesting as well, when it comes to the stigmas, and all that kind of abusive stuff, when you ask people logically… the opposing question. So the opposing, you know, reaction to that, using their same logic they don’t understand that their comment is completely illogical… like it doesn’t make sense. It’s very interesting though, that even the parents that are educated, they’re so much like… one thing that I find, because look, like I’m clued in… I’m cluey! Pretty aware of everything. When it comes to watching things like Q & A and whatnot, just hearing Australian people, I forget how primitive sometimes people… they’re primitive in the sense that like they’re so unaware, they’re… like closeted.

S: It’s almost ignorant.

H: Yeah! And they don’t want to change, and they think that it’s all a bit confronting, and you know, that can be hard for kids as well. I find the best thing to do, and this is an interesting thing… and I know that people would persecute me if they heard me say it… is normalize it. It’s mainstream, it’s no longer different, um… it doesn’t matter, it’s irrelevant, your identity, who you are. Who you think you are is irrelevant in this forum.

S: It comes back to the individual.

H: Yeah.

S: The individual is okay, no matter what that is.

H: Yes.

S: And it’s interesting, I was going to say before, that many years ago, and I don’t know the history of it, but gay people decided… that used to be an insult, and
they went, okay, let's take that, and they described themselves as that, and then suddenly...

H: And people hate that...!
S: Yes!

H: They hate it! They hate... like bloody pooftas... and like, yeah we’re bloody pooftas, look at us! With our rainbow flag... and people most don’t understand, like the most often comment I get right, is, Why are gays so always in your face? Wait a second, they didn’t exist. Twenty years ago gay people didn’t exist in society and if they existed, it was in a negative, derogatory like put down. They didn’t exist, and so I think people cope... are struggling to cope... even kids. Kids are struggling to cope with it as well, because their parents are. And this is where it gets very interesting, because... it’s hard to normalize something when families are confused, when the parents don’t know... and you know what, I think it’s interesting as well, is that Australians don’t talk... they don’t talk... we don’t have open forums... we don’t have places... I mean, Q & A is a great show, because it allows Australian to ask questions, like the Prime Minister. You have Australians asking questions and she answers them face-to-face. Those kinds of things aren’t held high in Australia. The problem is we could solve a lot of our problems... very post-modernist [laughs]...

S: It’s a wonderful idea!

H: ...by talking about things and working through them and by trying to find better solutions...

S: ...alternatives...

H: So in terms of... just back to your question... I think that it’s environmental, I think that it’s also you know, societal, and I also think it comes down to the fact that... any difference in... because high school’s an artificial environment, university is an artificial environment, the society we’re living in is artificial... but, when you look at it these kids are always with each other, they’re always in each other's back pockets... and so you get annoyed with someone, what’s the first thing you do? Point out a difference, because a difference is something that... define... makes them separate from the pack. They’re separate, they’re an alien, therefore, they're easy to attack.

S: Interesting point, I think... I agree with you.

H: And it’s only one of the reasons... like one of the possible reasons... that’s the hard thing with it... like I think people are always searching for like, Oh, why is this happening...? Well let’s not worry about... you can’t reduce it... you can’t melt it down to two things... it’s a multitude of things and I think when people stop and go, Okay let’s stop and look at the situation and what’s occurring in the situation, and let’s look at everyone’s part in it... that’s when you can start making some proper moves to kind of equalize it.

S: Because it's going to be different for everybody... that's the other point.

H: That's it... and that's the thing as well... with my choir, one technique that I've done is, I’m camp! I’m in a Catholic School I could get fired in a [heart beat] man... but because... I mean... I chose that school obviously... because I knew... like the music teacher is my best friend... like taught me from my Year 11 and 12... my best years, and we're still friends outside of school and... she's great... and, my approach is, forget the Christian aspect of it... that needs to be removed
in the situation because we're a vocal ensemble group... we're looking at music. Music should in every sense be central in my opinion... because it... like I'm just totally music... you know...

S: Well, it exists as an entity of its own, whatever the...

H: Exactly! And so um... my biggest thing is, I'm myself... and kids respond to that. All my kids have responded to that. One thing I can say about all my students that I've been teaching is that each and every one of them has improved in confidence... just because I'll say... like they do something weird and they'll apologize. Kids are so often ready to apologize, and it's like why? There's no need to apologize... they're funny, like hilarious... I mean. Or I'll dance, the kids go, The teacher's dancing! What the hell is he doing! But then they realize that I'm taking a knock at myself because I can have a laugh at myself because I'm confident because... do you know what I mean?

S: And just being yourself...

H: Yeah! Setting an example... and all the kids in the folk group, they're relaxed. That's one thing that you don't see in High School. They're not relaxed. Everyone's on edge. Everyone's walking around like... and the bullies are really predominant and they're relaxed because they own the show, but everyone else is all tense because they just want to get through the day... and what's good is you know, it creates that atmosphere where we've got boundaries, but we're relaxed.

S: Yeah. Fantastic... I'm going to let you go now... unless there's anything else you want to say...?

H: No... I think we've solved the meaning of life!

S: The problems of the world! And obviously singing is important to you... not necessarily being in that choir, but singing itself is important.

H: Very important. It's my... like life.

S: About who you are.

H: Yeah. And because it's the thing that directly... it's the consistent measure that has allowed me to be who I am. And the one thing about singing that's really... I get all emotional... one thing that it allowed me to do was to give myself something... give back to myself.

S: Okay.

H: People don't give back to themselves... and all through high school everything is being taken from you... you're this, you're that... and they pull you apart, pull you apart, and pull you apart, and you go home and they pull you apart, pull you apart, Why aren't you doing your homework? Why is this no happening? And it's negative, negative, negative, and the people who survive, and the people who grow up are the people who take all of that, let it go, become resilient...

S: Mmm... I love that word!

H: Resilience is invaluable... and it can only be taught through experience... and so as a result, like its' reflective in my life. So singing has given something to strive for... and you know, the hard thing with that though, well then, you owe that debt to singing, so then you feel when it comes to things like this... yeah... you think, well, I haven't done service to my voice, I haven't done service to singing... and that is something that is really important... and that affects everything.
S: You are a really interesting person, I love people like you!
H: I'll write a book!
S: Do! Do something, like change the world... I'm planning to!
H: I'll join you up on the podium!

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c) Interview 2

S: I’ve just got a few questions, which are basically prompts, so if you want to have a look at them... you’ll know the type of thing I’m going to ask you. But I’m not necessarily going to work through them one by one like that because this situation is quite different to some of the other groups I’ve looked at and because you know, it’s part of a course for an assessment. But I’m aware that you’ve got quite a bit of experience outside of this situation, in choir. Is that correct?

B: Yes.

S: Tell me about that.

B: I’ve been singing with choirs, particularly with the Arts unit since primary school, and that’s given me opportunities to sing... not just in Sydney, but overseas, in Canada. Gone on tours and... so I still do all stuff with choirs...

S: Outside of Uni?

B: Outside of Uni... yeah. I’ve been singing with the Sydney Philharmonic Choirs... recently I haven’t done many performances because of Uni. Yeah, that’s the most recent thing.

S: Okay. Is that something you will go back to?

B: Yes, that’s something I really want to go back to.

S: Cool. Can I ask you, particularly about this performance today, that you’ve just done... as I said, I know that it was an assessment for a particular course or subject for your degree... how did you feel about that? Tell me about the rehearsal process and then the performance. How did you go with that? What were your feelings about that... whole experience?

B: Um... I enjoyed it. It was a struggle sometimes... obviously in a group there’s people who don’t turn up and all that, so that’s always an issue. Um... but overall I found it fantastic to work with just an all-male choir. That opportunity just isn’t there.

S: Very different, isn’t it?

B: Yes. I found the group dynamic was really different... because we didn’t have a teacher saying, this is what we’re going to do. It was up to us to make all the decisions. So I think that really came out today in the performance with M conducting... yeah.

S: And how did you find M being the leader or the conductor? Because I know you’ve got some experience doing that, haven’t you? So tell me about that.

B: Well, I gave M a few lessons at the beginning of it... because I wanted to conduct but at the same time I thought, Why should I conduct, if I’ve already had the experience? Let someone else have the experience. I think in a way, like, he was the leader in that respect, but we all helped. In our rehearsals, like I played the piano, and we all took turns at leading the teaching of the songs. So...

S: So it was definitely a collaborative effort?

B: Yes.

S: Fabulous. Some of the things were difficult obviously... you just said people not turning up made life a little bit difficult. Did you struggle with anything, or did you notice any struggles within that group? In terms of rehearsing and then the performance.
A few times where there was... clashes of opinion... and I guess that can be in any group... but yeah...

And were they musical kind of clashes. Did people kind of, No, I want to do this in this piece, or were they personality clashes?

A bit of both. With the personalities, there's some people who just... it came out with people not turning up and...

Okay.

That was where the main personality clashes were... and with the people who have done choral work were ready to put in, and with the people who hadn't... that sort of clash of ideas.

Okay.

Musically, occasionally they would go, oh, that pause is too long, or it's not long enough... or we're not clear enough in this... people going, it should be done this way...

But obviously resolved itself?

Yes. It did.

So you worked well in the end... together, do you think?

Yes.

Now, if I was to ask you to define successful, it's interesting with other people when I say this to them, they get a little bit stressed out because they think that I am after a particular definition, and I'm going to say to you that I'm not after a particular definition... except yours!

Yeah.

So, if you were to define success, however that is defined, how would you describe it?

Success... um...

What does it mean to you? Just generally...

Just generally...?

Yes, and I'll ask you about choir in a moment.

Okay... I... Successful is doing my best. Yeah, I think that's the main thing. I know when I'm successful because I've done the best that I can possibly do. Sometimes it's the whole thing of, You must get... certain marks, like, must get a HD in this. I give myself parameters of what I have to achieve to be successful. But no, for me being successful is...

...mainly that, doing the best you can?

Yes.

Okay. Feeling satisfied by that?

Yes.

You've also mentioned just a little bit to do with a level of achievement, whatever those parameters may be... and in this case it was an assessment task. How does that change things for you then, in terms of...?

Success... yeah! So with the performance more so the success was not just for me. I want a... successful performance so we... I wanted us to all look the part... but also for the sound to be as close to perfect as possible... yeah, so...

So success in this situation was not just about how well you did but it was about the entire group and how that performance came across?

Yes.
S: Okay. Would you consider yourself a successful singer?
B: I’m successful like, in the fact that I do my classical grades, and what I’ve achieved through the different ensembles I’ve been in... and working to the top of the State and... So, I consider myself successful in that respect. But not successful as in ‘famous’.
S: Okay. Let me see... if you had to describe success in terms of the choir now, specifically, do you describe that choir that you’ve just been in... would you describe it as successful? Today’s performance.
B: In the assessment, I call that successful in general terms... against other choirs. It’d be successful, but there’d be choirs a lot more successful. Just thinking again about the presentation of it... the sour notes in it for instance... some ensembles have it absolutely crisp.
S: Okay, so you are talking about technical aspects that make it successful or not? And you’re talking about... what else did you say? I’ve completely forgotten what you just said!
B: So, how they’re staged, what they’re wearing... yeah.
S: Okay, so there’s quite a lot of things in your head that come into play making something successful. And you’re also talking about variations between... that is successful, but this might be more successful...
B: Yes.
S: Right. Have you experienced any difficulty about being part of a choir? Not just this choir, you can talk about your entire experience... it’s a long one.
B: Yeah. I struggled a lot when I first joined the choir because I was really, really shy.
S: And how old were you when you started?
B: Year 5, so I would have been 11. I did school choir before that. That was Year 3, but my main big choral experience began in Year 5. It was... I loved it, I absolutely loved it, but I never really made many friends or anything because I didn’t like talking to anyone. But as it went on... I made lots of friends.
S: So initially... was that something to do with personality? You’re just a shy person?
B: Yes, that was more it than anything. Especially starting off as a boy soprano. You’re singing in a part surrounded by girls... especially when the conductor would go, Okay, girls, this is what we’re singing. I would just stand there and smile at them and I’d go, Girls and [name]! Which I don’t think that made it any better, but...
S: So were you the only boy soprano in that situation?
B: In the small ensembles that had weekly rehearsals I was. A few others came later on, which was good, and when we did our mass choir things at the Opera House and the Town Hall, well definitely there was quite a few of us, so... that made it a little bit less awkward.
S: Okay... how did you find that? Obviously you were referred to as one of the girls. How did that... you obviously pushed through that?
B: Yeah, um...'cos there wasn’t much teasing or anything... I was worried there was going to be teasing... yeah...
S: But there wasn’t?
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B: There wasn’t. Everyone was just accepting... because it’s like the joke we’ve got for the tenors. The conductor goes, Sopranos, Altos, Tenors and Men!
S: Yeah!
B: So as a Bass we always laughed at the Tenors. So it’s just that usual making fun of it.
S: So what part do you sing now?
B: A baritone-bass.
S: Okay.
B: I got through every single part!
S: So tell me a little bit about that because you’re the only one out of the other two guys that I’ve spoken to who got that sort of change in voice. How did that go for you?
B: Well, as my voice was breaking, like one of my friends, he... when his voice broke it broke in a matter of like two months. He went from as high as me to the lowest bass, whereas for me it happened over two years.
S: Okay.
B: So it was really slow... and most of my friends actually left the choir at that stage... from the other regions.
S: Because their voices were breaking?
B: Because their voices were breaking. My choir teacher actually said, Don’t leave, you need to sing through it to help... and that really did help... and were really supportive so... Whereas a lot of the people that left they didn’t really have that support there.
S: Yes. So those people who left... they were from other areas, they weren’t from... like the lady who said to you, Sing through it... she obviously didn’t have that opportunity to say it to them... they were from somewhere else?
B: They were from other regions.
S: Okay.
B: Yeah, their teacher wasn’t... didn’t quite encourage them to do as much.
S: Maybe not the understanding.
B: Yeah, and a few of them came back afterwards, but most of them never came back.
S: So you said, over a two-year period...
B: Yeah...
S: How did that go? Did you struggle much or was it just...?
B: It was a bit of a struggle when I... that was during when I joined State Singers, so I’d only just joined State Singers and I was an alto. By the end of that first year I was singing Tenor, but by the time I finished with the ensemble I was baritone-bass. So, and again they supported me.
S: That’s really interesting... that support and staying in it.
B: Yeah. I think that’s a really big thing. I know other people who have done choir and the support hasn’t been there... and they’ve left and never done it again.
S: Yeah... wow! Now, tell me, in terms of, I mean... you’ve kind of touched on one thing, some of the guys, their voices break and they never come back, they leave and never come back... what do you think are some other reasons why boys might not be part of a choir?
B: I think a big thing is teasing... and bullying. I ignored that, personally, because I'd always been teased for something, so... I was like, Whatever! I don’t really care.

S: You’re used to it now!

B: I think there was a lot of teasing...

S: And what period was that? Was that like a High School period?

B: Late Primary School, early High School. In Year 8 I did a lot of musical electives, one of which was the vocal class. I was the only boy out of a class of thirty. So everyone again, teased me for that, which was like, Whatever... but others in that situation... I had friends who said, If I was in your situation, I wouldn’t stay in that class. And a few were going to go in that class, but they didn’t, because of the teasing.

S: So your friends, whilst they didn’t want to go in that class for those reasons, did they tease you?

B: To a point, yeah.

S: That’s really interesting.

B: That’s why they’re not my friends any more! Some of them are. Then there was a sort of a shift. They heard me sing... everyone at school. We did a performance at one of the big assemblies, or a combined assembly and... It was all the girls in the class and I was singing a solo... and everyone went, Oh, you can actually sing. It’s not you just going Oh, I can sing.

S: And you sound very different to the girls...

B: Mmm. Yeah...

S: That’s very interesting. Tell me, you’ve got a lot of experience in choirs... why is it important to you, singing in a choir?

B: It’s... I don’t know... after a while it feels like a family. Really. The support that was there... I absolutely love singing... so like, that support there, everyone is included. I just love the sound of it.

S: And, can I get you to compare... do you do much solo singing, or do you only do that in the context of the choir, you might have a solo in the choir... or...

B: I do musical performances with [suburb name] Musical Comedy Company. So I’ve had a few solos with that... and solos at school. I get classical lessons. I do solo work at the recitals and stuff.

S: How does that compare to choir?

B: I still enjoy it, but I prefer I think, in a way, singing in the choir. I like singing with other people. When you’re solo, like, all the pressure is on you. It’s fun, but at the same time you can get very lonely singing by yourself. Because it’s like...

S: You’re very exposed.

B: Yes.

S: Okay. This is probably a question I already know the answer to, but is singing in a choir something that you will do in the future?

B: Yes. Definitely.

S: Absolutely. Full stop, yes?

B: Yes.

S: It’s obviously important to you... we’ve talked about that... so I’ve actually asked you all the questions I wanted to ask you. Is there anything that you want
to say to me? Like... that you haven't had the opportunity to say, about singing in choir? Or about that performance just then?

B: I think I've covered everything. I think choirs are really important. Its actually sad to see locally every single Primary School in our area used to have a choir and we used to do the Performing Arts Festival and there's a festival down at the Joan Sutherland Centre, we used to do... and now I go into these schools and ask them how their choir programme is going and none of them have them any more. That's one of the reasons I want to go into teaching... and I want to go into choral conducting with Arts Unit...That's one thing that makes me really sad. It's not just men's choirs, it's no choir!

S: Why do you think that is, have you got any ideas? We talked about teasing by boys in a choir...

B: Well there's teasing by girls too, and it's not considered 'popular' to do it anymore. A lot of the kids you ask them and they go, Oh, choir's boring because I want to be a soloist. I want to be the star. And they don't realise when you are in a choir you are a star, because you can see everyone in a choir, you're not just a face in a crowd. In a choir of two thousand kids... you can still spot out every single face. Because they don't realise that... because... and it's not really talked about much on TV or news or anything. You never hear anything about choirs. You always hear about the soloists.

S: So you think they're more after the recognition of the person?

B: Yeah. So that's actually a bit of an aim for me... to get choirs started again in Primary School. Music is a really important part of life... I think... and with that missing, you're missing out on a lot.

S: Particularly in the younger years. I don't know why it's not there more.

B: Yes.

S: Okay. Anything else?

B: Not off the top of my head, no.

S: Fantastic! Thank you so much for talking to me today.

End of Interview
B.2.4 CHOIR 4: Community

a) Conductor 4

C: [Choir name] is not a career for these guys... because they don’t earn money from it. It’s a moot point as to whether success... It’s whether they’re in it for the love of each other or the love of singing... or whether they’re into it for the love of the fact that they’re influencing other people. But I’ve got to say, for me, the value of what I do is... that it is successful, when you are going to perform for 200, 300 or 500 or a thousand people. I don't think it’s successful in the... it doesn’t feel for me that it’s a business model, or a model of power. What the [choir] are doing is subversive to those ideas of power, because it’s not only about singing... but it undermines, albeit humorously... it subverts the norms of... you know.

S: When I thought about the [choir name] being involved, I obviously had traditional kind of measures of success, like, you've had CDs made, you go on tour... you've got merchandise. They're all little things that people look at... and you perform at lots of places... and they are all those things that people go, yeah, that makes them successful. Like you’ve said, you might not earn money from it...

C: I do...

S: You do?

C: I do... yeah.

S: There you go. So they’re all fairly traditional descriptors of success... I guess what I’m interested in, is what motivates you to be part of the [choir name]?

How did it start? Give me a bit of background. Why did it start?

C: I’ll answer that... [interrupted by phone call] ... So, let’s answer the question. The [choir]... at the time when... I think the [choir] began as an idea in my mind, I was in a mixed group called, [name of choir]. That was a Hippy group, if you like. Hippy, anarchist, world music group and they were kind of wonderful and magical, but a little bit chaotic, and at the time I lacked both... I lacked the ability to strongly musically influence I suppose a musical group like that so... there was a need for me to apply some musical leadership. So I started leading my own choir, and at the same time... similar time... I started dreaming about... because somebody in that group had introduced me to Georgian music... and that was undoubtedly the thing that kicked off. So I used to listen to this... a couple of choirs [...] choir, and funnily enough a mixed voice choir, who did this beautiful, shimmering religious kind of music. So I started dreaming... so I just started dreaming about what it would be like... I had a few experiences over the years... singing with men and really enjoying it. The simple thing about the fact that the timbre of men’s voices goes well with the timbre of other men’s voices. It's like building... you know it’s like building with wood, just wood. Whereas with women... with mixed voice, you’re building with wood and glass... and you’re sort of trying to make a pleasing combination with it. So... all of that. And at the time I was living... I don’t think... I hadn't often lived with men... like men hadn't been part of... like I lived in a very feminised world where the norms...
were... where women sort of told me if you like what my political sensibilities should be. And so I had some really strong good men in my life at the time, who used to do like men's evenings. It wasn't in any form of men's groups or anything like that... but it got to the point where I was living with a couple of other blokes... a couple of really good friends, who are still my friends. And so it was just this general air of... this was a counter current to the world music choir where it was all... magical and they had these little hats and danced around and stuff like that. So this was a very solid, stolid... um... a lot of these guys that I knew... they were... they were earthy, awesome dudes. So I started dreaming about this thing. We had a few opportunities to experiment with it... and for a while we ran a things which we called the choir boys, which met in Glebe Town Hall and sort of improvised and did stuff, but they, I think recognised... well, a mate of mine [name] he was in that group said, You've got to... like I was trying to improvise and create stuff and he was saying, "Just take charge. Just take charge". So finally... then there was another diversion that took me away for a couple of years. I fell in love and went away to the UK and then I did something, which woke up my song writing. I went on a ten day silent meditation retreat... and...

S: Great!
C: And then I did... a song writing week where I just... So I suppose I unblocked myself as a song-writer. I basically came to believe that I could write a song. So that's kind of... So I created a bunch of songs and then decided, okay, I need to come out... as a singer/songwriter. And so, I did a concert in [suburb]... and I thought well, what can happen...? What can I construct for this evening? And I thought what about the men thing... and I'd had the name, the [choir name] for five years before that, at least. At least five years. And that was, I just thought, Wouldn't it be great to have... a group called the [choir name]. And it would just be like... very masculine, and mysterious, ethereal and beautiful... and then I thought, Damn it, I'll just do it! I'll do it... I'll just call it... It's going to be the [choir name] and we're going to do it. So it was a [location] based thing, so I called all the guys I knew in [location]... there were choirs that I ran, I couldransack those... Some of those mates who had been involved in the choir boys project, two or three other people from entirely outside... a couple of people from [another location]. By that stage I was actually living in [location]... sort of living [...] so we did. We um... we did three songs... and none of them were original songs... it was... no, one of them was actually, yeah...we did a song of mine called Georgia which is a mock Georgian song. And we did an original Georgian song, and a song called [...]. We... out of everything that happened that evening... I thought it was a successful, wonderful evening. But of everything that happened that evening that was just... then it was massive... because you could feel the response from the audience. When the men just went [sings a note] for the first time! The audience just went... you know, it was just... it was palpable. Absolutely palpable. I think everything was from that point... seems like a natural development. Everything... everything that happened... the beauty and stupidity were written into the DNA... both of them are as important as each other.
And was that quite deliberate on your part? Or do you think you just captured something… natural?

It wasn’t… it wasn’t conscious… but it was obvious that men… somehow it was obvious to me that a male group has to not take itself serious. And that, with all due respect, distinguishes us from all the other male groups… because they do take themselves seriously.

Very seriously.

And so, ironically if you like, we wanted to sound as beautiful as possible without showing that we… that we… without looking like we are that serious about ourselves.

I think it’s quite spectacular that you have this… like musically… this beautiful, beautiful sound… and it’s musically brilliant to listen to… so you don’t compromise on the musical or the sound… so you can do the humour and that. It’s a wonderful, wonderful mix.

Yeah… when it’s working! I agree! So that was written in from the very first… We sort of did two serious songs and one funny song, the very first time we performed, but we also… we had this kind of stupid entrance, because there was a pipe organ there. So we got one of the guys to just play these weird spooky notes on the pipe organ for us all to emerge, you know, in this dramatical… theatrical fashion. So we just started doing the occasional gigs, and the response was really… at the time I was trying to make it as a singer/songwriter, but the response for anything that the [group] did touched… like everything they touched turned to gold, you know, by comparison with me, because I was just sort of a singer/songwriter. But also I think that as a songwriter I was able to achieve more resonance or success within writing for the [group] than I was with my own work. And part of it was the satisfaction of… um getting outside of it… Because being a singer/songwriter is an invitation to be self-obsessed, and egotistical and lost in your own world. [Group] is the perfect excuse to write for a bigger sensibility… to shelter, if you like, behind the umbrella of… something. It’s creating something which has got the power that’s beyond um… my… beyond ego if you like… So it’s not about… like we were… what we were discovering about the [group] was that we were, in a sense… it was my songs, our work in [group] was uncovering a male archetype… that’s there anyway. That wasn’t actually about an act of will. Like because everyone’s all about, you know, We’re creating a brand, we’re getting… we’re creating a style… and everyone wants to have style, you know, a brand… and whilst the [group] are no different to anyone else in that we like to ‘iconicise’ ourselves, the essence of that… is completely universal. The essence of what we’re going for is an ancient sense of masculinity… and so much so… that if someone was to emerge from the depths of Croatia or South America, which was a bunch of men doing a version of [makes typically male gesture]… we would just meet them as brothers… and if they called themselves the [group name] and if they understood things the way we did, then there wouldn’t be a problem with that… because like it’s sort of a social movement. At the moment, all I’m doing is being the arbiter of… or the… and not just me… some of the other guys as well… being the keeper of what is [group] and what isn’t [group]. So the stuff that we’ve done which is stupid… and not [group]… Stuff that we've
done that’s serious and not [group]. And sometimes it’s hard to say what it is that’s um... why is it [group]. I mean we had to sing a song that was... like an English folksong... like Raise the rafters... like a conscious anthem... [sings... ‘raise the rafters, raise the rafters’]... it was profoundly un-[group]. Profoundly. We also used to do a sort of a pirate song... where we ended up being very stupid and killing each other... and that was un-[group] too, because it was too... too vaudevillian.

S: Okay. Not so subtle.
C: We’re just... we’re just the un-coverers... and I’m the chief un-coverer... but if someone came along who knew it better... I think I’d be very happy to go, "Like he says." Know what I mean?
S: Yes. In some of the things you’ve said already, you’ve touched on this question, but what are some of the things that you enjoy most about being the director of the choir?
C: The things is... to get right to the point... when you influence people, when you move people... make people laugh... make people cry... make people think... you’re doing what... it is about being heard, it is about an exchange with [...] and we through beautiful sound and humour make people either admiring or you know, moved or disposed to think again about who they are... then... that’s the biggest... that’s the power. I mean every [note] serves that. The perfect chord, great... The perfect song, even better. I guess that sort of applies within the [group] as well... when you see a nice... I mean, I’m looking for a nice movement within myself and nice movement from those guys... in their... I guess their journey towards whoever they are becoming.

S: Cool. So, we’ve also talked a little bit about things that have been a bit tricky... like personality sometimes. But are there things that you don’t enjoy about being part of a choir or being a leader?
C: Yeah... just the administration... and the bureaucracy... and the struggle to make my schedule fit with everyone else’s schedules... and all of that. I mean, there’s nothing about being with those men that I don’t love really. Except when they give me the shits... but it’s usually... There’s a certain minority, I suppose, of the guys... who are a little bit more trouble in one way or another... and when that stuffs the group... but then there’s a significant majority that... and they seldom... that cause me anything other than... joy... I’ve got to say.
S: We talked at the start about the fact that I am looking at success... kind of understandings of success and what they are that makes a choir successful. Would you call the [group] successful? And why?
C: Yes. I’d say most successful. Say... why are the [group] successful? It goes back to what you were talking about... musical values and human values. It’s the fact that it’s a multi-level... it operates on a humorous level and a serious level... either overtly... or at a sub-level if you like. I think... our timing’s quite good. I think men are starting to think twice... and I think... almost more than that... almost as much as that, is that women are starting to think twice about the kind of men they want in their life...
S: Yes.
C: ...and I think that we’ve sort of... there’s a suggestion in... there’s a strong response to us from women that... I don’t know if this is true or not... we’ve sort
of happened across... we've happened across... we've happened as a... I guess, portray or show something, which is what women really... actually wouldn't mind having in their life from men... and that's... we talk about the territory, the sort of middle ground between thug and wimp... and you know, I think a lot of women would probably like a guy who’s... they want a guy that’s got some sensitivity but they also want a guy who’s unapologetic, and a guy who sometimes... who sometimes um... makes demands and statements, and says what he needs. So I guess you've got a pendulum that's swaying from a sort of... an overbearing patriarchy... in some men, probably a minority of men, back towards you know, I’m going to do the right thing. And as it turns out the ladies aren’t much fond of that either [laughs]. They actually want to go over the step and listen to them that they can compromise with a guy who’s not going to... not going to renounce his core values, not going to renounce his masculinity... not going to renounce the stuff that’s important to him. So for some of the guys, the [group] is really important to them. They make it a priority. A lot of the women they're very... I think... wisely understanding... at a cost to themselves, because it... they've got to... you know.... The only thing about this that causes me disquiet is the fact that the men are off getting adulation, fame and success and the women are at home looking after the babies... in the very traditional... thing, and that's kind of the only part of this which is... causes me some discomfort. I think that the women are you know... and when it comes down to it you know, we're... really celebrative of being ordinary... ordinary good men. But you know... for every good ordinary man... there’s an ordinary woman, equally deserving of... of... deserving of adulation.

S: You've just been talking about masculinity, and having watched the [group], as you’ve said as well, you do sort of poke fun at yourselves in many ways, and you take very masculine concepts, like the tools... and the... men just are like this... I mean is that quite deliberate on your part? In the way... are you trying to define masculinity? Are you trying to break down those sort of stereotypes?

C: Yeah, both. Because both... like, yeah... I don't know how to describe it.... We make fun of men and their feelings, so we pretend that we are emotionally illiterate, but ironically, I think a lot of the [group] are quite emotionally literate... and we pretend that you know, our tools are, you know... but ironically again a lot of the men don't get to use their tools as much as they'd like to. So, yes, it’s just interesting playing with that and pushing it... pushing... it's kind of the... making those kind of... just experimenting with how... what we want to say... about... about who we are... yes... it's complex.

S: It is! It's like you were saying before about not apologising...

C: It’s... oh, yeah, I was thinking of writing a new song... and you know, I'm just sort of interested in stuff which... I mean you know... the guys themselves, not many of them are gay, but some of them engage in some amusing homo-erotic humour... and one of the songs that I’m thinking of writing for the [group] is an old schoolyard thing called, Down, Down Baby Down like a Rollercoaster. It’s like a little pat, pat [claps his hands together] and there's a line in it which is, I made my boyfriend a biscuit, he’s as sweet as a biscuit. And for some reason I just thought it would be really fantastic for the [group] to go, [sings in deep bass], I made my boyfriend a biscuit! Because it’s... because it’s... if it was delivered in
that way, it would just be... if it's delivered in that really masculine way... it's sort of like... it's sort of like... a kind of homo-erotic humour, which suggests that... oh, what is it... it suggests that the idea of being gay is laughable, but that we are sort of sanctioning it... or that... yeah, I don't know... I like that kind of... and you know obviously if a couple of the... a couple of the boofy men in the [group] were gay then that would be interesting... interesting to see it... but um...

S: It's interesting that you say that because some of the things that I've read and people I've talked to... they talk about that. Men with men and that latent homosexuality... and even the idea of that Australian mateship. People have talked about those latent things... quite fascinating.

C: Well, it's really complex... you know. When they talk about homo-erotic, I think that a lot of men are not sexually attracted to one-another in the slightest, but they do desire closeness. And I think that I've noticed myself... that I like being physically close to men. I like... you know, putting my arms around them. I like fighting them a little bit... and joking around, but I wouldn't... I would never sleep in the same bed with another... that kind of stuff... and that's not because I'm... that's just because I'm... you know. So I think a lot of the stuff... that men you know... playing footy and showering together... it's quite simple and it's not... homo-erotic... or anything like that... it's homo-friendly. They're actually trying to get close to each other. And in traditional Australian culture, the avenues for that are not necessarily that many. You can't actually just go sort of just go, Oh, mate, I really like you [laughs]. You can't go... it's sort of like you’ve got to... sort of engage in this pretence. I would say, you know, better to engage in the pretence to get any closeness. But also I think... I also think that the language of men with each other... can be expanded to express the fact that they mean something to each other. It can be expanded so that they can speak about... about... I think it’s really important that men can talk... and that’s kind of life and death for some guys.

S: Do you see then, the [group] as an avenue for that... a deliberate avenue for that?

C: No, it was an accidental avenue for that. But the closeness amongst the men, I think it functions as a very good and very important community...

S: Because it’s quite a unique context... men singing with men in a choir setting, isn’t it?

C: Yes.

S: It’s not something that many people do.

C: No, no. And I guess we’re lucky that this whole thing happened...

S: I know we’ve got a time factor here, so I thought I will just push on. If I can get you to think about why boys might not want to be in a choir, I’m just asking you to speculate here... why do you think boys are not part of a choir? It may be some of the things you’ve already touched on... about perceptions of what a boy can and can't do, but in your opinion why might a boy not wish to be part of a choir?

C: Well... I mean, you’ve talked about success, I would sort of talk about... yeah, it's a perception of what a choir is. A choir’s perceived I think to be in a lot of... like in Georgian society singing is something... well it's not necessarily something...
that’s strong… but it’s something that’s just elemental, like eating or drinking. It’s just something that you do. You might be more or less passionate about it, but something in the fabric of life. Some celebrate it more than others, but it’s not regarded as something which is unique. Here, somehow, we’ve got to the point where singing is seen to be something that you only do if you’re weak or gay or if you happen to be awesome at it. So I think it’s… that’s one reason, so they’re just embarrassed in front of their peers to say that they sing. The other things is of course, their voices change, in a way that girl’s don’t… and they’ve got to cope with that… and that’s a bit rough.

S: Now, obviously conducting a choir is something you are going to continue to do… I can kind of see that… what do you think are the most challenging aspects of that role?

C: Conducting? Conducting’s hard actually… that and leading… it is hard and you often come across a younger person… oh, you do conducting? The aspects of group leadership are really most… you need to be able to stand in front of that group and hold that group, and that’s harder than it sounds. So, you need to have a certain amount of personal magnetism. And you need to have the comfortability and maturity to be able to stand in front of a group and go, I’m here, and I’m holding this energy [holds his arms as if about to conduct]... and we’re going to do this… and then we’re going to do that. And then… you have to manage… the… you have to manage the challenges of leading with a… if you talk about massage… someone said, You’ve got to have strong hands and soft fingers… you know, strong arms and soft fingers. So you’ve got to have a powerful will and the sensitivity to work with whatever you find when you get down to the level of feeling it. So you sort of… and that… you sort of have to oscillate between those extremes… as you’re learning to lead… you have to... to lead too much… and be oblivious to what people are saying… and you have to be too sensitive. And then you have to find that balance… so where you’re... riding the beast… and you’re sensing… you’re telling it where it’s going to go... and you’re sensing when it’s resisting that very strongly… you unmistakably have to drive the process... because it’s like riding a horse or something. You know, you go, We’re going here, horse, and the horse will go, I’m not going over there... the horse will see a snake or something, and say, I’m not going there. And so you have to work with the limitations or the... and be sensitive, you know. You’re in an equally invidious position if you don’t lead the horse properly or if you disregard those important signals that the horse is... is giving you... So leading a group, that’s quite massive really. That’s... that’s... that’s leadership... and that’s leadership that applies in any situation. People who lead... people who lead are not people who have learnt to lead... they’re people who do and find they have to lead. And leading itself is a skill... yes.

S: Do you think you’ve been successful at it?

C: At leading? I think I have... relatively speaking... If I can’t lead, I’m not sure what I can do... I’ve got to feel very comfortable with leading.

S: You obviously have a good response from the guys?

C: Yeah. As long as I’m doing... working with subject matter I’m passionate about, and enjoy... then everything’s okay. I mean, I feel more comfortable standing out in front of twenty or a hundred people than I do in front of my computer.
trying to work out which email to respond to... or a lot of other things as well. I’m comfortable. I mean, I couldn’t say... it’s hard to know about success... it’s um... I suppose in the relative level, I’ve... Put it this way, I’ve seen a lot of other leaders and I’mappalled at some of the stuff that they do... both the leaders of our country and the leaders of other choirs.

End of Interview
b) Interview 1

S: I might actually start from your experience now... where you're at now? Obviously you’re part of the [choir name]. Can you tell me... this is a bit of an open question... tell me a bit about what it's like being a part of the [group]?  
T: It’s an honour. That’s not what it’s like, that’s what it is. It’s a... the experience of being with a bunch of blokes, engaged in a common project, a common cause, that is very enjoyable. That’s probably the stand out thing about it, because I’ve never really been with a bunch of blokes engaged in a common cause. That is not without some real compromises involved, personally, you know. 
S: And is that something that... did you join for that reason?  
T: Oh, no. I was recruited. I was part of the initial intake.  
S: So that's something that has come out of being part of it?  
T: Yes.  
S: You didn’t go looking for that?  
T: Yes. That’s something that has happened. I should say quite a few of the other guys will make the same remark, have the same analysis... and... not all of them, but it’s something unique to that group. It’s not... Other groups of male singers... I hear it reported... don’t quite have that happening. That’s quite... I know that... [conductor] told me that he was quite disappointed to realise that. It’s something about this particular group... the actual people, the particular people, you know. 
S: Do you think... I was going to ask you why that is... is it just that mix of people?  
T: Look, I think it’s to do with the fact that, by chance, there’s a high proportion of grownups!  
S: So, apart from that, you obviously like to sing, obviously like to sing, why is it important to you? I am assuming it’s important to you!  
T: It is. It’s important. Of course it’s important, but importance is not the half of it. Actually it’s part of being human... that’s... it’s unthinkable not to. It’s as human as speaking... and I’m very lucky to have that nurtured in me when I was very young... early childhood.  
S: Right.  
T: That means I’ve always regarded it as pretty natural.... as a natural expression of humanity. You know, it’s unthinkable not to be singing. So, importance is a bit of an irrelevant word. You know what I mean?  
S: Yes... yes. Going back to your prior experience then, you came from a musical family?  
T: Yes. Well, my mother. My father wasn’t a musician at all, but he was a music lover. My mother was a music educator... she was a music educator.  
S: Can you tell me a little bit about therefore, your musical experience from a youngster?  
T: As a youngster? Well, in the same way as people will not remember... not being verbal, because you don’t have a consciousness of that time... with words, I don’t remember not singing. That’s the same sort of... memory of that... beginning. I just don’t remember it beginning. And I do remember very clearly doing a lot of singing as an infant... you know, in bed, going to sleep. The top of my voice. Very high... very in tune, I’m told. And actually singing things that I’d
heard in the... on the record player. Some classical I used to sing... and I remember... I'm reminded of it... but I also remember it. Singing the clarinet part of Mozart's clarinet quintet...

S: Oh, really!

T: ...just on... da di da or la la la. Top of my lungs, just... because that was a record that was playing, you know and I loved it. I was about five, I reckon, singing that... and I did... used to do that sort of singing... just without thinking about it.

S: I know you've said singing is part of who you are and who you were...

T: Just to go back to that... initial question, it's as intrinsic as one's sexuality.

S: Yes... that's really interesting. So as a child you were singing... was choir something you did?

