

ARTICLE

# ‘Singing is my superpower’ experiences of Austrian males in school choral music

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## Abstract

This study was of adolescent males about their musical self-perceptions and experiences in one Austrian school’s choral music programme. Participants who sang continuously in the school choir reported experiences consistent with flow theory. In contrast, participants who withdrew said that their school choral experiences lacked challenge levels commensurate with their interests and skills and that they wished for greater opportunities for autonomy and control. Participants who never sang in school choir lacked older male singing role models, an element consistent with the theory of possible selves. The study findings reflect those of previous research at The London Oratory. The article closes with implications for research and pedagogy.

**Keywords:** Adolescent males; choir; flow; possible selves; singing; voice change

What prompts a person to decide that singing, and singing in choir, is ‘something I do?’ Why do some people continue singing and others withdraw? What dynamics influence adolescent male singers when making decisions about their participation in school choral singing—or whether they are ‘singers’ at all? The purpose of this study was to gather and analyse the narratives of adolescent males in Austria about their experiences and self-perceptions as singers. Where there was only minimal related research a decade ago, the primary research base now includes adolescent males’ narratives from multiple countries across five continents. Freer (2022a) details these studies, including many situated in the United Kingdom. Other recent related UK-based research reflects discussions of gendered politics in choral music (Einarsdottir, 2022), the optimal choral voicing for males during voice change (Williams, Welch, & Howard, 2021), gender differences of singing perception (Orton & Pitts, 2019) and the influence of cathedral choral training on the lives of choristers (Barrett & Zhukov, 2022).

There has been no comparable study of Austrian adolescent male about either their singing activity or their experiences of voice change and/or related vocal pedagogy. Meanwhile, the professional skillset required of Austrian conductor-teachers has become a focus of attention, with emphasis on training programmes for those who work in schools (Schaumberger, 2019). The current national music curriculum in Austria reflects centuries-old traditions of preparing young male singers for service in cathedral choirs, only to be removed at the point of the adolescent voice change (Schaumberger et al., 2020). Recent versions of the Austrian National Curriculum acknowledge the male adolescent changing voice, requiring music teachers to accordingly adjust their pedagogy and repertoire (Bundesministerium, 2022). Schaumberger et al. (2020) note that the Austrian Choir Association, or Chorverband Österreich, has engaged in analysis of international models of curriculum to inform, promote and enhance singing instruction in schools. Students in Austrian schools report a strong interest in singing activities, owing to their

residence in a country ‘with a strong tradition of singing ... compared to other countries’ (Economidou Stavrou, et al., 2020).

The school in this study was a private male-only Catholic school with a long history of educating clergy, seminary students and, more recently, grammar school students aged 5–17. The school’s origins can be traced to the mid-1800s, with the school website detailing the development of the academy through periods of war, the German annexation of Austria in 1938, economic uncertainty and changing social attitudes. The school has established a lengthy record of academic rigour and currently holds its primary emphases to be music and technology. The highest-level choirs of this school are acclaimed throughout Europe, with multiple annual appearances across the continent. All students are required to take music class, which emphasises the development of musical knowledge and skills through singing. Students may additionally audition for an elite choir or elect to sing with other ensembles. Students who enrol in choirs receive academic credit toward the fulfilment of curricular requirements, though the rehearsals are generally held after the close of school hours. Though this is not a comparative study, the school setting of this study is similar to that of a previous study with adolescent male singers in The London Oratory (Freer, 2016). The London Oratory is a Catholic secondary school organised in much the same manner as the Austrian school, also with renowned choirs resulting from rigorous musical training. One key difference was that adolescent males in The London Oratory were removed from singing during the voice change; most did not return to singing when their maturing voice made them eligible once again. Findings suggested that ‘even experienced choristers sense a loss of control and autonomy during the voice change process’ (Freer, 2016, p. 74), an outcome consistent with a broad array of narrative research with adolescent male singers (see Freer, 2022a).

