

'I Don't Sing': Exploring Perceptions of Selected High School Students

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## Abstract

Many people in our society seem to identify with the phrase, 'I don't sing.' Students who are not active in music classes might identify with similar beliefs. The purpose of this study was to explore perceptions of singing among selected high school students who were identified as 'non-singers.'<sup>1</sup> Research questions were: (a) How do students describe their experiences with and perceptions of singing? And (b) What do students describe as influences on their perceptions of singing? This study employed a qualitative interview design. Purposeful sampling<sup>2</sup> was used to select six students who ranged in age between 14 and 19 years old. A protocol was developed and used to guide one 60-minute interview with each student. These interviews were conducted at two similar high schools in Michigan during January and February 2012. Data was transcribed, reduced, and coded for themes. 'Profiles' were created to tell each student's story and were presented with the unifying headings *My Music, My Family, My Singing, Other People Singing, My Influences, and My Opinion of Singing*. The following four themes emerged as findings: a) students described negative and positive experiences with singing, b) students described negative and positive perceptions of singing, c) students described their musical interests, family background, previous singing experiences, and their overall opinion of singing as influences on their perceptions of singing, and d) students described other elements of their identities as influences on their perceptions of singing.

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<sup>1</sup> Students were identified as 'non-singers' based on lack of participation in choirs and overall singing involvement.

<sup>2</sup> Four students were identified as 'non-singers' by a sibling in choir and two students self-identified to a colleague.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

Ever since I can remember, I have associated myself with singing. I grew up observing my mother sing in public, as well as informally at home. My father never appeared hesitant to sing and the most common forms of making music in our family were singing and playing the piano. I fell in love with choir in high school and chose to pursue teaching music as a career. Unfortunately, it has been my experience that singing is an uncommon cultural element of the school district and community where I teach music. It seems like every other person I talk to outside of my classroom – students and adults – mentions that they ‘can’t’ or ‘don’t’ sing. I am saddened and intrigued by this lack in singing participation and factors that might influence or contribute to it. I ardently strive to counteract this cultural element by advocating that singing is something everyone ‘can’ do if they want to.

It has also been my experience that a lack in singing participation is not specific to my school. Many people in our society respond negatively to questions regarding their general participation in singing. “It is a commonly held belief in much of Western society that we are not all born with the ability to sing” (Richards & Durrant, 2003, p. 78). Some studies (Durrant & Himonides, 1998; Pascale, 2002; Richards & Durrant, 2003; Welch, 1994) address this perspective as a cultural myth. Furthermore, Richards and Durrant acknowledge, “It is culturally acceptable and even cool to claim singing disability!” (p. 80). Such findings are problematic and challenge my teaching philosophy at its core. In our culture, is it acceptable to think of singing as something that everyone *can* do? Do all music teachers believe that everyone *can* sing? Should they?

**Why ‘I don’t sing’?**

With the current popularity of musical and reality talent television shows, one might anticipate a rejuvenated interest in singing among various members of our society (Olson, 2011). Certainly one can speculate the awareness these shows have brought to our lives with regards to the appreciation, critique, and quality of different music and voices. Still, how many members of our society actively participate in singing? More so, how many confidently and proudly admit to it? I suspect that if one were to ask a random person walking down the street, 'Do you sing?' the most common response would be 'No, I don't sing.' Similarly, I find the emphasis with which this response is often exclaimed to be fascinating, and perhaps representative of how some members of our society currently perceive singing.

From random people on the street to professional instrumental musicians, a variety of members of our society often seem reluctant to associate themselves with singing. Why? This reluctance is not universal. In many other cultures, singing is not seen as something you can or cannot do (Durrant & Himonides, 1998; Pascale, 2002; Richards & Durrant, 2003; Wheaton, 1998). "Why, for example, do African people appear not to be ashamed to sing whereas Western people appear to need to be confident about their vocal skills?" (Durrant & Himonides, 1998, p. 65). Is participation in singing primarily an issue of ability?

Mizener (1993), and Wheaton (1998) addressed the issue of singing ability in relation to participants' perceptions and attitudes toward singing and found that in both adults and students, participants with adequate singing ability were no more likely to actively sing. If participation in singing might not be an issue of ability, then what other factors contribute to the choice to sing or not to sing? Other studies discuss such factors as enjoyment (Chong, 2010; Durrant & Himonides, 1998; Richards & Durrant, 2003), general singing interest (Mizener, 1993; Tan & Woei-Chee, 2003), and social or family influences (Abril, 2007; Durrant & Himonides, 1998;

Gates, 1989; Stephens, 2012; Whidden, 2010). Perhaps another thing to consider is whether participation in singing can be related to our society's overall involvement in creating music, or lack thereof.

### **Music Participation in the United States**

The statistics on adults' involvement in creating music beyond high school are staggering. For example, only 2.2% of adults surveyed in 2002 actively perform or create music at least once in a 12-month period (National Endowment for the Arts [NEA], 2004, p. 5, Table 3). Furthermore, only one-third of adults surveyed reported taking music lessons or classes at some point in their lives (NEA, 2004, p. 40). Fortunately, of the adults actively performing or creating music at least once in a 12-month period, 28% are singing (p. 32, Figure 5), which is the highest percentage among other categories of musical involvement.

In his article "Music Participation: Theory, Research, and Policy," Gates (1991) summarizes the following questions frequently asked by music educators: (a) What influences people's attitudes toward musical activities? and (b) How do these attitudes influence people's behavior in joining or leaving music performing groups? (p. 3). Gates explains, "In short, for each participant, new or old, there is an idiosyncratic life context within which music participation fits" (p. 3). One might speculate whether music participation is for everyone. Similarly, is singing for everyone?

By considering perspectives from professionals, apprentices, amateurs, hobbyists, recreationists, and dabblers, Gates (1991) provides important implications and suggestions for future research regarding music participation. For example, "Researchers *must* derive a sensible theory of extracurricular participation that can guide future studies in the area. They should be more attentive to influence processes rather than focusing simply on participation outcomes"



(Brown, 1988, p. 111 as cited by Gates, 1991, p. 4). And so, this study was designed not only to explore negative attitudes and perceptions of singing among high school students, but also to identify influences behind their perspectives. This study was not intended to provide recruitment implications for music teachers. As suggested by Brown, my intent was to understand the *process* of thoughts leading to the response 'I don't sing.'

### **Purpose Statement and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to explore perceptions of singing among selected high school students who were identified as 'non-singers.'<sup>3</sup> Two research questions that helped guide this study were: a) How do students describe their experiences with and perceptions of singing? and b) What do students describe as influences on their perceptions of singing?

This paper consists of six chapters that introduce, design, and report on my first research study as a graduate student. The first chapter expressed my interest in this topic, presented the problem 'I don't sing,' and proposed the need to understand a lack of music participation in the U.S. by way of exploring singing perceptions among student 'non-singers.' The second chapter will provide a review of supporting literature, including research on student perceptions and attitudes and research on 'non-singers,' as well as offer a rationale for this study. The third chapter will detail the overall method used to conduct this study with regards to design, participants, procedure, data collection, and analysis. The fourth chapter will present student profiles gleaned from data, which serve as this study's primary display of findings. The fifth chapter will discuss themes based on cross-student analysis and make connections to previous research that strengthens these findings. Lastly, the sixth chapter will include a summary of the paper, implications for music teachers, and suggestions for further research.

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<sup>3</sup> Students were identified as 'non-singers' based on lack of participation in choirs and overall singing involvement.