T: [shaking his head] Only once at school... at primary school. I went to an OC class in fifth and sixth class, and the teacher there, who was a nasty piece of work, but that's in retrospect... long retrospect... I didn't realise it... he ran a choir... and he got us... and I actually loved it, but I realise it was the sort of repertoire that I would turn my nose up at now. It was pretty yucky. I didn't... that was not of any consequence to me then, it just didn't occur to me. I used to love... and I used to love singing the top soprano, boy soprano part... the top line. That was the part I sang... and I used to love it. I really loved it, even though, as I say, I would probably be disdainful of it at a backward glance. And I do remember my mother coming to a performance... to the school, and being quite dismissive. It was the repertoire.

S: Right.

T: And I was very disappointed... to hear that... because I enjoyed it.

S: So did that play a significant role in you not being part of it any more... the repertoire... or is that something...

T: No, that was the end of Primary School... and then... but there was one other very vivid memory of that same Primary School... it's a singing memory... very, very vivid. It actually sort of stayed with me as a traumatic thing... is that I was always very very nervous... doing a performance in public you know, like singing in front of the class or anything that was individual in public. I was just completely paralysed by that. And I remember singing... there was an Eisteddfod held to make money for a charity... and I sang. I sang a folk song... I sang a folk song on my own, because... playing my guitar... and I can remember, it was just hideous... the experience was just hideous. I thought everyone could see me shaking from side to side... and I just somehow got to the end of it, you know, crash or crash through. And I overheard people talking about it, saying, he didn't seem to know what's going on... you know... it was entirely... because I used to love singing so much, and to do it for the first time... and for the only time for a long time... and to do something so low as... set up as a performance... it just was crushing, absolutely crushing. I have no idea of the actual competence and execution of that song, whether or not, you know... what actually happened... I was just so relieved to get to the end of it.

S: That's so sad!

T: Yeah. It stayed with me for a long time... that experience.

S: So that was the end of Primary School? And through High School you didn't do choir?
T: No, there was no choir when I was in High School. Music was fairly poor.
S: Was that around Sydney that you went to school?
T: Yes, [suburb] High. It was just a... not a very good music school. I studied music for both the School Certificate and the Higher School Certificate, but it was so badly taught that I did the AMEB option in both cases. I don't... if there was a choir it had no profile at all... and I have no memory of it being there.
S: You think you would have found out.
T: Yes, but I do remember in High School, my attitude to singing changed... to do with puberty and stuff. I was so self-conscious about everything. Every single imaginable thing was... that I stopped singing. I just stopped singing. Completely stopped singing. I don't remember thoughts attached to that. I can't remember why... I don't remember... it wasn't something that had... a driver. I just remember stopping singing. I just stopped... completely.
S: Wow! And that was around...
T: I occasionally sang solos in class... in first or second form... that's Year 7 or 8. Occasionally sang with the class, when we did some general music.
S: So was that attached to that voice change period?
T: Yes, very much so... but not that I attach it. There's no thoughts attached to the action of stopping singing. I just know I did it.
S: So, what brought you back... to singing?
T: At uni... I was in my third year at uni... and I got involved in student politics... and there was a big kerfuffle on the campus, with the police being called, and arrests being made and... which I was part of... a series of occupations of the administration building... and that was big, and I was very much involved in that... and one of the student leaders, who was a very big influence on a lot of people at that time... um... he was slightly older than the rest of us... had been involved in political actions elsewhere... he got... he said, "I want to sing this song about the university council". There was a whole sequence of [...] big, big meetings on the lawn... and but one of them, he said, "I've got this song I want to sing, will someone sing it with me". He wanted someone to sing it with him... and he picked someone and that person just chickened out. And I looked at it and I thought, oh, I can sing that with you. It's a parody of the Admiral song from *HMS Pinafore*... [proceeds to sing]

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My family has money up to its ears,
We couldn't spend it all in thousand years
I gave it away in stacks and stacks
But only to reduce my income tax.
I gave it away with a hand so free
They put me on the council of the Varsity
I gave it away with a hand so free
That they put me on the council of the Varsity.
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And it was a parody, it was written in the forties by the [University name] Labour Club. It was in this little songbook, *Songs for Socialists*, and it was about the University council, which was absolutely right on. I sang this and I absolutely...
S: You remember it...!
T: Oh, yes, I’ve sung it so many times since. There’s a photo of me up there singing it... and I did that in front of this meeting of students... just unaccompanied with this other guy.

S: Just like that, you went, Yeah, I’ll do that.

T: That’s right! That... that was my coming out! It just... and then from that... there was a group formed, of which I was the notional president, called [name of university] Radical Songsters... and I met all sorts of other people. I mean, people I already knew... that had background in the folk scene. And that goes to my upbringing and going back to before High School... and where I was very much immersed in the folk revival... the sixties commercial folk revival. Very much... that was part of my family. And singing that folk song in front of everyone at Primary School... that was... it was in that sort of vein. And my mother... had she... my mother had been a... one of the leading lights... well, not the leading light but she’d been a significant figure in the Australian Folk Revival of the mid-fifties as a communist. I don’t know if you know anything about that... but I grew up with that as well... in my heritage without knowing all that much about the politics.

S: Would you say that at the time, or looking back she was a significant part of where you are now?

T: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. Our mum... I mean, inestimable. Inestimable.

S: And a positive...?

T: Inestimably, yes. Like, I feel privileged to have had, particularly in early childhood... to have had what I got from my mother. That’s... I can’t find words.

S: It seems to be that that early childhood period was quite significant.

T: And I only really know that now.

S: So, did you then start singing regularly with these people at uni?

T: No... not regularly. It was... we got together and we sang songs and we got people writing parodies and we did... I sang regularly with... one of the people... my mate M... he had the folk stuff in his family through politics, and we got together as a duo... and we... he’s been my best friend ever since... not just with music but... so that was the outcome of that.

S: And was performance involved in that... then, other than those little moments of social... politics?

T: At Uni? Not much. We sang that song over and over again. It got used a lot... but only after Uni with M there were the occasional performances... functions and that... but... just more with M on a more... performance based... after Uni.

S: I know you’re quite heavily involved in choir these days... how did that sort of come about?

T: It came about because my name was put forward as a possible conductor for a newly formed Trade Union choir in... I think, 1991. My name was put forward
because a friend I had in the union movement was part of the organisation of that and they were throwing around the idea of forming this choir... and he said, "I know someone who might conduct it". Why me? Um... because he knew me as someone who had been involved in music at the New Theatre and my music at the New Theatre was one of the activities that I undertook during a 20 year period when I was... in inverted commas, "not well". I was psychiatrically medicated and therefore a bit disabled... and subsequently discovered I didn't need that medication. It was actually causing that disability, but that lasted for nearly 20 years, during which time I did a few things. Everything I did was a bit of an... ordeal but everything I undertook I think was to do with music, in some form or another. I played the violin... I didn't say that before.

S: No, you didn't.
T: I played the violin and I got involved in the New Theatre, which was a political theatre, which was in my... particularly my mother's heritage, going back to early folk revival.

S: So were you involved in the New Theatre with... violin?
T: Mainly... violin, musical direction, not done very competently, and singing, yes. I got involved... the thing is, with M again that friend... we initially in New Theatre... we auditioned for Reedy River which is a famous Australian musical play... very famous in the history of Australian theatre... a political play about the shearer's strike... which puts all the Australian folk songs... first time in Australia the folk songs had ever been heard... Australian folk songs in the early fifties. It's quite an important landmark, in the history of the folk movement and also theatre, and we auditioned for a production there, which was always done by the New Theatre. Every few years they put on another production. It was in both our blood... those songs... we were musicians in that... and I sang and led off the Ballad of 1881 which was my [...] song... It was a sort of anthem... of the Australian Labour Movement. So I... that was a big thing for me to do it... it was a struggle to do it. So, from there I did more and more music... in the New Theatre... not more and more, just different musical things... but not particularly well. I'm not proud of any of what I did... but it was an activity that I did, and this guy I met through the New Theatre... he wasn't himself in it, but he had friends and I met him at a party. He knew me and I'd worked with him in music and singing with him and a couple of his friends. It was a couple of his projects. He was a writer... some sort of comic writer. He wasn't a musician... and he had some friends and we got together and we had a little troupe of doing his stuff. And I was singing then. And I knew this guy... he knew my history... particularly my family history with politics and my involvement with the New Theatre and that stuff, and he thought I might be someone who could conduct a Trade Union choir. And I never, never... and I was still very much in the twilight zone... with my illness, to be honest, and that was an incredible ordeal and they stuck with me. And when I was suddenly okay, and going off the medication, I was starting again and I sort of opened my eyes and blinked and I sort of started my adult life... and I started doing things with a semblance of competence. I very quickly learnt on that job and the choir started to go from strength to strength. I started to do the job properly... and learn as I went... very rapidly, and that was a moment. So to actually... to be in that position when the
'Rip Van Winkle' moment happened... um... I mean, that's the reason I'm here now, doing everything I do now. They were great to me over the years, the Trade Union choir.

S: So, I mean... would you say, in that period of time when you were quite unwell... you've mentioned music a lot through that... would you say, as well as good friends... would you say that that's what brought you through?

T: No. No, because it would have been there anyway. There's nothing... I mean, music is special... I don't want to say... but there's nothing special about me doing musical things in that period. It gave great solace, it gave great strength from time to time. Sometimes it caused me great... the opposite because I'd lose contact with it, you know. But because it's so much part of me anyway... I can't sort of separate it out. But it was... in as much as it gave me a focus...it was completely disparate activities, which I can't imagine anything else providing. One of the things I did, was I did a radio show, classical music. Once a fortnight I'd go in and present classical music to NBS. I played in the band with M... we had a couple of others, doing the folk stuff. I wrote reviews... classical records... classical record reviews for a magazine, which I'd always wanted to do. I did this music in the Theatre... it's these... dotted around... they're always... I mean, I guess because I could. I can't imagine anything else providing a focus like that.

S: But as you say, music is just a part of... who you are, what you do.

T: Yes. How I think... how I am.

S: Yes... phenomenology stuff, eh?

T: Exactly.

S: Okay, I'm going to just ask you a little bit about... the [choir name]... and in many ways you've answered these, but I'm going to ask you specifically... Would you describe the [group] as successful? You might want to define success for me... how you think of it.

T: I can think of a number of ways.

S: If you'd like to start there... and then tell me about [group].

T: I think in the most obvious and the face value way... successful as a phenomenon in the community... it's much admired, much liked... received much adulation... at places we've performed. So there's that level of success... you can almost call it... not quite commercial success, but it's that sort of success. It's successful as a... again as I've said before, at a people level. It's providing something a bit special for the people in it. That's hitherto unknown or hitherto unimagined, I think by [conductor] as well, you know. So all of that took us all by surprise. And that's that sort of fraternity thing... in a completely new sense. Something previously un-experienced. An alternative model, I think, for maleness.

S: Yes, yes.

T: An alternative. Not that it's completely comprehensive as that, but it's... I think we all feel a sense of... a way of asserting masculinity that's not brutish and boorish... and gross.

S: [Conductor] and I talked a little bit about this very thing, and he sort of talked... I'll ask you your opinion on this as well... he talked about the physicality of being a man... and men being physical with each other, in a way that's kind of
not really acceptable in society... but which sport kind of allows. But from his perspective he says, you get that from [group].

T: Well, I... I'm not sure I'm a hundred per cent with him on that... except to say I feel very strongly that singing together, male or female, is a real apotheosis of physical achievement... in a way that elite sport is... not elite sport... a good team sport. The experience of playing in a team... it doesn't matter how rough it is, or not rough... and that exquisite sense of it all coming together as a team, there is that same thing in a choir... and it is physical... because singing is physical. So I think it's a very close analogy in that sense. I don't think it's an analogy in terms of physical contact... don't quite see it that way. Put it this way, that hadn't occurred to me.

S: That's okay. It might depend on different personalities, too. I know [conductor] talked about you know, he would go up and put his arms around his mates and hold their hands in a performance...

T: Oh, yes, all of that is play-acting and parody and... parody or send-up of some kind of cultural norms and you know, stereotypes...

S: I was going to ask you to comment on that in terms of... in your view do you, with the [group], is that quite a deliberate thing that you do?

T: Yes. Again, a lot of this comes from [conductor]. In a sense we're part of [conductor's] performance. We're not really a group that he conducts, we're a group that he uses for performance, and performance is really important. I mean, you don't get the half of it on recordings... and what he does is of great effect and very thoughtful and very humorous... to send up a lot of those stereotypes... in a way that hasn't been done before. And that's what I think people respond to. They like... People like an assertion of masculinity that is not about the normal assertions. You know, that's quite different. But it's still unmistakeably, unambiguously... and part of that is of course the voice.

S: Oh, yes.

T: I mean, that's essential. That's physical and that's unique... and that's where I think... it comes. Everything is built on that, I think, in the [group]. But it is built... it is artifice... you know. It is a construction that is incredibly... that has a lot of meaning in it... a lot of potency.

S: So, would you say, when the Spooky Men go on stage and perform... I agree with you, it's a very visual thing... you don't get that in the recordings... would you say that you take on or present a persona almost? Or is it very natural for you to do what you do?

T: [laughs] It's hard to say... half and half. It's half and half. I mean, most of us are not very good actors, and that drives [conductor] mad. He wants us to do certain things. But also on the other side of that coin, he wants us to be ourselves. He wants us to have a persona on stage, that maybe you know, not our street personas... that is a construction, but it's something that feels good for us.

S: So, are you comfortable when you're performing?

T: Absolutely. Absolutely... feels very comfortable. But then, I feel comfortable... whenever I'm singing, I feel... I'm at my most comfortable...

S: Excellent...
T: I should say, if I've got to do some acting as well as singing, I find that often quite difficult. That's multi-tasking. But for me, singing is not the easy opposite of acting. Singing is an expression of yourself in action. Acting is how well you lie in action... so I find that quite difficult. I've had arguments with acting friends about this.

S: Can I ask you to speculate a little bit on why you think boys would find it difficult to be in a choir?

T: To join a choir?

S: Maybe to join... or be... stay ...

T: Um...

S: I know I'm asking you to speculate.

T: The obvious things are that it's not cool. Why is it not cool? I... um, I guess... I'll just diverge a little bit... I think boys would have until fairly recently almost universally thought it was not cool to dance... and the prevalence of the dance shows... which shows young men being incredibly uninhibited, incredibly sexy, incredibly adulated, if that's a word... for what they're doing in dancing has changed that, I would imagine. I mean, I don't mix with... a lot of... big populations of school-age boys, but I imagine that's changed somewhat... and I imagine the same thing could happen, and has actually happened a tiny little bit... with singing. But I think, the idea of the Justin Bieber conception of singing is one that's completely remote to most boys. It's not one that's something to aspire to. You see, the idea of singing... people think that singing... right across the board, whether they're kids or not... they think that singing is what Maria Carey does and Justin Bieber does. In other words, they hear professional singers... they hear people make a lot of money from singing... doing something that's quite foreign to them. Singing is not that... so um... I have gone off on a big tangent. I think if singing could be... the dancing analogy is not haphazard there... not right...

S: Well, I think, what I'm hearing from you is that sense of socially, culturally things becoming more normal or accepted...

T: I think so.

S: ...in the general mainstream.

T: I actually think that the reason... is that music itself is undervalued... grievously. It's not taught properly at an early level. It's in fact... it's neglected to the most shocking degree... in the schools. We're very poverty stricken in that regard and we don't seem to have the values in place to put it there. Now, if that was different... if that was different then you'd have people... more people wanting to join choirs, because... and realising that it's quite an... exquisite experience. It's about experience... it's not about performance. I think that's very important. I think that's got to be drummed into educators... about music generally, but especially choirs and singing... it's about the experience not performance.

S: That's quite interesting. Some of the little boys that I've spoken to were quite categorical... and I know that's to do with their age and it's very black and white... but they would say, you know, that success was winning competitions...performing and being brilliant... and earning lots of money from doing something. So when they are asked if their choir is a success, they have to...
go... "Actually we don’t earn any money from it, so is it?" But then they do think it is.

T: Yes...

S: So their answers change a little bit. Do you think that that, for men, is a significant element? The sort of career... that's what's coming through some of the things... if it's not connected to that money...

T: Yes. Look I think that generally, in the community, music is seen as a chance to be rich and famous... and not seen as something like an activity in which participation is the most important thing. And that's a value that's in our community... and that's pretty universal. And that's something a community choir member tries to fight against. So I'd be wanting that idea to be got through at an early level... and for people to move away from rich and... music is rich and famous.

S: So, you're quite involved in the community choir...?

T: I guess... yes, a little bit... I have been, yes.

S: So you see that as quite different... the way you... people approach the community choir... as opposed to what we were just talking about?

T: How I approach it? I mean, it's a hard one to get through. I mean people are... people want to perform, you know. People do see themselves as... you know, community choir performance... it always brings out all sorts of tensions and conflicts as well as good things because people... they see music as that... performance and they don’t defy it... but I think that the good community choirs are... whether it's explicit or not... are there for the week to week experience. People want to come along to that much in the way they want to come along to a weekly massage.

S: Yes...

T: It's for the participation. That's why... that's the starting point for all the other important things about community choirs... whether people have that explicitly in their heads or not. They generally don’t because they don't see music in society. They define music in society as performance. You're not going to change that, by saying, you know... just by saying it. But the experience is something that all people... people always... they’ll always latch on to, and they’ll always remark on it, you know in their own words.

S: And that’s... I mean you’ve kind of answered... I was going to ask you to compare the sport and arts kind of thing... particularly for men. I know some of the boys I spoke to, if they had to choose, at any given moment, whether to do the choir or sport, they would choose sport... every time.

T: Yes.

S: So... in your mind it's about the standing of music...?

T: That's in the ideology. Unfortunately that’s in the ideology. Yes, very much so.

S: Wow.

T: Because there are exceptions... as you know... that [conductor’s] alluded to... that anecdote about the school he went to where it’s more... it’s higher status to belong to the choir... than sport.

S: So it's more about the culture...?

T: It's about the culture, yes.

S: I also wanted to ask...
T: I should say... they did choose choir... I mean, the experience was there to be had... as it is in sport. It's purely a question of what's influencing the choice, rather than... that's separate from what the experience is like.

S: Yes. Absolutely. So... I don't know whether... just pardon me if I've gone over anything you've already answered, but...

T: You know I like talking!

S: I'm thinking about just that idea that these kids who are so enjoying being part of a choir in school... they talk about how... just like you've said, they talk about it being part of who they are... and yet when they're asked about it as a future activity... they say, No, they're not going to do it. So once they leave school they're saying, No, not going to do it. Would you... do you have any thoughts on that? Apart from what you've said about the musical culture that's obviously playing a part.

T: A very big part... because I think a lot of... well, maybe... there would be a proportion of kids who would be involved in sport in school and enjoy it, who don't go on to play sport after they become adults... and I think there's a similar thing going on. There are other priorities. Again I think it's about the quality of the experience that's been had. If it's good enough to hook people into it... You see, I never thought of joining a choir in that twenty-year period. I probably couldn't have, because I did try playing an orchestra once and I found it too much of a struggle... but I never sang in a choir... from primary school, until I got to uni... in the mid-nineties when I started my music degree, after I was okay again... and I sang in the university choir... I never sang in a choir.

S: That's quite interesting, because what I...

T: It actually didn't occur to me!

S: Yeah, okay.

T: I mean, I'm pretty confident about the accuracy of that. As an adult it never occurred to me to join a choir. Now, given that I was under some limitations... but no, it just didn't.

S: You just had that one, sort of experience in late primary school?

T: Late primary school, yeah.

S: Because some of the boys are sort of... there they are in choir through primary school, through high school and then there's this really big gap as an adult male until much later in life... they revisit that.

T: Yes. I can see that, yes, yes.

S: I'm just finding that really interesting... I'd love to get to the bottom of it.

T: Yes... I can see that very clearly. I haven't got any immediate ideas about that.

S: No. I mean, I wonder if... from what some of the people have said... and some of the stuff I've read, if it's about that role... that dominant masculine role...

T: [Nodding vigorously] Yes.

S: I'm the breadwinner. I'm the provider for my family... and that takes over.

T: Or... I'm going out there to live life as a male... and that's going out on Friday nights... and you know, doing a lot of just... fun things. That is about being a male... and just doesn't include that...

S: ...choir doesn't fit.

T: See young men will... I talked about going on with sport... a lot of men will go on with sport. They'll play rugby in their twenties... join the local team... and they'll
play cricket and stuff like that... and that's part of... there's a male culture there that they latch into... part of that culture that I was a bit dismissive of... and they'll find stuff there, but it won't be choirs. It won't be choirs. And I'm not sure if those... are obvious answers that I've just missed is that the choirs don't exist... that they would join.

S: Fascinating... I do find that bit...
T: Because, that's about repertoire. People have an idea about our choirs... it's what they sing... and that can be a determining factor. You know, they think a choir... so many people, if you say you're in a choir as an adult... if you say you're in a choir to someone who's not in that scene at all... they assume that it's a church choir. Straight away! Church choir.

S: Yes... yes, because that's the culture.
T: Yes. That's not going to appeal to many people. Now, it's a wrong idea, but they've got that idea. And I think a lot of it's about repertoire... and about the sorts of things that choirs sing... and it's sort of I think, quite rightly seen as it's a bit... icky... you know. I don't want to be part of that. It's something... you know I'll sing anything, but diversity is essential.

S: Yes. And going back to the [choir name], you've sort of alluded to the fact that the stuff that they sing is satisfying to you?
T: Oh, musically I wouldn't call it the most satisfying music...

S: But you enjoy it?
T: But I enjoy it... because of the total... the total package, yeah.

S: Okay. And... you're a bass, aren't you?
T: I am, yes.

S: So you had a lovely boy soprano as a littlee and then a bass now?
T: Piercing boy soprano... rather than lovely! That's what I'm told. But, yes, bass now. Just speaking very personally, that's a very wonderful thing to have as a male. I feel very good about having a bass voice.

S: Wow. I think that I've probably asked you everything I want to. I'm just having a quick squiz over my questions.
T: Can I just make one other comment about men singing and bass... particularly relating to bass. But the sound that men make, and I think I've told you this before, out of context, but... the sound that men make when they sing is unique, and it doesn't have a counterpart... a gender counterpart... when women sing. There is something about the acoustic properties of men singing together that defies accurate description.

S: Yes.
T: It... it's sexy... it's got a power... it's got an impressive aspect of it, as I say that doesn't have a counterpart. And that's I think... if guys could realise that... and discover that for themselves... to be part of that... oooph!

S: It's like you were referring to before... I mean, when I look at the [group], I look at the type of songs that you sing and the comic value or the fun value of the words sung, the sound... the sound that you make... the persona... it is so... there is no doubt that you are all... men.

T: Exactly! That's what's so good about it. Because to do that... to assert your masculinity in this culture... in most... um... normal ways is to assert something I think you don't want to. For us... you know... and these normal displays... of
maleness in culture... brutish... you know... sort of physically strong, assertive and all that stuff is not something you choose too, but you still feel unambiguously male and proud of that... and this is a chance to do that.

S: Yes, because I think strength is something obviously that's important to a man... that sense of strength, and I get that from listening...

T: Yes.

S: ...I get that from listening to the [group]. I mean when I was here at that rehearsal, when you talk about the physicality of it and just the way men sound together in a way that just is not seen anywhere... or heard anywhere else.

T: That's right.

S: I could feel that.

T: And we know that's what people feel, and that's amazing. If boys could be told about that...!

S: I wonder how we do that.

T: ...just that you don't have to go out on Friday nights and bash someone up. You don't have to... all these negative expressions of maleness in our society... either negative or neutral that are just stupid... very much about [...] I'm sorry...

S: That's alright.

T: There's lots of stuff that's just asinine, you know, and you don't want it. But you want to say, Yes, I'm a bloke.

S: And coming to the repertoire idea as well, we were talking about... a lot of the guys I've been talking to say, Yeah, I'll keep singing, I'll keep doing music... but I'll be a rock star... that's what I'll do...

T: That's right.

S: Yes, that's right. You don't do that in choirs, do you?

S: No.

T: You don't do rock star stuff.

S: And you kind of don't want to.

T: No! It's just not quite appropriate. That's right... doesn't work. Again, I come back to the experience being the thing, not the performance. Need to steer people away from thinking music is performance. I mean the rock star thing is interesting because it involves display... very much involves display and is very much a performance sort of thing. So it's getting guys more into the sporting analogy, I think, the team work, and the execution of skills... in harmony with others, you know. That's a really... I don't know how you go about...

S: I know there are schools that have done it. You know, if you're in the rugby team, you've also got to be in the choir. You can't be in the rugby and not be in the choir, you know. They sort of do it that way.

T: Yes. I would speculate too, often that imposed thing has got a sense of polarity in it, you know. It's rugby at this end and choir at that end. You've got to be both to be a rounded person.

S: Yes, and I think... one of my struggles in all of this research is not wanting... and very well-meaning people like we've just pointed out... in an attempt to get boys involved in things in school, they are kind of reinforcing these stereotypes anyway...
...that they're trying to break down. So it's a hard balance.

T: Yes and a lot of... as in team sport... a lot of these things come to you as a participant... these realisations of this... sort of consummation of individual excellence... together... as this exquisite unity. Those things only come with maturity. They often go... you see young men, boys and young men doing sport and it's all about them and the ego... and that's natural. It's all about their ego and they don't... they're not naturally good team players at a young age. That comes as an adult I think... if it's going to come. And that's such an important part of being in a choir, so again, you don't want to impose it too much, but that's what's there to be found.

S: Yes, and that might be part of the explanation we were talking about before... about why is it men are revisiting... or coming to choir so much later? Maybe that's actually part of it...

T: Could be part of it.

S: ...could be part of how they're wired.

T: But also they've lost... they've lost their physicality in other ways... can't go and play sport.

S: Yes, because it is often in retirement...

T: Yes. So I should... it's obvious, but I'll say it out loud... I'm a special case with my physical disability... is that, apart from when I was young, I've never had the opportunity to be brutish [laughing]... if you follow me, you know.

S: Yes... so did you have much to do with sport?

T: Yes. I wasn't very good at it. I was average. I was in the middle of the bell curve. I was average and I could learn physical stuff with a bit of diligence. I loved sport. I wanted to be a sportsman. I so much wanted to be. I wanted to be better than what I was... and it was a very important part of... that physical achievement. Raw physical achievement was very important to me... and I loved playing sport... loved playing sport.

S: So was that physical achievement... just the satisfaction of that? Just that feeling of...?

T: I guess so... I think it's just something that's there... yeah... I think so...

S: A hard one to define.

T: I played sport, but I didn't like rough physical contact... because I was a little bit um... trying to think of... I was not very robust... not robust... so I didn't like the footballs, but I did love playing sport a lot. I wanted to be a great sportsman, yeah.

S: Wow! T, I think that's all... It's been fabulous talking to you. I'm just looking at my questions and I think you've answered everything on there anyway.

T: Can I just put on camera something that I didn't tell you before?

S: Please do.

T: In another conversation about that thing of men singing together... and that unique sound...

S: Yes.

T: I'll never forget my mother saying when I was quite young... we were listening to a record of some folk... some... it was a field recording of some, I think, Spanish villagers. Men singing in unison... singing a folk song in unison. Um, it was a field recording... quite... in no sense was it... it was the opposite to
refined... but they were all together and they were all singing this Spanish song. And she looked... she sort of glazed over a little bit and she said, “There is nothing like the sound of men singing together”. And that was very much in her mind when she wrote the song that became famous, *The Battle of 1891*. She loved men only singing that song, even though she wrote it for a choir. And in *Reedy River*, it was done like that... just the shearsers on stage singing... this song. I’ll never forget her saying that. Nothing like the sound of men singing, and it’s literally true... there’s nothing like it.

S: There isn’t, and I mean [conductor] said exactly the same thing. There’s nothing like it and what can I say... men’s voices with other men’s voices... just sounds good! Sounds right. Really interesting. I would say the same thing, that I would prefer to listen to men singing together than women. Find it hard to listen to women for too long.

T: You know what I find... completely off the point... for me... I do a lot of choral arrangements and when I do arrangements for women’s voices only... I can’t do it, because it hasn’t got an accompanying bass line.

S: And you can’t get a woman to sing a bass line... it just sounds wrong.

T: No. You just give up because it doesn’t actually work... and I find it very difficult for me...

S: Yes, I agree. Um... we’ve covered success, which is one of my three main themes that I’m exploring and that’s been interesting... talking to you about success. We’ve covered stuff on like masculinity, which is also really interesting... and I think that those things are closely caught up with each other... you know. And the idea of possible selves, which we were just chatting about beforehand. So... I can’t think of anything else to ask you off the top of my head, so if I think of anything... I can come back to you.

T: Please... please do.

S: But...

T: You know I love the sound of my own voice.

S: That’s been great, thanks T.

T: Pleasure.

End of Interview

c) Interview 2

G: How much time do you need?

S: I don’t need more than an hour of your time. So if it goes for half an hour, ten minutes, that’s....

G: No, no, that’s cool. I’ve got no... no um... no pressing commitments, so that’s okay.

S: Great! So what I thought I might do to start with is just... start with your experience of the [choir name] and, I guess... What do you like about being in the [choir name]? What do you get out of it? I’ll get you to start there.

G: Okay.

S: Pretty broad question.

G: Yes. So, a couple of just framing... chronology, I guess, very briefly. So, I hadn’t done any singing at all until I was forty and then joined a community choir. So
that’s... whatever... eighteen years ago... and so then I was recruited into the [choir name] in their... in their first year... by [Conductor]. So by that time I’d been on quite a rapid learning curve, I guess, in terms of music and performing harmony, but that’s all over when you had to do... but I’d been discovering the ability to sing and all the pleasure that goes with that. So there was this whole rapid series of just progressions where... in a community choir, then starting after a few years to being like a little bit of a sub-leader within a choir... of taking a bit of responsibility and eventually starting to [...] through rehearsals and stuff... and then I was recruited into another classical group... more, you know... stepping up!

S: Yep!

G: And then I started a choir out at [Name] Hospital. I was doing some conducting... and so I think... that all happened more or less just in rapid succession over the previous couple of years... so to then go into the [choir name], which at that point was... just a brand new project of [Conductor’s] and we were really seeing just how it was going to go... So the way I felt about it... I guess, was it was incredibly fortunate... because I admired [Conductor] having seen him conduct other choirs. I didn’t know him at all, but I was really... yeah... I just felt really pleased, you know, that I’d been asked to join. So I was like, yeah... a kid in a toy store sort of situation. And it was sort of low intensity at first, because there was just like a couple of gigs you know... just one gig after another you know... no future plan, just seeing how it went, but it evolved and just gathered momentum and gelled into something... over that next two years particularly... just sort of... steadily, one thing after another. First, folk festival gig. That kind of brought the audience in... compared to you know, the little gigs... you know, with people you know and local community. Festival, cool! And then... a really critical moment... so this was 2001 when the choir... the group formed... with no known future and then end of 2003 we got into the National Folk Festival and that was like the big step up... and... this is the last bit of background I guess... so that thing around the end of 2003, we got into the folk festival and then [Conductor] at that point, at the time that we got in, had already committed to move to [location]. So he’d been living in [another location] and we’d been doing this easy thing with him leading it, and so having that couple of years building it up... you know, more songs, this is really cool. He’d come up with another thing, bring another little... um... you know, to the big composition... Oh, this is so great you know! And then he says, “Well, actually I’m going to go to [location]. I’ll be back up here for you know, occasional stuff, we’ll keep on doing [choir] things, but I’m going to be in [location] from now on”. Okay, alright, we’re thinking well may be... this might not go on... but then we got into the National Folk Festival and it went off like a small detonation. We were the hot gig of the festival and... by that time, you know, bit more repertoire, and then [Conductor] realized this is a growing concern. Right we’re going to make this work somehow. And after that, that next couple of years... I took some responsibility, I guess, for the business and also for the rehearsing, so I had a really close involvement for those few years, and that’s now moved on to others, but that was for me... that whole trajectory was just unbelievable.
Yes! And fast!

Fast! Yeah, I mean... I don't want to put jargon on it, but kind of self-actualization stuff, you know, in a real tangible way. It was not only like, my personal experience of experiencing the music... for the first time... yeah, like I had never been part of any kind of artistic community before. I mean, I... I've done a lot of talking and lecturing, and I've done public speaking and I've... so I had a... I was in my forties so I was comfortable in my skin... as someone who would get up and talk to people and I was kind of familiar with projecting myself as an individual... very cool to then sort of be in this sort of... group, this powerful group setting where you're projecting something that's bigger than any one person, you know, and it's tapping into... you know...

So many things!

All good stuff. So that was great, because I'd never done any male group stuff at all.

No?

No sport. I mean, I'd played sport but I'd not been part of the footy team. I've not done any male stuff, so there was this whole real pleasure in... as a middle aged guy... of just being part of a nice bunch of guys that you, you know, identify with... the mission.

So what... you were saying that you were about forty when you first got into that...?

When I started singing, yes.

Not necessarily [choir name], but when you first started... forgive me if you’ve said this, but how did that happen? Why did you suddenly go, "Oh, yes, I'm going to sing" with no experience beforehand?

It was actually triggered by [name]. She is my first wife. We divorced about four years ago. So she had started... she was musically trained and a pianist... and had been getting back into... the usual thing. Obviously you have kids and you lose your connection with your earlier life... music stuff, so she was up to AMus you know, a really good pianist... had not really done anything with any of that for a block of years... with our careers and stuff... and she started to then get back into taking piano lessons and she joined an a cappella group... I think she's with [...] Peasants you know, the small quartet she was singing with... and um... at some point in there, she saw the crowd around the Janet Swain movement... open for members, and said, "Look..." you know, she mentioned it to me, "I think I'll do that and see what it's like". And then... just... this penny just dropped, you know, I thought, "I think I'll have a go at this". I guess I'd been... you know, I wasn’t... not musically trained at all, but we’d been enjoying classical music and that sort of thing and something inside I guess, just sort of... just recognizing how cool that is. But not identifying with doing it! But also being aware that, you know, obviously I can sing. I can sing in tune and I've got a bit of awareness of music... but, no I’d never played an instrument. I had no outlet for it... so it was just literally hearing about the possibility of singing in a choir and thinking, "Well here's an opportunity" and at forty, just like... snowed under with work. Really, very busy at work, very busy with family and being aware of having no other hobby, no... other than books and reading and stuff... but no social outlet. So it was very much just about music... not actually the
social side of it, although I was aware I was socially a bit isolated... and never been the sort of guy who goes out and you know, Friday night you know. So it was just that kind of... I think... the way I remember it, because you obviously polish and reconstruct these things in retrospect.

S: Yeah, when you look back...

G: But I think I've always just remembered that key thing of um... you need another dimension to your life and, you know, this is something you really might be able to do... and I didn't have any other kind of motivation like I'm bored at home... or... it was really I've got too much, I'm really stressed and part of the um... the reason why work is getting me down is that I don't have another buttress to my life, you know. It just made sense... and the rest is history, I guess. I realized as soon as I got there after just a bit of initial, "Oh, my god! I don't know how to do this." And then, “Okay, I can learn how to do this”... and just... that whole pleasure of learning something new... and then gradually learning how to do it well... and realizing. Well, okay, I do really... well, I won't actually call it talent, but I do have... I do understand this. I know how to get better at this and it seems to be working, and my voice... people seem to like my voice... so that just rolled. But the motivation was literally about, How do I put something else in my life in order to make a better balance?

S: And did you find that that worked?

G: Straightaway.

S: Yeah?

G: [nods affirmative]

S: Wow! And... I find... it's hard to describe how singing makes me feel when I sing, but how does it make you feel? Particularly in that choir setting... any of the choirs you've been in?

G: Yeah, well it's been... I suppose it's similar in all choirs, you know, that when... It's partly getting out of yourself, but also being quite conscious of what you have to do to... yeah, to really make it work... and to get the best out of yourself. You're trying to get the best out of yourself and then... and then there's just the co-operation effect. The think that's really great in a choir that's been run well and where... and it doesn't have to be a talented or a high performing choir, it just has to be a choir that's being managed well as a group.

S: Okay...

G: So that... you know, anyone can sing... and it's literally a case of... as long as the person running the choir is um... I suppose just keeping on top of how to get the best out of the people that are there and keeping everyone in the right head space round it. So, they're doing the right amount of work, but also the right amount of just chilling and relaxing and being co-operative and taking pleasure in what they're achieving. Then that's just a wonderful reinforcing vibe. So you can be doing something incredibly simple but it's... hugely rewarding.

S: Yes. I think many of the people I've spoken to as part of this research have all mentioned the importance of the conductor or the leader and they've also mentioned that idea of collaboration.

G: Yes... yes.
S:  The collaborative aspect of being in a group setting... how do you see that as different as, say singing on your own? [laughing] Apart from the obvious numbers element... what does it mean to be in a group for you?

G:  Well... there's the power... the sheer power of what a group produces, and all the nuances that are there, but I'd never done any individual singing so... certainly nothing that I can remember. I'd never identified as a singer... as a soloist. I'm up for that kind of now, but I'm also... and there's a pleasure in that, but I've done very, very little of that. I've done some... I suppose with the [choir name] now there's... and in other settings... I have done a little bit more solo stuff... but it's never something I've been personally attached to... and I'm now really aware of how hard it is. I suppose it doesn't really arise... and I certainly... you know, because I've been lucky enough... on two grounds I guess... my voice doesn't actually blend easily... as long as I'm aware of that... I don't have the kind of voice that's quite hard to submerge... if I forget myself it can come out too hard. There's a technical side to that... particularly when I started with the [choir name]...[Conductor's] been... just his technical knowledge of how to achieve a blended group sound. Once you've experienced a properly blended, properly tuned um... group sound, especially with the sort of complexity harmonic music that's [Conductor] writes... you don't want anything else really because that is such a beautiful... oh, a beautiful experience, you know. And... the thing that was great about the transitions the [choir name] made over those next couple of years was we learned how to lift our game into that territory... how to get bet.... and especially once we started touring the UK. We do a lot of gigs and then you can get... if you really are... led into it you can achieve a level of quality that once you've experienced it you then know what it sounds like and then it becomes actually easier to achieve because... you know... like that's where we're heading, that's where we're heading... and it's less effort actually. There's a rough time earlier on where you know... particularly the people in the group who aren't musicians... might not ... ah... don't get it... and they get to the point where they hear it... and they only need to have heard it in one song and they're like, "Okay, that's... that's why it's really important for us to work on how to achieve excellent blending and fine... and really good tuning and pitch... and that's when the [choir name] in a couple of steps just went up to this other level, and so yeah, um... a soloist can't generate that.

S:  Right... right.

G:  You know, there's a whole other dimension to solo performance, which I'm kind of getting a little bit of an awareness of now, I suppose but... It's just not the same experience and it... it's not just about collaboration and collaboration's a wonderful part of it, but it's probably more like you know the way a... I don't really know, like a string quartet... you know, what they experience in that intense... you know, um... matching of what is different about each person... you know... what can be... where you can meet exactly... and then the music which is structured to produce these wonderful you know... comings and goings... and [Conductor] writes very high quality music. I think that's probably the other key thing. It wouldn't have happened to quite the same extent with the standard if you were working off the standard a cappella repertoire.
[Conductor's] writing is at another level and so you get some really terrific experiences that are not say generic to...

S: No...no. It's fantastic actually and I think... I wonder if he's really tapped into something in the Australian culture. This is what I'm finding... that his material and the stuff that you guys do... and then your kind of... persona on stage...