The narratives generated by this project were analysed to discern similarities and differences between the self-stories of Austrian adolescent males and the perceptions of other young males as recorded in the existing research base. Previous researchers have identified congruence between the perceptions of adolescent male singers and the ‘possible selves’ framework of identity development (Freer, 2022b; Freer, 2015; Markus & Nurius, 1986). The possible selves construct draws on decades of theory and research for its conceptions of hoped-for selves, feared selves and expected selves. Similar to elements of flow theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), research about possible selves suggests that adolescent males need to feel that a possible self is both proximal and attainable for there to be a motivational effect (Freer, 2015). Conception of a possible self requires that an individual either sense congruence between current and future circumstances or recognise that change needs to occur that will affect a future outcome. The emergence of such metacognitive skills, specifically the ability to hypothesise about one’s future, is a hallmark of adolescent cognitive development; it typically coincides with pubertal development and the associated voice change (dos Santos Kawata et al., 2021; van der Stel & Veenman, 2014; Weil, et al. 2013).

## Method

The study protocol was designed to provide understandings of why ‘music and singing is something we do’ and how ‘school music education connects with my singing expertise’. The two research questions, then, were (a) ‘How do adolescent males describe their singing in and outside school?’, and (b) ‘How do adolescent males describe their perceptions of how their current singing activities may influence their singing during older adolescence and young adulthood?’. Both reflected themes from a recent study of European secondary school choristers, including students from Austria (van der Sandt, et al., 2021).

The school’s headmaster gave permission for the researcher to contact the lead choral teacher and arrange for interviews with 12 male adolescent students, ages 11–15 years. The lead choral teacher selected participants who met the study parameters of either having sung consistently in school choirs, had withdrawn from school choir or had not sung in school choirs. All aspects of

data collection and written parental consent/student assent were approved by the ethics bureaus of the researcher's university and the participating school. Participants were interviewed individually, in-person and on-site, with interview times ranging from 16 to 25 min. They also engaged in one of three focus groups: (a) the five students who were continuous participants in school choral singing, (b) the four students who once sang with but withdrew from school choral singing and (c) the three students who did not participate in school choral singing.

Interviews occurred over the course of 4 weeks and followed the semi-structured approach of Holstein and Gubrium (1995) in which broad, unifying questions lead to unique questions as each interview's conversation unfolds. The interview protocol for this study included broad sets of prompts exploring each participant's identity as a singer and musician, awareness of older male singers, differences between male and female singing/vocal development, description of their personal voice change, goals for future singing and awareness of steps necessary to achieve those goals.

German–English translators were present for all interviews, though all participants spoke fluent English as required by the school; translation was needed only for a few phrases in three of the interviews. The translators reviewed and verified the resulting transcripts. Coding followed Braun and Clarke's approach to reflexive thematic analysis (2006, 2021) using Byrne's (2022) thematic mapping model as a guide. A doctoral student at the researcher's institution confirmed the coding, thematic identification and research summaries provided in this report. The doctoral student had completed the university's sequence of qualitative research courses and had full ethics approval and certification from the university's bureau for research with human subjects. All student names are pseudonyms. Each participant referred to themselves or others as a 'boy' or a 'man' and used the pronouns 'he', 'him' and 'his'. These and related terms are reported here as spoken or inferred by the participants, with gender-neutral terms used elsewhere.

## Portraits and Findings

The themes and subthemes in this study were drawn from the narrative comments offered by participants. Subthemes resulted from similar comments that were repeated by three or more participants. The subthemes were then considered for how they could coalesce into larger groupings that reflected previous narrative research about adolescent males and singing. The final list of themes and subthemes is shown in Table 1.

### *Students who sang consistently in choir*

This section profiles five participants. Of these, four have sung continuously in school choirs since they became eligible as treble singers in primary school. Now 14 years of age, Gregory said, 'I started when I was 7, so I've sung for quite a long time.' Each of these students stated that they were involved in individual athletics (cycling, snowboarding, running, tennis) rather than team sports. All four stated that they joined the choir with their friends, that comradery was a central element in their continued levels of interest, that they were focused on the development of singing skills and that they had older male vocal role models. Leon (age 11) joined the choir because it's 'fun' and 'I have friends here'. He likes everything about the choir, especially 'the cool songs I sing with my friends'. Leon first enrolled in music class and met friends there, and then they joined the choir together as a group. Faruk (age 11), though, had his interest piqued by hearing the school choir's singing, 'it was so beautiful, mostly the lower voices'. Faruk and Leon were the youngest participants in this study, and while they each knew something about the voice change, neither seemed to grasp that it would happen to them. Leon said, 'I am just a boy, and I don't think about these things', but added that 'I am a lucky boy because all of my teachers are good. I love everything about school!'