## **Chapter Two: Review of Literature**

Research regarding the history and development of singing has been essential to the music education profession (Henderson, 1921; Welch, 1979; Gates, 1989; Phillips, 1992; Mithen, 2005). Consequently, motivating factors behind participation in school, church, and community choirs have been the focus of many researchers (Durrant & Himonides, 1998; Neill, 1998; Turton & Durrant, 2002; Siebenaler, 2006; Sweet, 2010). Additional research has investigated concepts of singing ability and various stages of development among children and adults (Mitchell, 1991; Welch, 1986; Cuddy, Balkwill, Peretz, & Holden, 2005; Taggart, 2005; Dalla Bella, Giguère, & Peretz, 2007; Wise & Sloboda, 2008). While the aforementioned examples have contributed to a vast body of research on singing, this study focuses on perceptions of student 'non-singers.'

This chapter will review literature chosen from the following two categories: a) research on student perceptions and attitudes, and b) research on 'non-singers.' The first category consists of qualitative models in general education, as well as selected quantitative studies from within music education. Studies reviewed under this category were primarily chosen for broad themes relevant to this study. The second category consists of studies involving a variety of 'non-singers,' including university students, future teachers, and general adults. Studies reviewed under the this category were primarily chosen for specific participants and data relevant to the purpose of this study. A rationale for this study based on the reviewed literature will conclude the chapter.

### **Research on Student Perceptions and Attitudes**

Encouraging young people to express what they think or how they feel about certain subjects can be enlightening and also challenging. What are effective ways that other researchers

have gathered such input from students? Because of the design and participants, reviewing qualitative models in general education that focused on student perceptions and attitudes towards a variety of subjects was important to informing my study. It was equally important to consider perceptions and attitudes towards singing from within music education. A review of selected studies in music education focused on student perceptions and attitudes towards singing is also included in this section. A discussion of insights gained from selected studies follow, leading to a review of research on 'non-singers.'

**Qualitative models in general education.** In addition to focusing on studies that investigated perceptions and attitudes of secondary students, my search to find relevant qualitative models in general education involved the following criteria: a) studies that employed individual interviews to gather narrative data, b) studies that presented narrative data as findings, and c) studies that identified positive and negative attitudes and explored influential factors for both. Examples from general education that match this criteria include studies regarding high school fetal pig dissection (Barr & Herzog, 2000), reading in middle school (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001), and middle school physical education class (Nye, 2008). It is important to reiterate that these studies are included because of their methodology and effectiveness to gather input regarding student perceptions and attitudes. Therefore, a review of these studies will focus more on contributions of their qualitative designs, rather than a detailed report of findings.

Barr and Herzog (2000) interviewed 17 high school students from a rural North Carolina school district about their experiences dissecting a fetal pig in a biology class. "Student reactions to dissection are often mixed" (p. 54). This statement justifies the impetus for an in-depth exploration of these reactions. The researchers also acknowledged that due to sensitive animal treatment issues, individual interviews might be the most effective method of data collection.

Based on Patton's (1990) approach, Barr and Herzog used semi-structured interviews to discuss reactions with students after observing the dissection. While 12 students discussed enjoying the dissection and 5 students described negative experiences, having some ambivalence towards dissection was a recurring theme among most students. The researchers chose to use direct quotations during analysis and presentation of findings "...in order to give the flavor of the students' responses" (p. 57). Contributions gleaned from Barr and Herzog include the effectiveness of individual interviews when discussing sensitive issues, the potential for ambivalence despite students' positive attitudes, and also a rationale for using narrative responses from students.

In an effort to explore what makes middle school students want to read in class, Ivey and Broaddus (2001) interviewed 31 sixth-graders from three diverse language arts classrooms. These interviews followed a large-scale survey (N = 1,765) that was distributed to 23 mid-Atlantic and northeastern U.S. schools. The researchers used the follow-up interviews "...to obtain richer data about positive instructional environments," (p. 351). Ivey and Broaddus used findings from survey analysis to inform their interview protocol. This protocol expanded student survey responses regarding the value of independent reading, a high interest in teacher read-alouds, and the importance of having engaging classroom materials. The researchers discussed advantages of these interviews as strengthening survey findings and offering "more explicit information" on students' reading interests and motivation (p. 356). Alongside these advantages of their design, a major contribution from Ivey and Broaddus can be demonstrated in the application of my research questions: The essence of Ivey and Broaddus' study is to understand students' positive experiences with and perceptions of reading as factors influencing their

motivation to read in class. Adversely, will students' negative experiences with and perceptions of singing be factors that influence their motivation to not sing?

Comparisons to physical education or athletics frequently complete the paradox of exploring perceptions and attitudes towards music. Nye (2008) aims "...to explore and describe the help-seeking instances of middle school physical education students" (p. 373). After soliciting volunteers, the researcher interviewed 10 students about their experiences seeking help during physical education classes in an urban Midwestern school district. Two semi-structured interview sessions were developed based on field, descriptive, and analytic notes that Nye collected during her classroom observations and informal interactions with students. Interview sessions concluded with a follow-up 'depth-probing' segment that "...captured the students' thoughts and beliefs about seeking help" (p. 373). Inductive analysis followed, including constant comparative, coding, peer debriefing, and triangulation of the data. The researcher presented narrative findings that described students' reluctance to seek help, reasons to seek or offer help, and whom to seek help from and why (e.g. classmates, teacher). Contributions offered by Nye include the effectiveness of using in-depth interviews and rich narratives to capture and describe student perceptions and attitudes, as well as an overall consideration of her study as "an interpretive qualitative research design utilizing a case study approach" (p. 372).

In conclusion, my review of three examples of qualitative models in general education acknowledged several contributions gleaned from researchers outside of music. Contributions include: the effectiveness of individual interviews when discussing sensitive issues, the potential for ambivalence despite students' positive attitudes, a rationale for using narrative responses from students (Barr & Herzog, 2000); the possibility of understanding students' experiences and perceptions as factors influencing their motivation (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001); the effectiveness of

using in-depth interviews and rich narratives to describe student perceptions and attitudes, as well as consideration of a design based on an interpretive approach (Nye, 2008).

**Responses from music students.** What do music students think and feel about singing? How have researchers in music education effectively gathered this input? In my effort to gather similar input from student 'non-singers,' it has been helpful to look at studies investigating the perceptions and attitudes of music students, specifically with regards to singing. As previously noted, a lot of studies address these topics with frameworks of choir participation or recruitment. Such frameworks are not the nature of this review, nor the purpose of this study. Two quantitative studies were selected for review in this section because the researchers aimed to generally explore music students' perceptions and attitudes towards singing. A review of these studies will focus on researcher findings involving influential factors of these perceptions and attitudes, such as singing ability, grade level, and gender (Mizener, 1993), in addition to school culture and general singing interest (Tan and Woei-Chee, 2003).

By surveying 542 upper-elementary general music students, Mizener (1993) examined students' attitudes towards singing with relation to singing ability, grade level, and gender. A vocal assessment was also employed in which students demonstrated pitch matching and vocal independence by singing familiar songs. Mizener acknowledges that although one might think that singing ability would have an impact on students' attitudes towards singing, she found no significant relationship between the two. Furthermore, "...factors other than singing accuracy may determine a child's attitude toward singing" (p. 244). Grade level and gender showed significant influence on students' attitudes toward singing in Mizener's study. In answering the survey question 'Do you like to sing?' 86% of third-grade participants responded 'Yes' while 33% of sixth-grade participants had the same response. The researcher also found that 87% of

female participants and only 13% of males responded 'Yes' to the above question. Conclusively, Mizener found a decline in positive attitudes towards singing in higher grade levels and males.