G: The demeanour...

S: Yes. Do you have any thoughts on that? In terms... You know of... the song material, the idea of masculinity and of poking fun at that... all those kinds of things?

G: Look it works... certainly. I think it's helpful that we come from... the Australian cultural base helps a little bit because it's sceptical... and kind of deprecating. There is that in it. Well, at least the best bits of Australian culture have kind of got that element in it... where you don’t take yourself too seriously. I think that helps... but I don’t think it's uniquely Australian and certainly... well as [Conductor] explains in the gigs you know... we have this debt to Georgian music, which, on two grounds... and it's like a joke in every gig... but it's completely true... is that on the musical side they do have this... probably the deepest choral tradition and within that type of musical qualities that's there in Georgian music...

S: Yes... the harmonies...

G: The harmonies... and the... lack of a leading... There's a couple of things. The lack of a leading line... so the parts just in... they interweave... there's not just one stand out melody... at least in most... Georgian's a whole complicated mash of different sub... there's different countries and ethnicities... some of the musical traditions are solo based or lead with backing... but some of them are just this um... quite unique blended um... even thing... and where the climaxes are often a unison... rather than classic western European lead, lead... resolve in harmonies...

S: The chord!

G: The chord, the chord! It's often a unison... and it's got real um... then there's this... it fits... there's a cultural side of this... which is about um... yes, strong display and mobilizing of energy, you know. That's kind of a bit specific to their slightly paranoid, beleaguered culture in Georgia and it's highly gendered, you know... and not necessarily in a good way. It's very... you know... It's a patriarchal kind of society... the music is gendered, but the thing that's attractive about it, I think, is that the men... the men when they sing have a very... it's strong music... but it's incredibly down-played at the visual level. They... so they're fairly tall sort of angular people and when you look at videos, I mean there's some, I'm like, "Am I on this video?" [both laugh]... and they have this kind of... like granite, you know, very down-played presence and they... they sing with almost an immobile sort of face and that's part of the way that the sound quality... the sound comes out of that. You get different kind of harmonics when you've got a very relaxed back of your mouth and you're not articulating strongly. You get different consonants... hardly any consonants. So there's a whole aspect of the way they... you've probably... you've seen it and we parody it in name as grandeur. You're looking like you could be a statue on a mountain top... for no reason... other than...
S: [laughing] ...you just are!

G: ...you just are! So... it's very internal.

S: And it seems to work so well amongst Australian audiences and the Australian kind of blokey thing as well.

G: Well, this is the thing. I guess we’ve... I’ve performed now... the [choir name] have performed a lot in the UK and we’ve just started to perform to some other audiences... and obviously you get... even here... you might have people from northern Europe or southern Europe or you know, from Asian cultures who see us and so you get a little bit of feedback then whether it’s... how that works. And look I think, the thing that’s almost... well, it works in different ways in different places but the basic thing of guys singing strong... and singing soft... and also taking the piss... but not in a... not in a real um... a cheap trick sort of way...

S: You’re not crass.

G: [nodding] But a genuine clowning kind of way... and then if you look at the mix of songs we do and why we do them... they're all grounded in some basic observations about people... mostly people, of either gender, and then some quite specific sort of stuff which is about male stereotypes... and so in the Australian setting, yeah, it plays off against whichever male Australian stereotypes that are going... but it does... it is certainly helped by Australians. I guess the degree to which scepticism and irony and holding back... Australians will bloody hold back you know. The guys won't put themselves out there unless there's a reason, you know... but if there’s a reason, like we've got to run out to the footy field and smash these guys, they don't care how they look... out there. They're just out there, just doing completely their... you know... they’re just captured by the license to be muddy you know, knocked all over, you know, crying, bleeding. That's what you do in that environment. It's sanctioned. You just do that there. Now, you put them back in their job behind a desk then they’re back to being an Australian guy who won't necessarily you know, put themselves out there in the work place. They won't make a noise, they'll just... but put a footy jumper on them... So there’s... a bit of that, but I suspect that’s nearly universal... and it’s actually not gendered either... and for either men or women, there are the things that are sanctioned to do by your culture... and if you’re doing something that is culturally sanctioned it can be anything... absolutely anything. It could be women doing that. In some cultures it will be women doing that... but typically it’s more gendered around... built around stereotype roles. So the men are doing battle, the women are gathering food. There’s also irony in a lot of cultures about that... so that the women will sing mocking songs about the silly men or they’ll sing words that indicate that "We're out here picking the food because we enjoy it so much and then we'll go home and wipe the baby's bottom, you know. There's irony in a lot of cultures... around traditional singing. So, to meander back then... when we sing in the UK, there's obviously a lot of similar cultural baggage around men... just... they tap into... but I've spent a lot of time in Scandinavia. I've also got a lot of European colleagues. I've always thought, look, the northern Europeans are going to get this absolutely... this is their demeanour... this is what they do, you know. They don’t show their emotion, they um... even in highly equal Sweden or Norway, it’s very gendered... it's...
S: Well, I think Iceland has a very big choral tradition and that's very much a male thing.

G: [nodding] Finland and then... I figured look you're going to get it all the way down into the Netherlands, and then you'll start to find a bit of diversity as to what particular audiences will get. They'll get the music but they may not necessarily get the irony... and it's kind of like as you go towards the Mediterranean... and honour-based cultures, then honour is against irony, you know... and I suspect that's the gradient, you know.

S: That's really interesting.

G: And I think you could look at... I'm sure that they'd get us in Japan but they'd get us for somewhat different reasons. They'd probably see us as being a bit traditional... that we're... you know they have very full on theatre... this is the theatre of Kabuki and stuff like that, where men will do out... will dress up as women and do outrageously strong things. I suspect that if we were in Japan they wouldn't get us necessarily because of taking the piss about men, but many people would get it as, wow this is full on European guy doing... theatre...

S: Seriously...

G: Very! And like the intensity. And then there'd be an element that would get, Yeah, these are the [...] men and they're self-mocking their seriousness.

S: I think that whole idea you brought up about context, cultural context, even socioeconomic and social status kind of... all those contextual things... it's amazing how huge a part they actually play... in things that we don't necessarily think of.

G: Oh, yes! It's like a language. It's part of the common language. It's people connecting with you in a performance. So I think there's... the [choir name] even, although we were able to easily... mobilise, you know, Australian... somewhat Australian... stereotypes, right from the very beginning with being... visually universal... so um... it's... We've always realized the... because we were doing the Georgian music, and had that Georgian stereotype... that Georgian classic choir to work off... what we pretty quickly realized was that actually this could be any man, anywhere, at any time, and each of us would just kind of figure out our own stage visual presence. That's sort of informed by you know, whatever flavour of... so we've got, you know, somebody who looks like British explorers or something, you know, and he's just stuck with that. It's perfect for him. Another guy who realised pretty quickly he could be a pirate... and he's a pirate and he's always been a pirate. Another guy [Name] you know, when he first found his... Amish hat... that just worked for him! He just looks like an Amish minister... that's you...

S: [laughing] So totally works for him, yeah!

G: ...you know! I don't know quite what I am... but once I got the combination of clothes that worked for me... mine's kind of very generic... slightly... I don't know what it is... It's probably northern Italy or something... or the back blocks of Yugoslavia or something. Anyway, so we've been quite... we've been aware from very early on it's really universal and then that has meant that the audiences that we've taken it to, they... have just kind of... they've just kind of got it.

S: Embraced it for whatever it is to them as well.
Perceptions of success influencing male participation in choir – S. Powell

G: Whatever it is to them.
S: You’ve touched on a few things actually that some people might describe as success…and this is another big part of my stuff. Obviously the [choir name] are… they look successful… I mean people would describe you guys as successful. And lots of the things you’ve just said, you’ve pointed to why it actually works. Can you explore that idea of success for me a little bit? Maybe what it means to you aside from anything else… as well as in that choral context.

G: Yes, so, well if it wasn’t a successful performance that resonated with audiences we wouldn’t be here still at twelve years. But the fact is it’s resonating increasingly with audiences and so to that extent we’re kind of… um… there’s issues as any arts group… you know, you find your audience… you go to that audience and what you get is the sustainability at least being able to pay… it’s very expensive to get the [choir name] around to do stuff. So… it’s sustainable. We’ve been able to pay our bills and we’ve become more and more known. So, on the international scene now we’re kind of… as [Conductor] says, we’re kind of at the bottom end of famous. In Australia we’re still in the, you know, higher end of reasonably well known… and that thing of… what we get particularly out of the tours in the UK… is a sense of a thirsty and… excited audience… that just… We’ve been going there every two years and it’s like… they’ve just been waiting for us to come back… and there’s a real… The other thing I haven’t mentioned… it’s people of all ages obviously… it’s very, very universal. It speaks to men but it speaks to women, and kids and boys… boys and girls… and once again, once we realised well we enjoy doing this and other people enjoy watching us do it… well, that’s just a wonderful successful dynamic. You just follow it and the key, absolutely essential ingredient has been [Conductor] being able to… have that… adopting that as a major project in his life. The thing that puts constraints on things he does but also gives him some fantastic opportunities… with… you know, there had to be a point where he had… he obviously enjoyed it at all stages, but there comes a point where he’s trying to figure out what he does with his career and his life and then… there’ve been a couple of transitions but… where he’s really realised, you know, what that place of it is in his life as a musician and as a person… and… provided you know, his creative juices keep flowing from time to time to produce new waves of songs… all the ingredients are there and why wouldn’t you do it… and we all feel a kind of… well yes, an obligation, I guess, that this is so worthwhile and people enjoy it, and we enjoy it, so why the hell wouldn’t we keep…

S: …doing it, yeah…
G: …doing it? And [Conductor]… we’ve just launched a new CD with some fantastic new…
S: I’ve got that new CD. It’s pretty good… and very slick.
G: Yes! It’s pretty slick… and it’s progressing, too, so it’s not like we’ve kept doing the same stuff.
S: No! It was really interesting to hear how it had developed in so many ways… but maintained that flavour.
G: Yes, the essential flavours are all still there.
S: All there…
All still there. So... we've meandered... so success...

Success, yeah.

So success... yeah. Without the success of the actual performance... as a live performance, I don't know what the [choir name] would otherwise be... I don't know whether we'd... you know, if audiences stopped responding to it, I think we'd pretty quickly become another... bunch of friends that come together and sing at parties, you know. But the fact that it's got this... um... actual presence, an entity as a thing in itself we all serve then that's a fantastic success and we're all really proud of it, you know. [Conductor's] really proud of it... and we're proud of ourselves individually... how do we produce this, get that, look after it... so... given that... the success for the individual varies from person to person... but, without question, the ability to produce some beautiful sounds... in performance is rewarding, emotionally satisfying. Obviously depends on the audience's response, but even without the audience's response, if we were singing this really fantastic music and there was hardly anyone there it would still be enjoyable, because it's a really visceral, physical and emotional experience. But then, having the audience's response, I think... well it's a huge issue for any performer... how that affects you. It's just so lucky to be part of an egalitarian group that where what we produce is dependent upon all of us. Just yeah, cooperating, collaborating... um... submerging our individuality into that is a wonderfully positive way to then go to an audience because you sort of... on the one hand you... you're presenting yourself as an individual but from within the safety and the back-up of your friends... and as a collective and as an archetype... so there's none of the ego destroying crap that comes with being a solo performer... or even in a small... if you're a front person in anything... I've now met a lot of artists and friends who perform and I've heard them talk about, you know, the difficult side of that... you know, keeping your own personhood intact especially if what you're doing creates a strong emotional response from the audience, you know. That's very disorientating. So we're just lucky to... because we can do that. People are... you know, they're crying, they're moved, they fall in love... you know, but you just... can still just be a [choir name], go off-stage... you can meet and talk to people. We have wonderful, wonderful conversations and interactions with people... but you don't have to be anyone else other than who you are... and you're not... and it's not just because it's only a part-time job. I think it would work even if you were doing it full-time. You're part of an ensemble and so I think that what that tells me is that the... I suppose... the ethos of the performance and the content of the performance and the type of music somehow is just personally reinforcing and quite good. I don't know what the word is... but it's actually good for us in... in a way that... if you're a solo performer... or even in a small... if you're a front person in anything... But then, having the audience's response, I think... well it's a huge issue for any performer... how that affects you. It's just so lucky to be part of an egalitarian group that where what we produce is dependent upon all of us. 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People are... you know, they're crying, they're moved, they fall in love... you know, but you just... can still just be a [choir name], go off-stage... you can meet and talk to people. We have wonderful, wonderful conversations and interactions with people... but you don't have to be anyone else other than who you are... and you're not... and it's not just because it's only a part-time job. I think it would work even if you were doing it full-time. You're part of an ensemble and so I think that what that tells me is that the... I suppose... the ethos of the performance and the content of the performance and the type of music somehow is just personally reinforcing and quite good. I don't know what the word is... but it's actually good for us in... in a way that... if you're a solo performer... or even in a small... if you're a front person in anything... But then, having the audience's response, I think... well it's a huge issue for any performer... how that affects you. 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I suppose... the ethos of the performance and the content of the performance and the type of music somehow is just personally reinforcing and quite good. I don't know what the word is... but it's actually good for us in... in a way that... if you're an artist doing different kind of repertoire... and where you've got to be the thing... that thing... that weird, strange flower... you know, that dazzles people but that is not you actually... that would be really hard... Yes...
talk to me… but it’s not at all difficult and so I… but having said all of that… has it all changed? Well, of course.

S: Yes?

G: [Nods] And I’ve experienced it I guess… as a whole bunch of good changes. So it’s been a success, I guess. Personally, there’s obviously been pride in learning how to be, you know, a part time musician… but to do it… to do a particular thing at a high level that’s been wonderfully satisfying… and it’s certainly helped me to develop emotionally, without any doubt...

S: Is that to do with… excuse me for interrupting you...

G: [laughing]...no, I’ll just rabble on, you know!

S: Oh, it’s fantastic… Is that development to do with being with others or the actual act of singing? Because I find singing incredibly personal as opposed to playing an instrument… slightly different from my perspective. Slightly different… so… I’m a flautist, went to the Conservatorium, did flute, but also a singer, and when I sing I feel very much like I’m giving myself, but I’m not necessarily...

G: Oh, is that right!

S: …feel the same as when I play the flute.

G: You see, I don’t have any comparison there, because I’ve never learned an instrument.

S: Do you see singing as a very personal thing?

G: Yeah… absolutely. But I wonder whether part of the um… the thing that helps you develop is that it locates you… it strongly lo… especially singing in a group… It locates you somewhere just out there [indicates with arms a distance from self]. You know… I think it really helps… um… I don’t know how to find the words for it… it helps with your ego. You become very… it’s a giving thing, so it’s comfortable so you… you feel strengthened so I suppose… what does it do? Whatever you produce, say whether it’s good or bad like… obviously you have bad gigs, you have the odd bad song… you have… you stuff up… you know, you do something really stupid… so it helps make you a healthier ego in the sense that. You take a risk… and the [choir name]... you know, it’s not designed to be comfortable out there. You’re actually quite deliberately presenting vulnerability, stuff up… but strength… it’s realistic...

S: And that can be confronting… sometimes I guess.

G: Well, there are moments where it bloody is. I’ll come to that in a sec I guess. But… let’s say if I look back to myself before I started singing at all… I mean, I wouldn’t say I was a control freak… but a perfectionist, you know… it’s kind of part of my personality… and still quite anti- social, but a-social, not a natural… not naturally gregarious...

S: Nor am I… I get that.

G: There’s no right way or wrong way to be here! And that’s something you kind of come to accept in life anyway… so there’s all sort of aspects of yourself that you get into shape during your forties and fifties… and you’re through that all the time. So from there it was just gold to have… to actually develop as a person through performance and music. It broadened me out, you know. Like it was stuff that I hadn’t been doing. So there was all this positive feedback on um… on my daily life, I guess. Just in terms of being a more relaxed person then... yeah,
the risk taking in public... that... with people watching you... I knew a little bit how to do that... but really, it really brought me on there... and then um... as a perfectionist sort of person, then tolerance of failure and experiencing and how you cope with... quite public stuff ups, things that haven't worked and just um... you know, your resilience... around that... and then confidence, you know... so as a shy person all my life... you then get into this space where you've learned how not to be shy. Yeah... it's all positive.

S: It's amazing, yeah.

G: I couldn't probably enumerate all the ways that's made me a better person, I suppose, to be really banal about it! So how does it feed into other things? I mean I know... people commented on... at different times, you know, they've commented on... they're surprised at me getting into this... and then amazed to see what I'm prepared to do on stage in public, having known me as a... not a button down person, but a... um...

S: Not extroverted necessarily...

G: Not extroverted... absolutely... absolutely not! And look! Honestly, I think it helped me enormously with just inter-personal relationships... because that's all based on... um... you being comfortable in your own skin and being prepared to take risks in communicating... and self-expressing... so there's obviously within the [choir name], you know... and I didn't have any male friends other than just a couple of long term... you know, close-ish, but people you didn't see very often friends... and now having this broader group of guys being able to share with... it's just really, really positive. But with women too, you know, um... very constrained kind of life... only knowing a few people... to then just meet lots of people, women and men, and then just interacting at all sorts of levels. That was socialisation for me that... I would not have got into... I suppose the choirs... the choirs definitely did that, and then Spooky Men at this other... yeah, I mean, I learned a new level of confidence, you know.

S: Could you see that... were you aware of that all happening at the time? Or is that looking back?

G: Pretty much at the time.

S: Yeah? At the time? Wow.

G: Yeah. Interactions happen, just in terms of you know, really quite basic... the stuff of... you know, being a really shy person, really quite low confidence... always been a bit of you know, hate to put it this way... always been a leader... like I've been at the head of things... and obviously trained up in medicine you know... working as a doctor was an incredible growth experience for me... a lasting thing, otherwise I could have been... ended up being a nerd in the background... you know and never coming out to the light. Medicine taught me... and just interacting with people in health taught me a huge amount. But then I went into research and that all... that sort of stopped... and to get into music and singing sort of got me back out again.

S: Yeah...

G: And... yeah!

S: You mentioned a choir you started at [hospital] or...

G: Yes.
S: Can you tell me about that? Was that to do with patients and... making people feel better or...?

G: No, no! It was purely like an extracurricular thing for people who worked in the workplace.

S: Okay.

G: So... yes, it started with just organising some music for the Christmas party. Long story, but, doing some carols, you know, and instigated...

S: And you started this?

G: Instigated by my boss who is a really accomplished musician, but then I said, No, look, I can do that... yeah I can get some arrangements... because we’re doing some carols. I’ve got some nice arrangements that we’re doing with a family choir... and I knew there were other people in our department who could sing and were keen... so... I said, Let’s do this for the Christmas party. A couple at Christmas party said, Why don’t we do this at work? And so with their um... so I had a little critical mass of people who were prepared to give it a go... and then we ran um... and I conducted a group for five or six years which was open to... basically a community choir at [hospital]... and um... and we maybe put on two concerts a year for fundraising and so conducting was a huge... that was a huge development stage.

S: Yeah, a big learning curve. Did you sing at the same time as conduct, or did you just conduct?

(resetting recording equipment)

S: Excuse the interruption... and just that idea of success. Would you suggest... and you’ve made a couple of comments that maybe sort of allude to this... do you think that part of the choir’s success or... let’s just go with that word... is down to that leader?

G: Well, yes... say... and as a general principle... a choir needs um... different choirs have different objectives, I suppose, you know. There’s choirs where the purpose is people getting together to sing... so long as there is some framework that creates the setting, and they know they can turn up and can get that experience out of it. So that leadership of making that happen could be self-generated, it could come from multiple people within a choir, and clearly when you have multiple people who are working cooperatively to make the choir happen... that’s an absolute pre condition. [Choir name] have that. For you then to get up to performance standard... even as a community choir. Performance in public is a really big step and so... that’s where the choir leader, the director, has to have a certain level of skill... and of interpersonal awareness of the issues around managing a group of singers, you know... and that’s true of any level, even at the simplest community choir. The ability to sort of respond to the sort of things the choir would like to sing, but also to be able to stretch them... so they don’t just keep doing the same stuff... but you keep bringing fresh things to them, and then um... yeah... each year at least once or twice, to be able to take them from their comfort zone into the scary environment of producing a public performance... however small. That takes a degree of leadership, you know, and I’ve been lucky to see good people to do that, and I’ve had my own instincts around it... and you watch what they do, and you watch what works and what doesn’t work. I’ve got a reasonably good instinct... I’ve learned a reasonable
package of skills around that… and so I know the things I can do and things I can’t do.

S: Yes. Okay.

G: So that… um… there’s a real… both… there’s a level of musical technical knowledge you just must have… the ability to teach at the levels of the people who are in your group to be able to just absorb the elements just so it makes the job easier and makes their experience more enjoyable… and then… yeah… to be encouraging. I’ve seen a fantastic… the leader of our um… the [name] choir… Elizabeth Swain was just a wonderful exemplar of how to be relentlessly positive and… but also to be able to pick the things that… and to mention and to encourage things that were going to make a difference. And so you’d just constantly, constantly be improving. The group would be improving, the sound would be improving, the piece you were working on would start to sound better and better… her skill in being able to select only the things that were going to make that difference and not get distracted by… perfection. Or too much attention on one thing… that’s a huge, huge skill. So [Conductor] is an incredibly accomplished and good musical director.

S: Yes!

G: But there are issues around all of this that he needs support with… and there are different leaders within the group of the [choir name], who… again input’s welcome from anyone, but the group has always been very, very good at not being… or of not allowing any kind of domination, you know, so I suppose there’s the whole ‘no dickhead’s’ principle of who gets in… but then when we’re in, you know, there’s an ethos about the way we behave… and we’ve evolved a good, I think a way… a really good internal culture of supporting [Conductor] giving him feedback as required… either offline… either publically or offline about what’s working, what isn’t working interpersonally… and we’ve had… obviously there’s been some rifts… you know, there are… people have been unhappy… people who’ve left. And [Conductor] has accepted the leadership position for that… he is our artistic director… we said very early on, these are the things that will be your responsibility… so we’ve always been really clear that. We might have suggestions, or ideas about music, and he obviously collaborates with us to write stuff but… some stuff he generates completely himself. We know that if we give input it’s his call for what’s accepted. He’s the artist and we really respect that.

S: Yes. In terms of success, I’m thinking of a couple of comments that some younger boys that I’ve interviewed have sort of made, and that is sort of idea that they don’t want to be part of something that’s not very good… and so… particularly if they then have to go and perform that…

G: [Nodding] Yes, yes.

S: So some of the things that you’re saying reinforce that…? Do you feel a similar thing yourself?

G: I’ve experienced it over and over again… yeah… um… how to put this… I suppose it’s um… you want to have a good experience when you perform… so there’s a comfort zone… you know… aspect of it… if it’s anxious… if there’s too much anxiety around whether it’s going to work… or if you lack confidence seriously about what’s going on around you then, you have to be quite mature
to cope with that... you know. I can see why the young... you know! Everything's at stake for the young guy, the young woman, you know. You're not old enough to accept the fact that... or what the parameters are... it might be... well, okay we're showing up here, the preparation's been terrible, but we kind of all know that and we know that we're doing the best we can... and it's better for us to be at this um... choir shindig with our couple of songs than not be there. Because you get all this other... you know by then... if you're a mature person... you know that what you get out of it... you're dressing up you're joining [...]... you're mates, you know, you're supporting everybody. We're going to give it a go... and provided everyone's attitude around that is okay... it's actually an okay experience... even if it crashes and burns. And part... I think... part of being a good conductor and director there is that you share the same... like you're clear about what the expectations are, and... your ethics of the situation are um... that this is not about me or whether I'm going to be embarrassed about whether you stuff up... you're sharing...

S: ...part of it...

G: You're saying, this is why we're here... this song's cool, great, and look if we crash, I'll just stop us all and we'll start again... and we'll be fine the second time round. That's how we'll enjoy singing the song. I'm not going to... I'm not going to drive a train wreck through, we'll just stop... and then... half the group won't have thought of that as a possibility, you know. They go, Oh! That's okay... it's actually okay to stop and start again. And so you... you can... you can... and then at the same time you can work quite hard and say, Okay now in this song you know, da-da-da-da-da-da-da... it rolls and everyone goes, That's so cool! You know, so you can have those rehearsal moments where you prepare people for an enjoyable performance... and they get from that that the point of it is we're going to be proud of what we do. We're going to enjoy... We're not going to sugar coat the things that are failures... but we're not going to beat each other up about it where... it's a real shared thing. So, for the [choir name], the way it works for the [choir name] for instance, is simply... exactly very much the same. We found that actually we were pretty good at getting things up quickly so then if we go to a festival, we've got a new song, we've only just been working on it the last... even in the last week, but we're up for seeing how it goes... and we know... we're all familiar now with the process. So the process might be: look, make sure we all get to the Friday night rehearsal, and we'll try it you know, on the night and we'll go, okay, this might work, let's see how we go tomorrow afternoon. Da-da-da... not quite there, we won't do it at tonight's gig. Saturday night... let's... tomorrow morning we'll meet at camp at ten... because [Conductor] will say, I think it's almost there... and if we all don't believe that, we'll tell him. You know... we'll... like someone might say, look, I don't think so... and other guys might go, No, no, I think all we have to do is this... others will go, No, this is a crash. And we've all been around together long enough... we all know each other well enough, I think that we usually have a similar instinct.
around these things... so we don’t force ourselves to do things that aren’t up to
the standard we’ve achieved... so for a community choir it’s exactly the same...
there’s a particular standard you want to achieve... you won’t go out there
where nothing you do is... where it’s all horrible. But that’s all about selecting
the songs that people can do and... being enough within the comfort zone that
people feel they... it’s going to be okay. But the leader has... and the leaders
within the choir... you know there are obviously people who...

S: Yes, sort of anchor people.

G: Anchor people... but they need to share that same understanding and if you
don’t have that, you have a pretty unpleasant... it can be pretty unpleasant.

S: Yes, mainly. My final question... just looking at the time... it could be a very
simple question actually... Is the [choir name] or any choir, something that you
will continue to do... for life... as you see it now, I know things change...?

G: I... I’d find it really hard now to be involved now. Yeah, the [choir name], when
they will at some point... will retire...

S: Call it a day!

G: But I would... will... I’m still pretty busy at work... and young family and stuff so
I think... if I weren’t quite so busy, I’d probably be looking to join another
choir... a chamber classical choir because I just found the music development
side of that so good for me. I’d be angling to get back into a choir like that. If the
[choir name] fold I’d definitely join something like that. Yeah, I just want to
keep musically developing. And I know that I’ve probably only got another ten
years before my voice starts to you know, pack up a bit... and so... but again I
really enjoy the experience of singing so I’d be looking for the community choir
setting, I guess, because I find it so rewarding.

S: Yes. And the... I find it really interesting someone who, as you were saying,
didn’t have musical experience... so you didn’t sing as a boy or...

G: Just at school, you know.

S: Just school stuff?

G: School events and I suppose that’s the only feedback I’ve had was that... I knew
I could... nobody ever told me that I was singing out of tune.

S: So that was a reasonably good experience, even as small as it was, back... as a
boy at school? It wasn’t a horrible experience for you?

G: Absolutely... there was a... no, I suppose that’s right, yeah. There were just
enough opportunities to... it wasn’t like high school. The school I went to was a
boys’ school and it was just a natural thing that there was singing... were
musical items and there were mass choirs and everybody was in it and there
wasn’t a marginalised, specialised activity... there wasn’t a lot of it, you know...

S: ...but it was part of that school’s culture?

G: Yeah, it probably was just a critical minimum. If I hadn’t done that, I...

S: Sometimes things can turn out quite differently.

G: Yeah. If I hadn’t done anything... singing in school items... I’d have... it might
have played out a bit differently for me, yeah.

S: Yes, interesting. I managed to interview a couple of fairly well known people...
um... conductors over in the UK last year, and one of the things that came out
from talking to them was this idea of this cycle of tradition. Tradition related
to... what you were saying about culture. And of course in the UK you see that
very... here they are as boys... very normal to sing as a boy... it's obviously certain schools, it's changing as time goes on in other schools... but that then leads to high school then that leads to the next thing and they have choral scholarships at Oxford and other places...and that's a really normal part of that culture.

G: Absolutely... and look, things have improved a little bit generally. Young people now, as I observe it... are more... for all sorts of reasons... are much more open about performing and boys performing at school, like with their rock band or whatever. That's normal now in a way that it wasn’t... when I was growing up. But generally speaking yeah, our [...] culture and our Australian culture has been pretty poor at... and both men and women had very little experience at singing in public, and I found that... I worked in Sweden for a few years and it was quite striking there. They had a different culture. Everybody sang! They all sang, and they sang at all public occasions... so... parties, birthdays, in church... probably quite informed by the church... the tradition of singing in church, you know. But everybody sang and everybody knew all of the um... all of the songs that are part of the repertoire of... Christmas or birthdays or feast days or... you know, even in this... it was really quite an eye-opener... and what I noticed was that um... and what was quite different to here... was that teenagers would happily sing the daggy... the daggy songs... with the family or in... with the schoolmates or... they all knew the songs. They didn’t think twice about um... how strange it is to be singing in public because that’s what they do.

S: That’s just it, yeah.

G: That’s when I realised, Wow we've got a really impoverished broad culture about singing that’s kind of... people think they can’t do it, and... they conclude they can’t do it... they feel a bit... they feel quite shy about singing. 

S: And I think it’s partly to do with that idea that what we’ve really been saying is unless that culture is there... you know, you’re brought up that way, you sing as a kid, at home, at school or at church or wherever you are...

G: Dancing is very similar... 

S: Dancing is exactly the same, yeah.

G: And it’s so striking... you know when you look at lots and lots of other cultures... take... for example, African American people. You know, the concept in their head of never singing or not knowing how to bloody dance and move your feet... they can’t even conceptualise it!

S: No!

G: It’s like the Swedes about skating or skiing... you know. In fact you couldn’t even ask them about... how do I... they couldn’t teach you how to do it...

S: Like a reflex!

G: ...because just consciously, you just do this... you just balance... Yeah, but how do you?

S: It’s like walking, how do you explain how to walk...?

G: It’s so deep. Like if you start... as long as everybody does it and you start really early... then... that’s a resource that every single person has... and we certainly don’t have singing as a universal resource.

S: And I’m finding that, because I’ve been focusing on boys, particularly in this research... and it’s not even set up as a comparison. I don’t want to do that... but
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it’s just really interesting as a music teacher, my experience has been, Well the boys will sing this type of music... and they'll sing if they’ve got their guitar in front of them... and they want to be a famous rock star... but if you try to get them into the choral group or even just a smaller vocal group... even though the music is quite interesting and whatever... they’re just not quite happy to do that. That’s really interesting, certain contexts and certain styles...

G: And we’ve certainly been... the [choir name] have been told that over and over again and helped...well, we’ve um... we do a lot of singing in schools on tour and... particularly on tour... and... there was a big conference in Brisbane around boys and music, three or four years ago... but yeah, just us doing our singing in an environment... you know, you see the boys... kind of, they’re watching like this, they’re not sort of doing anything... and then you can see the lights going on, you know. They’re kind of... “So cool!” And then you can get them in.

S: I think that’s what stood out for me about the [choir name]. I think that’s where... when I started talking to you today about that whole idea that it taps into something in Australian culture... it’s fascinating what you said about the Georgian thing because I hadn’t really made those connections, but it works so well with the Aussies and you’ve seen it there.

G: Well... well, it’s partly... what makes it accessible is... that they can... say the boys... they can get in their head from where they are to where we are quite easily, because we’re mostly doing nothing.

S: Yes, yes!

G: We’re mostly just looking... we look weird and strange but... strong. The music is strong... and then we do... stuff happens or we react to things, or there’s words in a song... that just puncture that whole strength... so that what you realise out of that is... you don’t... you can be strong... doing very little but just doing important things, you know, and you can be strong by being brave... brave to look a bit ridiculous. Or respond to a silly joke, which is all about how... you know... something embarrassing. And so for men... a bit like on the sporting field, you know, that’s where kids, when they get into sport they learn how to take a knock... or pick themselves up and keep going, because there’s all this support and teaching they get around... well, here’s how you cope with that... you know, and... here’s how you fit in with the rest of us... I mean we all do that... we get this great result... or we resist this attack, you know. So there’s quite fundamental resilience in stuff about strength... and you... what the teenagers... the young boys and the young girls are looking for and trying to find, I guess, is... they’re trying to find... and they’re being just immensely cautious about things that expose them and you can show them in the singing here, Oh, no, actually you can do anything. You can go... and you can do something incredibly silly and you’re still strong and respected and people like it and that’s really liberating... and kids start to... they move from a very cautious, I’m so cool... because anything else is going to make me really vulnerable and bad things are going to happen to me... to... Oh, okay, I can take a chance here... or I can run into a tackle and even if it comes off badly that’s just what you do, you know. Well it’s the same with performing you know, so it... I think it mobilises them, yeah...
Appendices

S: Would you say... this will be my final question... would you say that the choral kind of situation is a really important context for young people... older people... anybody?

G: Very different at different ages, isn’t it? Um... young people... mostly... relatively few of them feel comfortable with that mixed age thing. So [choir name]... like we’ve got some younger guys, who are in their twenties, you know... and it’s really important for all of us that we gradually try refreshing the age mix... so that we’re not just becoming a bunch of old guys you know. But relatively... I think... leaving the [choir name] aside, even a mixed choir is a pretty challenging environment for younger people. It's not necessarily what they’re interested in... in doing. And they’re also... the sort of touchy, feely benefits of being in a group don’t necessarily appeal to a person at eighteen, nineteen... or early twenties, and it’s to do with your personal development. Your boundaries are still forming, and it’s a bit... and I don’t think it’s appropriate even for them to... because a community choir environment is mostly dominated by middle aged people who are just really relieved and enjoy the looseness and the emotional nakedness of singing. Young people don’t necessarily need or want that. But there are some incredibly powerful choir experiences for young people, which they really love, you know. So with your other young people... fantastic. Kids and teenagers, you know and especially the really high quality ones like Australian Children’s Choir, and Gondwana Voices... things like that, they’re amazing. But on a mass level, probably the closest kids get to that is like um... I don’t know... School Spec... or other massed choirs. The thing there... as we said before, that’s just such a huge, positive experience for kids. But yeah... community choirs are not necessarily the right thing... or even a good thing for um... for the teenagers or the young adult. Not because they're bad... but because it’s not what they want to do. They want to have different kinds of experiences with their friends and they also have a culture... that isn’t necessarily the same as a community choir culture.

S: It’s an interesting social... they’re social... very sociable about what do my friends think about me and that kind of thing, but at the same time it's still very much about themselves. So that group context is maybe a little bit... hard.

G: And there’s this development which keeps going until... I vividly remember it for me... in mid-twenties... you know. It’s actually only in mid-twenties that... my experience... there’s... maybe a bit of literature on it... you know, brain development stuff... you really haven’t got all your personality and all your faculties... until your mid-twenties. So horses for courses... all the way through there...

S: Yeah, yeah... Is there anything else you would like to say that you might have thought of that I interrupted you...?

G: No... no I think we tapped on the main things.

S: Yes, you really have tapped into a lot of things. Thank you so very much.

G: Pleasure...

End of Interview
B.2.5 Professional Conductors

a) Professional Conductor 1

S: As I was saying at lunch time, I'm particularly interested in perceptions of success. No right or wrong answers. I'm interested in the culture of singing in schools and anywhere in the UK particularly, because mine is about the Australian context... and any issues surrounding getting boys to sing in choirs... getting them to join in the first place and getting them to stay in choir... and those sorts of things. So, what I thought I'd ask you to do first is give me a bit of an idea of what you do here now and a bit of an idea about the school.

O: Okay. So, the school is an ancient foundation, traditionally boys and it was a boys' boarding school for many years. It ceased to be simply boys and it ceased to be boarding in the late 80s, early 90s, and it's now almost completely 50-50 co-ed... it's sort of 60-40... Going back to the tradition of it being a boarding school, there is a routine of chapel Sunday evenings and that chapel was built in the 60s – 1961 – and that's where the first boy's and men's choir first came into being. They would rehearse a lot in the cathedral tradition in terms of music and in terms of rehearsal and training... and they would sing every evening during term time. That tradition of Sunday evenings still exists. The choir still sings on Sunday evenings. Every Sunday during term time with the exception that now it's not just boys. Now we have lots of girls as well. So we have two girls' top lines – older and younger – and they will alternate with the boys. So, essentially we have three alternating top lines, and men. So, as I said, there's still a Sunday service sung and it's no longer just boys... but... so all of that goes back to when it was a boarding school.

S: So, as you said to me at lunch time, that's quite rare really, that it still continues?

O: Yes... I have spent a lot of time looking and I cannot find another school that is not boarding but still has a Sunday evening tradition. Of course, there are lots of schools that have choirs with chapels and aren't necessarily... they don't have to be boarding but it's the Sunday evening tradition that seems to be quite unique here. And we're very proud of it!

S: I would be. So your role here, what do you do?

O: I'm the organist and choirmaster. I have the responsibility for all of the music in chapel, so that means recruiting and training and inspiring the choristers – boys and girls – and overseeing that their repertoire is varied and suitable and... challenging at the same time... and I liaise very much with the Chaplain for what he wants, as well as with the Head of Singing, who actually herself runs the girls' choir. So she has charge of them and I'll play the organ when she conducts them. So that's the significant portion of my job. I also do classroom teaching. I teach 8 periods a week of Music Junior school, Year 7 and 8 - so that's 11, 12, 13 year-olds – and I also upper sixth, doing their A-levels. So I teach 8 periods a week.

S: So you're busy!!!
Yes, and I’m also the school’s Head of Keyboard. So, I’m in charge of all the making sure everyone’s happy with everything and the piano and all the teachers are happy with facilities and timetabling. I should actually say that one thing we do here, which I suppose is a significant portion of my job, I go to three primary schools a week in the area, and we have an outreach program called, ‘[town name] Sings.’ I go and – I’m going this afternoon – it’s primarily Year 5, sometimes Year 4s – and we will do songs and games and warm-ups… I will work with three schools a term, going into each one about 8 times, and then they will come here, to our […] Hall and we will put on a big sort of outreach concert. So that’s… yes, we have an outreach program as well… lots of singing, yes, lots of singing.

Great! So, did you sing as a boy and as you were growing up?

No, not really. I hated singing as a child. Where I went to school it wasn’t the ‘done’ thing, to be honest. There was a choir but it wasn’t something that ever occurred to me because there wasn’t a culture of it. I joined a church choir when I was 13 or 14. I was never very committed to it, and actually, through that route I became interested in the organ, so that’s how I got into it. And I came back to singing later on, I suppose. So, no, I wasn’t a great singer at all.

Wow! Really?!

No, not at all! I wish I was. I wish that I’d had the opportunities that the kids here have.

So why did you… I’m just interested in, without any background, you just went and joined the choir… what was that about?

I think it was something, to be honest, my parents sort of suggested it and I thought I’d give it a go. It was a local church choir and I attended the church, and a lot of my family did, as well. My cousins had been in this choir and it was no great commitment. I mean, they sang on a Sunday and so I joined it through that and… loved it… At first it was… I went along and I wasn’t sure, but in hindsight, I think I must have enjoyed it to have carried on doing it, to be honest. There must have been something there.

And you came back to singing a lot later then?