**Table 1.** Themes and Subthemes (listed alphabetically)

Themes	Subthemes
Autonomy	Individual musicianship Individual vs. team athletics Need for individualisation in choral instruction
Control	Desire to know about 'my' voice Desire to manage the voice change process Desire to stop the voice change (loss of the child voice)
Friends and Family	Influence to sing/not to sing Influence to remain enrolled Singing with family members
Masculinity	Desire for/avoidance of stereotypical masculinity Desire for a voice that signifies masculinity
Motivators	Choir Trips Progress through puberty/voice change Need for challenge in choral instruction The sound of 'my' voice
Non-Motivators	Public singing Competing interests and activities
Role Models	Influence of older male singers Being a role model to younger singers

Three of the four specifically referenced the desire for autonomy and control as they developed through the voice change. Sebastian (age 12) recorded his voice twice weekly so he could track the lowering pitch of his voice because 'I knew it would get lower but did not know when. I read a lot about my voice by the internet. I want to know how I can control my voice perfectly.' He continued, 'My voice is much more powerful than before, and I can control the height [pitch] and volume better now. Breath is easier to control, too.' Sebastian added that 'I love being in choir so I can sing as loud as I can ever sing! Many other boys sing very quiet, but our voices are powerful when we sing together.' Sebastian attributed the power to 'control over my singing muscles' and added that 'teachers should know that we want to be loud and strong and powerful. We want to be in control of our voices.' Gregory, by far the most verbose of the group, spoke similarly of control as he related:

If you can't breathe well, you can't sing well. Boys need to know that. I think it would help if teachers started with breathing stuff so boys wouldn't be embarrassed by singing out loud (at first). There was a younger boy who was ready to quit choir. I helped him with his breathing. We focused on his abdominal muscles. We went to YouTube and watched some videos. Then I helped him, and he decided that he could become a good singer. I think teachers think we can't understand what we can do with our voices and our bodies. We could do so much more if they were more specific about singing and how to do it. They just say, 'sing it' and then if it's not right, we have to do it again. We need to learn more. The most important thing should be how to sing, not on the music. You have to learn both, but first you have to learn how to sing and how to use our voices to later sing the music correctly. In my old school, the teacher was just teaching songs, not about singing. All of the boys quit, well, except for me. They got frustrated.

Each of these continuous singers reported singing with male family members. Sebastian sang karaoke regularly at home with his older brother and sister. Faruk noted that he was particularly motivated by older males—singers and athletes—rather than by adults. He enjoyed mentoring

younger males about singing, 'it's like being the chief boss; I like being in charge!' Faruk said he wanted to eventually own his own 'blacksmith firm' so he could show others how to learn the trade. Gregory's 'older brother plays piano and sang classical music in his choir. I wanted to be like him. I think I can now sing better than he could at my age. It's a good feeling. There are other things I want to better him in other ways, too. I'm pretty competitive.' Gregory added that he hopes his older voice is lower than his brother's tenor voice: 'Boys want to sing lower notes because being a bass singer is more like a man. All boys want to be manly, so they try to sing low. I'd be more of a man than him.'

A fifth participant, Elon (age 15) was an enthusiastic choral singer who had withdrawn from choral singing a few days prior to his individual interview. He withdrew not by choice, but because his parents' divorce forced him to travel between two cities and limit time spent in after-school activities. Elon could not recall ever singing with his father. He could not identify an older vocal role model. Elon did report that he 'really liked choir and the teacher. I don't think I would sing in choir if there was a teacher who was not as good.' He related that 'We learned how to use the body to sing the vocals. It can be frustrating you don't have the ability to sing the perfect note. So, it's training the voice.' Elon knew that the voice change was due to puberty and that the vocal folds lengthened: 'I learned this in biology, and I figured it was affecting my voice in choir class.' Elon spoke of the relationship of the voice change to withdrawal, saying: 'Boys often drop out of choir because they don't accept their voices when they change. I think boys are sad when they can't sing soprano or alto anymore.' Elon said that he does not miss his soprano voice, reporting:

I really like my deep voice. I remember when I was a boy that I looked in the mirror every day and asked, 'why doesn't it get deeper?', 'why doesn't it get deeper?' Then, one day, it changed. I noticed because I saw a video of myself in primary school and checked the notes I was singing on my handy [app on cell phone]. I saw that my voice was deeper. That made me happy.