Tan and Woei-Chee (2003) explored school culture and general singing interest as influential factors in Singaporean students' perceptions of choral learning. The researchers surveyed 122 high school choir students from two schools with contrasting cultures; one school offered choir as an elective while the other auditioned every student and assigned them to choir. The researchers found significant differences in student levels of participation and general singing interest between choirs at both schools. They concluded, "The results of our study show that school culture to a certain extent influences students' perceptions of learning" (p. 166). A summary of Tan and Woei-Chee's findings suggests that the presence of choice to sing at one school positively influenced students' perceptions with regards to general singing interest and quality of participation.

In conclusion, my review of selected studies from within music education acknowledged grade level, gender, school culture, and general singing interest as influential factors of music students' perceptions and attitudes towards singing. Findings gleaned from researchers include a decline in positive attitudes towards singing in higher grade levels and males (Mizener, 1993), as well as increased positive perceptions of singing in students presented with a choice to sing (Tan and Woei-Chee, 2003).

## **Discussion**

This section reviewed research on student perceptions and attitudes. Qualitative models in general education, as well as quantitative studies from within music education, offered insight on how students think and feel about a variety of subjects. Insight gained from these studies included benefits of using interviews to collect and describe student input, and also identification

of some influential factors regarding music students' perceptions and attitudes towards singing. A discussion of relevant insight will apply researcher findings and suggestions to my study, in addition to acknowledging the need to review research on 'non-singers.'

Some studies found that interviews most effectively communicate the researchers' purpose and intent (Barr and Herzog, 2000; Ivey and Broaddus, 2001; and Nye, 2008), thus providing a relevant defense for using interviews to gather narrative responses from students in my study. Furthermore, narrative responses are beneficial to describing student perspectives of their own experiences (Nye, 2008). This insight was taken into consideration during my analysis of student responses in the form of raw data. *How could I appropriately represent interview responses from students?* Consequently, my decision to create student profiles reflects Barr and Herzog's idea of keeping the 'flavor' of responses. Barr and Herzog found ambivalence among some students who paradoxically expressed having positive attitudes towards the study topic. I considered the potential for conflicting attitudes towards singing. As previously addressed, another important possibility was understanding students' experiences and perceptions as factors influencing their motivation (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001). The idea of a design based on an interpretive approach (Nye, 2008) was also something I considered while developing my protocol for interviews with students.

Music students have varying attitudes and perceptions of singing. Mizener (1993) found a decline in positive attitudes towards singing in higher grade levels and males. Aligning with my second research question, this insight encouraged me to further consider the negative attitudes of males in my study. The researcher also acknowledged that despite demonstrating significant singing abilities, some students reported negative attitudes towards singing. *What if students in my study contributed to this paradox and identified with both 'I can sing' and 'I don't like to*



*sing' statements?* Tan and Woei-Chee (2003) found the most positive perceptions of singing in students who chose to sing, indicating that the element of choice was a significant influence on student perceptions and attitudes. This insight was helpful when considering the attitudes of 'non-singers' who sometimes sing. Main findings of these studies encouraged the consideration of grade level, gender, school culture, and general singing interest as influences on student perceptions and attitudes towards singing. Researchers in both studies suggested the need to continue research that examines singing interest in relation to other influences identified. Although my purpose for this study did not target this relationship, I anticipated findings that might also suggest its need for future research.

My review of research on student perceptions and attitudes has yielded relevant insight from findings and suggestions in selected studies. Such studies were selected for this review because they explored perceptions and attitudes of *students*. Although research on students has been discussed, an important identification for participants in my study needs to be addressed. The purpose of my study was to explore perceptions of singing among student '*non-singers*.' As the first section of this review focused on the first component of my purpose, the second section parallels the second component of 'non-singers.'

### **Research on 'Non-Singers'**

There is a growing body of research on a variety of 'non-singers' and their experiences with and perceptions of singing. Both quantitative and qualitative models have shaped this research. In reviewing examples of literature within these models, participant and topic distinctions have helped organize selected studies into the following sections: a) studies surveying university students, b) studies investigating the perspectives of future teachers, c) studies exploring adult perceptions and experiences, and d) studies proposing a change in the

constructs of 'singer' and 'non-singer.' A discussion of insights gained from selected studies will follow, leading to the rationale for this study.

**Surveying university students.** Surveys have been an effective tool for researchers to gather specific input from many participants. Two survey studies that investigated the singing perceptions and attitudes of university students were selected for this review because of findings yielded. While these findings are explicit, some details about participants are unknown. In both instances, surveys were administered to general university classes without soliciting 'non-singers.' Researchers chose to include students with various musical backgrounds and levels of experience (i.e. K-12 schooling, church music). Such choices yielded responses from a broad base of participants. A review of these studies will discuss positive and negative survey responses and general findings.

Chong (2010) asked 90 university students, "Do you enjoy singing? If you do, why, and if you don't, why not?" via an open-ended survey form (p. 2). A content analysis generated qualitative findings. Main themes included enjoyment of singing (80 responses), enjoyment only when singing alone (7 responses), and no enjoyment of singing (3 responses). Subthemes were also identified, including self-expression (27 responses), aesthetic experience (15 responses), identity/empowerment (8 responses), and spirituality (7 responses). Positive responses included, "I love singing because I can truly express what I feel," and "Singing with others is what makes me want to sing" (p. 3). Negative responses included, "I am very self-conscious, so I avoid singing around other people," and "My voice is hideous and I have terrible sound" (p. 3). Among his general findings, Chong noted the distinction between some participants' willingness to sing either alone *or* with others (but not both), as well as the potential for singing experiences to influence their attitudes towards singing.

By surveying 171 university students about their singing identities, self-efficacy, attitudes, backgrounds, and influences, Stephens (2012) aimed to not only identify participants' perceptions of singing, but to explore predictors and conceptualizations of their perceptions. The survey revealed that 151 participants responded as 'non-singers' and 20 as 'singers.' Also, the most common age group that 'non-singers' reported determining their singing identity was adolescence (ages 11-15), while the majority of 'singers' reported determining this in early childhood (ages 1-5). Regarding self-efficacy, roughly 90 participants responded with having low or medium-low confidence and less than 20 responded with having high confidence. Generally positive attitudes towards singing were reported from 164 participants, including 'somewhat positive' (32 responses), 'positive' (74 responses), and 'very positive' (58 responses). In essence, the majority of participants self-identified as 'non-singers' with medium to low singing self-efficacy yet reported having overall positive attitudes towards singing. The researcher conducted extensive data analyses and found that home environment and singing experiences were significant predictors of participant perceptions of singing. Stephens also found that these perceptions were mostly comprised of two concepts: singing self-efficacy and attitude.

In conclusion, my review of selected studies surveying university students discussed positive and negative survey responses and general findings. Themes of positive survey responses gathered by both Chong (2010) and Stephens (2012) include enjoyment of singing and self-expression, in addition to participants having overall positive attitudes towards singing. Themes of negative survey responses gathered by the researchers include no enjoyment of singing, low singing confidence [self-efficacy], and identification of 'non-singers.' Chong found participants' willingness to sing only alone or only with others of particular interest, in addition to identifying singing experiences as potential influences on participant attitudes. Similarly,

Stephens found home environment, singing experiences, singing self-efficacy, and singing attitudes to be predictors or concepts of participant perceptions of singing.

**Perspectives of future teachers.** One or two music methods courses are typically what general education majors receive during their formal teaching training. These courses focus on musical elements, basic psychology of music, and an overview of music skills that inevitably include singing. Some future teachers have expressed concern in these courses over anxiety (Abril, 2007) or singing inability (Heyning, 2011). Studies investigating the perspectives of future teachers are among the growing body of research on 'non-singers.' It is of interest that many of these studies [and respective methods courses] have a majority of elementary education participants. The two studies reviewed in this section were selected because the researchers explored specific negative perceptions and attitudes: anxiety towards singing (Abril, 2007) and low self-efficacy or perceived inability (Heyning, 2011). A review of these studies will present an overview of relevant aims, methods used, and emergent themes supporting my study.