[laughing] I still wouldn’t describe myself as a singer! I mean I’ve come into it through the organ and that route and I do love singing and I think it’s very important part of everyone’s musicality to sing… but… I still wouldn’t describe myself as a singer. Only slowly but surely I demonstrate things to the choir… until the last 4 or 5 years I wouldn’t have done so… so… I do sing but… I’m not a singer.

You’ve kind of answered one of my later questions which I might come back to in a moment. You talked about the organ – primarily you’re an organist – so conducting and teaching, was that always something you wanted to do, and organ?

I always wanted to be a cathedral organist and I was inspired by the music that I heard – by the singing, by the organ playing particularly, and by the buildings. It was always what I wanted to do, but it was the organ music that primarily got me to that point. I think that, when I left school, I went to Chelmsford Cathedral, which is a very small cathedral in Essex with a lovely choral tradition and I went there as the organ scholar. And it was there that I really got to know
choral music and they had a very influential Director of Music, who was a singer, who became another musical director and he was very influential in waking me up to that choral world. From there I went to Oxford and was an organ scholar there and was suddenly responsible for conducting a choir. And so slowly I... I learnt a lot very, very quickly about how to do it and so... yes... it was through the organ that I came to do it.

S: That's interesting. Tell me what you enjoy about conducting.

O: Specifically, here, I enjoy... The enjoyment for me is getting the kids to do it and it's a challenge, as you say, and getting the boys to sing is a challenge... I get the enjoyment in that really and finding new ways of persuading them to do it, and inspiring them through different music, seeing what they enjoy and what they don't enjoy, and building music lists and schemes around what they want to sing. I find that the most enjoyable. And starting with something like today which they don't know at all well and building and four weeks later they're singing it beautifully. That's the enjoyment for me and also providing music for liturgy. A passion of mine is liturgical settings, so I suppose that's there as well.

S: Okay. My next question is about any difficulties with conducting or challenges and I guess that's a challenge at the same time, isn't it?

O: Definitely. Keeping the children... particularly in the context here, where they've been in school all morning, they've had a hard morning of lessons, and the beginning of their break time – the beginning of their lunch time – everyone else is gone for lunch and they're having to come and sing for half an hour – forty minutes – and that's... finding ways of making them want to do that is difficult. So that's a definite challenge here. The other challenge here is the constant battle for time, for sport and academic stuff, which, of course comes first... but it's constantly looking for time and negotiating with colleagues. Colleagues are very understanding here. It does work well. But that's a big challenge... is time.

S: Time, okay. You mentioned before it's very important - singing, music, choir – why do you think it's important?

O: For the children?

S: For you, for the children, for anybody. The listeners!

O: Several reasons... It's important for the church. Their job – and they know very well – when they join the choir their task is to provide music for the chapel and the people who attend it and that's important for the liturgical side of it and for attracting people into the chapel and for lifting the spiritual side of chapel. So it's important on a practical level for that reason. It's important for them because it gives them another way of expressing themselves, which I think they're probably completely unaware of and I certainly was at that age! But actually I think that having that way of expression is, sadly, something a lot of people don't have... because they're not taught it... and I think that's a very important side of it. And then of course there's all the scientific reasons... for getting both sides of the brain to communicate, and I think when one looks at the facts and figures about the effects music has on arithmetic and languages and all of those things... it's staggering... the correlation and for that reason I think it's very important as well. But also... you know, there are elements of teamwork... One thing that's very significant - and I've only come to realise this
very recently here, is that singing is, particularly in children, things tend to be very much in year groups. Friendships are in year groups, sports are in year groups, and classes certainly are, but when it comes to choir people are singing... the very youngest child is singing with the very oldest in the school and there's nowhere else really where that's the case. So for that social... it teaches them to be very aware and to look up to people who are older and it teaches the older ones to nurture and really support the younger ones and that's something that's quite rare.

S: And can you see that happening in choir when they're all together?
O: Yes, I do. I think... When the boys, when it comes to the voice change, boys move up to the back row, having been oldest boy in the treble line to being suddenly the youngest... yes... it has a big impact. It teaches them to think very carefully about how they fit into that team. So, yes, I do see it happening a lot.

S: The voice change is a really big topic. It's come up with all the little boys I've spoken to back home, the teenagers particularly, and even the men and conductors. And I noticed in the rehearsal just then that, very naturally you just... I don't know whether or not you recognised it! But you made some little comments like, “Well, if that hurts then don’t sing it.” So, is that a huge issue for you, for the boys? How are they dealing with it? I mean, you obviously support them through it, but it seems to be very natural.
O: We're very supported here by the vocal coaches and the School's Head of Singing, and [name] is phenomenal and she takes a very important part in that. Not all of the children in choir have singing lessons but I'd say two thirds do and so their singing teachers will have a big impact on that and will nurture them through that. Part of the success of it is the relationship singing teachers and directors have and they'll say, "Actually, his voice is going." [Loud noise in next room]. So I rely a lot on singing teachers. There is an issue that's, going back to what we said earlier, sort of the negative side of that age... that spread of ages. It's the fact that boys want to be in the back row. Particularly the older trebles. It's a very public thing to be singing treble in front of people... it's just alien to a lot of people who aren't in the choir, the idea of singing treble at the age of 14, 15. Last year we had a 16 year old singing treble and he managed it and coped brilliantly. So people do try and push their voices down and we get that a lot and recognising when they just need a little bit of support to stay in the boys' choir because they're not quite ready for the back row. So, it is a problem, but I'm very lucky that the singing teachers are able to recognise that. And of course, you and I can tell if they're voice is getting lower. And they will join the altos...

S: Absolutely. What's coming through, and what you're demonstrating through your answer, is very much about the culture of the school. That those things work and people feel comfortable and supported.
O: It has to be a very pastoral outlook really because I think people, the younger boys, are very aware that they're doing something very unusual in a culture where it's not understood as well as it should be and we do have to keep an eye on them and make sure they're happy to do it and they're not getting bullied [noise again]. So yes, it's a balancing act. We have to make sure every individual is happy with where they are with their voice, absolutely.
S: Now I'm just going to... try and talk over that strange noise!!
O: It won't last long!
S: ...and move on to success. From your perspective, thinking generally about success, how would you define success?
O: How would I define... in the context of the choir? Or in the context of....
S: Well, I'm going to ask you that anyway, but if you want to do that all in one go then that's fine. If I was to ask you, 'Being successful, what does that mean?'
O: For me it means achieving goals that you've set yourself, I suppose, or set for whatever it is that you're responsible for. So you have to set yourself ambitions but realistic targets and I guess if you achieve those targets then that's a measure of success. That's a general ting, but with the chapel choir it's the same. If children are enjoying singing and we've got a large healthy choir and they're singing a variety of repertoire and they're getting out and about, seeing different building and they're enjoying themselves, then that is the measure of success, for me here. Um... that I'm happy in what they're singing, how they're singing, and that they're happy in how they're singing, and everyone... the Headmaster is happy... and staff aren't upset because I've taken them out... [laughing] that's the measure of success here; that everything is balanced and sounding good.
S: You mentioned that the choir, sort of rotate for each Sunday... once every three weeks, they each have a turn?
O: Roughly speaking, yes.
S: You mentioned that they do other things, they go and perform elsewhere. Can you tell me a little bit about that? What sort of things do they do?
O: We do a lot of tours to cathedrals and big churches in the area... well not necessarily... the Chamber Choir which is the older men and girls are singing in St Paul's cathedral in London, in February. So that's their next thing. But they've sung in Oxford colleges and the boys' choir sung in Lichfield cathedral in May 2010... 2011, sorry, and the boys and men sung in Windsor Castle, in February this year. The girls' choir have sung in Trinity College in Stratford-upon-Avon, where Shakespeare is buried. So we get out and about and we create opportunities. Part of that is raising awareness outside the school of what we do inside and part of it.... [noise]... It's important that not only are they given exposure to fantastic music but also fantastic buildings as well. One thing about choral music is it does open doors to fabulous places and so it's only right that they get to sing in those places. And whether it's right or wrong, what we do try and do here is copy what cathedral choirs might do, certainly in terms of repertoire and style and so to show them cathedrals is a very important part of that. Other opportunities include singing in school concerts and things that aren't necessarily in the chapel. We've recorded a CD of Christmas music recently, so that sort of experience for them is a good thing.
S: So you would consider your choirs successful?
O: [pauses and laughs] Um... Yes, I would. Yes, I would. I think they're all happy. They're singing hard, sometimes sensitive music and they usually sing it well and they come back to sing it again, and the Chaplain is happy that it's fulfilling that brief... [noise]... so I'd say, there are things we could do better and things we could do more of and we'll move towards that, but yes, I think it's successful.
S: They sound beautiful to me, the little bit I heard! Now, you mentioned before that you don’t consider yourself a successful singer, but in terms of being a conductor, do you see yourself as being successful? In this role.

O: In this role!

S: It’s always hard to be asked those questions!

O: I think... with reservations... I’m learning all the time. I’m very young to the job, I’m very new to it, and I’m learning every single day from everything and the people around me, who are very important, and who are wonderfully experienced and supportive, and I observe lots of people who I would consider as more successful. So I’ve got a long way to go but I... as I say, I set out to make choirs sing and that’s what I do, so I suppose in that sense... yes.

S: Then you are... but you don’t want to say [laughter].

O: [laughing and modest] But at the same time, sometimes you’d come to things and I’d be thoroughly miserable and I’d say I was terribly unsuccessful! So it depends when... but I suppose, on the whole, we’re happy!

S: So, for you, being a successful conductor is about whether you can get the best out of the boys and ensure that that’s an enjoyable time, as well as make them sound beautiful... is that all part of that?

O: Definitely.

S: We talked about time and we talked about getting boys to come to choir, the fact that sport gets in the way or academic and those sort of commitments... have you experienced any other sort of difficulties in trying to get boys to come along? What’s your experience? I mean, there were quite a few boys there... that was phenomenal, for me to see that many boys in a... particularly in a co-educational school... that’s quite different to home. You might see that many boys in a ‘boys-only’ school at the choir and that’s okay, but in a boys and girls school you wouldn’t get that many! So what are the main issues, apart from those things you mentioned, if there’s any, that you see as affecting boys...

O: What stops them...? Do you mean why do I not have more or...

S: Do you have huge issues getting boys to come along?

O: Well, I can tell you what stops people. We have fewer boys that, I suppose, reach the standard and I think it’s very important that we don’t compromise the quality. We have a lot of boys who do come and audition who don’t get in. So that’s one issue.

S: Okay, I was going to ask about that.

O: It’s very important that we have something that they can join, therefore, so we’re not saying you can’t sing. That would be awful. So we have choirs that they then can join. So that’s the first thing. Second thing is, the negative side of having Sunday evening chapel is, of course, that parents don’t always want to bring their children to school on Sunday evening and if that’s doubled up with children not wanting to come in themselves, then that’s a huge stumbling block. And we do have choristers who do that. We have incredibly supportive parents and that is another reason for success here, the parents, and building strong relationships with parents, and then the parents are happy to come in, because, actually, giving up a significant chunk of their Sunday evenings is a big ask, particularly when they don’t always live that close to the school. So that’s often a stumbling block; people don’t want to come in on a Sunday evening, parents.
and children. That’s two reasons. I suppose a third reason is, as you say, they would come in but it clashes with sporting commitments outside school and we have lots of that, you know, “Oh, I would like to come sir, but I have rugby,” and “Can I come every other...?” You know! It doesn’t work. It’s either that they have to come or else it’s not fair on everybody else. Very, very rarely but I suppose it’s another reason, is the sense that people don’t want to be part of Christian worship here and we are a school that’s very varied and we do have people who would not necessarily fit in and feel comfortable being in that tradition and that’s... we do have that... very rarely, but we do have that as an issue as well. I think that’s probably the main reason why people wouldn’t... why people who are good enough wouldn’t join.

S: And it seems, from what I saw today, it seems that those younger boys there, they all seem to get on very well and seem to be quite supportive. I mean no one paid out on anybody because they got something wrong. I noticed when they do something wrong, they put their hand up...

O: Yes, and that’s something they need to do more of! No, I think they are very nice to each other and I think they’re genuinely supportive of each other. We have had issues. It’s not completely without issue of course. At the moment, touch wood, we are... they’re happy and they’re happy to be with one another. It’s a very new choir, the boys’ choir, at the moment, in the sense that we’ve had lots of people move up and we’ve had lots of people join of different abilities and so it’s still sort of finding its feet at the moment and it’s very early on in the year. So that might change. Relationships might get more fraught as the year goes on, but hopefully we see them coming and we can avoid it.

S: And from what you know of the rest of the school, is the choir, the boys’ choir, all of the choirs, are they quite well respected by the rest of the students?

O: That’s an interesting question and it’s very difficult for me to answer. There’s a tradition here, people say to me, certainly in the past, there’s been lots of issues in that people haven’t been respected... particularly with how the choir dresses, how the choir sounds. I think there has been an issue with bullying in the past, which I suppose is another reason why people might not join. But... I’d be naïve to say that doesn’t still exist, but I think it’s better and I think a reason for that is that discipline is very good now... here... that being one reason and I think that the choir is much more integrated into the school then perhaps it once was. So people are much more used to seeing the choir out and about wearing gowns and so that certainly helped that. I think that having girls in the school has made that slightly easier, because... well, maybe that’s not true. I just said that without really thinking about it!

S: It’s a hard question to answer. I’m asking you to speculate a little bit.

O: I think it’s better than it probably was than when it was a boys’ school.

S: I think I’ve asked you... Can I ask you in what ways have you seen the choir impact those boys in terms of just generally... I know you mentioned the impact music has on people and academic ability...

O: Hmm... how has it impacted on those boys, specifically?

S: Yeah. Have you seen anything?

O: I mean in terms of... the obvious thing would be to say that for the older boys and girls... a lot of them are now interested in going off and getting choral
scholarships and we’ve had a good number of choral scholarship people – Oxbridge and elsewhere – so that’s one way it impacts them. Do you mean more on themselves as people or...?

S: Anything at all, really! For example, they looked like they were enjoying themselves.

O: Yes, they are. One impact it certainly has is it improves their musicality and I try to be very strict on making them be aware of actually reading the music and not relying on others to do that, and I think it has an impact on their theory, musical theory and understanding and that obviously impacts on the academic music, so that’s certainly one way. I think there is something very much about discipline. I do find that the boys in the choir... it’s a terrible thing to be saying... my colleagues would hate me for it... but I think that the choir do carry themselves in a way that perhaps some other students don’t and I think because there’s a discipline there. I’m not saying that it’s the choir that’s the reason for that but maybe the children have something that’s maybe more suitable to the choir, I don’t know which way, what comes first, but certainly there are standards there that are very good for people to learn.

S: Yeah, I mean, I could see you doing that, you know, in the way you conducted it.

O: I think, certainly that’s a good thing.

S: And you’ve got a range of personalities.

O: Certainly have!

S: Why would consider choir or singing or music an important activity for boys and men to be involved in? A poorly worded question!!!

O: No, no! I think, as I said, on one level it’s a very important part of this country’s heritage. Boys and men singing in ancient colleges and cathedrals and foundations that’s a very important part of English culture and composers of music have been nurtured through that over the years. But if you think back all of the composers were employed by the Chapel Royal, you know. Purcell and all his colleagues before and after, so there’s that tradition and I think it’s very important that we carry that on as long as we can. So that’s one reason why it’s important. I think for them it’s important because it trains them in discipline, it trains them in liturgical awareness, it trains them in treating each other with respect and being aware of one another, strengths and weaknesses, and listening to other people, and it teaches them to express themselves in a way that’s very, very constructive, and to listen to other people’s way of expressing themselves in that way and so for all of those reasons it’s very important. From a musical perspective, it... music... singing gives you access to something... that... somehow there’s an inner ear that responds to singing in a way that nothing else... playing an instrument... does not have that directness. Training that certainly prepares them academically for music later on in life. So that’s a very important part of it. I think that’s probably...

S: Absolutely! Is there anything else you’d like to say to me that I haven’t covered?

O: I’m fascinated by it. I’m fascinated that there’s such a difference in how choir is run here and how choir is run there. Is that because... Is it that heritage bit we have here? Everything is just a little bit older. Is that part of it?

S: I think that actually plays a huge role. I think that culture... if we’re talking school particularly ... I think the culture of the school plays an enormous role in
terms of what happens and how successful it is, in terms of getting kids to do it and getting them to do it well. But, I mean the tradition that you talk about... I mean when I thought, "Ah, I’m going to the UK... choirs, cathedrals!"

O: But this is where people come isn’t it, the UK!? It’s a phenomenal Anglican tradition. It’s a wonderful thing.

S: And at home you will get that in those... in that tradition, there’s a few. St Andrews Cathedral in Sydney, and that’s a college as well, for boys... I think it’s only boys or is it co-educational?? Anyway, it’s a very similar tradition to what you have here, but that’s not the norm at home. So for me, I’ve taught at a few different schools. I’ve taught in Independent schools - all church schools – but nothing, no... nothing like this. And I was in charge of everything. I mean I was full-time classroom Music teacher; you do the vocal groups, the band... everything!

O: So time is an issue as well. I think that the wonderful thing here is that I am employed and I have the time to organise, which a lot of directors of music wouldn’t necessarily do. If you were in charge of all of the academic side of it, the orchestra, the string band, the visiting music teachers , you know, you’re in charge of a huge amount, and then to think about running a successful choir! A successful choir needs so much time nurturing the kids, playing the music, it’s a vast thing. That’s another reason for its success here. The school has invested a lot in it.

S: I think that’s also... From the little that I’ve seen, back at home, the Arts doesn’t seem to have the same kind of... I don’t know... credence, or something. I mean, even in National Curriculums that are occurring at the moment or being written, Music and Creative Arts are just getting smaller and smaller and smaller and yet it just seems to be so important in my view...

O: Of course...!

S: ...and all the research like you said.

O: It’s just persuading everybody else that there’s a problem!

S: Exactly! And all the research screams, ‘actually music makes better people’, music makes better academic results... everything is better!

O: Have you been in touch with a man that is incredibly influential in all of this is Graham Welch? I don’t know if you’ve been in touch with him?

S: I saw him very briefly... I was in Greece recently... but no, I haven’t been in touch with him. I know his stuff...

O: He used to come a lot to... before I was here I was in Wells’ Cathedral, in Somerset, which is a beautiful. It’s a lovely, ancient English cathedral and it’s got boys and girls choirs [...] and he used to... it was one of the first cathedrals to have a girls’ choir and what’s significant about it is that the boys and girls sing exactly the same amount of services and he would come once a term, maybe twice a year... possibly. I think it was twice a year he would come with a colleague whose name I can’t remember. They would come and do all sorts. They would measure the girls’ necks and they would listen to them and they would do all sorts of scientific experiments and I was fascinated. Separately to that, I went to a conference that he was speaking at and I was just blown away by his... by the statistics he has.

S: Yeah. It is... he is amazing!
O: I know that he would be really interested in all this. He’s such a down-to-earth bloke. I mean contact him and get everything out of him that you can [laughing].

S: Look, I’ll leave it there because I need to go and you need to go so thank you so much.

O: It’s a pleasure. It’s wonderful to be part of it. I hope it’s been helpful and I look forward to... I hope we might be able to read it! Is that a possibility?

S: Yes, definitely.

End of Interview
b) Professional Conductor 2

S: Fantastic... thank you!
H: Okay, let’s begin at the beginning. This may not be what you want at all, but I promise I’ll come back to the script in a minute.
S: No, that's fine.
H: My experience is that in this country... anyway, let's just say in this country... but I also have a great deal of experience in other countries... but in this country, boys sing obviously in an all-boys environment. It's still quite easy to get boys to sing to a very high standard in a boys' choir. Hence, there still are those thirty-two cathedral choirs for example. [School name] being an example of a boys' school in which there was a great deal of singing that became mixed but retained the ethos of the idea that boys sang. Now I have a fascinating job that I began on Monday, being the first ever... it’s difficult to believe, but I am the first ever director of choral activities at a British university. Now of course, Oxford and Cambridge are full of cathedral organists conducting their choirs, so I’m not unique, but Birmingham University is the first place to pay a... to pay a lot of money to have a professor whose job is in the American sense to direct choral activities. And it's a very large university and it has a great music faculty, the second best in the country and so on and so on... but it has no very great history of performance. The performance is rubbish at the moment and the academic side is excellent. My job is, along with the new director of orchestral studies, to give it a huge kick up the backside. So, we’ve had already very, very good response this week, but I auditioned... considering there are 27,000 students, I auditioned a hundred students. This is my first day, okay, so there’s no time to do anything about it. The standard was very high... but... there were only... there were eighty-eight girls and twelve boys. Now, the twelve boys, I took eleven of them.
S: Wow!
H: Six were tenors and five were basses. I was very surprised by how few there were but I was very surprised at how good the eleven were! So that the six tenors were more or less at what you might understand to be potentially professional standard and the five basses are fine. Now, I was expecting many more than that and compared to the university at which I used to teach thirty years ago, which was the University of Warwick, which is very nearby here, of equal status, but half the size number of students – 17,000 students - and that university... just for what it's worth... does not have a music faculty. So music was set up from its earliest day... which is only 1962... whereas Birmingham University goes back a hundred and fifty years. So, if you like, Birmingham University is the University of Sydney, and Warwick is yours...
S: Western Sydney!
H: Western Sydney. But because the founding fathers of Warwick in 1962 said... placed a performing arts centre as the central building of the campus and had string quartets in residence, lots of teachers and so on and lots of great theatre and a film theatre and so on... saying everybody must be a rounded person, but there were not to be any drama students and there weren’t to be any music students or film students or anything. So everyone’s reading mathematics,
modern languages, medicine and so on, but they're all expected to... and there's a fantastic sport's centre... they're all expected to do sport and music which is as it were, the traditional things, going right back through the centuries, certainly to the nineteenth century, of the education of the whole person. The result is, I was talking to my equivalent number there today, and they were saying they'd had this week, four hundred students applying for the choir of which exactly half were men! Oh, and... excuse me! Two hundred! A hundred women and a hundred men. But a university twice the size had eighty-eight women and twelve men. So... the point is that Warwick was set up from the beginning for it to be a smart thing to sing and play... and so they have a hundred men trying out for the choirs, because visible all around them is the evidence that large numbers of young men sing to a very high standard.

S: The culture is already there!

H: So there's two things. You either choose to go there because you know the music is going to be good or when you get there, and this is the case with most of them, people would sidle up to me and say, Can I join the choir? Because it was so good, it was cool to be in the choir, you see! So then, boys choirs are fine and very, very care... and it's absolutely fine of course ... if singing is led by a genius man, then small potential men will flock around them and it's quite clear in this country recently with a group called, Only Men Only Boys and Only Kids allowed, in Wales, that suddenly started from nowhere, a huge and quite outstandingly good boys choir with them coming in huge numbers and from under-privileged backgrounds. No idea that it... of course, on the one hand... we have an amazing choir programme here for kids, which I'll come on to in a minute... but no one was saying in Wales, Come and sing for Simon Rattle and the Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, which is what we were saying... they were just saying, Come and sing! So in the end a great deal of it comes down of course to the choir leaders and sometimes those choir leaders... and I would really beg you to look at something called the Boston Children's Chorus in the United States, which was started nine years ago by a civil rights leader and a whole load of social workers who said, How do we mend a fractured society? They then appointed choir directors to work and to create a choir, which now has about nine hundred members all over Boston and it's a very interesting thing because what they have is, of course they have lots of kids coming to choir in BMWs from the good areas, but they have got all the different colours and creeds represented and they have a very large number... the two largest numbers in the choir are the rich and the extremely poor! Because the extremely poor are there on scholarships basically and they are in equal numbers... there's quite a dip in the middle... sort of what you might call the lower middle classes or whatever. But what they are also achieving is a hundred per cent high school graduation! Whereas in this lot... the rich kids... ninety-eight per cent would high school graduate anyway... on this side only twenty per cent would. They have never had a single child in nine years, who didn't graduate high school and go to university, because what they've taught them through music is concentration, commitment etcetera...

S: Everything!
H: Everything... all that I don't need to tell you about. Now if you go to their website you can just get everything about it, and there's a similar program called the Young People's Chorus of New York City, which is equally an inspiration. Now, we have something here at the CBSO where we simply said, Your child... without any social thing behind it... Your child can sing for Simon Rattle... this is twenty years ago when he was music director... and kids came in very large numbers and we simply selected according to ability... and we got initially in the junior... in the training chorus about two-thirds girls and about a third boys, and that was enough boys for boys to sort of hang on in there. But as the years went by the number of boys fell off and so we've only got a quarter now. We know that we should be doing something about it... also because they graduate from the junior choir to the senior choir and that's only girls... in the thirteen to eighteen sort of age range. So we did fund a boys' choir to do something about that, but unfortunately the money ran out... but we are trying to do something about it nevertheless. But the boys we have are extremely devoted but in quite small numbers, but they do in almost every case buck the trend in their school. They're the only boys singing in their school. What they do is they find another ten or fifteen or twenty boys like themselves by coming here... the geek if you like from each high school... Now, the other incredibly unfair thing, of course, across the whole education system in this country is... opportunity. You have even more private schools than we do, but we have seven per cent of kids in private schools and on the whole kids in private schools are going to sing and play instruments, and have every opportunity to have the best sporting facilities and it's exactly the same in your schools. If you're in a state school as we call them here then it's pot luck. You can be in a school where there's the most incredible music and every bit as good as the very best private school. But it's pot luck. So in that case... and where boys used to sing was in church and most parish choirs have withered and that's to do with the reduction in congregations and also the arrival of guitars and so on...

S: Rock music...

H: ...and rock music which of course destroyed the traditional church choir and the traditional church choir when I was a child, my local church choir had eighteen or twenty boys in it and eighteen or twenty men in it and the eighteen or twenty men had been boys in the choir and there was an age range of about eight to seventy and there were forty of us and we loved it and we turned up twice a week, the same two services on Sundays, the same cathedral type services and lots went to university on scholarships out of it... and that choir does still exist... but there used to be ten thousand of them and there are now fifty of them. So, that... a whole area where boys used to sing has disappeared. So then it has to be replaced as society changes by something else and the only way you can change it is if there are adults who are sufficiently thrilling that kids want to sing for them! Because there is nothing inherently cool about singing and it doesn't... I personally don't think it matters what sort of repertoire it is either. I don't care! Just as I'm absolutely certain, although I'm not in any sense a professional sportsman, I would be very disturbed if my children weren't relatively fit and didn't take part in sport and one of the reasons for paying a fortune for them to go to a private school was to get them
singing every day and compulsorily doing sport every day. And I’m sure I would have been the sort of parent that, of course, had I stayed in the state system I would have been a very vocal parent to make sure that was happening in the state system. Of course, the trouble is that parents like me don’t often stay in the state system, when actually they need parents like me. But that’s neither here nor there! So, singing is no less cool than playing football. It’s just a question of attitude and when you think in recent times a lot of things in this country have happened. About twenty-five years ago, something called the Association of British Choral Directors was founded and that made a big difference because it meant that choral directors could get together and see each other’s best practice. There was also the government run scheme, Sing Up, which you’ll have heard about and I won’t go into… though this building was one of the two centres spreading the gospel basically. That was incredibly important because what it said was basically kids should be singing every day in school… not in a choir, but just in class… on an everyday basis. Therefore it should be normal in every Primary school, and the aim was in every Secondary school, should have two just regular class teachers who could just say, Right! Let’s do a song. And my daughter is not a music specialist and she is doing Criminology at university with a view to teaching in difficult schools, but she was in the choir here and she learnt the piano at least to Grade 5… and she always said even as a twelve year old she was going to soldier on with the piano till she got to Grade 5 because she knew that when she’s twenty-eight and is a classroom teacher in a difficult school she will want to say, Come on now, I want everyone… let’s break the atmosphere… I want everyone to do a song. And she wants to be able to have just a crappy old piano in the corner… and to have the skills. Now… if it becomes part of everyday life and… we have this very odd thing suddenly that singing became very cool on television here. So you have these television competitions and so on and… um… the Christmas Singles done this year by the Wives Choir of the Army… did you hear about this? And they’ve just won the Classical Brit for this year today. So, the point is, suddenly on television and radio you are endlessly assaulted by everyone’s in a choir, everyone’s in a choir. Also in a city like this, a multicultural city like Birmingham… there are over two hundred gospel choirs for example… which, people like me didn’t know about until we discovered that… and every time something dies, something comes in new. Once upon a time in Wales, and on the edges… the Celtic edges of the United Kingdom, you used to find a lot of male voice choirs, and so young men would aspire to be in the choir and these were run by the workplace, by the mine or the factory, and of course, all the mines and factories are gone, so those choirs are gone. So you have two choices, you either beat your breast and say nothing is as good as it used to be, it’s terrible, or you say, but society has changed, what is the need for singing now and it changes. So, Wales for example still has a lot of singing in its schools, it still has better singing than England. What it now has is County Youth Choirs and Town Youth Choirs and so on and so on. So the repertoire has changed, but there’s still just as many people singing. And of course, many women are singing in Wales, where not so many were previously so that’s good, but because more women are singing, the number of men singing is reduced. But
because in Wales there's a tradition for male voice singing there are a lot of young male conductors who say we want to run a men or a boys' choir. Suddenly, only boys allowed, only young men... what are they, only kids allowed and so on is growing up and that's replacing... you know... so it's constantly changing. So when they grew up there were church choirs, and now every town has a youth choir, every county has a youth choir and there are the national youth choirs in every part of the country... none of this existed twenty years ago. No symphony... this orchestra runs... only four years ago decided an adult chorus and in those days it was simply... like the Melbourne Symphony Chorus or Sydney Philharmonia Chorus... and was simply to sing Beethoven Nine when the orchestra needed a choir. Then, twenty years ago, [name] and I said well actually, no, we've got to be responsible for music education in the future, like so many other orchestras, and we did it initially through choral music. So we founded three youth choruses... so that there are three times seventy, two hundred and ten kids singing here each week, and a hundred and ninety adults, so there are four hundred people singing here each week. Well there are only eighty-five orchestral players, so the [group name] family plus administration, is give or take, five hundred of which four hundred are singers. So an orchestra is actually eighty per cent amateur singers. That is now being copied by every orchestra in the country and tomorrow I become music director or I take on a new post at the [location] which is called, very interesting, Choral Director to the [name of orchestra] and my job is to deliver to them the same thing as we have here. I won't conduct very much of it, but I will show them how to do it and the [City name] Philharmonic, I am responsible for overseeing a five year education project, which is that, 'Singing is the basis of all music'. You have the London Symphony, City of Birmingham Symphony, Berlin Philharmonic all saying, Actually singing is where it's at... then the message is beginning to get out... do you see what I mean?

S:  Oh, yes!

H:  If... then in a way it becomes curiously less important whether it's boys or girls, because what you're saying is come on, everyone's got to sing. Everyone's got to sing to mend the broken society. The broken society... I won't talk to you about it because New York and Boston will give you all the information you need on it. Boston does something I'm starting at [Name of University]. They say, really clever... they say, We're going to have a men's choir, a women's choir and sometimes they'll sing together, which gives you the SATB choir. Now, what I'm going to try and do... what they have in Boston is they have enough boys and they have enough boys in the New York, but in the end at [name of University] I don't want thirteen young men, eleven young men... it's going to be twelve from tomorrow, thirteen the day after... but I'm going to say, Actually, you know, in two or three years' time, I want thirty-six men in this choir, and in every choir concert a third of the program will be sung by the men... and so in every choir practice, the first hour is split. They come to the same rehearsals... the men learn that... the women learn that, because there are many more women who want to sing at the moment. If in the end we aim for twenty-four or thirty-six men we can of course have forty-eight or sixty women and they can sing a whole load of wonderful women-only music. And what I'm saying at the
moment is when they get together, not all the women can come with the men. So there are two categories of women. So there is a balanced choir, and there are eighteen or twenty women, who can only do women-only music but at least that way they're involved. But that's a very different thing than wringing your hands and saying you've got a mixed voice choir but not enough men, do you see what I mean? So it's all to do with how do you sell it and I think we stand a much better chance of attracting... particularly as there are a lot of men at the university singing music theatre... Gilbert and Sullivan and things like that... we stand a much better chance of getting them into a men's choir, possibly doing a slightly lighter repertoire and then doing your Palestrina and so on when the women are there. Yes?

S: Yes!

H: So it's all to do with presentation I think. And there are some interesting choir school projects. Most choir schools in this country now, have a women's choir as well as a men... the boys' choir. In some cases, if the school is mixed they simply have sixteen boy choristers and sixteen girl choristers, like Salisbury on the same model. Each choir sings four services a week, with the men and that just means twice as many kids get the opportunity as they did when I was a kid. More normal is the sixteen boys on scholarships at the school, and the cathedral runs a sixteen strong girls' choir, who come from the town, who are paid some pocket money but are probably in secondary school and unlike the boys who are aged thirteen the girls are maybe twelve to twenty-one. And the boys may be continuing to sing six services a week and the girls do Saturday or something to let the boys have a day off at the weekend. And there are just two that have eight boys and eight girls... Manchester and Edinburgh. They have an absolutely fixed number because as soon as you say, we'll just have a mixed choir, within three years there'll only be one boy left in that. So there are eight boy scholarships and eight girl scholarships. That works fine, too. And all the shit we used to have to put up with about girls don't sound like boys, whatever it is... all sorts of work's been done, playing voices to choir leaders saying is this a boy or a girl and they always get it wrong. It seems to be... it's interesting to see how quick that problem disappeared and it does appear to be a complete irrelevance now. Let's just have everybody singing. So actually then the next problem becomes how do you get across the cultural divides... the colour, the creed divides...? And of course it's relatively easy to get kids from cultures that naturally sing... so here in [city name] it's very easy to get the kids of West Indian origin singing because...

S: ...it's what they do!

H: ...that's what they do... but we have a very large number of Muslim children and they don't naturally sing... so getting them to sing is much harder. And you see it also in the schools that... I mean, one of the fancier schools here recently has changed its sporting policy. It was the famous Rugby school and they finished up with two-thirds of the pupils being of Asian origin and they don't want to play rugby... so it's become a premier hockey school. It's the one... so they just said, Cricket and hockey, those are the things that all our pupils play and we're just stopping rugby. There are plenty of schools where you can do rugby and actually this school, once upon a time, sent lots of kids to university to do the
liberal arts, is sending everybody to university to do maths, business and medicine. So they’ve also changed the curriculum. But that’s also fine... so we need to be ready to adapt. Of course, it’s chicken and egg, because if not enough boys are getting the bug then not enough boys are going to turn into the leaders of the future... do you see what I mean? So... I mean a huge amount of work has to be done, but I’m not sure how you do it...

S: I was going to ask you that!

H: I’m not sure how you do it unless you have the right people so, we have an astonishing young man who’s only twenty-three... twenty-four, who runs the children’s chorus here who has an absolute natural affinity for young children. I taught him his Masters degree at [name of university] and he was fine with the students, but I could never understand why he wasn’t better and then he came to take one rehearsal here with some of the little kids... and I saw this utter genius... it was his milieu... these were the kids he related to. Give you some idea, a friend of mine’s small seven year old son began in the choir last week... it was his first week. He’s quite severely dyslexic and finds school quite difficult... and he came out and his mother said to him, How was it? Mum, he said, it was brilliant! I found what I can do!

S: Oh!

H: So here’s this dyslexic kid with an amazing choir director. It didn’t matter that he got his words muddled up or whatever it is. It just wasn’t an issue... and also he was singing through... it’s like my son is very dyslexic and is a fantastic singer and it was just going to a different part of his brain, but his child at age seven on one rehearsal... she said, What was the conductor like? He said, He was amazing... this was someone that every child felt total security with. Of course... if only we could... if only every teacher of every subject was that good...

S: Could make everyone feel like that!

H: ...then everybody would be good... so do you see... actually the problem is not resources... there’s plenty of music... it’s not rooms, it’s not pianos... it’s not buildings... it’s not public transport. All these things have a little influence on them... what it comes down to is: Is the teacher any bloody good? If the teacher is really good then the kids will crowd round and do it. And that’s why the great choirs are in the most unlikely places. They’re just wherever the great choir director takes up shop. So, how do we get more great choir directors? Well, this country has been very slow in teaching conducting, but we’ve now got five places doing choir conducting. The young woman you’ve just seen me down there with is the first [name of university] MA student in Choir Direction... beginning. Cardiff is on its fourth year now. The Royal Academy of Music has been doing it for a while. Now, some of these, in typically British fashion, are very precise and prescriptive and Cambridge and the Royal Academy of Music are doing a lovely job, but endlessly producing people who are going to conduct professional choirs like King's College choirs, which is fine, but those people are always reproduced anyway. But the name of university] and [name of university] courses are much more interesting because the idea of them is... we take people who are one might call quite ordinary keen musicians and turn them into something better than they would have been... and so when they go
to their community it's not going to be the BBC singers of Westminster Cathedral, but they're going to make a difference in their community... and that's what seems to be interesting. And you see, I see a lot of other students in [country] where I spend half my time and they are very good at teaching choral conductors, but they do it all through academic theory and conducting a piano and conducting each other and they've got no spark when it comes to standing up in front of people. So it's how do you make sure the people who've got spark have enough things they can do with their hands and enough technique and so on to be doing a better job. And how do you put a spark into those who can tell you this is the coda and it's in D major...? And you know there's the endless thing of how much can you teach and I don't know, but you can certainly guide and it's very notable that in... There are so many people in this country who come through either the National Youth Choir, who are very inspired by that or by King's College Choir, Cambridge who are very inspired by that... who go out and do things. And you see that in Scandinavia... particularly where everyone learns initially with a man called Eric Erickson after the war and up until about 1980, in Sweden... and basically every one of his choristers became conductors in their turn... so that's how it works. Similarly things like Gondwana Voices and all the stuff those people do and the stuff that's now going to be a Masters course at Melbourne University. So as all those Gondwana kids go out and grow up... you know! Why is it New Zealand's choir music so good? Well, it's for two reasons... one is of course, everybody who lives on those islands comes out of a tradition that sings, so that, so that unlike the Aboriginals who didn't sing... of course they're an amazing culture... but the Maori sang in parts... so it was terribly straightforward in New Zealand... everybody was singing in parts anyway. So it wasn't exactly difficult to get everybody together in a choir. No one was doing anything that they weren't already doing... and then just one or two people in a very small country, very early on in the history of New Zealand were very influential and choir music got sewn into the country very deeply at a very early stage, so while there were only two million New Zealanders... well, there's only about four or five million of them now aren't there... while there were two million of them, and lots of them were already singing and teaching and doing stuff... so that they are disproportionately good at it... whereas probably Australia... now I do speak with some knowledge because for four years I was guest conductor of the [City name] Philharmonia Choir... so I spent eight weeks a year for four years there... and I've been back as a teacher at [name of university] quite a lot. I mean, in my next life I'm coming back to Australia... it's my favourite place in the world...

S: Mine, too!
H: ...but there's absolutely no doubt that initially choir music and orchestra music and things were so... on a fairly rocky bed. That has been revolutionised in the last twenty years. But it's rather the other way round with New Zealand, who had it so right with the founding fathers, yeah? So if you haven't got it you then have to develop it... but then you have that bizarre things, which I don't know much about, which is completely outside the culture of China and Japan was the idea of choir singing until both countries decided to do it... and then it becomes

Perceptions of success influencing male participation in choir – S. Powell
huge. And they do it, of course, by sending people out and bringing it back. So... what are the questions...?

S: If you sign that it means I can use what you say in my thesis... and that's info if you want it. You've covered so much in what you've said... in terms of what I was going to ask you.

H: Well, you now ask me questions.