Elon had 'heard the stereotype that "singing is for girls, so boys should not sing in choir."' He reasoned that 'boys won't sing when everyone thinks they should not sing. I don't believe this stereotype is in Austria.' Still, Elon thought that 'choir teachers spend too much time trying to convince the boys who aren't very interested. I would like teachers to pay attention to the most interested or best students so that they do not get bored.' Elon's voice changed quickly over the previous summer vacation, and in the autumn, Elon was assigned bass, skipping alto and tenor. He had learned about reading bass clef notation in the mandatory voice class. He related

I like singing bass because it's easier. It's not like soprano with the [makes rapid succession of da-da-da-da melisma-like sounds] and it's more like slow, like the chords instead of the melody. This is good because then I can control how my voice sounds on the notes because they're slower and longer. My voice is really deep and powerful now. I don't get to use the power very much when I sing, but people are surprised when I do. I say that singing is my superpower.

### ***Singers who withdrew from choir***

Four of the participants had fully withdrawn from school choral singing even though they reported liking individual singing. While there were nuances in their singing backgrounds, each provided the same two reasons for withdrawal from the choir: (a) they had too many competing interests, and (b) they found choral instruction to lack challenge and individualisation.

Stefan (age 15) considered himself a good singer but made the distinction that 'I was a good singer . . . not now. I liked my high voice.' Stefan knew 'a lot of boys [who] dropped out of choir, mostly because they wanted to do other cool stuff, focus on sports, or study more.' Stefan was a

member of the school choral programme for 1 year during which the ensemble travelled to Italy for a performance. All 11 of this study's other participants mentioned the motivating factor of choir trips. Stefan felt otherwise; he did not like having the teachers along: 'I think it's typical of boys to not want to be with their teachers. I did not want to be controlled at all times. I want to control what I do.' Stefan has since become an aficionado of hip hop, but he is frustrated that he lacks rehearsal strategies that would help him improve. He only knows to 'start again' and 'maybe it will get better.' He wishes he'd learned how to practise while he was in the choir. But 'there are many people in the choir, so it's not solo at all. I have more control in hip hop.' Stefan likes hip-hop performers who are 18–20 years of age. He hangs around with older kids, 'mostly 16, 17 and 18,' who share his interest in hip hop. He lacked a group of friends when he was in the choir. Stefan disliked being conducted, with the teacher in charge of decision-making. He said: 'I want to be the producer, the recording artist, the sound engineer, and the marketing agent. I want to be in charge of it all.'

Pascal reported that he liked singing but 'was not a good singer, so I quit' about 1 year earlier, before his voice began to change. Pascal could not say anything positive about his voice. The 14-year-old was frustrated that choir was 'mostly about right and wrong' rather than 'learn this, do it this way, and go practice' as was the case in his chosen sports activities of tennis, football and hockey. Pascal attributed his interest in athletics to his father's career as a professional athlete

He is a professional football player, and he sings. That's cool. My brother sings. My mother sings. We all sing, so it is kinda the thing to do in my family. But singing in a choir was very boring for me. I like singing individually and with my friends, not being told what to sing by choir teacher. So, I quit, but I still sing. Just not in school.