In a case study of three elementary education majors, Abril (2007) investigated the anxiety participants felt toward singing. Participants were three female students who expressed severe anxiety in a music methods course designed for general elementary teachers. Data collection involved participant interviews and journals, in addition to researcher observations and field notes. Analysis included triangulation of data, interpreting and categorizing responses, and recognizing patterns within and among participants. Individual cases were presented as narratives from the researcher's point of view. Themes that emerged from data were the nature, roots, and beliefs of participants' anxieties. The nature of participants' anxieties was recognized by cognitive, somatic, behavioral, and affective symptoms. Abril revealed that all participants identified a negative experience from adolescence as a root of current anxieties towards singing.

Participants' beliefs about singing offered another dimension of their anxieties. Participants abstractly described singing as being formed 'inside' – literally and figuratively – prompting the researcher to conclude, "This might explain why they found it difficult to believe that singing could be learned" (p. 13). Furthermore, music teachers and family members were described as influences on participant singing beliefs regarding their ability and identity.

Heyning (2011) reported on an Australian singing program that was implemented within an arts elective to further equip general education majors with adequate singing skills and foster confidence to sing alone. Previous classes demonstrated the need for additional training in solo singing. "A strategy was then put into place to improve self-efficacy in their perceptions of singing, singing anxiety, and their singing skill" (p. 9). The essence of this program was action research. The class met four hours once a week for 11 weeks and consisted of 22 students, the majority of whom were primary [elementary] education majors. The singing program employed small group practice, informal performance, and the use of various accompaniments (i.e. piano, CD, a cappella). Data collection involved before and after singing task assessments and interviews, as well as participant journals and notes regarding their interpretations of conversations and observations. Themes referencing responses about singing confidence and perception prior to the program emerged from analysis and were presented amidst narrative comments. These themes are: a) *I just can't sing* (3 responses), b) *I can sing but...* (9 responses), c) *I can sing but I do not have confidence...* (7 responses), and d) *Yes I can sing but I want to...* (3 responses). Upon completing the program, all participants expressed aspects of empowerment with regards to singing skill and ability to more confidently sing in their classrooms.

In conclusion, my review of selected studies investigating the perspectives of future teachers presented an overview of relevant aims, methods used, and emergent themes supporting

my study. Aims of the researchers included understanding future teachers' anxieties towards singing (Abril, 2007) and reporting outcomes of a singing program implemented to develop solo singing skills among future teachers (Heyning, 2011). Both researchers employed interviews, journals, observations, and interpretation among their methods used for data collection and analysis. Emergent themes discussed by the researchers were the nature, roots, and beliefs of participants' anxieties towards singing (Abril, 2007), as well as 'I just can't sing,' 'I can sing but...' 'I can sing but I do not have confidence...' and 'Yes I can sing but I want to...' (Heyning, 2011). The three participants in Abril's study described negative singing experiences, particularly impacting them during adolescence. Conversely, Heyning reported participants' positive experiences in the singing program, focusing on their empowerment and increased confidence. Similar positive and negative singing experiences also appear as themes in stories of adult 'non-singers.'

**Adult perceptions and experiences.** The idea of 'non-singers' singing is quite a paradox. How does the 'non-singer' identification carry from or into experiences with singing? Two studies that shed light on this paradox were selected for this review because the researchers explored adult 'non-singer' perceptions and experiences primarily within singing contexts. Contexts discussed in this review involved church congregations (Wheaton, 1998) and a 'Can't Sing Choir' (Richards & Durrant, 2003). A review of these two studies will address the above question by considering themes illustrated by the participants.

Wheaton (1998) surveyed 54 adult self-identified 'non-singers' from various church congregations to explore their self-perceptions and attitudes towards singing. Survey questions focused on participants' perceptions of their own singing. A second component of her study was assessing and comparing participant singing abilities to their survey responses. Wheaton found

that participants were more critical of their singing than necessary. In most cases, the researcher's assessment was more positive than participants' perceived singing ability. "Apparently subjects enjoyed singing, yet lacked a positive self-perception of singing ability to the point of considering themselves non-singers" (p. 24). The summarizing paradox of Wheaton's study was that most participants reported having 'average' singing ability, were assessed as having significantly 'above average' ability, and yet all self-identified as 'non-singers.' The researcher also revealed that nearly half of the participants reported previous involvement in a school or church choir. Wheaton's findings have propelled other researchers to investigate the constructs of 'singer' and 'non-singer,' in addition to exploring the potential to shift between these two self-identifications (Pascale, 2002; Whidden, 2010). Further review of these constructs will soon follow.

In a case study of the 'Can't Sing Choir,' Richards and Durrant (2003) explored the paradox of self-identified adult 'non-singers' who still yearned to sing. The 'Can't Sing Choir' was created to give 'non-singers' an opportunity to sing together. Through participant observation, questionnaires, and interviews, the researchers collected data focused on participant perceptions. Richards and Durrant used in-depth narrative analysis to yield findings. They found that negative perceptions of singing were sometimes attributed to participants' lack of ability erroneously assumed during childhood. Singing in the 'Can't Sing Choir' modified these negative perceptions. The researchers expressed that participants were "...content with just being able to participate in communal singing for the first time" (p. 86). The researchers also acknowledged the positive role of the choir instructor. In their observations of the instructor making comments such as, "You can't be wrong" (p. 86), Richards and Durrant considered the impact of positive reinforcement on people who have a strong fear of failure when singing.

Subsequently, participants expressed having a successful and encouraging experience primarily because of the instructor.

In conclusion, my review of selected studies exploring adult perceptions and experiences within two singing contexts addressed the paradoxical question, *How does the 'non-singer' identification carry from or into experiences within singing?* Wheaton's (1998) participants carried their identification as 'non-singers' even from the context of singing church congregations. A lack in positive self-perceptions of singing ability was a major theme illustrated by these participants. Richards and Durrant's (2003) participants willingly carried their identification as 'non-singers' into the context of the 'Can't Sing Choir.' The researchers acknowledged the instructor's positive impact on participants as a major theme of their study. Additionally, "Some of those interviewed reported having life-changing shifts of self-perception with the discovery that they can actually sing after all" (Richards & Durrant, 2003, p. 85). As previously noted, other researchers have further explored participants' shift from 'non-singer' to 'singer' and vice versa. The following section will review these essential constructs.

**A change in constructs.** There are a number of directions that researchers have taken their interests regarding 'non-singers.' Attitude and self-perceptions of singing, family or social influences, and singing experiences are among recurring topics in this review. In addition to these topics, Pascale (2002) and Whidden (2010) proposed a change in the constructs of 'singer' and 'non-singer.' Both researchers employed a phenomenological approach and effectively used narrative inquiry to gather and present responses from participants. These studies were selected for this review because of their designs, participant stories, and researcher findings from narrative data. A review of these studies will focus on the researchers' paths leading to their philosophical change in constructs of 'singer' and 'non-singers.'