S: Yes. I'm particularly interested... and again you've touched on it... in more specific terms, the idea of success and a definition of success. Do you have a definition of success?

H: Do I have a definition of success?

S: General... or choir...

H: I don't... Let me see... My symphony chorus in this building is successful because it's very good... and because it's very good people want to join it. Because we get a lot of people wanting to join it when they're young, because when they see it... there are a hundred and ninety-six of them and one hundred and thirty-two are under the age of thirty-two. So if you are a young person arriving in [city] you look at this choir and you say, My God, all my mates are already there! So you join it. Now, it wasn't always that way, so it is the result of thirty years of careful work. A lot of our young people are our own graduates from our own training programs. Once it became clear that there were young people enjoying singing here, suddenly everyone from the university wants to join. As soon as one joins... we had a particularly charismatic young tenor from the music conservatory... and he brought all his friends. Once his friends were coming the next generation came. I'm now starting at the university, we've already had a number from the university... suddenly last night... of the... suddenly another six from the university joined last night. So last night we did auditions for fourteen people. One was very good and fifty-five and I was very glad to have her. Thirteen of them were aged between eighteen and twenty-one... and I sent two of them away to have singing lessons and told them to come back in a year... two weren't good enough and I took... nine. So nine out of fourteen is... when you're pretty selective is pretty damn good. And it did include more women than men, but I have got thirty tenors and forty-five basses and so people do come forward to join because if you're a tenor you're not going to be in the minority in this choir and the tenors are very good and so you don't get that awful thing of everyone relying on you being the only tenor... yes? So success comes slowly and once it's built up... and because I run very lively and very jolly rehearsals the thing is run with enormous... they get the schedule a year and half in advance and we have three fulltime administrators so... what's happened from a slow start the budget has become ten times bigger and so on... and other people look at it, like [Name of Symphony] and say, We want to do that. So in the case of the Halle, which is the orchestra in [city], we simply told them how to do it and they found good people to do it and it's happened. In the case of the [Name of Symphony] I went to advise them and they said, Right, under what circumstances will you come here and do it for us yourself? So, I'm going to try starting tomorrow. But there is an interesting thing... that was... or is a very famous choir and it was the market leader, but they didn't have the right people running it, they didn't move with the times,
the membership grew old. Today I will work with a choir with an average age of somewhere around thirty-five and tomorrow with an average age of around sixty-five.

S: Wow! That's very different!

H: Very different. So why would anyone come and join it if you were nineteen! You see? Because there's no one there! Why would you join it if you were forty-five? There's nobody there! First thing. Second thing, it's not very well organised... up till now. The new full-time administrator began on Monday. They're quadrupling the budget in one year. Now, they can afford to do it because the [name of symphony] can put more of... can choose to put more of its resources onto the choral side, but twice I didn't go to the [name of symphony] ten years ago and twenty years ago because on every occasion I told them how to do it and they said, No, that's too expensive. But that's a whole industry there... the reason Volkswagen and BMW are still making cars when a lot of other people aren't is because they invest. It's good management... and I do motivational speaking in [country] for businessmen. In the end it's exactly the same... In the end it's exactly like running a business. If something is worth joining, then you'll join it. Now the [City] Symphony Chorus sings quite well... no one's really noticed they're not quite top-notch yet. Not really. And so the idea is to save it... and I'll be interested to see how long it takes. I'll be interested to see how long it takes for the word to get out around the campus of [name of university]. I would expect next year to have four or five hundred people trying to get in to the audition choirs and I'll be disappointed if not and I will be very disappointed if in two years' time I don't have ten people a month trying to get into the [City] Symphony Chorus. But at the moment it's only two a month.

S: So, from your perspective, a lot of the success of something is also looking at it in the long term... so you go, Yes it's going to work now, but it's also going to work...

H: Absolutely. So a choir has to have a good charismatic director... but it's got to be well run... and I have written a book on the subject but it's in German. Chapter One is a very straightforward document and it says... and I fight this all the time even in the most august places... have you got a good rehearsal room? Is it warm? Is it light? Are there enough lavatories? Is there enough parking? You see, round here, there is enough off-street parking and the reason we rehearse at 6.45 is because the parking becomes free at 6 o'clock. At the BBC Symphony Chorus... actually you probably should try and find someone to... I am translating the book into English at the moment... it will come out in August this year, but I haven't done it yet. But it's the most obvious things. The BBC Symphony Chorus and Orchestra, bizarrely begin all their rehearsals in London at 6.40 till 9.40, because when does parking become free in London? Well, it's 6.30! So they begin at 6.40. Here, I never over-run the break. The break is always fifteen minutes. We provide them... we say these people give a lot of their time... we provide the drinks for them and they eat before they come out. There's a warm-up that begins at exactly 6.45. No one's allowed to be late. If you are you sit on naughty chairs and wait till invited to join the rest of the choir! They have the information two years in advance of what they're doing. The office here works like clockwork and keep on top of everybody's
availability. No one ever misses a rehearsal without saying, I’m not coming on June 23rd for that one, but my percentage is still alright. Which coaches are you going to London on so-and-so. We’ll pick you up on that motorway stop and so on and so on. So it’s a real pleasure to be in it.

S: And this is one of my arguments about schools for example. Unfortunately kids are having to choose to miss out on something if they want to do something they like.

H: Ah! Now let me give you an example! There is a school in this country, which I went to... a really fancy school called Winchester College. It was founded in 1376 and at a very early stage they decided that the whole school should ideally sing. It’s a boarding school and so even to this day the school choir... now there’s a chapel choir that sings every day... and there are lots of close harmony groups... but the big community choir is from 5 o’clock to 7 o’clock on Saturday... and in that time you only have two choices as a pupil in the school. You can be in the choir or you can sit in your boarding house in silence!

S: [laughs] What are you going to choose!

H: So everyone sings in the choir. Now, nothing is scheduled against it.

S: Yes, that’s the key.

H: Nothing, and because it’s the only possible way to use those two hours, and because half the teaching staff also sings in it... and this is the moment you see when you see your teachers wearing jeans and being part of the community and you can actually talk to them about their kids or your mum or whatever it is... but you can’t when they’re teaching you Latin. It’s also the time when the school feels like a family, and so it’s the thing you look forward to, yes?

S: So it’s pleasant... like you said.

H: And also the guys doing it are brilliant, the facilities are fantastic, and the concerts are amazing... and no one ever forgets it... but also everywhere I go, I’ll stand up in front of a choir and someone will come up and say, I used to be at school with you, I remember that. I sang in this... very old-fashioned word... but I sang in the Glee Club at Winchester College... but I’ve virtually been singing in... the [name of city] Symphony Chorale or the [name of city] Symphony Chorus all my life. So it’s opportunities, isn’t it? That’s the same as sport. How are you ever going to learn... I often take a number of examples... so because we obviously... we share the same sports... I learnt to play cricket and soccer and rugby at school and therefore I can understand them and therefore I enjoy going to them and therefore I watch them on TV, and I read the back of the newspaper. Now I can see that if you’ve grown up in the United States with ice hockey and American football, that it’s great, I completely understand that... but as far as I can see, all that happens is that some people wearing a hat...

S: ...and stupid outfits...

H: ...stupid outfits, run on to the field, fall over and run off again! So, I have no interest in watching it. Similarly at school, I was very lucky in being taught English literature very well. I was taught languages very badly. So when I had to learn German, aged forty-three it was a real effort for me, but I did. But why I couldn’t have been properly taught... so languages was basically closed off to me at school... I had to learn German later, but if only I’d done it when I was thirteen, it would have been so much easier. Or if only I’d had the idea, that...
because we did French at school... that because I was good at that language, it
would have been relatively easy to do German. As it was I just thought
languages were impossible. No one ever did very well with me with visual arts,
so I used to go as a student on an inter-rail ticket around Europe with mates
from university... and they kept wanting to go into the art gallery, and I don’t get
it! So after a while they said... look, this picture’s good, because... and I would
start looking and only because of that can I now go to an art gallery and begin to
look at a painting. Now, and I had the most privileged education that money can
buy... and still it’s got huge gaps in it. How do you get a kid who has a normal
education... their education has just closed off three quarters of the possibilities
in life to them.

S: And it’s a really long time to be at school and to be bored...
H: That’s right... that’s right. I can’t remember what the question was, but...
S: We were talking about success.
H: Success! Well, success breeds success and all that...
S: The self-perpetuating thing, too, I think, is very interesting.
H: And also it comes down to, if you think music’s important are you going to...
how are you going to organise it? Every community can do it differently. So, it
would be possible for... and perfectly good for the city of... Adelaide, to say,
We’re not going to provide any school music, but we’re going to provide the
most astonishing neighbourhood music schools after school. Or... we are going
to provide instrumental tuition for every child in school, but there is no after
school provision at all, for example. But it needs vision and that’s why someone
like El Sistema, for example, these are the visions, these are the amazing visions
of one person.

S: Yes! Well I was interested recently, now that you’ve mentioned that... at ISME in
Greece just recently... I went to that conference... and the guy from Costa Rica
was talking about music being the basis of their entire education system...
because in their view... and I think their motto is ‘Music makes better people’.
H: Yes! And all the research is done, and we all know this so how is it that we’re
not doing it?
S: And Australia seems to just go, Okay you tell me that... I’m going to ignore that
now... and so Creative Arts is getting smaller and smaller... it’s so depressing.
H: Yes...
S: Obviously... obviously you are a successful conductor and musician... do you
consider yourself a success?
H: Yes. I do now, yes.
S: Can you explore that a little, I mean, you’re obviously a charismatic person...
like you were talking about... that’s very important.
H: Well... I think, if I’m honest, I think that I’m quite a good musician... but I have a
great deal of energy and I’m very well organised and I’m, if you like to call it,
charismatic... and therefore I’ve got a much bigger career than perhaps my
music ability would allow. Now, my music ability is sufficiently good that I can
be at top table and taken seriously, but the people I work with... and I don’t
mean to name drop... but the people I regularly work with... are Simon Rattle,
and Daniel Barenboim... so these are the two great collaborations in my life.
They both take me seriously as an equal. But as a musician I am nowhere in the
same field as either of them... but I can provide something that they can't get
from anyone else and therefore... I can give therefore to the people who sing for
me the opportunities to work at that level with these guys. If that's a success,
that's a success, yes?
S: Yes! And was it something that you've always wanted to do?
H: Yes... and it's... and of course, this is cheating... my dad was a conductor, my
mother was a conductor, I was sent to music specialist schools from the age of
eight... and read music at the premier university of this country. So I am not a
good example, except that I'm a very good example, because all my
contemporaries went on to fine careers in music, but they all did it, for example,
working in professional music working in Early Music or Contemporary Music
or whatever. I think I have made a difference to thousands of lives.
S: I think so...
H: And I don't work with many professionals. I work with hundreds and thousands
and thousands of amateurs, and they go away thinking, This is something I
really love doing and I must explore how to do it. That's a different thing from
doing a really wonderful performance of the Mozart Requiem.
S: And do you see therefore that's part of what makes you very successful? That...
working with amateurs?
H: Well if you want to call it successful, yes, yes!
S: Would you call that successful?
H: Yes, Yes, that is successful, because it's made a difference to people's lives. I
increasingly think that I do buy the thing that music is at the basis of
everybody's lives and there are a number of us that have to crusade for that and
not everyone can because not everybody has the personality or the abilities or
whatever, in which case be a great pianist, or play the organ in the church... do
what you can. To each their gifts.
S: Excellent... So just thinking about boys in particular and I acknowledge as
well... what you've said about everybody singing... and I totally agree with
that... but just for the purposes of today... thinking about boys... are there
things you think, specific to boys, that stop them being part of a choir?
H: Oh, yes... but it's more... and I think I'll turn this on its head. Why would a boy
want to join a choir? You see, if you start with a list of why you want to join it...
then it's something that they want to join... which doesn't necessarily mean...
well it could mean... that they sing for an hour then play football for an hour...
could do... but the world's full of boys who don't want to play football.
S: That's right!
H: So... there are lots of boys' organisations that still flourish. So you have to work
out what it is that will get boys involved where you live and it's not a blueprint
that works everywhere. Isn't it...?
S: Yes, I agree.
H: How are your boys going to come? It's got to be... and it's all things we've
already listed.
S: Yes. For boys at home, what I'm finding... for boys sort of in Western Sydney
area, which is very different to your Sydney area... particularly North Sydney...
those sort of areas... because it's got a... there's a real sort of white Aussie male
bloke...
H: Yes... yes indeed!
S: ...and singing is not going with that!
H: No, no, but where did you get that from? You got that from here! We have a very similar thing. So, how would you break through... and you break through by excellence and if formulas that have worked in some countries, like the television competitions and things like that, can work here, they can be copied and are indeed copied and work in other places. But in the end... why did this choir win the Britain Award last night? Why were they Christmas number one? Actually, because the conductor is an amazing man! We keep on coming back to the same thing. And so he completely transformed television’s view of choral music... one man was like the Pied Piper.
S: One thing I’m finding interesting... and what you’ve described is... I mean, it’s a very public success if you like... those sorts of things, like ‘The Voice’ and the X-Factor and those kind of television programmes...
H: Yes...
S: ...we have at home as well... and it's about being that recognised... and what have you... and boys that I’ve spoken to at home, that's quite important to them. They like to be a star...
H: Yes.
S: And what I’m really interested in... if that element is not there... is that playing a role in [why] maybe boys aren't really interested?
H: It could do, but why did they used to sing in church choirs? Because it was expected of them and they were delivered there by their parents and they'd be in church on Sunday anyway so they might as well sing in the church choir. Some will do it because they want to because they're musical and they want to find an interesting form of expression. I think the thing to do is to look at the really successful boys' choir...the community boys’ choirs...so I would strongly suggest you have a really good look at ‘Only Boys Allowed’... because that's invented very recently. Of course, another thing of course, a lot of the role models are women, which is not a real... in singing and in choral music... today there's a shocking... it is a shocking report. In the third or quarter of all state schools in this country there isn't one single girl studying physics!
S: Oh, wow!
H: It's the same thing. It's the other side of the coin.
[Recording ends - only two or three minutes missed]

End of interview
Appendices

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- Perceptions of success influencing male participation in choir – S. Powell

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<th>c) Professional Conductor 3</th>
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<td>S: I have some planned questions, but I am one of those people that like to be led by the person...</td>
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<td>R: You like to listen? Okay.</td>
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<td>S: I like to listen, because I find it so interesting. I’m talking a little bit about success, as I said to you... and I’ve got three major things that I’m finding in my research. One is around identity, and is called possible selves, which is quite fascinating... and it’s an aspect of identity that looks forward rather than always back. It says, Well I can see myself being that... and they may be more likely to pursue it or if they can’t they may try to avoid... it’s those sorts of things and boys, well everybody actually fits into this thing about whether they want to do something, what they expect to become, what they fear becoming. And decisions based around that.</td>
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<td>R: Yes... yes.</td>
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<td>S: And of course, back home, the Aussie male image is quite, well very macho... real blokey mentality. So, I’ve come up against this a lot, and have when I was a school teacher. While I’m here... this is a very long introduction, sorry!</td>
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<td>R: No, that's fine.</td>
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<td>S: While I’m here, I thought it would be fascinating to see if there were similarities, if there were differences, in what’s happening between the two countries. Obviously it’s only a little taste, but I’d like it to sort of inform my introduction in my thesis, and say, “I had the wonderful pleasure of speaking to people over in the UK... where choral singing is a huge tradition and it just seems to be part of what the country does.” So that’s where I’m coming from.</td>
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<td>R: Oh, absolutely.</td>
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<td>S: So, can I ask you to tell me... I mean, you have a huge amount of experience... can you tell me a little bit about what you do now and what you’ve done in the past?</td>
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| R: Right, okay. I came to music late and I came to choirs late. I played piano from an early age. My parents intensely loved music and I didn't realise that I loved the sound of choirs till I was fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, when I heard a good choir at school. Now, I was at a boys only school and for music, the great advantage of a boys only school is that boys aren’t constantly looking to see that they’re different from girls. They are with other boys and they’re ‘more happy’ to be themselves... Exactly as they are without trying to change anything, and they’re far more biddable then. You can encourage them to develop their real talents. On the games field, with art, with drama with music... and if they show an aptitude in music and a delight in music, then you can lead them anywhere they want to go. I... oh, there’s teaching in the family, there's music in the family, I am a music teacher... and that is what I most like doing, and... I had some amazing music teachers when I was at school, and I just looked up at them and thought, “I want to do the same as you.” I... I’m quite bossy, so I’ve always run the music... but... if it’s being well done, I can work for anybody and do exactly what I’m told, but if it’s not well done, I can be quite difficult... you know, I want it to be well done! I think... this is something you were talking about earlier... I want it to be well...
done. We all want things to be well done. We all want excellence but it is something you tap into, which is unquestioned with young people. So if you say to them... “Look! You've managed 85 percent. I'll give you 85 percent for that, that's not good enough! We can get better than that... they all respond to that... there's nobody that says, “Oh, excuse me, I'd be happy with 85%!” Nobody does that. Everybody wants more. So that's a really good thing to say, and I... it's one of the little tricks that I do and I find it always works. If I say, It's only 85, you know, and then, in teaching, that becomes shorthand. When you've done that speech, another time you say, 85! “Oh, okay, he wants us to do better!” Now... the macho thing is in all of our male genes and we... there is the sense that we want to be the big and strong one, that rushes off and kills the hunt, brings back the meat and um... and fights off predators and fights off rivals for our wives. And that's just... we've got those genes, like it or not and culturally we have to work out how we can be better than that, because we have all sorts of genes that we don't want, and so culturally we need to work out how to do that. Now, we've done it in England by mistake, because we have boys only schools quite a lot and they started going mixed but we're going backwards again now. I mean you know, people are saying, "Oh, no, let's not make our school mixed. We've just got away with not doing that.” And girls only and boys only... often... not always, do a lot better. I... my personal feeling, and I haven't been into it in great depth... my personal feeling is that if people are mixed by the time they get to sixteen or seventeen, that's okay, then there's a nice atmosphere between sixteen, seventeen year olds. But it's as you're approaching that age that boys think, I want to be a boy not a girl. So it's a lot easier in a boys only school. However, still people have come forward even if they haven't been, because they've got a burning desire to do music, they don't mind and so they will do it. And so I found that in my boys only schools, which has been mainly... there's only been one sixth form which was mixed, and that was lovely. I found it pretty easy to get boys to come and sing and partly because they'd been introduced to it extremely well from an early age, and introduced to it really well, and shown how to do it well. And they aspire to doing it well. If you ask any boy coming up from choir schools, “Tell us about your choir”, they'll pretty early on tell you how good it was because they're proud of the standard. So if in a school that takes them on to an older age, you can say, Look, we still do it well... listen to what we're achieving. Then they'll say, Right! I'll come with you. When you're asked why do you want people to be in the choir, some people have compelled people who are good to be in the choir... I've never done that. I've always... in all three schools that I've taught at, they used to do that, and on the first day I've been in the school, I've said, No. I want them to want to be in it or not. If they don't want to, that's fine. Now, I make sure that their tutors, the pastoral staff, the house-masters, all know very well whether they would like it or not...and if they're not doing it just because they think it's not the macho thing to do, then they'll be able to deal with that and say, Look, come on, you'll enjoy it, it's done a lot in this school... lots of people are musical... it's admired, so come on, why not do it? That expression, It is admired, is unworthy actually isn't it?! We don't want to do something just because it's admired, do we? We don't... and yet, Oh,
if people are going to admire it... you know... but there it is. It is a tool we have. But a better, a more admirable one, is because it's going to be excellent.

S: And it seems... as I said at the start... that boys do like it, and they like to be part of something that is good.

R: And young boys love singing with their full treble... big voice... when they discover what an amazing sound they can make. How it sounds when they soar above everyone else... singing descants, they adore [...] ... you know, when they do them well... in a very wonderful chest voice.

S: I was at [name of school] the other day, and I met [Name]...

R: He's great.

S: ...and I got to sit in on the rehearsal with the junior boys, and... exactly what you're describing... they were just so good. And I actually felt that they were performing for me as well!

R: Oh, there's a lot of that... there's a lot of that.

S: So, it was very, very nice. Okay, so you were saying about yourself that you came to singing and choir quite late...

R: Yes.

S: ...as a fifteen year old, did you have any issues with that, yourself?

R: No. Didn't even think... people have told me about this macho thing... it did... not once in my thinking did I consider that... not once! Because music was important to my family, music was important to the school. There was an atmosphere, and my friends were musical and I knew them... no, absolutely didn't... so it took me a bit of time to understand that, you know.

S: So, in all your experience now as a teacher, you talked about some people not necessarily wanting to be in the choir, and working on that, what are the main issues that you come across... trying to get boys... if any... to be part of the choir, apart from what you were just saying then?

R: Nowadays, having left [name of school]... well, when I was in [name of school] the way I would get people to be in the choir was to make it as good as possible, and as much as possible to have a waiting list for the choir. So you know... and particular places for everyone in the choir... and, "Yes, you can have a place in that choir when this voice changes...and then I've got a place." So all in choir stalls, so if um... anyone was late too often, or absent, then, You sure you want to be in the choir, because if not, off you go, because there are plenty of other people that want to be in it... you know?

S: So, it's creating that culture of excellence in that choir, as well as in that school, and also I guess a sense of achievement?

R: Achievement and pride. And things like... I'm very strong on turning up on time, and I get quite shirty when people don't turn up on time. And they like that... they go, Oh, I want to be part of a unit that is particular about people coming on time. The boys say it's the only fair way... the only fair way is to all come at once, so I will start on time. If there are people late, I'll deal with that later. I'm not waiting for them. Achievement, yes. Everybody likes achievement. Everyone likes to do things well, everyone likes achievement... everyone likes... and interesting... nobody ever says, But hang on, singing well in the choir, I've achieved that, but it's not going to help me get a larger salary in my job... nobody ever says that! Nobody! I've never heard that. Sometimes you get
people, misguidedly, often parents... occasionally teachers... misguidedly advising people not to do any music during exams. I can't bear that! Oh!!

S: I don't understand that!
R: Excuse me! It's good for them. If music is good for them at other times, it's certainly good for them during this ridiculous charade that we go into called exams... please!
S: It's good to hear you say that!!
R: Please! So many people... but the best schools don't. When I was at [name of school]... I feel passionately about this as you can probably tell...
S: Yes!
R: When I was at [name of school]... when I was at [name of school]... not once in all my twenty-six years, did any teacher, any house-master, or any parent come up to me and say, We think he ought not to be in the choir because he's got [???] or because his work is... you know... because that's not how life works, not how the human psyche works. If you enjoy music and put your heart and soul into it, the rest will come along. Everyone... young people need to find something they're passionate about and other things they need to do will join in its wake.

S: I'm really interested in the excellence thing that you're talking about because at home, the university I'm from is the University of Western Sydney, and that whole area is quite... I mean, it's really mixed. It's not... I guess you'd call it a lower socio-economic area. Again, it's varied because it's such a huge area. I think at schools they don't have that same passion for excellence, kind of in anything really, in my experience... and particularly not music, so what I'm finding is that choir doesn't have a great reputation. For example, not necessarily great people to run it, which is probably a key element. And the other thing that I'm finding is that kids might be part of a choir in school, and even through high school some of them stick with it... even when it gets tough when their voice changes and all that... but between leaving school and retirement, they're not interested in being in choirs as men. Do you have any thoughts on that? Is that similar in this country, or is...?
R: That they stop singing?
S: Yes... after school. Obviously school gives them the opportunity... it's right there...
R: I know. It does happen and... it's a great shame.
S: It is!
R: I reckon that... they go to university and carry on singing at university, and then they start a job and don't think of it anymore, because... then they have to bring up a family and... as well as starting a job and it's all too busy. But it's when that just calms down a little bit, that we want to say to them, "Er... do you remember you enjoyed singing, why not the both of you go to the choral society down the road. They're doing the Messiah at Christmas. Messiah? I used to love that... Well, get in there...". We ought to be able to grab them at that point.
S: And I know some of the men that I've spoken to back home, say quite a similar thing. They've had quite a good experience as boys, and therefore when they did have the opportunity... yep, they went back to it. Whereas somebody who's had a poor experience doesn't necessarily look at it again. Generalisation,
though. Can you tell me what you enjoy about conducting and anything to do with choir? What do you enjoy about that?

R: That's very, very interesting. I hope that the thing I most enjoy is the involvement with the music. I love... the conductor's always in the best place to hear the music because you're right in the middle... and it's a beautiful sound... if you manage to conjure beautiful sounds out of the choir, you're the one that gets the advantage of them... more than anyone else... and you should always choose music that you love. Never, never say, Oh, these children they only know pop music, so let's give them only pop music! Education means to lead out... lead out from where they are and take them somewhere new. I run a choir at the moment called, [name of choir], which is for boys and girls from 10... each of 10 comprehensives in this area of London, and many of them, not all of them, but many of them haven't been in a choir before... and the first thing I gave them was a madrigal in a minor key, *Weep oh, mine eyes*... and people said, Oh, you won't get them doing anything like that, because they only know pop music. Not one person said, Oh, why can't we do... you know... they loved it! It's good music, they love good music. So, I like being in the middle of that... I like getting things better. I do actually... I have to say, being the boss of a group of people. I like talking to a group, I like conducting a group, and I suppose that's something to do with power! I'm sure it is... I like doing it [both laugh]. Oh, everyone's looking at me... everyone's doing exactly what I say. That's nice, I like that... but if it's music as well... you know, good beautiful music, then I'm crafting... and that's wonderful.

S: Yes. In terms of repertoire... is that something you always choose yourself? Do you ever take into consideration if somebody says, Can we do...?

R: Oh, yes. I've just... I run the music at Trinity [...] called the Music in the Chapel, at the [Name of Chapel] in Greenwich, which is lovely. I said to them, I'm just doing the carol service, tell me anything you like. And... I've just asked them what they'd like to do next term, you know. Oh, yes, I do a lot of... but, my job is to lead them out of what they do into something new and good, so I must be careful of that. Not doing just what people always like. I want to do something else that they would like...

S: And... the things that you find difficult or challenging about conducting and teaching a choir... what are those? What do you find challenging?

R: Um...!

S: ...if anything!

R: Well, I've made such a sort of... I've developed the art in myself of it over the years, because it's the thing I most like doing so I've developed techniques for everything... really. I find I'm constantly called upon to be resourceful. The hardest thing is if you get a group of people going: [makes a gesture: head going droopy] aaaaahhh [makes a pathetic vocal sound]... and you think, Okay, why did you come here in the first place if you're going to go aaaaahhh...? And then you think, Actually, you did come here in the first place. They do want to sing... and if I can show them how to go AAAAAHHH [sings with vigour] rather than aaaaahhh, they'll be pleased! So now, how do I get them to do that? And whatever you do, everything is positive up to a point. So every now and then... it's so easy, your mind tends to the negative... different amounts in different of
us... but it tends to the negative... Oh, that was dreadful! Why aren't you sitting up! Why are you so... you know, that kind of whiney thing. Never! However, I did that for some years and then I thought actually sometimes they simply need to know that it's not... you know... so as long as you do it because you know they will respond. They will agree with you. You can sometimes say, Actually, you can do a lot better than that. Come on! And that really makes them re... and that's about as negative as I go...

S: And that's not particularly negative anyway!

R: No. I suppose I might go as far as to say, Argh, that was horrible! You know, like that... meaning, you know that was horrible so do it again. I sometimes... blerk! I do that. And I get a bit horrible when they're late. I can't bear... I can't bear lateness... I just can't... I don't know what to do about it. It leaves me in a total tizz when people come in late... and I've learnt to deal with it in myself and people know, and tend to come on time. It just sort of feels as if they don't care.

So that's what I find a challenge. You know, if somebody doesn't turn up, that's a challenge because you can't excite them if they're not there... and, I have to say, that the way to deal with that, anyone that doesn't turn up, you go straight to them afterwards... and you don't tell them off, you just say, We missed you. And if they think, Oh, did you? I thought you didn't miss me, I thought I wouldn't count. Yes, you do count, we want you there. I asked you to be in it in the first place... so we want you there. That's all you need to do. You don't have to tell them off... Why weren't you there! We won't be able to keep a place in the choir if you don't... [spoken in a gruff voice]. You just say, We want you. That's what people want to know. That's it.

S: And do you find... thinking about that whole team work aspect... that's another thing that's coming through a lot with people I've spoken to, some of the boys back at home... they really do feel as though they're working as a team. They don't necessarily know that they're saying that to me, but what they're expressing is that. Do you see that in action as well?

R: Oh, yes. I often use that... We're a team! You can't do that, we're a team... join in, help... help everyone else to be the best they can. We're all different singers; we all have different things that work for us.

S: I noticed on the programme last night... particularly the soloists... you know, the gentleman who was doing the solo line... said, he didn't want to let the rest of the choir down...

R: ...let them down, yes! That's it...

S: ...I thought, Wow, nobody told him that, nobody had said anything like that but... he felt that himself.

R: Yes, yes.

S: I know that music, as you've said, is a really natural part of who you are, who you always have been and that's just something innate, but can you express why that is so important to you? Music in general and choir... you said you just love it. Why is it so important?

R: Don't know! I've been into it, read about it... and thought about it... and ultimately, the closest I can get to it is... is that we like the sound of other people's voices, and we need to like the sound of other people's voices... we're talking about... genetics... evolutionary [...] We need to like the sound of other
people's voices because we want to communicate with them. We are teams and we like to hear other people speaking, and we need to like other people speaking. We also like speaking ourselves because we communicate essential things... about loving someone... about needing someone's help... or about needing someone not to do that again... or it's... but the way people are thinking at the moment about speech... is that actually it started as gossip more than pragmatism. So, we needed to gossip to form teams. We need to form alliances. The most powerful thing that people do is form alliances. It's more powerful than our huge brains... because... you can do this, I can do this... let's get together. I find myself since I became freelance fifteen months ago... I found myself making all sorts of essential music alliances with people. I think all through the work that I do. I help them and they help me... and that... in order to start that going, you have... you talk to people, you natter... you gossip. You talk about nothing. It doesn't matter what you say... you just natter and we like doing it. And I think that communication is what speech is about first and foremost. After that it became pragmatic. You know, Where's the water? Where can I throw this? And... come round this way and you'll be able to hunt better there... that prey... you know. But first of all it's got to... so we like making sounds... we like hearing sounds... and we have just honed that into something very sophisticated indeed in our choir singing. And it's gone from completely straightforward hearing of sounds into, Listen to this edifice I can build. This... beautiful sounds from everybody... and the parallel with that is people who play the piano. I marvel that somebody can play a twenty minute piece of complex harmonies, off by heart... remember it... with complex movements of the hand from the brain, and that we want to! We want to do it and it's a pleasant experience. I do think it's almost a platitude to say it comes down to singing, but I do think it comes back down to singing. Platitude, cliché... so say that it comes down to... but I think it does come down to singing and that form of communication. Our extraordinary brains... and we got these big brains somehow... and they don't always serve the purpose. We use them for things, and that's what's so exciting about being human. We've made this great edifice, which is choral music. There you go!

S: That's very interesting! I'd like to talk a little bit about success and just ask you... I know we talked a little bit about liking achievement and liking excellence... how would you define success yourself... just in general?

R: It's... There are lots of different kinds of success. There's setting yourself a goal and achieving it... is the main thing. Setting yourself a goal and achieving it. Success in your own eyes is more important than success in other people's eyes. We like other people to see us through their eyes as successful and that's... we like being admired... so anything you do that's admired, that's great. And if we are successful in our own eyes and we are acknowledged by other people as being successful, then that is wonderful, but... So we give ourselves a goal, or somebody else gives us a goal... usually we give ourselves goals because we can reject that goal that somebody has given us, we don't have to go with that goal... so it is our own goal really. So we go for that goal, and we judge for ourselves... whether or not we achieve it.
S: Yes... so does that then apply in your mind to a successful choir? How would you describe a successful choir?

R: [pause] I think everyone can hear when it’s out of tune, when it’s not together, when it’s not balanced, when it’s not blended, when it’s not rhythmical, when the words aren’t clear and when it isn’t really saying anything of value. So everybody can see that themselves and they need a director to point out how well they’re doing with those things, but ultimately it’s for them to hear and them to feel it together... all those things... and so success is when they have heard that they are doing that right. Again it comes down to the person. Of course, if we’re a professional choir... in fact any choir that performs to other people... doesn’t have to be a professional choir... if it performs for other people then... you... that effect you’ve succeeded in producing will be pleasant to the people who listen. So it’s a success in the ears of the listener as well as the ear of the singer.

S: Do you think... just on that topic of performing... do you think a choir has to perform in order to be successful? Or is that an individual...

R: In theory no, but in practice, yeah! Everybody likes performing... and why not? Are we just doing this for ourselves? Well, yes, there are plenty of good choirs that do. Groups of people sing for themselves, but ultimately getting from eighty-five to a hundred per cent is very difficult indeed unless you’re going to give it to other people.

S: I was interested last night... with... is it Gareth...?

R: Gareth Malone, yes.

S: He made a couple of comments along those lines of you know... “You’ve proved yourselves now”. And using the performance as an incentive like you said... for this choir to get better you’re going to perform this... you want to win this competition... it was used as an incentive.

R: Absolutely...

S: Would you consider yourself as a success? Sounds like a really daft question!

R: [pause] In musical terms, yes. Yes. I’m a very lucky person. I think I always had good luck. I really do. Things go well for me, and I... the pattern that my career has been just as I would have liked it. I went freelance at just the right time and I’ve achieved what I wanted to achieve. Success for me is having groups of people making music with me, with whom I like making music. It really isn’t being on the telly! [both laugh]. Although you know, of course it’s nice being on the telly! Of course I liked that.

S: I just went, Oh! That’s who I’m meeting tomorrow!

R: Yes! That is nice! I mean seeing yourself on telly is... yes, of course... it’s... gives you a buzz.

S: Yes. But my real feeling of success is to have individuals singing for me. To be able to make music with them, that I love... and that’s really up to standard.

R: And has that always been your goal?

S: Yes. Yes it has really. At various times I found that the groups of singers that I’ve got I can’t quite get up to the mark that I want and so, I’ve got the very best out of them I can. And then you need to find better singers sometimes, you know.

S: Can I just change the subject slightly and... well, quite dramatically actually... and just talk about the voice change time in boys. You would obviously come
across that in your experience. Do you deal with that specifically in choir? How would you... do you support boys through that? Or is it kind of... deal with it themselves?

R: I say to them, Oh, it's going, isn't it? Let's hear that... sing that... tum-diddly-um... alright, you'll probably find that you're doing that not necessarily but... gradually you'll find that you can't get the high notes... or there'll be a patch in the middle of your voice that you can't do... or it will be squawky. Sometimes you can sing it, sometimes you can't. Carry on singing, but... here's where your musicianship comes to the fore... leave out bits that make you uncomfortable. If it's painful come and tell me. You can stop singing for a bit. Some choirs are able to find people jobs... boys jobs, so that they stay in the same social group, which is nice. At [name of school] we had Lower Chapel Choir, which was brilliant because the trebles used to come to College Chapel Choir, which was what I took, and then when their voices started changing and they were no longer able to sing treble or alto in College Chapel Choir, they'd go to Lower Chapel Choir and sing tenor or bass in that and they all wanted to carry on singing. One or two find it uncomfortable, and they will say, I'll give it a miss for a bit and then... but the great thing about a boarding school is you see them all the time. You can say, How's your voice coming on? Well, have a singing lesson... you know, book in with a singing teacher and have a singing lesson and see how it's going. Or even, Come and sing to me. Oh, that's wonderful, what a lovely sound you're making! How exciting. One of the most exciting times is when you hear their voice... I once... several times I've said to a boy, Marvellous that you're still singing treble... just sing me the sound um... that you make as a bass or tenor. And they've sung and out has come the most astonishing... [gestures as if singing]... Very exciting, you lucky person... you know, making a sound like that!

S: Oh, wow!

R: And I can think of two or three of them, who, in the profession now are a pretty well-known soloist who... for whom that happened.

S: Yes. Have you had much experience of boys giving it away altogether, because their voices changed at all?

R: Occasionally. Yes, if they've quite enjoyed it... perhaps their parents wanted them to do it, but they didn't really. The most important thing I've ever learnt about teaching music is that there are two parts of the brain for music. One part for... listening and loving; another part of the brain, completely different place for making music. Sometimes, as a music teacher, you find a child is extremely keen on their music but actually not all that good at it. You've got to give them every chance with patience and every chance to develop. Sometimes you'll get someone who is brilliant at it and doesn't really like it. Every now and then you get both... and they're amazing. But the ones who are very good at it but don't particularly want to do it, you've got to be understanding... even though...

S: Shame!

R: ...and you must never say, What a waste of talent. It's not a waste of talent; he doesn't want to do it. That's it. Someone else has got the talent. They are all the things that come to play when one's talking about... when one's talking about change in voice.
You’ve had a long career. In that time, have you seen changes in the way boys... or a change in their attitude to singing at all?

Not much. They will have a better attitude to singing the more of them that do anyway. So, if you’re in a place where lots of people are musical, it’s far more likely to be acceptable.

So, it’s just part... being part of that culture?

Yes.

Just natural?

People say voices are changing earlier. I haven’t noticed that. They certainly... there was a time when they did, but the last thirty years... not a lot of change. I think it’s something to do with diet.

Yeah... I know one of the choirs at home I talked to, there was a boy in Year 10... so he was fifteen... and his voice still hadn’t changed... and that was quite interesting. He didn’t want to talk about it much. Still singing!

I had boys... carried on singing till they were sixteen...

Amazing... yes.

And very happy to, too.

Do you think choir is an important thing for boys... and men, to do?

If they want to. Yes. If they don’t want to, it’s not. Not remotely important for them.

Yes, you’ve covered that. And those people that want to and are part of choir, how do you see it impacting their lives? Or do you?

It gives them energy... an inner energy to do well and achieve.

So, the most important aspects, just to summarise... I am coming to a close, unless there’s anything else you want to say... the most important aspect of choir in terms of keeping boys there and enjoying it... what would you say they are, just to summarise?

The most important way of keeping boys in choir?

Yes!

Other boys doing it!

Okay.

That’s the main thing. It being done to a very high level; the teacher being good; the music being good... How do I know what’s good? I’ll say what’s good! [both laugh]Those are the things. Other people doing it; it being done well; the music being good; the teacher being good.

I know... I also spoke with [Professional Conductor 2] the other day...

Yes... yes...

...and his huge focus in what he was saying was about the conductor and he said, Yes, lots of other things, all play a part, but in the end, it’s the conductor that makes something work. Would you agree with that, too?

Yes, of course, because if you’ve got a whole lot of people just milling around, without a conductor, nothing will happen, and if one comes forward and says, I’ll be the conductor, then it starts happening, so you know... But if you’ve got a really good, dynamic conductor that knows exactly what they’re doing, and is good with people and can understand the ones that need to be brought on and the amount to which you’re judging... how strict to be and how encouraging to be and all that... then... brilliant.
S: And would you say, in terms of the culture of singing, which in this country is obviously a long tradition... like cathedral choirs... schools... those sorts of things... it's a bit different at home, so I'm a bit ignorant of the UK... but, has it changed much... or is it changing much from that tradition... or is it quite solid and sort of... happening?

R: It's great... yeah. Very good indeed. There are boys' choirs all over the country.

S: Yes... there seems to be. In Australia, it's not and I think that's really sad and I wonder why... and that's what I'm trying to work out. I want to change the world.