Lukas, age 13, agreed, saying 'when I go to hockey practice, the hockey teacher teaches us how to shoot, and how to use body to achieve a goal.' Lukas was bothered by the sound of his changing voice: 'It was difficult, the high notes, because the sound was very breathy, and my voice got tired very quickly.' He said that his voice cracks made him feel 'out of control', leading him to withdraw from the choir. He said that his rapid growth in height was problematic because his arms and legs grew at different rates; he often lost his balance. This was when Lukas's voice cracked the most frequently. Lukas was bored by the low level of challenge he experienced in choir. He rather wished that teachers taught him about the voice and why, anatomically, it changed. It would have 'been interesting instead of boring all the time.' Pascal similarly reported that he wanted to learn how to use his articulators and resonators to rap more quickly. He occasionally sang with his friend group as they sang along to music videos, often those of German recording artists, mimicking the vocal sounds, dancing and movements of the rappers. The friends all once sang in the choir but had withdrawn. Like Pascal, Lukas joined the choir with his friends, but he withdrew while his friends remained. He said he might have stayed if public performances were not required of singers while their voices were changing.

Jacob (age 13) had a slightly different story. Like the others, he withdrew because the choir was 'way too much. I have too many things to do, like homework and sports.' Jacob is a football player who reported being a good singer and could play the piano. Jacob loved singing old-time rock and roll 'like Queen' with his father in the car. He commented that 'People and teachers say I have a good voice and wonder why I am not in choir. But I say I have not the time', though he thinks 'it would relieve stress, and I have much stress.' Jacob reported learning about the voice change in biology class, but not in music class. He liked that he could 'sing very low' and surmised that it might have been a result of singing with his father so frequently that it had become a 'kind of singing exercise.' Jacob liked that his football teacher found ways to keep him focused 'when I want to talk rubbish and the like.' Jacob related how his football teacher was teaching him how to increase his forward speed while dribbling: 'He showed me like this.' Jacob got out of his chair, invited me out of mine and showed me the technique he wanted me to learn. Jacob loved this little



teaching demo. Later, Jacob said that he wished his music teachers would be as specific with their instruction. Jacob said he wanted to become the Chief Executive Officer of his father's legal firm. He knew where he wanted to attend university and had specific plans for his envisioned future.

### *Students who never sang in choir*

Thirteen-year-old Niklas spoke slowly in a deep baritone voice, carefully articulating each consonant in his words. Niklas related, 'Some days I sing some classical stuff, sometimes pop stuff where I can sing low like Johnny Cash.' Niklas tried to understand how his voice was changing by culling playlists of singers he had heard on YouTube and Spotify. He tried to match their pitches to track how his voice was developing. He ultimately selected Louis Armstrong's 'What a Wonderful World' as his model: 'I like his low notes and the raspy sound. It has its own style. I don't want to sound like every other boy.' Though Niklas liked singing, he did not like to sing in his compulsory music class. He would rather sing privately than in front of his friends: 'It's awkward when the voice cracks.' Niklas added, 'I don't sing in the choir because it is too much time. Plus, it's the public stuff that boys hate.' Niklas's voice 'changed earlier than everyone else in my class. I started to like singing when I got lower notes because I was proud of them.' Niklas recalled that he 'wanted my voice to stay high when I was a boy' and that his 'younger voice was a little more flexible, I think, going easier from note to note. I thought I was a good singer because I could sing the high notes better than the other boys. I miss that a little bit.' Niklas saw that one benefit of puberty in that he was 'still the same person, but in a much bigger body now. I have a lot more muscle now because of sports. Plus, in sports you learn how to use your body to accomplish goals.' Niklas recently saw an older man who looked a bit like him, but that man was 'lazy and slow'. So, Niklas has devised exercise and career plans to avoid that outcome.

Tom (age 11) struggled with vocabulary a few times as he spoke with his unchanged voice. He thought choosing his pseudonym was great fun and giggled each time 'Tom' was spoken in the interview. Like most participants in this study, Tom had clearly learned some elements of vocal technique. He knew enough about the voice to know that vocal resonance parallels the acoustic properties of a guitar. He knew that the vocal folds ('the vocal lips') vibrate to create a sound wave, that the folds lengthen during puberty and that vocal resonance can be analogous to the acoustic properties of a guitar. Tom was confident about his singing, 'but only high notes because I can sing smooth up there.' He felt he had gotten better at singing 'because we exercise our voice in class, but we do not do concerts.' Tom was asked about a hypothetical situation in which his class music teacher announced that the students' parents were invited to hear the class sing. Tom replied: 'Everyone would walk out the door and never come back. Singing in the class is good, but only when it's just us.' Tom did not want his voice to change, saying 'I like singing high notes, and people tell me I sing them well.' As with the other younger participants in this study, Tom had not comprehended that the voice change experienced by other young males would also happen to him.