Pascale (2002) addressed the 'non-singer' phenomenon by investigating the aesthetic and cultural constructs of singing. The researcher conducted two different studies and compared the narrative data, ultimately informing a revised philosophy of singing. Study A asked college students (ages 19-23) "What does it mean to be a singer? Are you one?" (p. 19). Questionnaires and interviews revealed definitive statements expressing participants 'knowing' their entrenched singing ability. One participant's statement changed the course of study A. "Well, I guess it depends on what I'm singing whether or not I'm a singer. When I'm here I'm not a singer. When I'm singing my music in Barbados, I'm a singer..." (p. 29). By further examining this statement, Pascale concluded, "...the meaning of 'singer' and 'non-singer' are constructed by beliefs that are formed by the culture and society in which we live" (p. 31). Study B was designed to understand the singing experiences and perceptions of adults (ages 20-75) offering four different cultural perspectives: Western Slovakia, Puerto Rico, Ghana, and Germany. Interviews with the three non-Western participants revealed inclusive statements such as, "Everyone is comfortable with singing," (p. 44) and "There is no expectation about how we sing" (p. 45). Conversely, the German participant offered excluding statements such as, "If you can't do it well, don't do it" (p. 46). Study B led to Pascale's revised philosophy incorporating the non-Western participants' cultural constructs of singing "...as an activity that is possible for everyone, without judgment, without restrictions, without qualifications" (p. 48). With the addition of these non-Western constructs to traditional Western constructs of singing, the researcher makes a case for both aesthetics to coexist and enhance one another. Finally, Pascale provides curriculum resources for teaching this philosophical shift in the way that singing is perceived in music classrooms.

Whidden's (2010) work documenting a change in 'non-singers' to 'singers' exemplifies Pascale's (2002) philosophy. Whidden interviewed adult 'non-singers' about their negative

singing experiences in school and at home. Twelve participants with an age range of 27-74 years old and various backgrounds (ethnic, religious, vocation) discussed why they self-designate as 'non-singers', a construct Pascale and Whidden both challenged. The second component of Whidden's study was to employ six sessions of singing with participants that were videotaped and transcribed, as were before and after interviews. Throughout the five months she worked with participants in this capacity, Whidden witnessed changes in participants' perceptions of their own singing, as well as their constructs of what [who] a 'singer' is [does]. Upon the study's conclusion, nine of the participants expressed their identification with *becoming* a singer. As one participant explained, "I now think of a singer as anyone who enjoys singing in a group, or even alone, if they want to! Somebody that feels confident enough to enjoy singing" (p. 98). The majority of Whidden's participants described this type of change in construct due to their positive singing experience with the researcher.

In conclusion, my review of selected studies proposing a change in the constructs of 'singer' and 'non-singer' focused on the researchers' paths leading to their philosophies. After conducting in-depth research on aesthetic and cultural constructs of singing, Pascale (2002) incorporated concepts of inclusion with 'traditional' concepts such as distinctions and standards to develop the philosophy that both aesthetics can coexist in the same singing community. Whidden (2010) builds on this philosophy, offering that it is possible to change one's construct of self as 'non-singer' to that of 'singer' through positive singing experiences.

## **Discussion**

By reviewing selected studies surveying university students, investigating the perspectives of future teachers, exploring adult perceptions and experiences, and proposing a change in the constructs of 'singer' and 'non-singer,' meaningful insight was gained that helped

inform my study involving high school 'non-singers.' Insight on 'non-singer' experiences, perceptions, and attitudes towards singing was particularly beneficial for the purpose of this study. Also, recent research on 'non-singers' has effectively used narrative inquiry to gather responses from participants, hence the informed design of this study. A discussion of insight gained from research reviewed in this section will compare researchers' findings and draw themes that strengthen a rationale for this study.

Research on 'non-singers' tends to focus on positive or negative responses involving participant singing experiences, perceptions, attitudes, and influences. Positive singing experiences have occurred primarily in contexts that have been designed for 'non-singers,' such as classes for general teachers (Heyning, 2011; Pascale, 2002), a 'Can't Sing Choir' (Richards & Durrant, 2003), and private lessons (Whidden, 2010). Negative singing experiences have appeared as emotions in the face of singing, such as anxiety (Abril, 2007; Wheaton, 1998) or no enjoyment of singing (Chong, 2010; Stephens, 2012). Some negative singing experiences have even occurred in music classes (Abril, 2007; Whidden, 2010). Positive perceptions of 'non-singers' include recognizing their enjoyment (Chong, 2010; Pascale, 2002; Stephens, 2012) and increased confidence [self-efficacy] (Heyning, 2011; Richards & Durrant, 2003; Whidden, 2010). Negative singing perceptions are sometimes represented in 'non-singer' beliefs about inability (Abril, 2007; Pascale, 2002) or self-efficacy (Stephens, 2012; Wheaton, 1998). Positive attitudes towards singing overall are common among 'non-singers' (Chong, 2010; Stephens, 2012). Negative attitudes towards singing are mostly rooted in 'non-singer' perceptions of their own singing and fear of others' judgment, especially that of music professionals (Abril, 2007, Pascale, 2002; Wheaton 1998; Whidden, 2010). Research has identified that 'non-singers' can positively or negatively be influenced by their home or school environment (Whidden, 2010),

music teachers (Richards & Durrant, 2003), singing experiences (Abril, 2007; Chong, 2010; Pascale, 2002), singing attitudes (Stephens, 2012), and singing self-efficacy (Heyning, 2011; Wheaton 1998).

Studies selected for this review included a variety of researcher recommendations for the future. Stephens (2012) and Wheaton (1998) both acknowledged that 'average' ability [self-efficacy] was not valued among participants. Stephens embraced the 'acceptability' of informal singing by encouraging more education about it. Stephens also recommended further research focused on the identification as a 'non-singer' and relationships between singing self-perceptions, attitudes, participation, and age. Similarly, Chong (2010) and Wheaton suggested exploring the specific influence of singing self-perceptions on attitudes towards singing. Abril (2007) and Chong indicated that negative singing experiences can instill a lack of confidence [low self-efficacy]. Both researchers suggested exploring strategies that teachers can use to help decrease anxiety and insecurity among students. Richards and Durrant (2003) endorsed the creation of more opportunities that offer 'non-singers' an environment they might be more comfortable singing in. Believing it was not enough to *tell* 'non-singers' that singing is a learned skill, Heyning (2011), Pascale (2002), and Whidden (2010) put these suggestions into action. Furthermore, the researchers encouraged elimination of the once-a-'non-singer'-always-a-'non-singer' mentality because "...it is imperative to think about shifting the way singing is perceived and implemented in teaching, particularly for those who believe they cannot sing or that others sing better than they do" (Heyning, 2011, p. 8). In addition to Pascale's pioneering singing philosophy, Richards and Durrant also suggested investigating cultural singing perceptions that "...abandon the term 'non-singers.' The joys of singing should not be reserved for those who 'can' and withheld from those who 'can't'" (Richards & Durrant, 2003, p. 87).

Themes and findings leading to the above recommendations are what contributed most to insight gained from research reviewed in this section. The following points summarize insight strengthening my purpose for exploring the singing perceptions of high school 'non-singers':

- A paradox of 'non-singers' is that many 'can' and do sing (Stephens, 2012; Wheaton, 1998).
- Fear of inability inhibits 'non-singer' singing participation (Abril, 2007; Chong, 2010).
- More opportunities are needed for 'non-singers' to become comfortable with singing (Richards & Durrant, 2003; Stephens, 2012; Whidden, 2010).
- Music teachers have a lasting influence on 'non-singer' experiences, perceptions, and attitudes (Abril, 2007; Richards & Durrant, 2003; Whidden, 2010).
- Some 'non-singers' have developed into 'singers' (Heyning, 2011; Pascale, 2002; Richards & Durrant, 2003; Whidden, 2010).
- A 'singer' is considered a specialized role or talent in some cultures (Chong, 2010; Pascale, 2002; Richards & Durrant, 2003; Stephens, 2012, Whidden, 2010).
- Some researchers are working toward teaching a change in cultural constructs and perceptions of singing (Heyning, 2011; Pascale, 2002; Whidden, 2010).
- Interviews are the preferred data collection tool of researchers who explore singing experiences, perceptions, and attitudes (Abril, 2007; Heyning, 2011; Pascale, 2002; Richards & Durrant, 2003; Whidden, 2010).