R: Well, you need somebody... have you... do you know about the Drakensberg Boys School?

S: Only by name... a little bit.

R: Look at that, see how they did it... because they started a choir school from nothing... and they do loads of... [phone rings]... they do loads of music, they're up in the mountains, and they have a wonderful time... and they are nuts about their singing, they adore it. Really vibrant. And I think if you get a lot of boys together, which is sort of unfashionable, but if you get a whole lot of boys together... and in a boys school... in a cathedral choir... and after all... after all, I was dealing... I was at a school dealing with nine and ten year olds... ten and eleven year olds... and we're in a class, and all the girls went to that end... and all the boys went to that end [indicating opposite]. Well, if that's what they want to do, let them. It's not going to spoil them for the rest of their lives, they won't be able to keep out of each other's... after a time, you know... they'll be in each other's arms! We tend to think... Oh, perhaps we're all making them gay or something! And of course we're not. You try, it's a much more complex process... than just whether they meet other girls or not. People, you know, it's a lot of ignorance about that.

S: Yes... I agree.

R: And... I met a teacher who said that she had terrible trouble teaching mixed class maths. About 10.30 in the morning, mixed class, and they were about fourteen. Girls and boys battling and not getting anywhere. Boys looking miserable, and girls being, you know... achieving and putting their hands up and boys resenting it... and she was talking about this in the break after this, and then a man, who was also teaching maths and finding exactly the same thing with his. They said to each other... Tell you what, without telling the Head, why don't I just take the boys next week and you take all the girls. And they did. They came back afterwards into break and they both said, Bliss! Oh, it was wonderful...! The girls were able to say what they wanted... be enthusiastic and all that... Boys able to be themselves and not constantly think about you know... Fantastic. Shall we keep it going? Yeah!

S: That's it. I've read quite a bit about that debate... the girls only, the boys only. And it always... well generally comes back to that.

R: I actually... I'd say, Ask them! Big arrogant teachers all thinking they know better. Ask the child... say, ask a nine-year-old boy... and a nine-year-old girl... and ask if they want lessons with girls, and the answer is, No! Ask a ten year old, No! Eleven year old, no! Twelve, thirteen, No! Fourteen? Yeah... just starting. Fifteen... and judge then. They'll tell you. Ask... you can have a questionnaire...
how about this... to children... saying, Do you want to? And you can ask another
question, Do you think you learn better if you’re with other girls or other boys?
And just... how about that? Questionnaire... and please tell me the results!

S:  /[laughs/] I will!
R:  Exactly which age, you know.
S:  Yes. Um... I had a question I was going to finish with, and I've forgotten...
R:  Ring me or email!
S:  Thank you so very much for your time.
R:  It's been a pleasure. I've enjoyed talking about it very much indeed.
S:  Oh, I'm glad.
R:  And there's always talk of possibly doing a choral course in Australia... you
  know the ones I run? In summer.
S:  No!
R:  That's my main thing! My main thing is choral courses throughout the
  summer... for sixteen to twenty year olds.
S:  Okay... in this country?
R:  Yes. Next year I have two at Eton and one at Oxford, one at Cambridge, one at
  Durham one at Cheltenham, one at Wellington. And they... four hundred girls
  and boys come and we have nothing but choral music all the way through... and
  they love it... and it's fantastic.
S:  I did see that on your website.
R:  And I want that... I'd like to do one in Australia. And the head of music at
  Canberra Boys Grammar School is interested and she's very good indeed and I
  have contact with her, you see.
S:  There are places like... in Sydney... you know, like St Andrews College... and
  those places have those traditions...
R:  I was disappointed with St Andrews... this was about twenty years ago... it was
  so feeble.
S:  That's what I'm finding. When I've heard choirs back at home it's like... awful to
  say it... but it's nothing compared to what I've heard here... nothing at all.
R:  I know! I know!
S:  And I just don't understand. I don't think Australian schools have this sense of
  wanting things to be excellent, you know... and striving for that. It certainly
  hasn't been my experience in the schools I've been at.
R:  It hasn't sparked off yet. It needs to spark off. In America and places it does... it
  has sparked off, but it didn't straight away. But it was by huge... trying... by
  some very dedicated people... and now they really do...
S:  I know that Richard Gill in Australia... I know that he... really tried to focus on
  singing and getting that to happen...
R:  Well...
S:  I'd love you to come to Australia!
R:  All these courses happen for sixteen to twenty year olds, so maybe we could do
  something.
S:  I'll keep in contact with you! Thank you so much for your time.
R:  It was lovely to meet you.

End of interview
Appendices

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Perceptions of success influencing male participation in choir – S. Powell

d) Professional Conductor 4

S: I know I’ve emailed you, but what I’m doing back at home is particularly looking at boys and singing, and men and singing. And in the Australian culture it seems to be sort of not something men seem to do or boys don’t tend to do it, whereas here it’s… there’s this wonderful tradition of choral singing which is just beautiful and I’ve… as I’ve said, I’ve heard some nice stuff already. Boys’ voices. So what my PhD is looking at are ideas surrounding success. How do people think of success… perceptions of success… and is that idea of success actually influencing whether boys are doing it? For example, I’ve had a lot of young guys say to me they want to be famous. They tend not to be famous in a choir so they’re not going to bother to be in choir. In schools for example, they’re the sort of things coming out. And of course in Australia it’s caught up with ideas of masculinity… what it means to be a real bloke, you know, you’ve got to play sport and that sort of thing. And also things connected to identity and how men see themselves… and they’re all closely linked, I’m finding. So maybe what I’ll get you to start with is to tell me a little bit about your role here. What you do, and about your experience, which I’m sure is vast!

O: [laughs] So, at Queen’s College I’m called the organist, which actually means I don’t play the organ very often. It’s historic. It’s a term, in English cathedrals for the choir director. So historically, [college name] had a choir of boys and men, but for several decades now, it’s been a mixed choir, with almost all the members being under-graduates… a few graduates. So my role as organist to the College is to recruit, train and direct that choir in three services a week in term time. So for twenty-four weeks of the year, we’re doing that… and also on tour once a year and recordings, broadcasts, and concerts here and elsewhere in the UK and abroad. So it’s principally a job… I mean, most of the time within a normal week in term time, my role involves directing the choir in chapel in services, and then there’s a secular music making element to it with concerts and so on.

S: So, you’ve obviously been doing that for a long time?

O: Well, I’ve been at [college name] since ’97.

S: Okay.

O: …and it’s only one part of my role in [college name] because I’m Music… also Director of Studies in Music at [college name], so I teach the under-graduate course. I teach a number of post-grads in [college name] and I also have a university post, academically, so I’m Reader in Music at [name of university]. So, there’s three elements to what I do, which may seem a strange combination in some ways, but there’s quite a strong tradition… not just in the UK but it’s particularly strong here… of people who combine the practical side of the choral tradition with a teaching post of some kind, and/or research.

S: I find it quite fascinating… the strength of the tradition. Did you sing as a boy, growing up?

O: Yes, I did.

S: Was it part of what you did?

O: I was in a school choir… so I wasn’t a cathedral chorister. My school was a day school, not a boarding school… but we had a choral service every Sunday.
And was that for boys only?

Yes, it was a boys’ school. It’s now a mixed school.

Okay. I was talking to [Conductor 3] the other day and he was saying many schools have done that now… in the last few years… have become mixed… but there’s just a few that are holding on to the boys only.

A lot of schools, even if they’re single sex before the sixth form they’re mixed in the sixth form. That’s quite common.

So, growing up, singing as a boy, what was your experience like… singing as a boy?

Well, it was a very traditional Anglican Church Choir with that principally nineteenth/twentieth century Anglican Cathedral repertoire. So the choir was almost all boys from school with one or two adult members of the choir. So I suppose it was a very useful exposure to that repertory, and to some extent also to this tradition of learning music quite fast, performing it almost straightaway in a service after you’ve rehearsed it… I mean not as large a repertoire as a student choir like this one, but some kind of introduction to that and also, as is quite common in that kind of context, I also started learning the organ while at school. So it’s the… choral side and the organ playing side often [combined] into one another.

So it was a very normal part of school life?

Well, in my case it was only on Sundays, and one other rehearsal in the week, so it wasn’t a sort of… dominating aspect of my school career, as it is more so for people who are cathedral choristers.

So, the role that you have now… conducting a choir and directing music at that level… is that something that you’ve always wanted to do?

Umm… no, but I suppose the idea was beginning to form probably late teenage. Perhaps two or three years before I went to university I wasn’t actually sure whether to read music at university. It was between that and classics. It was a difficult choice. Then I did decide to go for music and to apply for organ scholarships at Cambridge, and I got an organ scholarship at St Catharine’s College, and that was one of those mixed voice chapel choirs, where the organ scholars conducted the choir once they were the senior organ scholar. So, from my second year at university I was directing a choir of, in that case, my contemporaries at college and that… it was doing that that shifted the balance from organ playing to the choral conducting. So, certainly by the time I was at my second year at university I was pretty clear that one of the things I wanted to do alongside being a scholar and a university teacher was the choral director.

Wow! Amazing. What do you enjoy particularly about conducting a choir?

Well, it’s a very… mentally and emotionally engaging experience so… We’re moving very fast in rehearsal, learning music and then performing it in public an hour later and so everybody in the choir has to be extremely alert. It’s… I think a particularly engaging kind of music making because it’s involving the voice and therefore is inherently expressive.

Yes.

And the repertory is, I suppose, the other aspect… which is appealing because there’s such an enormous choice of repertoire. So in a choir like this where everyone’s seeking to refresh the repertoire regularly and to introduce the
singers to a wide range and to teach them about the performance styles of different forms of music. It’s a very rich area in which to explore all those kinds of possibilities and challenges, because there are so many to choose from.

S: And do you do all the selection of music?
O: Almost all, yes. So I work with the college chaplain and he will suggest themes for the services on a particular day of the week, to fit in with the sermon on Sunday. So we work together on themes and then that gives me a springboard for choosing the music... but one aspect of the musical training is that we have two organ scholars, who are, if you like, my assistants in the choir and they conduct... each one of them will conduct about three or four times each term. So... for the services where they conduct, they will have chosen some of the music... as long as we make sure it fits in with the balance of difficult and easy pieces, and early and late pieces for that week and that... it fits with the themes... so there's also a teaching role for me within the choir because I'm in part training the organ soloist as well as the singers.

S: Wow! And all the people in your choir, aside from the organ scholars, are they... they're obviously auditioned to come into the choir... are they all music students? Or are they from across... [as O shakes his head]
O: No, so, they are all auditioned... and at [college name], the majority of them, between eighteen and twenty, hold choral scholarships and that means that they did a vocal audition in the September usually one year before they arrive here... and that audition process happens before, but independently from, their academic application to Oxford. So if they then get in academically and if they're high on our list in terms of vocal ability for their voice part... we give them a choral scholarship and that means that they have an obligation to sing in the choir for the three or four or... however many years of their undergraduate course... and we pay a scholarship and we pay for their singing lessons. And the rest of the choir... most of them are either other undergraduates at [college name] or they are undergraduates at other colleges... and then we have two professional singers, lay-clerks, this year they both happen to be tenors, one of whom is a school teacher and the other is a lecturer at another college and also he's doing a doctorate in engineering. So we have all the range of subjects represented in the choir because you don't have to be reading music to hold a choral scholarship. So we have, probably slightly more reading humanities than sciences on average, but it's reasonably even.

S: That's really exciting.
O: Yes!
S: Fascinating. What would you find the most challenging aspects of running a choir?
O: So, you're dealing with relatively young voices and particularly for the men... relating to your topic... they've only been singing on their broken voices for a few years... They tend to have, therefore, less experience vocally on their adult voice than the women do and in fact an increasing number of the women have been... for example, cathedral choristers in those cathedrals that now have a girls choirs as well as a boys choirs. So they've been singing on... admittedly a gradually maturing, but nevertheless, essentially the same instrument for a number of years... and the boys not. So the men in the choir... So, what that
means is that one is trying to develop a sound which isn’t artificially over-mature for the age of the singers but nevertheless is a powerful and flexible instrument overall. That’s a challenge... and the fact that they all have singing lessons if they’re choral scholars, of course, helps with that and I collaborate with their singing teachers and get reports from them.

S: Okay, that was going to be one of my questions!

O: Second challenge is... that the timetable in term time for these people is extremely crowded. So to insist, as we do... that choir takes priority timetable-wise one has to be quite hard-hearted about that. So there can be clashes in orchestras... people want to play... they want to be in all kinds of good things, but in order to maintain the current standards that we try to, we have to be actually more disciplined about it than the students will have to be for some other aspects... so while it wouldn’t be the end of the world if they were to be a few minutes late for some of the other things they do in the week, we try to ensure the frame of mind that they don’t turn up a few minutes late for the choir. So that can be... that sort of authority... part of the role... can be quite challenging. And I suppose in all things, you’ve got a group of thirty people living in the college... you’re going to get quite a lot of illness, particularly at the start of the term, so in a practical... things that can’t be anticipated.

S: On the topic of voice change... it’s always a big one in boys... have you had much experience in boys changing voices? I know you talked about the sort of... weaker younger male voices.

O: Unlike quite a lot of conductors in the English music tradition, I wasn’t in the cathedral choir context, and I haven’t worked with an all-male choir regularly of men and boys. I don’t have that much professional experience with that. The vast bulk of my professional experience as conductor is with mixed student choirs and with mixed professional consorts.

S: But as you said you work quite closely with the vocal tutors... with some of those younger guys?

O: Yes. I mean... So we’ve got a team of singing teachers... people I know who are going to be sensitive to people’s vocal development between the ages of eighteen and twenty-one. And it’s also three years where people’s voices are developing pretty fast, sometimes because they have more intensive lessons here than they have had at school and they’re doing a lot of singing also. So it’s important to talk to the teachers regularly about... For example sometimes people will turn up presenting themselves as a bass when in fact the natural range of the voice turns out to be high baritone or tenor. Of course the same can happen with the women. Some women who sang alto at school have been on the alto line because they’re good sight-readers, and not because they are actually altos. So within the limits of keeping a balanced choir, we try and be flexible if it turns out to be that they’re singing in the wrong voice part for their voice.

S: Great. Can I ask you... can you explain why... I mean, obviously you think choir is important – I’m assuming that...

O: Yes!

S: Can you tell me why you think it’s so important for people to be part of something like that?
O: In this kind of educational context, yes?
S: Yes.
O: Well, I think that it's socially important for them, is one thing, because life at university can be very daunting and the choir provides them with a sort of instant social set of about thirty people. It also provides them with a very, hopefully enjoyably intensive framework of doing something four times a week. I think it's important because the Oxbridge choirs are a major feeder of the continuing flourishing of the choral traditions of the UK, in that, on the one hand, professionally, if one looks at those who are singing in all the London churches and professional choirs a lot of them are Oxbridge choral scholars. Of the professional consorts particularly early music consorts, a lot of them went through this sort of training at university. So it's very good for professional training. It trains people in the very quick learning of pieces and even sight-reading, even if they weren't when they arrived. They're singing with a young version of the kinds of... if they want to go on to professional... the kinds of professional consorts they hope to be in after university. For those who want to go on to Conservatoire training as soloists, it gives them many solo opportunities whether in services or in concert. So, when we do a major work like Messiah or St John Passion, although we may use professional soloists for some of the largest roles, we try as much as possible to give choral scholars the other solos. So it's a chance for them to be singing recitatives and arias in front of large and demanding audiences in a sort of professional level context before they then launch themselves into post-graduate vocal training... and I suppose more widely I'd say that it's, I hope, educationally and culturally valuable to them and not just the music students, because it's introducing them to a wide variety of repertoire and ways of making music... performance wise, practice wise.
S: It sounds like it teaches them pretty good discipline, too.
O: Well, I try to, without being too heavy-handed about it.
S: That sort of leads quite nicely into the topic of success and if I was to ask you how you would define success in any context, as well as the choir context... how would you define success?
O: Fulfilment I suppose would be an important aspect of it... and that fits very much with the choral context and in other singing contexts... that it's an activity that does provide people with fulfilment and will give them an opportunity also to work out how far they want to go with their singing after university so that they can define what fulfilment is likely to be for them whether their aspiration is to go on to do singing or to... work in an entirely different sphere but to be keeping their singing going through good, local amateur choir or whatever. So I think that should be at the top of the list.
S: Do you think performing is a significant element of success? I mean, I've had people say that a choir that doesn't perform is therefore not successful... they've gone as far as saying that.
O: Well, I think, the communication with the congregation or the audience is crucial and speaking of the choir's liturgical role first, yes, the success of the liturgy in a collegiate setting is in part a reflection of the choir's attitude and approach and, of course, part of that is that they sing in a musically inspiring
and engaging way to make the text clear and such that they are successful in that communication. It’s partly about deportment and maintaining that sort of atmosphere and that can be a tricky thing because... for example, religious bar to membership of the choir like this and yet they are taking part in a tradition... quite a traditional liturgy. We’re lucky here in that the chaplain is very engaging and imaginative in his conduct of liturgy and construction of services, such that, because we get mixed congregations of people from the city, tourists, and members of college... students... and senior members of the college, so you’re actually singing to quite a mixed audience. For concert singing it’s actually quite difficult for a liturgical choir like this to switch to the kind of engagement... successful engagement with an audience that... particularly in the English choral tradition where you are almost never singing without music... and actually it’s often quite striking when we’ve been on tour to choir congresses internationally... singing with university groups and others, from other countries... and often [singing] from their traditions that they know a relatively small repertory, extremely well learnt... largely by heart... and they perform in a certain way, and they basically are concert choirs a lot of them. And we’re a liturgical choir that does concerts and recordings. So it makes success in projection and communication to an audience more difficult to achieve. I suppose there’s also for a choir like this success is measured in terms of recruitment... how many people apply to be choral scholars here? Measured in terms of profile for the choir, so we have a sort of machinery of administration, which works through CDs, broadcasts, tours, to try and make the choir successful in those terms. So there’s musical success and there’s also... I mean... I wouldn’t describe it as commercial success, because it’s not a money spinner, but in terms of the satisfaction for the singers of knowing they’re in a choir with a certain profile...

S: Reputation.
O: Reputation... yes.
S: Therefore you would consider this group a success?
O: Increasingly, yes. I mean, I think it’s a never-ending effort. The choir’s changed a lot in what it does and how it sounds, in the time I’ve been at [college name], but it may be my career here might be quite long but there is still a... may be a kind of entity which hopefully is going to be there for a very long time after that and will continue to evolve... but I think it acquires some sort of momentum after a while so I think the college is aware of the fact that it has this... quite well-known... and culturally valuable and educationally valuable thing going on with the college regularly, even those members of college who never come to chapel.

S: Yes. Do you think there are particular elements in this choir setting that affect its success? Things that maybe you’ve come up against and had to deal with that affect their success.
O: Well, I think... there can be practicalities like, you know, just which singers you have available to you in a particular year... and a choir like this fluctuates fast because most people are on three year, occasionally four year courses... you lose a third of your choir each year. What you’ll hear is the second service that this choir has sung ever... in the sense that a third of them are new as of a few
days ago. So you’ll be rebuilding it each year... that’s on the negative side... or challenging side... sorry I’ve lost the question now...

S: ...it’s about elements that affect success.

O: Self-confidence of singers, pride in the group... without getting, you know... overly proud about it or precious about it. Taking themselves seriously, in that sense, I think, can help. And I think also the sense that it’s a communal effort... but certainly it can be infectious in that if it’s an exciting project the choir tends to... like we’ve just been on tour to North of England and Scotland and it went very well. It was very exciting engagements and the members of the choir who were there... so two thirds of the choir that were here last year are still I think fired up a bit about how they approach choir from that experience.

S: So it had a spin-off effect for the new people.

O: I think so. What you hope happens is that each year... the new people arrive to find themselves in this slightly different outfit in terms of its aspirations.

S: And can you see... or do you see the way that being part of the choir impacts the people in it? Can you see them enjoying it? Can you see them sort of working together and those sorts of things?

O: It’s very easy to choral conductors to monitor that and be aware of it because... more so than with orchestral conducting, you’re getting eye-contact... in fact you’re asking for eye-contact. So I think it’s true to say that choral conductors are very aware... should be very aware of the sort of dynamics of the group and of course you’re apart from the group, to some extent, you’re the authority figure for the group, but particularly actually in performance... it’s very easy to... monitor is not quite the word... but to keep an awareness of that in a way that’s difficult in conducting a large orchestra, where the conductor would be watching out of the corner of his eye... and also aware that there’s an instrument between you and them... and this directness of communication through the voice... I think also makes it that easier to judge.

S: And do you think that’s a particularly special part about the voice... I guess that more intimate... personal aspect?

O: Absolutely. You’re singing powerful texts a lot of the time. Even if in the liturgy you’re singing the same texts, in some cases they’re in different settings than what you sang two days before... and a lot of the job of a choir like this, their director is to find how to project and express the text, which the composer would be helping you to do but of course, particularly with early music is not giving you indications on the score about the fine nuances of how it is to be achieved... and so... and actually this is part of the to and fro between the conductor and the choir, because the conductor if they’re alert will be receiving ideas about shaping from the choir to some extent while also instructing in basic ideas about shaping on them.

S: One of the guys that I spoke with back at home... one of the things that he said was one of his favourite things about conducting a choir was you’ve just explained... that immediate kind of connection between the conductor and singers. He said the very same thing. You don’t get that with an orchestra. You get people looking straight back at you, eye contact, everyone’s in it together. He said he just loves it... loves it.

O: Absolutely. It’s great stuff!
S: Yes! Just keeping an eye on the time.
O: Sure.
S: Can I ask you, do you consider yourself a success?
O: [laughs] Well to the extent... this is that fulfilment thing... I've been lucky enough to end up in this sort of combination of jobs which involves music-making, research and teaching and the three do quite often feed off one another and into each other... and so I count myself very lucky because there aren't a huge number of professional positions in the world where that particular combination with this kind of choral music making is very easy to achieve... and then of course I'm also doing it in architectural[ly] stunning surroundings which acoustically and visually and so on are quite inspiring... and for an historian, as I am... is also sort of appropriate and inspiring. And so, yes, having done it as an undergraduate, this kind of combination I've come to... I'm very lucky to be able to spend every working day here.
S: Very good! Now, I just want to keep an eye on the time so I don't go over. Just in your opinion, do you see it as difficult for boys... again I'm aware that you've got older boys... young men basically... and men... but in your opinion, do you see it as difficult for boys being part of a choir?
O: At undergraduate age, not at all, no... I don't detect any tension... sort of on the sides of the other... the non-academic sides of the college... For example, something you mentioned at the start... some of the men in the choir at the moment here are key figures in the sporting life of the college. So the choir is quite key in keeping college football going. We've got those in the choir and so the whole spectrum... well... see the members of the choir are, of course they are a distinctive group within the college to some extent... one kind of selective... I suppose you might call it elite without that being in a derogatory sense, but I don't see any sort of pressure or challenge for... I mean, there's quite a lot of the college which probably knows not much about the choir among the undergraduates and are not interested because people are not particularly musical and not into classical music, which is, in these days not a very usual thing to be into for people of undergraduate age. So a lot of people who probably wouldn't know much about or be interested in the fact that one of their friends is a choral scholar except that they'll see the disappearing at five on Wednesdays and Fridays and Sundays to go and sing. I don't think so.
S: No! Well that's good. It would seem to me that the culture and traditions of a place play quite a significant role in maintaining something of this nature. Would you agree with that?
O: To some... in some ways and not in others. I mean to have in a couple of square miles thirty-odd Anglican chapels with some kind of choral establishment singing the Office or the Eucharist regularly once or seven times a week is an extraordinary survival into the twenty-first century. There are actually only two places where that's true – here and Cambridge... where you get that concentration of that very traditional activity, and where much of what is going on is directly traceable back to the Oxford movement in the nineteenth century and then back to the Reformation and further back than that. So it's a... in some ways a rather old survival of the fact of these cultures with a religious foundation and were founded to have chapels and chaplains and boys trained
in singing as [college name] was. But... and I’m sure that some of the choir take pleasure in the fact that they are doing something that's been going on for a long time and is traditional, but I think what matters most about it is entirely modern and is about creativity... and that is actually the core of what we do... now some of the creativity is liturgical creativity. It’s not music for music's sake... but some of it is... the excitement of giving a concert or whatever. So it’s a funny mix, I would say in something like an Oxford college.

S: So you're saying it’s more about... even like that sense of satisfaction of being part of music and being able to express yourself and being creative... that maybe keeps things going?

O: I think so. I mean, obviously, I know every time I walk into chapel I’m very used to the building, but it’s immensely beautiful and immensely striking and it’s difficult to judge whether part of that... that one’s struck by is because of its age, but I think more powerful than the age is the aesthetic quality and the same is true of what we do as a choir musically and actually the fact that the choir after any given period of certainly four years you will have nobody in the choir four years before... nor the organ scholars, so in fact in terms of the performing body the only stable element in the choir short term is myself and that makes it very different from even school choirs where people would be in the choir relatively longer...

S: Much longer...

O: So that means it’s like an animal shedding his skin very regularly.

S: A very quick turn-over.

O: It’s striking actually is the degree to which there is musical memory that survives these changes of personality... so that many of the Oxbridge choirs have a very particular sound, which will survive the change in generations to some extent... like famously the sound of the John’s Cambridge Boys is different to the King’s Cambridge Boys. So some of these things do survive, nevertheless, the sound also evolves every year, and certainly every three years, quite substantially, because they’re quite small units... like you know, the mixed choirs like ourselves and Trinity Cambridge are bodies of about thirty... so are their chamber choirs.

S: I think I should leave it there because of the timing of everything... so thank you so much for talking to me.

O: My pleasure!

S: I should have asked if there’s anything else you wanted to say... or that you thought of?

O: I don’t think so.

S: Thank you so much.

End of interview
S: I've got questions all over the place... because I've interviewed lots of different age groups and so I've got a choir, a junior school choir... and then I've got a mixed secondary school choir which is [name's] choir up there in [location]. I've also interviewed a university choir at [university name] in [location] and I've also interviewed the [Choir name]. So they're all kind of case studies... and I'm looking at basically perceptions about success. I'm looking at ideas about masculinity and how it affects boys and their decisions, and I'm also looking at possible selves, which is a facet of identity, which says, 'We are our past, we are our present and we are actually also our future', and what sort of role that plays. That's just a really brief background to what I'm doing. So where you come in, is basically your vast experience of music for yourself, or how you've taught in the past... all those sorts of things. So it's purely from your background, all your experience... whatever you think, alright?

C: Sure. Yes, I understand.

S: And any context, singing, orchestral... it doesn't matter. So maybe if I start by asking a really broad question... and that is, What are your ideas about success? What does it mean? What does success mean to you?

C: Me, personally? Not...

S: Yes.

C: Just me... alright [pause].

S: How would you define it?

C: Well, I would...as far as [...] music is concerned, I would define it as something you constantly work to achieve. So, to say you've had a success for me it's final, and I'm not saying that things aren't good or things that have happened haven't been good. I'm not saying that, but what I'm saying is success should be, in the real meaning of the word success, to follow. Something that happens that you would consider successful should inspire you to go on to do something else and not say, That's the end. So... that's what success means for me. It means, that wasn't enough, we need to get better with that.

S: Excellent, thank you. Having said that, do you consider yourself a success?

C: No! No, absolutely not. I also don't consider myself as a failure. I consider myself as someone who is still working to achieve things... and again, this is not to say I don't know what I've done... or that what I've done I could have done better, but it's about analysing as you go and saying, Okay, this was good... For instance, I did a concert last night in [city], and it was good, you know, it was a good concert, but I don't come away saying that's fine. I don't come away saying I know all about that. So for me, I think success is basically elusive, and it's why we do it and in music it's very elusive, because it's so intangible.

S: I'm finding very different perceptions as well. Everyone seems to have a different idea, which is... kind of obvious, but interesting all the same and how it influences everybody. Okay, I've read a little bit of your book so far and it's very interesting how it fits in with what I'm thinking... in terms of the idea of the future... When you were younger, did you have an idea of where you wanted to go? Was that something... or did that just evolve as...
Appendices

C: Yes... I think, it was always music. That was never in doubt... and there was always, I mean, I thought I wanted to be a concert pianist... that sort of stuff, you know. Um... in music that’s like wanting to be a fire engine driver or a train driver, you know, when I grow up I want to do trains... So basically my musical life has unfolded fairly unpredictably in the sense that I’ve gone from things to things... I’ve not planned anything, other than saying I’m going to Europe, that was that. I didn’t really plan to do anything... apart from to go to university, which I didn’t do... so, you know the Robert Frost poem, Two paths led into the wood... and I chose the one least followed. You know people say like, Ah but your career... I don’t feel that I’ve had a career... you know, I’ve done things. I’ve done different things.

S: One of the most common descriptions of success that’s coming out when I’ve talked to little boys, teenage boys, and older men as well, and young men... is that whole idea of fame, achievement, and recognition... and they’re defining success. Even in a choir... as, if I’m recognised... if I earn money from it... I’m successful...

C: [laughs] That’s interesting... I understand that... but that’s not success to me.

S: No.

C: Success to me is you’ve conquered a particular musical thing... as far as that goes, you know. And for me, I’m still conquering... I’m still out there doing it.

S: Yes... that’s excellent. Have you had much experience with, I mean you were a music teacher for the school at one time...

C: Yes, that’s correct.

S: ...and did you have much involvement with boys and singing?

C: Yes. When I went to [name of high school] in 1963, the teacher who was there, [name], had a choir going, and I looked after the boys in that choir and that grew. And so we had a big boys choir and we had vocal quartets and what have you... and the boys also had the Jazz band and you know, rock and roll and we had a folk group... it was the 80’s folk music, and so it was very cool to sing... singing was cool. And our kids, the [school] kids were often in the then... Secondary Schools Choral Concerts run by the Department of Education, and we were frequently asked to do both choirs because there weren’t enough boys. So we provided the boys often for both concerts, and of course the kids, now they would interpret that as being successful. They would say, Hey we’re really good! But... it’s very interesting that, because I never really talked about success... to the kids. I remember a child saying once... when we did a performance of Noah’s Flood, in 2006, the opening of the Opera company in [city name] which I ran... one of the boys said, Oh, it’s fantastic to be part of such a great success... and I thought that’s a really interesting view from a child!

S: Yes!

C: And I thought what does he really mean? Has he had a really good time? Or has he recognised the huge audience appreciation? Was that counting as success? So, one day I will ask him.

S: Yes! Well they are the very things I am asking people at the moment and it is interesting to see how it comes out. And I think rightly as you say, they haven’t necessarily thought about what that really means...

C: No...
S: It’s just a word, you know. Did you find anything particularly difficult about singing with boys?
C: Yes. I think... These were adolescents, primary boys, no... adolescent boys, yes. And part of this is to do with the changed voice. So... I used to get my boys to sing through the change... and it didn’t worry... if they couldn’t get there they sang what they could. In the end it was not really an issue, once you recognised that the change in voice was fine... and we referred to it as breaking, you know, the voice... the term was breaking... and it wasn’t an emotionally loaded term as it is now. So, my voice is breaking, Fine then you’re going to be a tenor. I used to have trebles and altos and... Year 7, they lasted Year 7, and by the time they got to Year 8, for some it was a disaster. They all seemed to mature over summer... and come back into Year 8 after Year 7 and they weren’t trebles any more, and they wouldn’t be really altos... so I would put them into the tenor section, and they would sing... [plays notes on the piano and sings to demonstrate range]... around there... so they could do that. But they had nothing here [plays low notes], and nothing here [plays high notes]... so they were quite useful there. And the idea was to keep them interested... and not say, you know, come back when you’ve grown up. My view was, that’s part of growing up. So they should all sing. And we had class singing as well. There was classroom singing. That was standard.
S: So that was part of... as you say, it was a very cool to sing... the culture was there already?
C: We sang in the classroom... we sang Calypso. Calypso was big in the 60s. Bob Dylan, Peter, Paul and Mary, they were big in the 60s. I didn’t ever try to teach them art songs or stuff like that...we did occasionally but basically they loved to sing Peter Paul and Mary, you know, sing Bob Dylan, loved to sing all the pop songs, and I had no issue with that. None at all.
S: In your vast experience have you seen a change in the way singing is viewed by boys... or schools?
C: Well... not really, because I just... I get to do choral festivals from time to time and there are always plenty of boys... and they all seem to be very happy to sing. And of course, in [city], where I’ve been for the last 7 years, there are schools, all boy schools... where the whole school sings, and [name of school] is an extraordinary example. And they sing rock and pop and Bach and Purcell, an African song and an Israeli song. Now, these are Q1 kids... these are top quartile right, they’re all 135 plus, so it’s a selective state high school... but they all sing.
S: They all sing!
C: And it’s fantastic.
S: Yes...
C: And it’s not seen as, aren’t we good at singing or aren’t we... It’s you sing, you play football, you row, you do maths, you do science...
S: Just an ordinary.
C: Absolutely! It’s just part of it.
S: One of the things that I’m finding... not in a huge way, but it’s still coming out... are the stereotypes surrounding boys who sing. Probably more around the adolescent age you talked about... with it being seen as feminine... maybe like, gay if you’re singing [conductor nods] ...and those kinds of things. I think it’s
interesting the point you make about that type of school as well... and maybe that's part of the issue. Have you seen that?

C: Yes. Certainly. I mean there are... when I was teaching in the high school there were kids who thought if you sang that was gay or what have you... but my view of that was, that's their view... and they hold that view through any number of reasons. They're frightened to sing, they don't understand it, so therefore they take the line of least resistance by calling someone gay. So they become offensive. So, to me that just meant insecurity, and... what happened at [name of school] was, the football team sang, they were in the choir. So the football kids... you know, I remember the sports master saying to me once... those were in the days when they did allow the kids to [...] it's dreadful what we were allowed to do. Not me personally, but what the sports teams were allowed to do. And they would have a BBQ at the weekend, and they'd drink beer, you know, there was no two ways about that. The sports master came in and said, The kids this weekend, we had a party... they were all singing Vivaldi around the cake!

S: [laughing] Doesn't kind of go, does it!

C: No! Vivaldi and beer, but that's what they were doing. So I think that, you know, kids who were in the air training corps, they were seen as either gay or power mad, right? The kids who played house sport... they were seen as sort of soppy, weak, wussy... kids who were gay or stupid or what have you. So, it didn't... no matter what the activity was, there was always someone who would brand it. So... and... I don't know that you... I think that it's changed a little bit, but my view is that it's not a big issue. You know, my view is, who cares? They can have a view.

S: And those people are always going to be there.

C: They're always going to be there. There are always going to be rat bags. So...

S: Yes! Did you sing as a boy... at school?

C: Yes, I did, yeah.

S: So what was that like for you?

C: Are you kidding, I loved it! Absolutely loved it! We had a very big school choir... and... I started off singing as... a young child... at St Anthony's in the valley... so I, you know... Singing is absolutely crucial... has been crucial, fundamental to my musical... development. So, yes, singing is what I've done all the time in my life.

S: Are you able to pinpoint why you loved it so much?

C: No, I can't. I guess it was a buzz. I guess it was like a physical thing... like... I really enjoyed the sound I made. So... singing high notes and singing loud notes and long notes and all that sort of stuff, and I call it in children the chromosome effect... you just... there's a chromosome called a singing chromosome... and it turns them on. And... you know... lots of them do it, but lots of them get really turned on... like really. So I think I was probably like that. I really wanted to sing and I loved it.

S: And did you like singing solo as much as in the choir?

C: It didn't matter to me. Solo, choir, duets... if it was singing, I was there.

S: Yes. I'm finding that a lot of people who maybe aren't really confident, they absolutely love being part of a choir because they love singing... but they only
way they get to do that is if they’re with a group... so the group mentality seems to be quite an important thing. Sing Your Own opera. A lot of community work... well, we put it out into the community and did it in town... and people enrolled to do that... you know, signed up to sing your own opera... and there were no conditions. You didn’t have to be able to sing... you just had to come along... and that was amazing, you know. People would finish up in tears because they’d been told they were lousy and couldn’t sing and suddenly they came along to this event and felt they could... and it was the best day of their lives... blah blah blah. So, that was really interesting. I did quite a lot of that.

S: I find it stunning... I mean, it’s obvious to me... but I find it stunning how important singing seems to be to everyone... even people who don’t realise it... and I don’t quite understand that... but the chromosome thing sounds quite good actually... a good explanation.

C: That’s what I call it, the chromosome effect! They respond... you know, it sets off some sort of reaction.

S: Yes. Now thinking about... in terms of your role at the moment... that’s to do with opera, yes... is that right?

C: Yes, well, I’m no longer the director of opera there now. I finished there. I had 7 years... but I still do opera and I’m still conducting freelance and do all that sort of stuff.

S: Okay. Well, just in terms of the things that you do, what do you find is most important to you about what you do?

C: Getting... well, when I was director of opera... getting the very best out of singers and the orchestra. The idea was to try and make these people look and sound fantastic. In other words, I saw my job was to make the singers, and I use make in the right sense of the word... to allow the singers to be really comfortable... so they could sing their best all the time... which meant, you can’t run a rehearsal room which is fearful... but you also can’t run a rehearsal room which is slap dash. And so somewhere between... let’s all have a lovely time and being Hitler with singers is the happy medium. I like to think I found that... and I also like to think... I know the singers said that. The singers loved being in my room. They would come and say, I love being here. I feel that I can do my best. So... that was really good to know that. The singers felt completely comfortable. They could make mistakes and they knew I wouldn’t scream and yell... that we’d fix them... and what I was doing... psychologically, which I don’t think they really recognised... was putting the onus of the work on to them. So, you made a mistake... I’m sure you’ll be able to fix that. You don’t need me to tell you how to do that. Or... if I had a thought... I’d say, Look, try this... you know, see how that goes. So in other words what I was trying to do was empower them to find their own way through. They were adults, right. It’s easy enough to say, Do it, but if you can empower them and give them a sense of... responsibility for their own performances... the performances become fantastic. And I find I do that in the classroom, too... with children.

S: Yes. So the achievement is...

C: I make the children...

S: ...theirs...

C: Exactly. They’re responsible for the lesson.
S: What do you see... I mean, this is a really broad question like most of mine have been... what do you see as some of the most... significant things that affect... say, your rehearsals... as to how well it goes? Or all the music classrooms for that matter?

C: Um... what...

S: I'll use the word success...

C: What makes a good rehearsal for example?

S: Basically, yes.

C: Alright...

S: Things that affect it the most...

C: I think... um... running rehearsal... you have to be in charge... and I always run a rehearsal with the point of view that it's not a democracy. I'm not interested in free-for-all discussion. If I have a discussion, I identify it... and say, Okay, guys let's talk about this stylistically... and then I listen to everybody and then I make the decision... okay? And they [respect] that, because in the end... that's what they want. They want leadership. But they also want to know that their views have a point. And when I left the opera... Eddie Perfect wrote me a song... because I've worked with Eddie in a couple of shows... and Eddie... [laughs] the song was... "He gathers his minions, and listens to their opinions, and then does just what he likes." [Both laugh] So Eddie got it! But... there's often, you know, someone will say... I can't do that key, so we put it down... or up, you know. That's not a big deal, and it means the singer is comfortable... but it's like the captain of a ship. The captain cannot take advice from every passenger on board. So... and in the classroom I believe that's true too. I do not subscribe to this idea that the average 5-year-old knows what they want to learn. Right? The student centred lesson... the student driven lesson... I think if you're teaching one to one and the child is unbelievably bright... adolescent... and who has experience, you talk about that sort of stuff, and I've taught at that level. Or I've said, Okay what do you want to do? Well, I need to do this, this and this... I say, okay here we go. But in the general classroom circumstances... no, that's chaos. I think that's chaos.