Tom's passion was drumming: 'My dad bought a drum set for me. It makes a huge sound.' Tom and his father began taking drum lessons together, but the father stopped after a few months. As a result, 'I am a better drummer than he.' Tom loved taking lessons with his father, and he thought he liked the drums because of his father's influence. At home, when practising, Tom and his father encouraged each other. Tom missed that very much: 'It's cooler with my dad than without my dad', quickly adding that 'he's a very good dad, even if he stopped drums.' Tom said he also liked his drumming teacher because they could converse informally, as opposed to the formal types of communication required between teachers and students at his school. Tom felt he 'talks with my drums' better than he could 'talk with my voice'.

Johannes (14 years old) was also a drummer; he participated in a number of solo sports like cycling and skiing. Johannes had a large physique that made sitting in wooden school chairs an uncomfortable experience. Johannes had never sung in a choir because he considered himself to be 'not a good singer, not a singer at all. I play the drums.' Johann was introduced to drumming at the

age of eight by his uncle. Johann recalls, 'I've always looked toward him, and I thought I would be special if I could play like he. It was really exciting the first time we got to play together for the first time.' Johannes could remember that the walls of his uncle's studio were padded and brown and that his uncle wore denim and a light red shirt. Johannes's father was a pop singer, but Johannes was not interested in following that path. Johannes practised his drums at home, not in public, sometimes with drummer buddies who all brought their drums to Johannes's home: 'It is very loud! I love it! I like to show off what I can do on the drums.' Johannes took weekly drumming lessons with very specific guidance from his teacher, who 'notices what I could do better, what I need to do with the sticks to make it better, he shows me, and then I practice it myself at home.' Like the other study participants, Johannes was in the music class at school where 'It's OK to sing in the class, but not in the choir. I would not want to sing for an audience.' Johannes thought young males would be very interested if they had specific instruction about why and how the voice changes, what they will experience and how it will affect their singing. As the interview ended, Johannes turned back with a final thought: 'I am very proud of the choirs at this school, even if I am not a singer in them.'

### Discussion, conclusions and implications

The adolescent males in this study contributed narratives that made this report quite difficult to summarise. Why? Because all participants were loquacious and eager, provided an abundance of information about their singing backgrounds and offered many insights into their musical interests, their motivations and what they wanted to learn from choral music instruction. The detail of the participant stories initially inhibited the analytical crystallisation of themes and findings (Ellingson, 2009; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2008). Even so, the reiterative process of thematic analysis gradually narrowed to reveal overarching alignment with two theories: flow theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Tan & Sin, 2021) and the theory of possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Freer, 2015). This section begins with consideration of these alignments, and then how this study of Austrian singers relates to the previous study of adolescent male singers at The London Oratory (Freer, 2016).

Flow theory describes optimal experiences and the conditions that allow them to occur (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). When individuals experience a state of flow, they report several characteristics; among these are high levels of perceived challenge and perceived skill, a clarity of goals, deep personal involvement, self-directedness, self-awareness and the receiving of immediate feedback (see Freer, 2016). It is impossible to know if the adolescent males in this study experienced flow through their singing, but nearly each participant alluded to many, if not all, of these flow characteristics when they described the experiences and activities they hold as important.

On the contrary, however, these reports also documented several instances when some participants sensed the absence of flow characteristics. Each study participant who had withdrawn from choral singing reported low levels of challenge relative to their perceived abilities. Eleven of the 12 participants spoke of the desire for instructional feedback specific to a task involving the enhancement of skills, whether in singing, athletics, or other areas. Every adolescent male in this study said they liked to sing, but many said that the instruction in choir lessons focused on repertoire rather than vocal technique. This drove away those who were less confident in their singing skills, and it failed to attract those who had not previously sung in school choir. Findings from this study clearly indicate that adolescent males respond positively to vocal/choral instruction that is specific to their desire for mastery, control and autonomy. The perfection of repertoire for performance will attract a small percentage of individuals to the choir, but a far larger proportion of adolescent males is motivated by the development of vocal skills that are practised during the rehearsal of choral music. Though choral music teachers may already hold



this model as they plan their instruction, the participants in this study suggest that teachers make their thinking clear to the singers they work with in choral settings.