### **Rationale**

Reviewing and conducting research lends efficient tools for shaping singing perceptions within our profession. The researchers discussed in this chapter offered support and suggestions for future research that explores perceptions, attitudes, and the phenomenon of the 'non-singer.'

The purpose of my study was to explore perceptions of selected high school students who were identified as 'non-singers.' My rationale will address the support and need for this study with regards to its purpose, participants, chosen methodology, and qualitative design.

In order to shape singing perceptions within our profession, as well as consider evolving values of singing in our society, it is essential for music teachers to explore singing perceptions, and particularly those of adolescents (Abril, 2007; Richards & Durrant, 2003; Stephens, 2012). Investigating why non-choir students do or do not sing has been of particular interest to me throughout my career. I was fascinated more by the value of informal participation rather than any kind of recruitment strategies. Discovering studies that addressed 'non-singers' opened my eyes to purposeful research I envisioned myself conducting. The previous points summarizing insight from these studies are the inspiration of my study's purpose.

Various paths to participants were represented in the studies selected for this chapter. Several of the reviewed studies employed questionnaires or large surveys as the only source to gather participants' perceptions and attitudes toward singing (Chong, 2010; Mizener, 1993; Stephens, 2012; Tan & Woei-Chee, 2003; Wheaton, 1998), while others collected further data by also interviewing selected participants. (Abril, 2007; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Pascale, 2002; Richards & Durrant, 2003). Some studies collected data from already intact classes (Barr & Herzog, 2000; Heyning, 2008), while Nye (2008) and Whidden (2010) solicited participants for their interviews.

Selected studies in this chapter that employed interview methodology all used individual interviews to collect narrative data from participants (Abril, 2007; Barr & Herzog, 2000; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Heyning, 2011; Nye, 2008; Pascale, 2002; Richards & Durrant; Whidden, 2010). Presenting their findings as narratives was a focus in half of these studies (Abril, 2007;

Heyning, 2011; Pascale, 2002; Richards & Durrant, 2003). "Rich narrative often presents some of the most useful data in a case study...individual subjective experiences are considered valid and reliable research evidence in the case study approach" (Richards & Durrant, 2003, p. 81). Whidden specifically addressed the support and need for a narrative inquiry study focused on high school student 'non-singers.'

Additional literature that was not included in this review has greatly contributed to the overall methodology of my study. Gates (1991) summons qualitative research designs by stating, "It is my view that, for the present, the goal of understanding the participation phenomenon is better served through qualitative research designs" (p. 25). Consequently, the goal of understanding 'non-singer' phenomena is benefited by contributions from qualitative research. Creswell (2009) offers support for interviewing participants when observation is not possible or applicable, as in the case of 'non-singers.' Mertens (2007) identifies the purpose of using interviews as, "When you want to fully understand someone's impressions or experiences..." (p. 345). And so, my qualitative journey with participants begins by using a narrative inquiry approach to explore singing perceptions of high school student 'non-singers.'

This chapter reviewed research on student perceptions and attitudes, as well as research on 'non-singers.' Selected studies included qualitative models in general education, quantitative studies in music education, studies surveying university students, studies investigating the perspectives of future teachers, studies exploring adult perceptions and experiences, and studies proposing a change in constructs. A rationale for this study was addressed with regards to the purpose, participants, chosen methodology, and qualitative design of similar studies. Chapter three will detail the overall method used to conduct this study, including design, participants, procedure, data collection, and analysis.

## Chapter Three: Method

### Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore perceptions of singing among selected high school students who were identified as 'non-singers.' Two research questions that guided this study were: a) How do students describe their experiences with and perceptions of singing? and b) What do students describe as influences on their perceptions of singing?

### Design and Theoretical Perspective

Qualitative research seeks understanding meanings rather than quantifying results. Characteristics of studies that apply qualitative design include exploring perceptions and experiences, utilizing descriptive data, and focusing on inductive and emergent processes (Creswell, 2009). This study was rooted in qualitative research upon its conception and employed a basic qualitative interview design. Creswell (2007; 2009) and Patton (1990)<sup>4</sup> offered general resources that informed this design. Being that interviewing was my chosen tool of data collection, Seidman's (1998)<sup>5</sup> text became an essential guide as well. My biggest research goal was to authentically represent students' stories as 'non-singers.' I also anticipated comparing these stories and drawing cross-student themes to enhance my understanding. A theoretical lens or perspective refers to the guiding philosophy of researcher inquiries, identification of participants, and data analyses (Creswell, 2009). My philosophy was rooted in the thought that 'non-singers' are a phenomenon. 'Non-singers' are addressed as a perceived phenomenon in some of the research on this topic (Abril, 2007; Pascale, 2002; Richards & Durrant, 2003; Wheaton, 1998; Whidden, 2010).

### Research Sites

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<sup>4</sup> Patton (2002) is the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the same text.

<sup>5</sup> Seidman (2006) is the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the same text.



Data was collected at two high schools in Michigan. Specifically, interviews took place in music teacher offices at both schools. Demographics of these schools are similar, adding to the trustworthiness of this study<sup>6</sup>. School A has approximately 3,000 students district-wide and about 950 make up the high school student body, with 63% participating in free/reduced lunch. School B has approximately 3,500 students district-wide and about 1,000 make up the high school student body, with 65% participating in free/reduced lunch. The average graduation rate of both schools is 90% and both received an EdYes! grade of a B. All K-5 students receive music instruction at least once a week, and band and choir are offered as an elective for grades 6-12 at both schools.

### **Participants**

There were six students selected for this study: Dylan, Kurt, Tia, Hope, Ken, and Tammy<sup>7</sup>. The order in which these students are presented reflects their general attitudes toward singing. Students ranged in age between 14 and 19 years old, and all but Ken were current high school students at the research sites described above. Ken was a recent graduate from School A and a first year student at a nearby university (his interview still took place at School A). Tia, Hope, and Tammy were students at School A, while Dylan and Kurt were students at School B. Purposeful sampling was an essential path to participants in this study.

**Purposeful sampling.** A hallmark of qualitative research is purposeful sampling. Patton (1990) explains, "The purpose of purposeful sampling is to select information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study" (p. 169). Participants were selected based on the criteria of being a student who was identified as a 'non-singers' This most reflects 'criterion' sampling (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 1990). The idea of finding student 'non-singers' who would

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<sup>6</sup> School demographics were taken from [www.mischooldata.org](http://www.mischooldata.org).

<sup>7</sup> Pseudonyms were assigned upon analysis.

talk to me about singing was initially perplexing. I considered what student 'non-singers' might look like and how I could find them. Some of my choir students' non-choir siblings came to mind. I was familiar with these siblings, mainly from our interactions after choir concerts or elsewhere around their choir siblings, and I knew that most were students at School A.

In an effort to find out which of the non-choir siblings might be 'non-singers,' I asked the choir-siblings. My conversations with the choir-siblings consisted of an overview of this study, determining if they thought their non-choir sibling was a 'non-singer,' and discussing their sibling's potential willingness to participate. Out of seven potential non-choir siblings I was familiar with, five students were recommended by their choir-sibling to participate. One student abstained and four agreed to participate: Tia, Hope, Tammy, and Ken. It was my intention to have equal representation of both genders, therefore, a second wave of purposeful sampling proved useful.