S: I agree. I'm just aware of time, I don't want to take too long... too much of your time. Do you think that people... in that choir or orchestra situation... or any situation really perhaps... do you think people enjoy... striving for excellence?

C: Yeah, I think... there's no doubt that people... um... I'm just trying to think of the level... Like, Sing Your Own Opera, where they all sing like it's hideous, it's awful... as it gets better everything changes dramatically. But with a group of professionals where you've got an incredibly high level, their sort of feeling of achievement comes from the fact that they've communicated something to an audience. They have a very, very different level of... like it's a job, and rehearsal is two and a half hours and there'll be a break in an hour and a half... and blah blah blah... right?

S: So, business-like?

C: Yes. So... but, they also know when it's good. Like last night. They loved the concert last night... and they gave me a terrific hand, like seriously wonderful... which is very rare for orchestras to do that. So...that was very nice and I appreciated that, but they will also let you know in two seconds flat when it's
not going well whereas, with children for example, I ask them how they feel it’s going. We’ll do something and I’ll say to them, Why did we do that? Or, What do we need to do in this particular phrase to make that better? Then we do it and then I say, Was it better? And then I say again, Now, why was it better? So, in other words, I’m trying to do with kids… and this is with adolescents, right through, right? Even with these students in […] …so what I’m doing is getting them to evaluate what they do while they make music. And I think that’s really important. I’ll give you an example, to the complete contrary. Again with the [name of opera group]...we were doing the play of Daniel, right? And these kids are singing Mediaeval music in Ancient French and Latin etc etc. Doing it really well, and the director came up and said, No, I want you to do [...]…that was fantastic... now come over here, it was awesome and that was a brilliant... and at the break I said to him, Look these kids are very used to working with me... and I don’t use ‘awesome’, ‘brilliant’, ‘outstanding’, ‘excellent’ or ‘fantastic’... I say ‘good’, ‘better’ or ‘rfi’...’room for improvement’. And I said, They think you’re joking... because they know it’s not good. So you’re not encouraging them... you are actually discouraging them by constantly telling them they are fabulous, because if they’re so fabulous why are they here?

S: Yes, that’s... I’m very happy to hear you say that... because, if you don’t mind me speaking for a moment...

C: No, please...

S: The school that I’ve been to... to watch a choir, I was really struck by the conductor’s exuberance, congratulating them... and I was struck by the fact that it didn’t match... the quality of what they had just produced. And I thought, Wow! I wonder if at some level they then only worked to this point.

C: [Throwing out his arms triumphantly] I always said to teachers, You only get from children what you demand. And I used to say that to the opera, the kids... I’d say, I know if I ask you to do this that’s what you’ll do, but guess what, I’m a wake up to you lot. So here we go, we need to be better than that...and I would say to them, Are we satisfied with good? No, we’re not!

S: Do you think that’s partly... part of my research is also... and it’s very specific to Australia, because I think it’s quite cultural... do you think that there’s an element of um... I’ll use the ‘she’ll be right’ term... but...

C: Hmm...

S: We are a little characterised by that as a broad culture... do you think that’s at play? You know, Oh, that’s alright...

C: [nodding] I think... yeah, I think there is a spectacular culture of mediocrity in the country in education... and I think it is totally contextualised by NAPLAN. I think NAPLAN is... NAPLAN waves the flag of mediocrity, and so nobody sees anything... um, teachers who are lazy are thankful for that because that’s all they’re doing. Teachers who are creative know they have to do something about it but that’s time wasted when they could be doing other things. I also think we’ve come to the other part of the pendulum where everything that comes out of the mouth of a child is praiseworthy and they all have certificates and they all get awards of merit or congratulations and...

S: ...thank you for your participation!
C: ...thank you for your participation, for coming to class, for being nice... I think, they don't value that... because there are too many things whereas the children themselves know. They know who's the best at maths... they know who the best arithmetic person is, who the best writer is... who the best singer is... who runs the fastest... they get that and they accept it.

S: Do you think as well... and this could be coupled with the idea of mediocrity... and the stereotypes and labels, but I wonder in the Australian culture and I'm finding in some of the talks with kids that Aussie men are like this... therefore they don't sing. Do you have any ideas on that?

C: I think that there'd be lots of kids who think that... and there'd be lots of kids who think that when the AFL people sing or the team sing, which is not singing... you know they scream and yell... that... that's very stirring. What I find more dangerous than that... in and of itself... is that nothing else exists. I don't have a problem with AFL people singing their song and sounding like crap but don't think that's what singing is. And the thing with kids is if they made that decision at thirty that's how they want to live, fine... but as children they need to know that life is a banquet. So you can sing and dance and run and jump and have oysters and BBQs and caviar and chops and hamburgers... like, there's a wealth of stuff out there... and the choice you make... you don't have to make a decision to be a moron until late in life. So you should hold off the moron decision until you feel you've made lots of choices. But lots of kids are led down the path of moron. Because it's easy... it's the line of least resistance...

S: Yes... and...

C: ...and I believe that's a failure of the education system...

S: ...that's the question I was going to ask.

C: ...to teach the kids how to learn. They don't understand why they go to school. If they understood they were going to school to learn how to learn... and to learn how to think... they'd get it. I mean, if a teacher said that to them on a daily basis, they'd get it. But [shrugs]...and I know that treating kids like that has remarkable results. When we did this play of Daniel people said, Are you seriously going to do it in Latin and French? I said, Absolutely, why not? Why start from the premise that they can't do it? Let's start from the premise that they can, and if we find that they're struggling, they can use the music... and what will happen is they'll start to learn from memory anyway. So, let's not worry about that. And what happened was amazing, and we had the [...] saying, This is the best thing we've ever done... so...

S: So for you, I mean, in terms of thinking about success, and that... as you were saying about striving for things... that's a perfect example of that, I guess. And would you say that part of that success as a conductor is setting up those expectations? Like we were talking about...

C: Yes.

S: Is that quite deliberate... do you think deliberately like that?

C: Absolutely. You've got to go in and say, We're going to do this, this, this and this... and by the end of the day we will have done this, this and this... so that the kids... I've always... mmm... not always but nine out of ten times, have a specific set of things that I want to happen at rehearsals. And then we do it or
we don’t… then at the end of rehearsal I’d say, Well what have you done and why? So, the kids know exactly where they’re going.

S: And what they did.
C: And what they did… and what needs to be done. I think that is really important.
S: Do you teach boys and girls differently?
C: When I was teaching co-ed I used to teach to the boys… because they were slower. The girls in the co-ed circumstances were always faster… really!
S: Yes.
C: That was an observation I made. You can’t say that’s a universal truth, but that’s what I found. I’d teach the boys… I wouldn’t ignore the girls, but I would teach to the boys knowing that the girls were getting it. And the girls also had questions and, you know… etc…
S: Yeah. In terms of the voice change… I’m going all over the place…
C: That’s fine. That’s fine.
S: You talked a moment ago about singing through that… were there other specific things that you did differently for those boys?
C: No.
S: Or was it just very natural, just keep singing…
C: Just keep singing… and if you can’t, stop. If it hurts, stop. Easy.
S: Yes. I’m just checking my questions… I’ve really enjoyed our conversation about success… I love your ideas. No, I think I’ve covered everything I wanted to cover.
C: Are you sure?
S: Is there anything else you want to say?
C: No… but if you think of something let me know.
S: I will. I’m just finding that, what seems to be happening is… the perception of success… if a boy… in the context that I’ve […] …if they see that thing, choir, as successful in terms of going into competitions and being quite well recognised and appreciated by the audience… if that’s at school, wherever… they are much more likely as boys to follow that. And I’m thinking that… I just think it’s a little bit sad that that’s our idea of success. There’s a few other ideas like personal success and the private impact that it has on you but they play a much smaller role and they tend to be particular types of children, you know, resilient sort of children. They’re going to do that anyway because that’s who they are. Do you have any thoughts…?
C: Well, I think part of that is… for adolescents a lot of it is a sense of belonging. So it’s good to belong to something… good, so… And if I’m part of something good then I’m a good person. That sort of thing. But… I’m just trying to think way back to my kids. They basically did it because they wanted to do it… they were quite happy to do it… they didn’t… they had views you know… if it wasn’t good they’d say… if it was great they had a good time… but it wasn’t a big deal. They just… because they were pretty good at other things… and they had quite stable lives…
S: Yes. I think that’s quite significant… upbringing plays a part.
C: I mean when I was teaching in London… the lives of children were far from stable… primary school and infants children… the singing was the thing that united the school… and the singing was the thing they could all do because they
Appendices

were... let's put it this way... there were no Nobel Prize winners at this school... okay? But they could all sing. So singing gave these kids an immediate sense of achievement. And when we did *Oliver*, because they had memory issues, I used to say, We can do one more song if you can memorise it. Because they did have problems memorising... well, they couldn't read!

S: Of course!

C: So what we did... the singing generated an interest in reading... an interest in memory, an interest in participation... and so on. So... it was a really good project. It had massive benefits for these babies, socially as much as anything else.

S: Actually, I realise one of my questions was about How have you seen these kinds of things impact... so you've answered...

C: Well, this case... it wasn't that they got masses musically out of it... but they did get an enormous amount socially. And I have no problem with that!

S: No...

C: That's a fantastic boast.

S: Can I just ask you very quickly... thinking back to your own experience... how you moved through life, career and that sort of thing... was... for a lot of boys that I was talking to career was a really big focus... so they're choosing things to do at school or not to do certain things based on what I'm going to do... and so choir doesn't fit... they're not necessarily going to do it... even if they loved singing. What was your experience like? Did you... did everything you kind of do point towards a career? I mean... for you it might be different...

C: I didn't think about a job because I was going to leave school in Fourth Year and not do the leaving certificate, but I didn't get a job, so I stayed at school... and then I sort of drifted into primary teaching for a minute, then I got a scholarship for the Con. So I sort of thought that music would happen for me somehow. I was never really... I never obsessed about the idea that I was going to work, because it didn’t... what occupied my thinking... was music. And so... I've been working in music now for... this is my 50th year as a teacher, so to speak... or as a musician. And I've worked every day of my life except one, where I left an apartment and for one day I didn't have a job and I got a phone call at the end of that day... so...

S: Wow... wow! Okay, that is really interesting. I think that’s partly to do with how education works these days... as well, with kids feeling a bit pressured or something...

C: All the time because they've got all this stupid stuff with NAPLAN and the stupid stuff with HSC and [...] and God knows what... so yes, the pressures are all crazy. And what that does is promote mediocrity.

S: Well you know, this is completely off... well it's not off topic but it's not necessary to my interview... I’m finding that even teaching... I’m teaching part of the Master of Teaching at [university]...and now I’m that age where I can look back at people coming through now have gone through that system of NAPLAN and those sorts of things, and I’m actually really stunned by each year as they come through, how much less and less and less they actually think.

C: Yes.

S: And they're quiet in the class and to get them to talk... is almost impossible...
C:   Because they want the information...
S:   They do!
C:   They want to tick the box.
S:   Yes. And spoon-fed seems a little redundant... it seems beyond. It's like you said, they don't know how to think anymore. It really irritates me.
C:   Well, it would! Particularly if they're going to be teachers!
S:   I know! I said to one of my... one of the unit co-ordinators... sort of feel a sense of responsibility here for the future students of... this country...
C:   Correct!!
S:   I'm sending these people out. I've been told to pass this person on their assignment and I really don't think I should.
C:   I know, exactly and it happens all over the country, Sarah...not just your university.

[recording ends]

End of Interview
### B.3.1 CHOIR 1: JUNIOR SCHOOL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REHEARSAL</th>
<th>SUCCESS</th>
<th>MASCULINITY</th>
<th>POSSIBLE SELVES</th>
<th>OTHER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Note: This rehearsal took place 3 weeks before Eisteddfod performance.</td>
<td><strong>Public Success</strong> Uses the reminder of competing in Eisteddfod as incentive. Incentive to achieve seen in comments such as, “If you do that, the judges will...” or “If we make it to the final...”.</td>
<td><strong>Vocal Change</strong> The key of one song too low for the boys – struggled to produce strength of sound. Sound almost disappears as the song gets to its lowest notes. Conductor provides technical</td>
<td><strong>Future</strong> Preparation of repertoire projecting to the possibility of being in the final of the competition.</td>
<td>Logistics of the room – piano positioned on stage – conductor up above boys – power? Lack of perfecting technique – reflection of time span before the performance? Or boys’ interest levels? Context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If we go really well in the</td>
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<tr>
<td>SUCCESS</td>
<td>MASCULINITY</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eisteddfod and we sing really well, then we’re invited to go back for the finals.</td>
<td>support regarding high notes.</td>
<td>performance.</td>
<td>important.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical Success</td>
<td>If that’s getting a bit high for you, sing softly, with your mouth wide open so that jaw is nice and relaxed.</td>
<td>Conductor uses a lot of “If” statements. Hypothetical outcomes based on the boys’ actions/performance.</td>
<td>What influence does the level of expectation from parents/school have on approach?</td>
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<tr>
<td>'Red Lorry, Yellow Lorry' - Vocal exercise where words are repeated and tempo increases over time. Sing Twinkle Little Star through buzzed/vibrated lips.</td>
<td>Stereotypes</td>
<td>In case we go through to the final... instead of panicking at the last minute, I want to talk to you about an Australian song today.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conductor provides a lot of technical advice about the song but does not drill or work on these skills.</td>
<td>Physical stretches to start; boys stand for short periods throughout.</td>
<td>If we go really well in the Eisteddfod and we sing really well, then we’re invited to go back for the finals.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I’ll tell you what was good about that...</td>
<td>Standing up; open mouth wide; arms stretched out in front and above; loosen shoulders.</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>...that’s a long phrase. If you have to take a sneaky breath that’s alright...</td>
<td>Appears to be a lack of enthusiasm and engagement at times.</td>
<td>At times boys asked to admit to doing something incorrectly – some can but others will not but they seem to know who is at fault at any given moment!</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sound quality not a focus.</td>
<td>Yawning; daydreaming; gazing; blank faces.</td>
<td>Boys all turn to look at one boy after conductor comments on someone “going astray in the middle.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>That was good soft singing.</td>
<td>Cheekiness amongst the boys to each other – delightful – struggling with seriousness.</td>
<td>Someone is trying to sing down the octave, occasionally; [Name] is that you? No, it’s [name of another boy].</td>
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<tr>
<td>Some boys singing out of tune or incorrect notes but does not stop to go over this.</td>
<td>Boys prodding the boy next to them without being noticed and other discreet looks and whispers.</td>
<td>Many boys appear shy or reticent and a few demonstrate great</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>There was someone going astray in the middle there. Be really listening to the person next to you.</td>
<td>Boys constantly interacting with each other (N).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Boys make a good sound but they</td>
<td>One boy strikes a ‘fighting pose’ in a moment of ‘down time’.</td>
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<td>Different levels of engagement</td>
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</table>
SUCCESS
have ability to sound better.
Some technical drilling on lyrics
and pronunciation.
Perceptions of success influencing male participation in choir – S. Powell

Remember those round vowel
sounds; it has to sound beautiful.
...I talked about the word
‘sing’...give it an extra little push
on the beginning of it. Okay?
Provides frequent
encouragement.
Excellent. Good.
Beautiful soft ending.
Much, much better.
Praise not always matched with
boys’ performance.
Conductor says ‘excellent’ or
‘very good’ after the boys have
sung a section and yet boys might
be out of tune, very quiet, untidy
etc.
Does not appear concerned by
noise and restlessness but
chooses strategic moments to
discipline.
[Child’s name] I simply said you
don’t need to do that.

456

Good. Sit up please. Looks like you

MASCULINITY
apparent.
One boy – focused on conductor;
does not interact with other boys;
look of pleasure and
concentration on his face.
Other boys fidgeting and restless;
looking around the room and
sometimes at the camera;
interacting with other boys.

POSSIBLE SELVES
confident demeanour.
Numerous boys not opening
mouths much and not always
producing a level of sound
expected from the size of the
group.
One boy sitting up attentively with
the ‘typical’ demeanour of a choir
boy.

OTHER


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUCCESS</th>
<th>MASCULINITY</th>
<th>POSSIBLE SELVES</th>
<th>OTHER</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>need a rest.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Moves quickly through repertoire – possibly to maintain interest.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sings through new song, ‘Monkey and the Turtle,’ once then moves on to the ‘Alleluia’.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uses humour, making the boys laugh – they respond well.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>What would you do if I said you don’t have homework for a week?</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Demonstrates pronunciation of certain words using much exaggerated Aussie accent. Boys all laugh and copy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conductor very much in charge.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Starts playing the tune on the piano amongst the noise of the boys waiting and they immediately stop and listen.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The boys show consistent, respectful behaviour and respond well to her instructions.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Personal Success</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Experience is different for individuals.</td>
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<td>One boy very engaged and appears to love it. Not distracted by anyone. Look on his face is</td>
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<tr>
<td>SUCCESS</td>
<td>MASCULINITY</td>
<td>POSSIBLE SELVES</td>
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<td>sheer joy.</td>
<td>Stereotypes</td>
<td>Choir identity – recognition?</td>
<td>Led by different conductor (also female) whilst usual one plays piano.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>PERFORMANCE</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Public Success</td>
<td>Boys file on stage in very orderly fashion. Wearing school uniform. Boys seem nervous but also display a sense of occasion.</td>
<td>Introduce the performance using the school name rather than the choir’s name.</td>
<td>Conductor protocol of bowing to audience at end and acknowledges pianist but does not acknowledge the boys.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First piece (Bach) less perfected than second.</td>
<td>Tuning issues; slow tempo caused breathing issues; lacks energy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Second piece winning piece from Eisteddfod.</td>
<td>Confident performance with energy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Performing at the main school campus in front of entire school.</td>
<td>Performing at the main school campus in front of entire school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>One boy introduces the choir with school name rather than choir name.</td>
<td>Very formal presentation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Very formal and still throughout, with hands straight by side or clasped in front.</td>
<td>Wearing full school uniform; hand by side or in front; eyes on conductor; very still.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Musical Success</td>
<td>No mistakes; words from memory; all boys focused.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Know the song well.</td>
<td>Sound quality issues – nerves?</td>
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<td>Intonation inaccuracies throughout; purity of sound</td>
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### B.3.2 CHOIR 2: SECONDARY SCHOOL

<table>
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<th>MASCULINITY</th>
<th>POSSIBLE SELVES</th>
<th>OTHER/COMMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **REHEARSAL**<br>Takes place a week before performance.  
Year 9 boy runs rehearsal for first 10 minutes.  
Music Teacher takes over and rehearses performance piece – ‘Someday’. | **Public Success**<br>Boys show sense of achievement.  
The basses do a brief victory dance when they get it right, even though the rest of the choir gets it quite wrong.  
The boys celebrate how well they sing through a section on which they have been working – clap, smiles, relaxed.  
Lead Bass starts dancing as they start to sound really good! Others | **Vocal Change**<br>Physical placement.  
15 year-old boy soprano standing in front with girl sopranos.  
Significant physical distance between the boys and girls. | Logistics of the room.  
Ordinary classroom; very untidy; choir sitting on tables; spread across the room with fair distance between each other (see picture).  
Lead Bass Year 9 boy is a strong character on whom the other basses rely. An anchor person.  
Basses look at him |
| **SUCCESS**<br>compromised when quiet.  
Follow the conductor closely.  
Eye contact solid throughout entire performance.  
Private Impact  
Audience response suggests enjoyment/appreciation.  
A solid, appreciative applause from whole school community. | **MASCULINITY** | **POSSIBLE SELVES** | **OTHER/COMMENTS** |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUCCESS</th>
<th>MASCULINITY</th>
<th>POSSIBLE SELVES</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>join in. Lots of smiles, lots of laughter and interaction, obvious enjoyment of small moments of success.</td>
<td>Image - boys. Lack of excitement being displayed; slouched posture; mouths hardly opening; self-conscious. Lack of structure. Constant interruptions. Constant talking. Good response to lead boy. Boy soprano standing well away from other males. The boys much more focused when the sopranos and altos (girls) have left the room. Boys helping each other learn parts. Even after choir has finished with the song, the boys drill each other on certain sections, trying to get it correct. It appears the conductor was unaware that the basses were struggling with their part. None of the basses asked the conductor to go through it; they turned to Lead boy to ask him.</td>
<td>because the other Tenors are lost as soon as he drops out. This boy throws his arms up in the air and laughingly responds, “You’re just trying to tell me that I’m not good enough.” The girls laugh. Conductor replies, “I thought we agreed you were the best in school, didn’t we?” Lead Bass pretends to start crying saying he thought he was the best! Affirmation of individual importance and sense of belonging to this group.</td>
<td>constantly for confirmation they are singing the right notes! They struggle without him standing next to them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance used by conductor as motivation and reminder to pay attention. <strong>Okay, this could potentially one of the last times we rehearse this so I’d like to be really efficient with our time, if we can.</strong> What will people remember? .... The beginning and the end. This is the last time we are going to rehearse it before we perform it. You’re going to perform it tomorrow for the carols, then on Monday for the carols again and then on Thursday, so this is probably the last time we will get together, I’d say... <strong>Musical Success</strong> Respect for conductor. Started by Year 9 student (later the music teacher takes over). The moment singing stops the choir starts discussing things</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Tenor and bass parts physically close to each other, and facing a particular direction although tenors seated, basses standing. There is a physical gap between the tenor and the next person. And further to that the alto and soprano parts are angled differently. What are the acoustic ramifications of where they are seated - can they hear each other properly? Can they hear their own part? Can they hear the other parts? The basses may have an awareness of this and are not only standing, but standing as a close knit group.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Future**

Lead Bass put on the spot to perform the improvised solo section. Happy to do it. Shows a confidence in ability to manage this in short space of time before the performance. Conductor confident with ability of Year 9 Lead Bass to conduct in preparation for performance. **[Name] do you mind conducting it now and ironing out any problems.**
### Perceptions of success influencing male participation in choir

**S. Powell**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUCCESS</th>
<th>MASCULINITY</th>
<th>POSSIBLE SELVES</th>
<th>OTHER/COMMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>amongst themselves and ‘conductor’ tries to talk over the top of din.</td>
<td>Boys show growing confidence, particularly when they rehearse without the girls.</td>
<td>Boys happy to ask for help, to tell someone else what to do, to sing confidently.</td>
<td>Use of humour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student obviously talented and this is recognised by choir – the boys are his friends.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tenor: Can we run through the ‘Someday’ bit because I’m not sure of it?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Use of guitar to play parts; happy to sing alone to demonstrate lines.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Choir laughs over double meaning of ‘C-section’ as conductor discusses the structure of the next piece.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Choir asking him to go over elements.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Laughter when Conductor ‘speaks’ the soloist section to get the timing right whilst the boys are singing.</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Praise</em> given constantly and</td>
<td></td>
<td>Conductor using guitar to pick out notes and play parts.</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>There were some really great moments in that (Lead Bass).</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>Boy soprano is positioned to identify separately from the girls.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I’m amazed at how quickly you guys have been able to learn this... It freaks me out... it’s unnatural... how good you guys are at picking this sort of thing up! It takes me ages.</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>Standing at the front, next to conductor and facing the basses/tenors (see picture).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>You guys are doing really well, by the way.</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>Boy soprano required to rehearse with the girls.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Technical drilling of particular sections.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Leaves the room to rehearse with</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Okay, let’s go from... I always have trouble with that, but it goes like this... [demonstrates].</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>SUCCESS</td>
<td>MASCULINITY</td>
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<tr>
<td>The main thing is that the Tenors get that bit right.</td>
<td>the girls while the boys stay with conductor.</td>
<td>Boys not sure how to take compliments sometimes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Okay, I really want to drill the tenors and the bass.</td>
<td>Boys not sure how to take compliments sometimes.</td>
<td>One boy jokingly responds, “Oh, shucks!” and another asks if they can get a drink!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conductor working the boys/choir hard and insists on it being accurate.</td>
<td>Conductor strategic when working with the boys.</td>
<td>Splits the parts – sopranos/altos leave and tenors/basses remain to work with the conductor.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stop, stop, stop. Tenors... what happened to you guys?</td>
<td>Boys start to lose interest and get distracted. A lot of laughing and mucking around now. Conductor suggests the boys break for a drink then return to sing through with the top two parts.</td>
<td>So we really want to be solid and strong.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Now there were other rhythmic issues... Let's go back to the B Section.’</td>
<td>Significant display of physicality amongst the boys throughout.</td>
<td>Physical readying of themselves before starting &quot;from the top&quot; where they stretch, crack knuckles, shift their seating position.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...’over on’ we’re still not getting, but that’s okay; we will.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pleased with their effort, the boys jostle each other about as they</td>
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<tr>
<td>Singles out one boy and tells him what he’s doing wrong.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conductor uses musical or technical language.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The notes are all right next to each other. They just move by step.</td>
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<tr>
<td>That’s good. We’re blending a little bit better which sounds better to my ears.</td>
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<tr>
<td>A lot of ‘down time’.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Approx. 3 minutes of 11 mins total were taken by singing and the rest talking.</td>
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<tr>
<td>SUCCESS</td>
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<tr>
<td>After break rehearsal does not start for at least 5 mins.</td>
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<td>finish and tell each other the bits they did wrong or where they got lost.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conductor (teacher) definitely in control but also shows equality and partnership.</td>
<td>Boys making very “singer” gestures – like opera singer.</td>
<td>Moving constantly. Basses always touching each other and standing close.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Appeals to the kids because he is feeling unwell, by asking for their particular attention.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Displays a level of choral inexperience and seems to encourage (ask for) collaboration.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Does not stop peer learning/teaching that is occurring, particularly between the boys.</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Just to let you guys know, I’m not feeling very well today, so I do need your attention when I’m talking.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>I don’t have the energy to keep yelling, ‘Hey’, so try to keep your eyes on me, so I don’t have to work so hard.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Strong sense of working together.</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Let’s work together.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Student conducting; students give each other advice and help to learn parts.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### SUCCESS

A tenor suggests a reason why the tenors might be struggling. Lead bass suggests a way to help with note accuracy, which the tenors accept and try, with success.

*Let's try to bring things together as a group.*

*How do you guys think the best way to do it is...?*

**Personal Success**

Different levels of engagement demonstrated.

One boy sitting head in hands while singing. One remains seated with a vacant stare.

One tenor’s facial expression shows concentration, enjoyment, entering into the feel of the song. Similar from Solo alto.

Lead bass enjoying it, with smiles and body movement, but also keeps making eye contact with the other basses demonstrating his role as supporting them.

One boy (tenor) sits slightly away from the group; is very quiet; angled away from the rest and even the conductor.
### Success

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Body language from some:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Masculinity</strong></th>
<th><strong>Possible selves</strong></th>
<th><strong>Other/Comments</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>slouched posture; yawning; playing with hair; expressionless faces.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

#### Private Impact

Conductor reminds them to show what the song means through their expression.

- **Make sure you get into it... it's about hope and salvation.**
- **I actually really like you guys laughing and having fun, so make sure, when we do the performance, that you do that... Obviously, we don't want it to affect your performance in the meantime.**

### Performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Public Success</strong></th>
<th><strong>Vocal change</strong></th>
<th><strong>Past</strong></th>
<th><strong>Possible that the casual attire is a way of making the occasion less formal and therefore less daunting and more acceptable for the boys.</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Choir visibly happy with their performance and audience response.</td>
<td>Difference in vocal strength of soloists.</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Self-confidence from the student conductor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They smile a lot at each other; physical contact between them; they wait on stage for a moment before filing off.</td>
<td>Girl soloist is strong and clear. Boy soloist is less so despite his confidence.</td>
<td>Future</td>
<td>Stands, moves and gestures confidently and generally looks the part. Displays a belief in his ability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Musical Success</strong></td>
<td><strong>Stereotypes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate a good performance.</td>
<td>Choice of clothing denotes possible attempt to keep it casual.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Quality of the sound and tuning is</td>
<td>Choir wearing t-shirt and jeans. Look tidy but casual.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Past</strong></td>
<td><strong>Present</strong></td>
<td><strong>Future</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUCCESS</td>
<td>MASCULINITY</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>generally good; technical elements accurate; ensemble good.</td>
<td>Choice of stance and position mix of formal and informal.</td>
<td>All standing very still with hands by sides. Standing in one line across the stage.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Conductor leads effectively.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Confident demeanour; accurate gestures for bringing parts in and for cut-offs.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Personal Success</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Soloist (girl) shows a love of singing and an inner sense meaning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moves to the music; eyes close at times; facial expression.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Display of confidence from most students.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maintain composure on stage while waiting for starting notes and after the performance before leaving the stage.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good balance of looking at the audience and watching the conductor.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nerves and less confidence displayed by others.</td>
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<tr>
<td>These students do not look at the audience and show little facial</td>
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</table>
### B.3.3 CHOIR 3: UNIVERSITY

#### REHEARSAL

**Note:** This rehearsal took place 4 weeks before the final Assessment performance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUCCESS</th>
<th>MASCULINITY</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public Success</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sense of excitement and achievement when the group is pleased with their effort.</td>
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<tr>
<td>After a particularly 'good' section the guys turn to the camera smiling and the conductor says, 'Yes! Get that on tape!'</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sense of achievement used as motivation.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Conductor punches the air to get the group pumped up.</td>
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<tr>
<td>From the top, all the way to bar</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Vocal Change</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Future</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A couple of very strong voices but most blend with others and do not stand out.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Body language of one bass shows this is not likely to be part of his future pursuits, but simply a means to an end in the present sense.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest voice stands; and one middle part voice who is a voice major.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Piano player appears comfortable in this choral role - singing and teaching.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possible links here with PC4 saying about this age group still having 'young' male voices.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Engaged throughout; focused expression; quiet patience; always helpful to the group.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stereotypes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Present</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Men and movement; rough play; physicality.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The conductor was chosen by the group prior to the rehearsal, but he is also singing as part of the group.

Rehearsal takes place in performance space – same as performance – all on stage throughout rehearsal.

One young man sitting at piano playing starting notes and going through sections for each voice part.

Eight men present (11 in performance).
<table>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>30.</strong> Achievement an important dynamic for them.</td>
<td>While middle part work on a small section, the conductor and guy adjacent muck around, pretending to beat each other up.</td>
<td>Difference in engagement may be due to purpose of task.</td>
<td>This rehearsal is run by the students – no teacher present.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Oh, close!</strong> (When they almost sing to certain bar).</td>
<td>Similar interaction later between two other guys.</td>
<td>The body language of one bass (sitting, arms folded) demonstrates a disconnection with the activity. The act is simply connected to this being a course assessment task.</td>
<td>The group is preparing the piece to perform as a course assessment task.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One guy frequently asks the piano player to go through his part for him.</td>
<td>Confidence and mateship.</td>
<td>Piano player very engaged and takes his role seriously.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-five between middle part when they get a section right, having worked on it.</td>
<td>Parts are often rehearsed in pairs at the same time as others are doing the same. They often ask the person next to them for help rather than address the group.</td>
<td>Continually helps the different parts, the conductor, playing their individual parts and providing the starting notes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The group wants to achieve their goal.</td>
<td>There is a lot of joking and laughing throughout the rehearsal.</td>
<td>Basses rarely ask to go through their part.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Run through the whole thing then have a break.</strong></td>
<td>Male image. Self-conscious about camera.</td>
<td>Take on a ‘performance persona’.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical Success</td>
<td>Relaxed look; many stand with hands in pockets.</td>
<td>Demeanour changes from mucking around to professional, serious and focused, as the group sings through the piece.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical ability is evident but this rehearsal about learning the notes.</td>
<td>One very capable student stands with back to camera when not singing and side on when helping his mate.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>All rely heavily on the printed music; lots of part drilling with the help of the piano; often lose their place.</td>
<td><strong>She’s going to go through and say, “This is so bad!” We’ll be like the butt of the PhD. She’ll be like, “But there are some choirs…”</strong> (looking at camera).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle part often apologises for losing his place and asks to go through it again.</td>
<td><strong>1:</strong> This is on tape! (after laughing)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conductor spends large periods looking over the score as parts</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>rehearse individually.</td>
<td>about something inaudible</td>
<td>Homosexual image.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sound quality improves quickly.</td>
<td>2: When you’re famous, I’ll put it on YouTube!</td>
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<tr>
<td>About 20 mins into rehearsal the quality of the sound they are producing is significantly better than the start.</td>
<td>3: It’s worse than a sex-tape!</td>
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<tr>
<td>Move on from note familiarity to other technical considerations.</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Just make sure you end ‘lux’ on the beat exactly.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>One guy suggests they need to be aware of the numerous cresc and decres throughout the piece.</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>If you can read the dynamics, then read the dynamics, but we’ll do that next week.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Top part discusses how to breathe for the long high note.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Musical understanding clear although at different levels.</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Just think chromatics.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>It is all the same note</em> (this to help middle part guy who does not appear to read music).</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>You just need to carry that note over into the next bar.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Often discussion amongst the</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>group about what the different parts are doing, demonstrating they are listening to each other and seeing how their part fits.</td>
<td>It's my immunity.</td>
<td>Isolation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At times the conductor brings the group back together to focus.</td>
<td></td>
<td>One bass not involved in the laughter and joking. Makes a point of getting a chair and sitting part way through, then folds arms and looks unhappy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Right-y-o! Everyone got their note?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conductor provides clear directions in relaxed manner.</td>
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<tr>
<td>We're just going to see how far we can get. Okay, let's go from the start.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conductor works the group at being accurate and does not move on until it is.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Was that right? Let's do it again. Have you guys got that part now? Okay, let's look at bar 20 onwards. I know the basses have it. Start from there; see how we go. Can we have the notes, [name]?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asks the basses if they know what they are singing in a particular section.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Conductor uses an audible click to keep the group in time.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Conductor has a clear plan for the rehearsal.

Telling the guy next to him that he wants to get through the whole piece today and as he does so, others begin to tune into the discussion asking him to repeat it.

30 mins or so into the rehearsal, focus is lost for about 10 mins, in which time very little is done except talking and laughing. This is followed by the conductor saying,

*Okay, last page.*

Conductor balances encouragement with drilling.

*Okay, you guys got that!*  
*We lost the timing.*  
*No, we lost it.*

The process is collaborative and demonstrates a strong sense of working together.

Guys make suggestions and try to help each other learn their part.

*H: That was really helpful when you went [gestures like the conductor].*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUCCESS</th>
<th>MASCULINITY</th>
<th>POSSIBLE SELVES</th>
<th>OTHER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>M</strong>: Can we go from bar 17?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C</strong>: Is it okay of we go back to bar 13?</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Do you want to just try and get up to bar 24? So do what we’ve been working on, then move to the next bit.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Personal Success</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Different levels of engagement demonstrated; reflects self-confidence (possible).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Some are actively engaged, asking questions, trying to perfect their part. Some show less involvement at that level and simply sing when they are meant to. One bass leans on piano, hands in his pockets and later makes an obvious point of getting a chair to sit on, arms folded.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Most of the men appear to be enjoying themselves.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Laughing and joking throughout; discussion and relaxed atmosphere.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>PERFORMANCE</strong></td>
<td><strong>Public Success</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional appearance.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All wearing black. Standing still</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Present</strong></td>
<td><strong>Most of the men display a demeanour of confidence,</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUCCESS</td>
<td>MASCULINITY</td>
<td>POSSIBLE SELVES</td>
<td>OTHER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and quiet before the performance begins.</td>
<td></td>
<td>showing a belief in their preparation and ability.</td>
<td>Poised stance; balance between watching the conductor and the score; slight movement with the music.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience made up of student/course peers; examiners; tutors and friends.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Beginning shows poise and confidence.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Already assembled in formation on stage; wait quietly; watch conductor for start.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical Success</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of the conductor is strong, confident and demonstrates good skill level.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Takes his time to begin the piece – does not rush; shows the pulse; then makes obvious gesture for starting.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attempts to show dynamic variation and expression.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Indicates part entry and endings.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Well-executed pause after first section ends on beautiful, strong major tonality. Not rushed to start next section.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appears to know piece well – not having to rely heavily on the score and always looking at the</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUCCESS</td>
<td>MASCULINITY</td>
<td>POSSIBLE SELVES</td>
<td>OTHER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Also singing as part of the ensemble.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Accomplished level of skill demonstrated.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intonation generally accurate; diction consistent; working together as ensemble; generally good sound quality produced.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familiarity for the piece is evident in most.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Although the choir is still referring to their printed music, they maintain good attention to the conductor, following his gestures reasonably well.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>It is clear who knows the piece well and who does not.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Some rely exclusively on the score, not looking at the conductor. Others show balance in this.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Private Impact</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience response is good.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature of the task possibly makes group less inclined to relax and show emotion.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very serious faces and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**B.3.4 CHOIR 4: COMMUNITY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REHEARSAL</th>
<th>SUCCESS</th>
<th>MASCULINITY</th>
<th>POSSIBLE SELVES</th>
<th>OTHER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PUBLIC SUCCESS</strong></td>
<td>Mention made of performance plans and attending recent events.</td>
<td>High part get ridiculed in good fun, when their voice ‘breaks’ in very high sections.</td>
<td>Conductor even asks the entire group to sing that section and make their voices crack like the high part.</td>
<td>The rehearsal takes place at one member’s house. 14 men present (total of 34 in the group). All sitting around a large, wooden kitchen table. The first part of the session is spent chatting, casually passing some new music around and waiting for everyone to arrive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WINTERSONG: BOOTCAMP; WINTER MAGIC FESTIVAL; UP-COMING PERFORMANCES.</strong></td>
<td>Performance the goal of rehearsing.</td>
<td>When this occurs, most copy and dissolves into laughter. The irony of it is not lost on the men!</td>
<td>Even during rehearsal the persona of the group is there as they plan each move, each look and gesture, and the way they deliver certain words or phrases.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EVENTS</strong></td>
<td>Even at this early stage, they are planning their stage moves:</td>
<td>Even during rehearsal the persona of the group is there as they plan each move, each look and gesture, and the way they deliver certain words or phrases.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Puff out chest on “some of us are quite big”</td>
<td>Does it hurt?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Look at next person and nod</td>
<td>Stereotypes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Image, Confidence. Awareness of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discuss the lead into the song and addressing the audience.

Musical Success
Conductor rarely gives orders but certainly in charge.

Conductor provides some commentary about the group to the camera while they're settling.

Conductor greets the guys as they arrive enthusiastically. One younger man arrives in bad mood and very seriously tells of his car crash. The group listen respectfully but it is not long before this turns into funny laughter. The young man joins in with the rest of the group.

Conductor teaching new song largely through echo and repetition.

Despite having sheet music, the conductor will sing a small section and the relevant part copies after which he sings the next part and builds up the parts. No direction to start given. Conductor starts singing a warm up and all simply stop talking and join in. Most often, he sings a section and then that part joins in. Some guys struggling with a small section of music and losing focus so the conductor gets to his feet and they re-focus and get it right. Makes eye contact with each man throughout.

Conductor provides some commentary about the group to the camera while they're settling.

We're oblivious to you! T: You know what? We're ridiculously well-behaved! C: Tonight? Yeah... look at us [looks to camera] We're not normally like this! [turns to men] No one say, 'This is f*cked!'