The adolescent males in this study not presently singing in school choir did each view themselves as a singer. They liked singing, but they were not in the choir. Those who had never sung in school choir had influential male musical role models, but none of these role models was a choral singer. This finding is consistent with the theory of possible selves, which holds that people develop conceptions of what they hope to be in the future (Markus & Nurius, 1986). One key to conceptions of possible selves is that they are viewed as attainable through a series of steps and actions that can be logically arranged and progressively followed. Role models are essential to the development of future, hoped-for selves (Elmore & Oyserman, 2012); they provide the motivational elements necessary for persistence (Oyserman & James, 2011). In this study, participants who viewed drummers as role models desired to be drummers. Those who viewed pop artists as role models desired to be pop artists. Future research may seek to clarify the sequence of role model development in music. Does an individual's interest precede the identification of a musical role model, or does the presence of a role model prompt the identification of musical interest? Previous research has documented the influence of music teachers as role models (Pitts, 2009). While the participants in the present study found benefit in their school's vocally oriented music class instruction, they lacked exposure to the same instructors in choral settings, preventing the teachers from being identified by these students as choral role models. These findings suggest that the problem lay with the separation of instruction about vocal technique from the choral ensembles' repertoire-centric focus. A combination of vocal/singing instruction and choral performance might have addressed this issue, though many of this study's participants urged a rethinking of the need to perform publicly for audiences. These findings point toward the need for a reconceptualisation of music course content, choral ensembles and required concertising for adolescent males during the period of voice change.

The findings of this study resemble those of a comparable study with male adolescent choral singers at The London Oratory (Freer, 2016), specifically that 'boys with changing voices often perceive a loss of [vocal] control' (p. 85). This leads some to withdraw from choral singing in favour of activities where they can experience greater degrees of personal success. Both studies suggest that adolescent males focus on a limited set of extracurricular activities to maximise their focus and the eventual attainment of greater skill. This reflects research suggesting that the overscheduling of adolescents may limit the positive effects of these activities (Knifsend & Juvonen, 2022). Participants in both studies who sang in choirs each mentioned the motivational factor of doing so with their friends. Those who chose not to sing in choirs reported interest in solitary activities and coursework affinities. Finally, adolescent males in both studies uniformly made requests to learn more about their developing voices, the process of voice change, the technique of singing and what the future holds for vocalists like them.

Most of the adolescent males in this study perceived choir as rigid and formal, reflecting traditions of repertoire- and conductor-centred instruction. This and related studies indicate that this approach is optimal for some young adolescent males, but not for all. The process of the male adolescent voice change can be unnerving for singers who previously experienced success and acclaim when they had treble voices. Many participants in this study suggested that public, choral performance be avoided during the period of adolescent vocal development, with a preference for group singing classes that involve diverse musical genres and incorporate instruction concerning the fundamentals of vocal technique. These participants wanted to sing, including those who were not members of school choral ensembles. Future research in varied school settings might further examine some of the findings extracted from the narratives of these participants, among them the reasons why young adolescent males withdraw from choral singing concurrent with the voice change. If the reason was a dislike of singing, then there might be little for choral teachers to do in response. However, this study suggests that the reasons implicate changes to pedagogy that might be more readily managed by choral teachers. These include that students may desire a

prioritisation of learning over performance, the development of vocal technical skills, the attainment of musical skills that transfer beyond the choral experience and enculturation within a multigenerational community of singers and singing.

As 13-year-old Niklas related, the adolescent males in this study wanted the knowledge and skills that could promote vocal control, and they wanted to enjoy making music together with their friends:

I didn't want my voice to change because I was a really good boy soprano singer. I felt like I was driving a car, and I was in my lane on the road. My voice change felt like I was driving off the road, between the lanes. My friends weren't in the same lane with me, and sometimes it felt that they weren't even on the same road any longer. So, I stopped singing altogether. I miss singing with everyone.

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