Dylan and Kurt were originally recruited for pilot interviews. These students were solicited through a music colleague at School B who presented the opportunity to selected band students. The identification as a 'non-singer' was the criterion sampling used at School B. Dylan and Kurt emerged as students self-identified as 'non-singers' and agreed to participate in this study. Having a sibling in choir was not a criteria for sampling at School B, however, interviews with Dylan and Kurt revealed that they each had siblings who were involved in singing. This enhanced Dylan and Kurt's relevancy among the other four students. Although first conducted as a 'pilot,' these two interviews provided information-rich data alongside the non-choir sibling interviews. It was also helpful that both of these students could fill male representation needs. Therefore, I believed it was essential to include Dylan and Kurt with the other four participants and not marginalize their stories as being only pilots.

The following table illustrates student demographics, as applicable to this study:

*Student Demographic Information (listed in order of appearance in Chapter 4)*

	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Musical Background</b>	<b>Siblings</b>
Dylan	14	M	9	Band (trumpet)	3 younger brothers 1 younger sister
Kurt	15	M	10	Band, Guitar	1 younger sister 1 older sister
Tia	16	F	11	6 <sup>th</sup> grade choir	1 older sister
Hope	17	F	12	Church singing	1 older sister
Ken	19	M	College	Band (trumpet)	3 older sisters 1 twin sister
Tammy	17	F	12	Informal (piano, singing)	2 older sisters 2 older brothers

### **Procedure**

A protocol (Appendix A) was developed to guide individual interviews with the students. Follow-up questions that evolved were documented in the interview transcripts (Appendix B). The protocol outlined Seidman's (1998) suggestion for a 'three-interview series' method of data collection (p. 11). Seidman's 'series' was condensed into one interview due to time constraints of this study. The first part of the interview explored a 'focused life history' that centered around students' previous experiences with singing. The focus of the second part of the interview was 'details of experience' and aimed to elaborate students' perceptions of their experiences with singing. The concluding part of the interview was a 'reflection on the meaning' and encouraged students to consider possible influences on their perceptions of singing. As suggested by Seidman, interviews were approximately 60 minutes in length.

### **Data Collection**

Consent forms were distributed to students in December, prior to the winter break from school. Interviews were scheduled once student consent forms were collected and initial questions were answered. Interviews were conducted in January and February 2012 and in the

following order: Kurt, Dylan (School B) and Tia, Ken, Tammy, Hope (School A). All interviews occurred over a period of four weeks (January 9-February 3). Data was transcribed within two weeks after the last interview.

### **Validity and Trustworthiness**

Patton (1990) describes enhancing the quality and credibility of analysis in terms of validity and trustworthiness. Creswell (2009) indicates that validity and trustworthiness involve checking for the accuracy of findings among procedures used in this study, as well as approaches used by other researchers. Strengths of this study that contribute validity and trustworthiness include the background of the researcher, and the process of creating this study.

**Background of the researcher.** Investigator expertise (Patton, 2002) and interviewer rapport (Seidman, 1998) were factors contributing to researcher credibility in this study. For instance, I had been the choir teacher at School A for nearly six years at the time, and because of this teaching experience, it was natural and comfortable to converse with the students. I knew Tia, Hope, Ken, and Tammy informally as siblings of my choir students. I firmly believe that my previous interactions with these students strengthened the information-rich data collected from their interviews. My confidence interacting with these students reflected 'investigator expertise.' The success of non-choir students talking to a choir teacher about singing was also enhanced by familiarity and interviewer rapport.

A rapport with students had already been developed from previous interactions typically with their choir siblings. Additionally, rapport is the dynamic built between two people and should reflect respect for one another (Seidman, 1998). It has been my experience that high school students feel respected by adults when some kind of common ground or mutual interest is acknowledged. Aside from the common ground of their choir-sibling, I focused on other familiar

elements that encouraged students to know that I was interested in and respected what they had to say about singing. I intended to establish a rapport based on my appreciation of students' musical tastes and/or memorable music experiences. This intention was reflected in the interview protocol. People generally like to converse over what type of music they like and their experiences involving music. It was my hope that by establishing a rapport based on musical familiarity, students felt comfortable discussing their experiences with and perceptions of singing.

I speculated if student responses were non-indicative of their honest opinions about singing because I was a choir teacher. This was my thinking particularly during my interviews with Dylan and Kurt, of whom I had no previous interactions with. I considered how I could remove my bias as a choir teacher and simply have a conversation about singing. Upon beginning each interview, I reiterated the purpose of this study to the students. I was also aware of my bias throughout the analytical process of transcribing, reducing, and coding data. It was my intention to have the students' stories speak for themselves with minimal interpretation. In most instances, I shared student profiles (Chapter 4) with some of my friends and family members to be sure that bias could not be found in the writing.

**Process of creating this study.** Interviewing and reflexivity were strategic procedures utilized that contributed to validity and trustworthiness in this study. The accuracy of findings depended on the integrity of the interviewer, process of analysis, and overall context of this study.

The role of a researcher-interviewer as an instrument for data collection is an effective element of qualitative research, and it is important to celebrate the relationship between the interviewer and participants as strengthening the trustworthiness of the study's findings.

(Seidman, 1998). As facilitator of the interviews, I was essential to probing for meaning in student responses. Seidman (1998) defends validity and trustworthiness in participant responses by outlining an interview structure that “incorporates features that enhance the accomplishment of validity” (p. 17). Because students established a context for their experiences and perceptions through the interview structure, rich narrative responses enhanced the validity and trustworthiness of the findings (Barr & Herzog, 2000; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Richards & Durrant, 2003). Ultimately, interviewing and collecting rich, descriptive data from students enhanced the validity and trustworthiness in this study.

Creswell (2009) describes ‘reflexivity’ as the researcher’s experience of reflecting on biases, values, and background shaping their interpretations in a study. The timeline of this study induced reflexivity. As previously noted, interviews were conducted in January and February. Written analysis began early-April and was completed by the end of June. Reflexivity was a natural and beneficial component of my intense periods of writing, thus contributing to the trustworthiness of my analysis. Furthermore, my proposal meeting was late-September, kicking off an 8-month period of reflexivity through the process of creating this study. It is important to examine this extended timeline for reflexivity, as it offers an overall context for validity and trustworthiness in the design, analysis, and findings of this study.

### **Analysis**

In addition to Patton (1990), Seidman (1998), and Creswell (2007; 2009), Strauss and Corbin (1990) provided a helpful resource with regards to the process of analysis in qualitative research. Although this study did not reflect a grounded theory approach, some general analysis steps were appropriately applicable. This section will detail analyses, including transcribing,

reducing, and coding the data. A diagram illustrating and summarizing these analyses will conclude the section and lead to a wrap-up of this chapter.

**Transcribing: Preparing the data for analysis.** All interviews were recorded using GarageBand software on a personal MacBook. The first step in organizing the rich data collected from these interviews was to transcribe all six audio recordings as soon as possible. Though clearly necessary, this was a time-consuming task. Transcribing each recording involved slowing down the audio enough to carefully type the interview verbatim. I used the protocol document as a template to type in the student responses, as well as add any emergent questions and dialogue. Each recording resulted in a corresponding 'filled in' protocol document (Appendix B). These documents were visual representations of the recordings. Reflecting on data as I listened to the slower recordings and transcribed each interview was the impetus for my next step in the analytical process.

**Reducing: Peeling back the layers of understanding.** It is no secret that figuring out how to analyze narrative data is considerably ambiguous or even daunting. There is hardly an exact science to it. Seidman (1998) offers, "The researcher must come to the transcripts with an open attitude, seeking what emerges as important and of interest from the text" (p. 100). Here I had pages upon pages (approximately five per interview) of data to finally look at and little idea how to start analyzing it. My advisor encouraged me to consider meaningful ways to tell each student's story. I envisioned student profiles ala Studs Terkel (Seidman, 1998), but knew there were important steps between here and there. I went with what made the most sense: simplify what was in front of me.