After a particular few make a mess of a tricky exercise (scale by numbers up and down minus 4), the group dissolve into laughter and the conductor turns to camera and says:

Did you get that?!
SUCCESS | MASCULINITY | POSSIBLE SELVES | OTHER
---|---|---|---
A high level of singing and musical ability is clearly evident and expected. | accusations of blame and holding them up that day. | So it was you who made us late that day?! |
The quality of the sound is beautiful; in tune; rich, despite the new material. | We're not talking about morals; we're talking insurance!! |
Group gets lost at one point; conductor laughs, plays the notes and they sing it again. | A: I don't want to live on this planet anymore. |
Conductor sings into the ear of one guy struggling with tuning. | C: Well, that's the rational response! |
Group able to try things to see how they sound. | Masculinity. |
Rehearsing it very purposeful. | All have some form of drink – beer, whiskey and coffee. |
Conductor does not go over things unnecessarily. Stops them continuing when satisfied they got it right. | They remove a vase of flowers from the table. One says: |
Practise small elements like pronunciation of words or vowel sounds; diphthong exercise. | It's lowering the tone! |
The conductor provides encouragement and criticism, but not prolific. | Conductor announces next new song in big, deep voice: 'We are the Men.' This is followed by several minutes of toilet humour. |
You're stuffing up the bit that goes...[sings]. | Song words very 'male': "walking around, girding our loins". |
Of all the people to f@*k it up! | Ridicule Asian man who cannot sing the low final note of the song. |
<p>| | You don't have enough balls. |
| | Stay the f@*! out of that note! |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUCCESS</th>
<th>MASCULINITY</th>
<th>POSSIBLE SELVES</th>
<th>OTHER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yeah... I’m liking that.</td>
<td>Don’t worry; you’ll grow into it.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No; you’re flat on that note; do it again.</td>
<td>One man tells story of where the idea of ‘war’ song originated – Amazon tribe would sing early in morning.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lovely work, gentlemen.</td>
<td>M: Women do everything except this song.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>That’s pretty good.</td>
<td>G: Men have been up doing all the important stuff!</td>
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<tr>
<td>Very nice. Nice, nice.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conductor applauds the group at the end of rehearsal.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quality of sound.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I just want to see if that ends up sounding good.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spend time on an exercise to produce correct/round diphthong – discuss how the sound is affected.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Working together.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The different parts quietly help each other get it right when there is a moment to do so.</td>
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<tr>
<td>One man deliberately placed next to conductor in order to receive enough support – tuning, anchor person.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal Success</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasure in the sound created.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>How good does that sound? [to</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>SUCCESS</td>
<td>MASCUINITY</td>
<td>POSSIBLE SELVES</td>
<td>OTHER</td>
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<tr>
<td>---------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camera: How did that sound?</td>
<td>he worked in antiques</td>
<td>his name was something like Sebastian!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyment.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Laughter and joking throughout the evening.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>High level of engagement demonstrated in facial expression and body language.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>We’re making ourselves laugh, at least. That’s a good sign.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERFORMANCE</th>
<th>Public Success</th>
<th>Voice change</th>
<th>Possible selves</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional appearance.</td>
<td>Feigned disdain shown when some men sing really high/falsetto.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All wearing black; standing in formation.</td>
<td>The group stops singing until the high singing stops. Expressions of disgust directed to the high singers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Performance in front of large, outdoor audience as part of local festival.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Everyone rugged up against the cold winter evening. Hundreds of people in crowd – seated, standing, out in street – no room to move.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical Success</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of the conductor is to lead group as well as to sing and talk with the audience.</td>
<td>“Lightpole” song tongue-in-cheek – juxtaposition of men and vulnerability.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Brings the group into new sections, indicates to soloist;</td>
<td>Soloist pretending to be very shy and serious, although words are very silly. He tries not to laugh.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conductor holds soloists hand to</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Present Group persona.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Each of the men wearing their own, particular hat.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This is maintained throughout in terms of the way the men stand and move; the things the conductor says to the audience; the facial expressions of each man.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bow to the audience at the end; hats off.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Choreographed.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Simple arm movements and steps; all the same and stilted (deliberately).</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Confidence.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The group knows their material</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Takes place on stage, outdoors, on a winter evening, during Winter Magic Festival.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SUCCESS</strong></td>
<td><strong>MASCULINITY</strong></td>
<td><strong>POSSIBLE SELVES</strong></td>
<td><strong>OTHER</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>teaches the audience some movements; engages in antics with the soloist.</td>
<td>encourage him. Train whistle 'scares' the soloist and he tries to run away but the group bring him back. The group continue to sing their underlying 'ooohs' while all this occurs.</td>
<td>well and even ad lib when a moment arises. They take their lead from the conductor.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sound quality and technical considerations.</td>
<td>Play on male stereotypes. Sing a song about men only having one feeling. Attach 'feeling' with food.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The group produce a beautiful sound despite the outdoor setting. They use microphones and fold-back.</td>
<td>The high part get excited in a small section and 'let go', singing falsetto; the rest of the group stop and stare at them disdainfully.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>The group knows the material very well and exhibit confidence. Choreographed and well planned. Every detail, however simple, has been planned and rehearsed. Simple rhythmic actions/movements. Private Impact</td>
<td>A similar thing occurs when another guy starts dancing and enjoying himself freely.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience response is good. Laughter throughout the performance; significant applause after each song and as the group finishes. Conductor connects with the audience. He uses references to local geography and things familiar to the local people.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Audience participation. Conductor teaches the crowd 2 dance moves. Asks everyone in the crowd to do as well. Hold hands and the men on stage.
### B4 Survey Results Tables

**B.4.1 Audience Members’ Survey (AMS)**

**a) CHOIR 1: Junior School**

Total number of surveys = 136

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 1 Do you know someone in the choir?</th>
<th>Son/daughter</th>
<th>Friend</th>
<th>Relative</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>55</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 2 This choir is a success because...</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>they sound good.</td>
<td>113</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they present well.</td>
<td>85</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they enjoy singing and performing.</td>
<td>103</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they connect with the audience.</td>
<td>51</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the audience enjoyed the performance.</td>
<td>81</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

other – please specify.

An excellent teacher.
They are musicians too.
Builds confidence in a group.
Awesome.
The boys are disciplined choir-wise.
Enthusiastic teachers.
The conductor very good.

Excellent teacher.
They looked happy and at ease.
They are very good.
Amazing.
They suck.
Excellent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 3 Being a boy in a choir would be difficult.</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Extra comments**

Boys who attend practise should be praised; those who do not attend should be asked to leave. I understand that practise attendance from some boys is poor. If they cannot attend practise then they should not be in the choir.

Talented choir teacher.
Ever heard of bullying?
Need modern music; more up-beat pieces to sing. Difficult – not if the school promotes it; depends on the individual. My Year 5 son loves it.
b) **CHOIR 2: Secondary School**

Total number of surveys = 120

| Question 1 Do you know someone in the choir? |
|-----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Son/daughter    | Friend         | Relative       | Other          | No             |
| 26              | 28             | 12             | 21             | 30             |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 2 This choir is a success because...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>they sound good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they present well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they enjoy singing and performing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they connect with the audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the audience enjoyed the performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other – please specify.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just doing it is a success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M is in it!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They have [name].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They have [name].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A choir is a path to teamwork.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The footy/soccer playing boys sing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to connect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was fantastic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They sound awesome.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There's a range of voices and ability to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>improvise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love of God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good witness for Christ.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because of male and female voices.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 3 Being a boy in a choir would be difficult.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extra comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They get teased.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have been in choirs since 8 – now 48. Keep up the good work guys! And gals! Don't think Qu3 is worded well. Gay. It shouldn't be [difficult]. It would be tragic to see only women in any choir. My son wants to join it next year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger boys might get teased. Talent, regardless of gender should be fostered and developed. They should be encouraged. I think they can be shy – peer pressure against? Depends on the choir culture.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
c) CHOIR 3: University

Total number of surveys = 17

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 1 Do you know someone in the choir?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Son/daughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 2 This choir is a success because...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>they sound good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they present well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they enjoy singing and performing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they connect with the audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the audience enjoyed the performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other – please specify.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice of song was moving, dynamically.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 3 Being a boy in a choir would be difficult.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Extra comments
d) CHOIR 4: Community

Total number of surveys = 91

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 1</th>
<th>Do you know someone in the choir?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Son/daughter</td>
<td>Friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 2</th>
<th>This choir is a success because...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>they sound good.</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they present well.</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they enjoy singing and performing.</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they connect with the audience.</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the audience enjoyed the performance.</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other – please specify.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Their fascination with tying to be funny whilst mumbling! Good play on words. The feeling they give out. Great sense of humour. Silliness. Excellent hats. High level showmanship. Great frontman. Humility and humanity. They sing in Finnish. Great atmosphere and sense of humour. They are different and quirky. Light-hearted and fun. They don’t take themselves too seriously. They take the mickey out of masculinity. They are clever lyrics.</td>
<td>They listen to each other; look at the conductor and convey their emotions. They sing with feeling. Comic presentation. Clever, creative, imaginative. Highly original, unexpected. Nothing else quite like it. They speak on behalf of ‘human-ness’ with humour and insight. I loved it! They are mad and talented. Write their stuff = win. They have the ability to grow beards and sing in tune. Comedic presence; charisma and voice. Overall awesomeness. They are a bunch of cool cats. They are existential. Distinct persona.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 3</th>
<th>Being a boy in a choir would be difficult.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Extra comments:
- Difficult – possibly but not necessarily; depends on boy/choir. Circumstance dependant.
- Good male voices are wonderful.
- I want to join, but I’m a girl! Emotional, subtle, beautiful, original, nothing like it. My ears are very happy. So witty. Such fun.
- Have been in a choir myself.
- I like to be in the [name of choir].
- Being a Spooky would be an amazing experience.
- It was well supported.
- The men are handsome and good with tools; outrageous male bonding. It’s the boy in the man who loves it. Wonderful.
- Do it. Do it well. Enjoy it. Hang the rest.
## B.4.2 Choir Members’ Survey (CMS)

### a) CHOIR 1: Junior School

Total number of surveys = 40

| Question 1 Do you like to sing? | Yes x29  
Yes, I do very much. Just not like Justin Bieber x2  
Yes, I love it.  
Yes, I have always liked to sing.  
Yes. It’s my favourite thing to do anywhere, anytime. There is nothing I like more than singing. | Sometimes.  
Yes, I do most of the time.  
Yes, most of the time but not when I’m in a bad mood.  
Yes, because you try new things.  
I like to sing when I hear a good song.  
Sometimes if I feel like it or are in the mood. |
| --- | --- |
| Question 2 Have you always liked to sing? | Yes x25  
Yes. Ever since I was little I have liked to sing.  
No. Not when I was young.  
I have always liked to sing but not as much as now.  
I have always liked from the age of 5. | I love playing drums and sometimes sing.  
I guess.  
No x7  
No, I started last year.  
Mostly. |
| Question 3 Why do you like (or dislike) to sing? | Yes, because:  
The music makes me feel good.  
I have been watching the X-Factor and The Voice. These shows got me interested.  
It is entertaining; it sounds good; it is a talent. I don’t like hard, confusing songs.  
It makes me distracted from everything else.  
I sing what I feel.  
It is fun and some of my friends do it.  
It is fun x4
It is very nice in all songs.  
It’s a good way to get out of class  
It expresses my feelings.  
It helps me learn new music and new words.  
I have been singing for a long time and I play the piano and sing my songs to it.  
It makes me feel happy x7  
It’s entertaining and it’s fun.  
It’s fun and I’m good at it.  
It can get you lots of money and it’s fun. | You can express things that are happening in your life in your favourite tune.  
You can make up your own songs, make up your own beat and it relaxes me.  
It’s lots of fun and you get to go to places.  
It’s enjoyable.  
It’s lets out your emotion.  
It’s fun and joyful.  
It’s enjoyable and it relieves stress.  
I can do it anyway I want to.  
It expresses my feelings and I love it.  
I don’t like to sing because it’s not really my thing.  
I like to sing when I’m happy.  
I dislike the Justin Bieber songs and the One Direction songs and I like to sing Jason Derulo songs.  
It has been in the family.  
I love to sing, I’ve always loved to sing and always will.  
Music and singing are an old hobby of mine and it’s a God-given talent that people tell me I’m good at. |
| Question 4 Where do you sing? | In private.  
I last sang in the talent quests at my old school.  
At school, at home and in my band.  
At home and at school x2 |
## Question 5: Do you feel more comfortable singing in certain places?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes x18</th>
<th>No x18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, with family and friends x2</td>
<td>I don’t like singing by myself in public.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, at home and school more than in public.</td>
<td>At home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At home and in the car x2</td>
<td>In my band x2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like anywhere in the front row.</td>
<td>I like singing privately or in front of someone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I happily sing anywhere x2</td>
<td>In my bedroom because no one can see me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In the car x2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In a group.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Question 6: What sort of music do you like to sing?

| Pop music x5 | Alternative music. |
| Mostly pop and a bit of rock. | Pop, some opera, rock. |
| Good music on the radio. | Rock-pop legends music and some of my personal faves. |
| Hunters and Collectors, AC/DC, Billy Joel, Bruce Springsteen – classic rock | Don’t really care. |
| 360, Gig Time, Rush, Cold Play. | Funny music. |
| Soft. | All rock x2 |
| Classic rock. | New bouncy songs. |
| All the latest songs x | Pop songs and the iTunes top ten songs. |
| R n B. | Also slow songs. |
| All types of music x2 | Pop and hardcore. |
| Bruno Mars or artists on the radio x2 | Pop, rap, hip-hop, country, especially rap. |
| Modern pop x3 | R n B, rock, hip-hop. |
| Adult contemporary. | Rap, hip-hop. |
| Pop, techno, funk, rock. | Jazz and rock. |
| The Oldies, 60s, 70s, 80s, 90s and now. | Any except hardcore rap that’s just plain bad and other language songs. |
| Random songs. |  |
| Any. |  |

## Question 7: Do you ever get to choose what music the choir sings?

| No way. | Sadly, no. |
| No, never on this earth. | Never. |
| No x33 | No, they are very unexpected songs. |
| No, never, ever, ever, ever but we should. | No, [conductor] chooses. |

## Question 8: What do you find hard about singing in the choir?

| Nothing x10 | Some notes are too high and it hurts my throat. |
| Solos because it’s on your own x4 |  |
If you're off key it makes the choir sound bad.
Learning new songs and trying to get the right sound out.
Nothing, except losing my voice.
That people have different voices and you have to compare yours with others.
The Latin parts and fast singing.
The songs that I've never heard.
Fast singing.
To hit high notes
I miss subjects and sport meetings so I have to chase people up.

You have to practise a lot. Some songs are hard and confusing.
Fitting your voice in.
Singing low.
You can get bullied and the songs aren’t good.
Having to admit it. Not always the music I like.
I’m not sure
Sometimes I find it hard to get my voice up high and down low.
Having to do it over and over again.
When you hit the wrong note you are embarrassed.

**Question 9 What do your friends think of you being part of the choir? Does anyone tease you?**

I enjoy getting away from English.
They don’t care and no one teases me x2
It makes them respect me.
No, not really sure x4
No one teases me and they like it x3
They think it’s weird but no one teases me x2
Nothing, no x2
My friends think it’s normal because they all know I love to sing. No, nobody teases me.
No, quite a lot of my friends missed out and they’re sad about it.
No, my friends are either in the choir or want to be.
No one teases me because of the choir x7
No, because then what if the person who is teasing you and his friend is in the choir.
No they don’t tease me; most of my friends are in the choir.

None of my friends are in the choir, it’s just me. None of my choir mates tease me.
Don’t really care, no x2
No they’re proud of me. It’s all so social.
My friends don’t tease me because some of them are in the choir but my others don’t dislike me because I am in the choir.
No one teases me because they think I am pretty good at singing.
My friends say that choirs are for girls.
Yes, I do take a bit of ‘crash and bang’ about it.
A lot of my friends are in it so I don’t get teased.
No, because my friends are nice.
They think it’s weird because I’ve never been in a choir.
Some of my friends wish they were in the choir and some tease me.
They like singing x2

**Question 10 Why is choir important to you?**

My family loves big choirs so I wanted to try one and I LOVED IT.
I wanted to sing more.
Missing school work x2
It’s an opportunity.
I get to sing.
It’s fun x7
It’s important because I can show my skill without judging me.
I love singing x6
You get to get out of class x2
You get to go around Sydney x2
I want to learn how to become a better singer.

I have the chance to sing with others.
It’s a group that I get to be a part of, I get to see my friends, and I get to sing.
It just is.
It gives me confidence.
My friends are in the choir.
It is a great way to sing and not be as pinned out of being bad.
I can meet new people and sometimes you get to sing solo.
I like it and we’re told it’s a privilege.
It’s not really.
I have always dreamed to be in a choir and sing and perform.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 11</th>
<th>Do you think your choir is a success? Why do you think this way?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, because this school is well-known for singing in the past.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, everyone has a good voice (all are good singers) x5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, because we miss school work.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We learn a lot of songs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choir is a success because we rehearse a lot or practise hard x2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, we sing well together x3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, because we are pro x2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because our teacher is extremely helpful when it comes to organising the choir. Yes x5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because everyone puts in 100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We get chosen for out of school contests.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone wants us to sing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, because we win competitions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 12</th>
<th>Why do you think boys might not want to be in a choir?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It takes up time.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s boring x2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They might get embarrassed by their friends.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They think they’re too cool.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They think choir is for girls (girlie) x8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They think it’s not fun.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They think it girlie and they are shy to sing in front of everyone.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because of all the strange songs we sing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most boys say choir is for girls. They’re just jealous.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People might tease them that they sing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>because people think singing is for girls.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They might want to sing rock songs or they’re just not interested or it’s just not comfortable being around others.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 13</th>
<th>Do you want to be in a choir in the future?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No, I want to be in a rock band x4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes x10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No x10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maybe (or not sure) x5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It depends whether I like singing then.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, there are other things I want to try and do and being in choir like this is just not my personality.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes and no. I want to be a soloist when I’m older and sing with my local choir.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, I would rather be a solo singer.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, I want to make my own album.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, because you get to go to New York.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maybe or be a solo singer.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, but only if I can pick the songs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No because I don’t want to take singing as a career.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, all the way up till I finish high school.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### b) CHOIR 2: Secondary School

Total number of surveys = 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 1</th>
<th>Do you like to sing?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, if it’s in my comfortable range.</td>
<td>Yes, love it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes x4</td>
<td>Yes, love singing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absolutely.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 2</th>
<th>Have you always liked to sing?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. This year was when I started.</td>
<td>I’ve grown up singing in a musical family and I’ve always been doing it. It’s definitely a form of escape for me and where I feel in my element.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes x4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not always.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 3</th>
<th>Where do you sing?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Choir and church.</td>
<td>I take singing lessons so in studio concerts and Mountains events such as Foundation Day. School events – choir &amp; small groups. Church. Also BMMS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church and home.</td>
<td>Musical productions, church functions, school performances, choir.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anywhere I can.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School/church.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anywhere. I don’t really care where.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretty much everywhere – at home, school, church.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 4</th>
<th>Are there situations or places in which you feel more comfortable singing?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Around my friends.</td>
<td>When people want me to.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With my friends.</td>
<td>When I’m in the choir, have back up or I’m alone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anywhere – with other people.</td>
<td>Singing with my family or with my friends just having a jam and singing for the fun of it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In my family and in the school worship band. I feel comfortable singing most of the time.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 5</th>
<th>What sort of music do you like to sing?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anything that interests me.</td>
<td>Any except Screamo and Techno.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anything in my range.</td>
<td>Gospel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any sort I can.</td>
<td>I like singing anything with a good melody and harmonies. Contemporary music and musical theatre definitely. Choir pieces with harmonies are lots of fun and really rewarding too.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indie.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am learning classical so quite operatic but I love singing a capella &amp; especially folk music.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 6</th>
<th>Do you have any say in what music the choir sings?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes x2</td>
<td>Yes, we have a lot of say, not only in the choice of music but also how we want to sing it and arrange it. A lot of the time we get to pick the music unless for a particular event. Not really but I don’t mind x2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, a bit, but only if the others agree.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I could, but I don’t really choose to.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes. Our teacher always asks mainly a few of the older members’ opinions about the pieces and their arrangement.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 7</th>
<th>Have you experienced any difficulties singing in the choir? For example, physical, social, or parental.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The songs can often be difficult and high. Sometimes my range isn’t good enough so I change parts.</td>
<td>Yes, voice strains sometimes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, physical.</td>
<td>Yes, physical – there are some notes I can’t hit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No, besides a bit of a sore voice.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Question 8** What do your friends think of you being part of the choir?

| They accept/endorse it I guess. | They find it fine. |
| Most of my friends are too. | They are in the choir. I’m not a good singer but the company is good. |
| They like it because they’re in it as well! | |

**Question 9** Why is belonging to the choir important to you?

| It is a place where I can improve my singing skills. | Part of something that sounds good. |
| It’s a place where I can sing without criticism. | I like to sing. |
| It's fun and enjoyable. | I get a chance to sing & expand my musical talent. |

**Question 10** Would you describe your choir as a success? Why?

| Yes. We all have fun and sing pretty well. Yes. We sing to entertain people. Yes because we have performed at many places. | Yes because we all sound good together. Yes, we get it down! Yes, we have fun and laugh. |

**Question 11** Why do you think boys might find it hard or avoid belonging to a choir?

| Some people might associate singing with femininity. People may think singing is silly or stupid. Self-conscious about their voice. | Because some people think a choir is just for girls. Not good at singing. Because choir is seen as a feminine activity. |

**Question 12** Is singing in a choir something you would like to do in the future?

| Maybe. It depends on how my voice and friends go. Probably not in a choir – solo career or band. | No. As a school I love it but not as a career choice. Yes, definitely. Yes x2 |
c) **CHOIR 3: University**

Total number of surveys = 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 1 <em>Do you like to sing?</em></th>
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</table>
| I love to sing x2 | Yes x5  
| Question 2 *Have you always liked to sing?* |  
| Yes x3 | Always.  
| Not always – started singing at age 18. Since early high school. | Yes, all my life  
| Question 3 *Where do you sing?* |  
| I sing in my band and my own solo music/YouTube covers. Church; uni; used to sing in the Philharmonic Choir, Vox; in high school and primary I was in regional and state choirs and toured overseas. At uni; in venues (pubs, clubs etc0; on recordings (home studio). | Karaoke, shower. Pubs, clubs – acoustic guitarist/vocalist all weekend. At uni; in gigs; at home. Anywhere really. Geography isn’t important. Public influence is.  
| Question 4 *Are there situations or places in which you feel more comfortable singing?* |  
| Anywhere is good. Home, uni, church. On stage, in studio, bathroom. Solo with acoustic guitar. | In front of people in pubs. No, I’m pretty confident all round. Alone; in front of friends; with my guitar.  
| Question 5 *What sort of music do you like to sing?* |  
| Question 6 *Do you have any say in what music the choir sings?* |  
| Just do what we have to do to meet the course requirements. Not always but I enjoy this so I would have picked it anyway. Slightly but not much. | No, chosen by uni. No, none. Assessment – no choice. No.  
| Question 7 *Have you experienced any difficulties singing in the choir? For example, physical, social, or parental.* |  
| Some (maturity levels). Nope. No, not particularly. No, I enjoy singing in choirs; nice change from my solo acts. | No. Sometimes there is a clash of ideas but this happens in big groups. No, everything’s been fine. Hearing yourself over others can be sometimes difficult though.  
| Question 8 *What do your friends think of you being part of the choir?* |  
| All good. I’m not really bothered to tell many but those who know think it’s cool. They don’t have a say in it. Most think it’s pretty cool but that has taken years. | Laugh at first but when they hear how we sound they really enjoy it. They don’t really care. They know I love to sing at any moment possible. Only friends that know are in the choir but I don’t mind telling people.  
<p>| Question 9 <em>Why is belonging to the choir important to you?</em> |<br />
| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Helps me with pitching – good to be part of group work. I really enjoy performing in choirs. Being able to rely on people for a change. To pass the course.</th>
<th>You get a richer timbre and texture in a choir compared to solo. The music, the friendship, learning together.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question 10</strong> Would you describe your choir as a success? Why?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Semi (we’ve not been together long). Yes, because 80% of us are not primarily singers yet we still do quite well in my opinion. It is getting there. Sometimes people can be really disrespectful. Yes, we actually sound quite good together when we finish.</td>
<td>Yes &amp; no – we are here because it is for uni; some people see it as a way to get marks. Yes, we chose to all be here – we had the choice. Yes, we have learnt works and people like it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question 11</strong> Why do you think boys might find it hard or avoid belonging to a choir?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because it’s “gay” – not what I think. Female/gay implications. Because it challenges the gender norm. It is stereotyped in being a ‘girls’ thing. Because there is a stigma about singing in a choir being feminine but I guess when you get older people get past that.</td>
<td>Choir was something that contained a majority of females. Possibly the style of songs. Peer pressure, voice breaking (in high school).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question 12</strong> Is singing in a choir something you would like to do in the future?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes Recreationally, yes. I’m impartial. Yes &amp; no. I love being in a choir but I love the spotlight (haha).</td>
<td>Possibly. I enjoy it but I enjoy solo singing more. Yes. I plan to work for the Arts Unit &amp; conduct choirs. Perhaps but I do prefer singing in a band or my own music.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
d) **CHOIR 4: Community**

Total number of surveys = 13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 1</th>
<th>How long have you belonged to this choir?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Since it started – 11 years x 4</td>
<td>8 years x2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>2.5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>5 years x2</td>
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<tr>
<td>9 years</td>
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<tr>
<th>Question 2</th>
<th>To which age group do you belong?</th>
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<tr>
<td>a. 18 – 25 years</td>
<td>d. 46 – 55 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. 26 – 35 years</td>
<td>e. 56 – 65 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. 36 – 45 years</td>
<td>f. Over 65 years</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<th>Question 3</th>
<th>Have you belonged to other choirs in the past (or do you currently)? Explain.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes; Sydney Conservatorium Choir; small choir in Launceston and also assistant leader; community choir in [location] for a long time. Several community choirs in the past; just one gospel choir now. UNSW Choir when I was a student there (1990-8); Solidarity Choir 1995 – 2000; currently in 3 community choirs; and also conduct choirs. Yes. I sang with my university choir and sang with two choirs while living in Canberra previously. I am currently singing with another community choir in Kensington, NSW. Joined local choir <em>Easily Swayed</em> upon moving to [location] in 2003, a local community choir led by [conductor], which led to joining the [choir] later in 2003. Belonged to local community choirs: Voice Works, Crowd Around, Easily Swayed. No longer a member of any others.</td>
<td>Only church and school choirs as a child, youth and young man. Stopped singing in my early 20s as other typical activities were more important (eg. Football, tennis and beer). [Name] is the only choir I’m involved with currently, mainly due to time constraints. Yes. A mixed-gender community choir in [location], 2001-2002. Yes. A community choir of which I’m still a member. Approximately 5 years now. No. Yes. Various community choirs; one at Macquarie uni – they all suffered from poor material and/or lack of musicality. No – other than at school. Tried a choir outside school but didn’t like the ‘authoritarian’ approach. The shower, Lawson community centre, in the car, on stage, in my band, two choirs.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Question 4</th>
<th>Did you sing in a choir as a boy? What was the experience like?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes – the Secondary Schools combined in the mid-60s my first experience of choir. No choirs existed in the primary school I attended. A great experience. Yes – awesome. I sang in a church choir from when I was 7 to 14 and ended up head boy of St David’s Cathedral in Hobart. It was something I was naturally good at and gave me great self-esteem. Plus it was fun hanging out with the other boys in a non-physical, competitive environment. I sang throughout primary school</td>
<td>Yes I did and always enjoyed it. I was always moved by the power of a mass of voices and loved being part of that. I also loved to sing by myself (in private). Yes. School and church choirs. Enjoyable. Yes. Year 3 primary school. Seemed to recall it was a reasonably pleasant experience, but short-lived. Yes – Primary school only. One memory – exhilaration after performance. No, not really. I enjoyed singing to an ABC show called ‘Let’s Sing’ at school but there was not a choir.</td>
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(although not in a choir) and took part in choir in high school, singing in several school music productions. It was a great experience and taught me a great deal about harmonising, not vocally, but instrumentally.

No.
No. I only started singing in a choir in my early twenties.

**Question 5** If applicable, why was choir something you did **not** do?

| As a kid in Primary School I auditioned for the school choir. Sang a few notes. Response was, "Next..." After my early 20s I fell out of the church and religion and lost touch with choirs. I was never introduced to community choirs until I had been living in [location] for several years. I didn't have the time to get involved but after seeing the [choir] perform the itch returned. | Choir not available. No background in music. "I can't sing."
1. Opportunity 2. There was a certain nerdy association with being in a choir, but I simply not aware of choirs being available. Not really wanting to be in a community choir – the material they seemed to perform never excited me. |

**Question 6** Have you ever experienced difficulty associated with being a male in a choir? Explain.

| No x6 Yes, but only in the sense that I may have been the only male. No, not really. By the time I started singing in choirs, men really became popular, as they were a precious commodity. Not really. Some male friends do think it’s an odd thing to do. The perception is that it is not very masculine, but it doesn’t bother me. No – the opposite x2 | The difficulties I have had have been technical rather than gender-based. Though I have witnessed that predatory circling of men by ‘she sharks’ within choirs. My wife sings in [group] too so babysitting use to be an issue but they’re big enough now. With the [choir] it’s a matter of balancing commitments to family and choir. |

**Question 7** Was singing in a choir always something you wanted to do? Explain.

| Not really – but liked singing. Only after seeing “Café @ the Gates of Salvation” in Glebe in mid 80s. Have done so since High School. No, I thought it was just part of my boyhood until I started to go to festivals, discovered festival and then community choirs and singing. Always sung. Always in choirs. No. I got dragged into joining the university choir and enjoyed the experience so decided to keep doing it. | It was never n aim, just something that I fell into naturally and found enjoyable. No. came a time when I wanted to connect with community and I thought I could sing a bit. Not particularly, but was considering the possibility for a year or two prior to joining the Spooky Men. Not as a burning desire, but I do enjoy it. No. I just wanted to learn to sing and it was an easy way to get into that. Not really. |

**Question 8** Do you sing in any other context? Describe.

| Have played in rock band for 35 years. Busking – weekly. Soul band – 5 or 6 gigs a year. Rehearsal, just singing, play guitar | Yes. I sing in an acoustic guitar duo, a power=pop three piece rock band and a funk/soul/Motown band, in both a lead |
and sing.
No x2
Made up my own music as a small child.
Some teachers at PS included singing in the class program. There were also ABC music broadcasts. High school as part of elective music. Conservatorium activities. I used to sing at home and in the shower but I find myself doing this less now I am singing in choirs. I guess there's only so much 'song' in me.

vocalist role and providing harmonies to others.
Sang in bands and wrote songs (a long time ago).
Only at home and at the piano.
Yes. I have sung in bands and as a singer-songwriter and every night to my children.
Yes, either singly or with a small band.
The shower, in the car, [friend's] place, [town] community centre, on stage, in my band, two other choirs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 9 What are the main reasons you joined this choir?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loved the Georgian harmonies. Loved the humorous material.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn ensemble skills (blend, tuning, performance); I was asked to; regular performance opportunity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exciting opportunity; we were good; relationships with other blokes – big attraction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As adult it was the most enjoyable form of music making for me. Spooky Men – I was invited to and who in their right mind would knock it back!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was dissatisfied with community choirs and was given the opportunity to apply to audition for this one, which I grabbed with both hands, the Spooky MC were and are my favourite choir.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I liked their music and looked like they are having lots of fun. Plus, they are kind of famous in certain circles so I guess they are my way to fame and stardom!</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 10 Why is choir important to you?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Deep appreciation of the quality of the sound we make. Also the bunch of blokes in the [choir] is awesome.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same reasons as a boy – it gives me great satisfaction, self-esteem, fun with other guys and enjoyment in expressing myself through my creative strengths and I get to travel the world with them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is an important departure from other forms of music making that I've encountered over the years (primarily rock and pop bands), and differs in that its primary objective is not to make money or to show-off, but for the enjoyment of the performance of music for its own sake. The dynamic is also very different in that a choir is very much a cooperative with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We make beautiful I genuinely enjoy the company of these men.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gives me a hobby to escape from the drudgery of life's routine.</td>
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<tr>
<td>It's currently my only creative and performance outlet and I love to be part of it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Camaraderie, ability to perform, satisfies musical desires.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like singing. I like the people in the choir – they are on the same wavelength as me – musicians. The people running the choir set the tone – I have tried other ones and I can't stand it if the teacher is the wrong vibe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is one of the outlets for what little of my 'artistic' and 'creative' juices to flourish. It</td>
</tr>
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egos being checked at the door – there is no agenda apart from that of making music and having fun. Maintains sanity. Escape from tension. Making music with others is just the best thing to do.

is also very therapeutic. To sing at a professional level. Honing of music skills. Good blokes. Love the sound. Deep connection with music and other men. Feeling important - capable of being part of something bigger. Simple joy of singing.

**Question 11 Would you describe the choir as successful? Why?**

| Yes. We manage to sing harmoniously and to both critical and popular acclaim. And we have fun. | Oh yes. Not only is it successful popularity-wise, it is a successful choir in bringing a bunch of disparate men together to sing music great for men to sing in an atmosphere of camaraderie, humour, compassion and joy. We make audiences happy. It’s all about the love. Yes. It’s a one-off – eccentric and is greater than the sum of its parts. Stable over many years. Consistent performance record and high standards. Yes. We make children laugh, women cry and men vaguely aware that there is more to life. Absolutely. Audiences LOVE it (standing ovations are common). The membership loves it – still going after 11 years. Yes. It tours, records, has a website and is reasonably well known in choir circles. Sure. We are big on the festival circuit and in the UK. But [name] is also successful even though we don’t do a lot of gigs – we make a good sound and people like coming to practise. That’s a success in my book. |
| Yes. The guys work well together and get along well. Respect for each other. We all have a quality that makes us work together effectively. We can sing okay. We learn stuff quickly and are adaptable. We have a good and talented leader. Yes. People like what we do and we make beautiful, relevant, funny, edgy music. Humour is very much a natural by-product and is in much evidence at rehearsals and gigs, which carries across to an audience, and helps to engender a strong sense of inclusion. The choir also has an ability to appeal to a broad cross-section of the populace on several different levels, whether they be male or female, young or old – a lot of people ‘get’ the SMC and can relate to many of the issues we address, all lovingly punctuated with plenty of self-deprecating humour. Yes, very. Everyone is having fun always and we sound bloody good when everything clicks into place. | Yes. People like what we do and we make beautiful, relevant, funny, edgy music. Humour is very much a natural by-product and is in much evidence at rehearsals and gigs, which carries across to an audience, and helps to engender a strong sense of inclusion. The choir also has an ability to appeal to a broad cross-section of the populace on several different levels, whether they be male or female, young or old – a lot of people ‘get’ the SMC and can relate to many of the issues we address, all lovingly punctuated with plenty of self-deprecating humour. Yes, very. Everyone is having fun always and we sound bloody good when everything clicks into place. | Yes. The guys work well together and get along well. Respect for each other. We all have a quality that makes us work together effectively. We can sing okay. We learn stuff quickly and are adaptable. We have a good and talented leader. Yes. People like what we do and we make beautiful, relevant, funny, edgy music. Humour is very much a natural by-product and is in much evidence at rehearsals and gigs, which carries across to an audience, and helps to engender a strong sense of inclusion. The choir also has an ability to appeal to a broad cross-section of the populace on several different levels, whether they be male or female, young or old – a lot of people ‘get’ the SMC and can relate to many of the issues we address, all lovingly punctuated with plenty of self-deprecating humour. Yes, very. Everyone is having fun always and we sound bloody good when everything clicks into place. |
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**Question 12 Why do you think singing in a choir is (or could be) difficult for boys?**

| Singing in a choir could be perceived as an undesirable activity if 1. There is a perception that singing in a choir is somehow ‘daggy’ or even somehow effeminate for boys to take part in, 2. That the musical material covered in the choir arrangements would not be desirable to perform, ie. Too old or again too daggy or out of touch with current musical trends. There is also a tendency, I would suggest, to sticking to tried and true favourites, largely derived from the Western canon, and not enough exposure to vocal harmony traditions from other cultures. If the local culture and environment makes singing in a choir somewhat ‘unacceptable’ or unfashionable or there | Usually peer pressure. Conflicts with a boy’s need to run around – school rehearsals in lunch hours present a conflict of interest. In OZ, there is a strong cultural negative to overcome. I have conducted children’s choirs for a number of years and it is always difficult to keep boys involved in a mixed choir. Accessibility and acceptability. Difficult role model/identity issues. Material is usually so ‘naff’ or highbrow. Has to be relevant, resonant, meaningful for boys. Self-confidence issues – scared of appearing not tough, but it depends on how they’re raised. It’s like any Arts participation for boys. It |
| There is also a tendency, I would suggest, to sticking to tried and true favourites, largely derived from the Western canon, and not enough exposure to vocal harmony traditions from other cultures. If the local culture and environment makes singing in a choir somewhat ‘unacceptable’ or unfashionable or there | There is also a tendency, I would suggest, to sticking to tried and true favourites, largely derived from the Western canon, and not enough exposure to vocal harmony traditions from other cultures. If the local culture and environment makes singing in a choir somewhat ‘unacceptable’ or unfashionable or there |

Perceptions of success influencing male participation in choir – S. Powell
are negative connotations associated with singing in a choir. I believe the difficulties are often overstated. I grew up in TAS in the 60s and went to an all-boys boarding school – very tough – and I was the only one singing in a church choir and although I stood out I wasn’t bullied for it, just teased a bit. The perception is that boys who sing are effeminate or at least soft but everyone, even children, can see the evidence every day in popular music culture that this isn’t true. Boys who have the guts to sing can gain just as much respect from their peers as with any other pursuit. The main difficulty is that there are not enough other boys prepared to have a go – it is always more supportive the more do it and hard to go alone. does not allow a child to run, expend energy, or yell. Lots of people (men and women) are not interested. If boys want to be in a choir they join them. I think mostly they are interested in other things. Also, your typical community choir has mostly older people in it (40+), which may put them off. Choir is not seen as being very cool or masculine. Still a perception I think that anything involving performing arts (other than rock bands) is not bands. Peer pressure is the only reason I think of... it’s not a boy thing to do.

<table>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Question 13</strong> Is choir something you wish to do in the future?</th>
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| **Yes** x9  
Certainly, though I have been spoilt by my experience with this choir and would have to raise the bar considerably to joining another choir. | **Yes. This choir.**  
Yes. Until I am no longer capable.  
Only this one or one of the same standard – I’m over non-auditioned community choirs. |

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<tr>
<th><strong>Question 14</strong> What would stop you belonging to choir?</th>
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</table>
| **If it stops to be artistically challenging.**  
No longer able to sing. Some sort of disability that made it impossible.  
At the moment I get a great deal of enjoyment and satisfaction from singing kind of material with this group of men. I guess if that were to stop I would too.  
If my voice gave out. Or if we ran out of material, though, this seems unlikely at present – we are fortunate to have a very talented songwriter in [conductor].  
Incompetently led. | **When I lose my voice permanently.**  
If I didn’t like the people in it, the way they ran things, the music chosen – all those things but mostly if I just stopped enjoying it.  
Loss of voice – physical in competence – mental insufficiency.  
Dying!  
Perhaps deafness or loss of voice.  
Time demands on the domestic front.  
Family commitments, pursuit of other musical challenges. |