Simplifying this data involved 'reducing' each transcript down to the most important information (Wolcott, 1994). "In reducing the material interviewers have begun to analyze,

interpret, and make meaning of it” (Seidman, 1998, p. 100). My goal was to have a one-page write-up of bullet points for each student; responses that jumped out to me as a reader, as well as particular differences and commonalities among students (Appendix C). This simply organized write-up provided a list of what I first thought of as ‘identifiers’, and later as ‘codes’ or preliminary themes to be analyzed after the profiles were pieced together. I knew that if I was going the profile route, I needed to have something to unify all six narratives. In essence, there were two immediate tasks ahead: a) selecting [marking] and reducing the interview text, and b) determining an appropriate structure to present students’ stories (Seidman, 1998). The above tasks are termed by Patton (1990) as *case analysis* and *cross-case analysis*. Herein lies the nature of coding.

**Coding: Preparing for presentation and interpretation.** I first undertook the task of case analysis. Patton (1990) suggests, “...begin with individual case studies where variations in individuals are the primary focus of the study” (p. 376). Seeing that the purpose of this study was to explore perceptions of singing among selected high school students, Patton’s suggestion seemed appropriate. Acknowledging demographic information such as age and grade, any type of previous or current music participation, and also specific music preference was at the top of the list of each student’s one-page write-up (Appendix C). This information came from the first few questions that were asked in the interview. I felt this was meaningful information because it put into perspective the student’s subsequent responses. Similarly, key bullet points followed in the order the responses were typically given. This made scanning the one-page lists for differences and commonalities easier because students’ opinions could be read even more linearly. I also felt that using bullet points to organize key case study data in list form would be more efficient than writing traditional paragraphs.

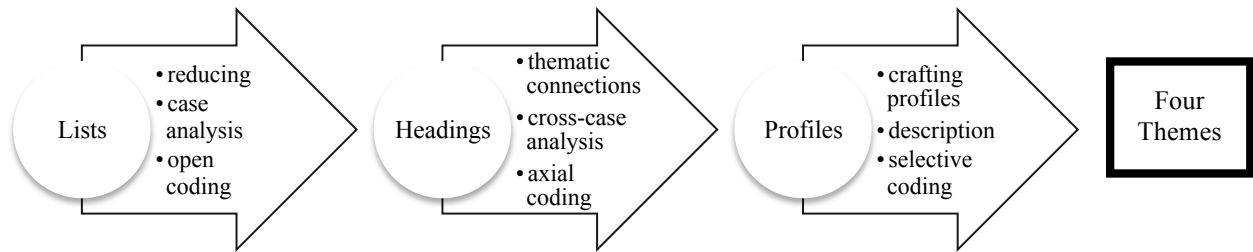


The initial step of organizing one-page lists with key bullet points also aligns with what Strauss and Corbin (1990) refer to as *open coding*. “Open coding is the part of analysis that pertains specifically to the naming and categorizing of phenomena through close examination of data” (p. 62). This critical step involved summarizing, but more importantly ‘conceptualizing’ text from each transcript. It was helpful to have the following goals in mind: a) be an objective voice that presents a synthesis of the rich data collected from all six students, b) draw similarities, differences, and other distinctions between students in an effort to organize themes, and c) use the research questions to help guide the analysis of this data. Some of the bullet points were direct student quotes, while others were conceptualized labels like ‘family influences’ and ‘friend influences.’ After these clearly organized one-page lists were created for each student, I began the task of cross-student analysis.

The second task in my process of coding for this study was to determine an appropriate structure to present the students’ story. This involved grouping previously organized key bullet points into headings that would unify the presentation of narrative data. Strauss and Corbin (1990) explain, “Categories [headings] have conceptual power because they are able to pull together around them other groups of concepts or subcategories” (p. 65). I previously refer to this task as *cross-case analysis*, which is inherent to Strauss and Corbin’s term *axial coding*. ‘Axial coding’ and ‘cross-case analysis’ are terms that designate making connections between categories of data. With regards to organizing interview data, Seidman (1998) addresses this task as making ‘thematic connections’ (p. 107). And so, the following headings with which to unify data within the student profiles emerged from the reduced one-page lists: My Music, My Family, My Singing, Other People Singing, My Influences, and My Opinion of Singing.

The six headings were developed through 'inductive analysis,' meaning that they came from data collected during the interviews with students and were not conceived of beforehand (Patton, 1990). These headings are the culmination of everything discussed thus far in this chapter, naturally providing an appropriate structure [framework] in which to present the students' stories. The next step was to try to fit as much of the narrative data into a corresponding heading. Seidman (1998) refers to this as 'crafting a profile' and suggests presenting data in the order it was collected. I strived to do this, however, I felt that it was more important for the data in each heading to be a cohesive synthesis of students' perceptions of singing. In general, the order in which the headings are presented in each profile roughly aligns with the design of the interview protocol. I went through each completed protocol document (Appendix B) and plugged student responses into what I thought was the most appropriate content-based heading. This also involved putting raw data into context by eliminating the protocol questions (e.g. bracketed text) and consequently, beginning to interpret each student's story.

What Patton (1990) refers to as 'description' is reflective of Strauss and Corbin's (1990) term *selective coding*. "The purpose of the description is to take the reader into the setting" (Patton, 1990, p. 31). Straus and Corbin use *selective coding* to refine and develop the interpretive task of telling someone's story. The following diagram illustrates and summarizes the analytical processes used in this study:



### Organization of Findings

The next two chapters reflect my analysis of data in the form of student profiles and emergent themes. Chapter four will present the stories of Dylan, Kurt, Tia, Hope, Ken, and Tammy through the following unifying headings: My Music, My Family, My Singing, Other People Singing, My Influences, and My Opinion of Singing. Chapter five will discuss four emergent themes based on cross-student analysis and make connections to previous research that strengthen these findings.

## Chapter Four: Student Profiles

This chapter is centered around narrative data collected from individual interviews. In an effort to “re-story” data, unnecessary words and punctuation have been eliminated, such as ‘like’ and various transcribed ellipses (Creswell, 2007). The following six profiles are presented in an order based on a continuum that reflects the students’ attitudes toward singing. Dylan, the first student presented here, expressed the most criticism of other peoples’ singing, whereas Kurt, the second student presented, expressed the most criticism of his own singing. Similarly, the third student presented here, Tia, expressed a moderately negative attitude towards her own singing, but a positive opinion of singing overall. Hope, the fourth student presented, also expressed an overall positive opinion of singing as well as a hesitant confidence about her own. Finally, the last two students presented – Ken and Tammy – affirm their singing ability with many ‘I can sing’ statements. Each profile begins with an introduction to the student and organizes their story with the following headings: My Music, My Family, My Singing, Other People Singing, My Influences, and My Opinion of Singing. A discussion of students’ responses that reflect the research questions concludes each profile.

### **Dylan – 14 years old**

As a high school freshman with a strong instrumental background, it didn’t take long for Dylan to tell me how he felt about singing. When I introduced myself as a choir teacher, he replied with, “Oh, a singer. I see...” and was quick to explain, “People can sing as long as they’re good, but if they suck they need to stop.” Dylan plays the trumpet in band. He also composes for various instruments on his computer. We talked about his four younger siblings, three of whom are involved musically (e.g. band, piano, and singing). We also talked about singers he seems to admire, including his Aunt and her son, a friend and choir student named

Annie, and Mrs. Morris, the high school choir teacher. Despite his admiration of these singers, Dylan clung to his instrumental roots throughout the interview. This is profoundly demonstrated by his statement, "We play instruments, not vocal cords." Consequently, it was particularly interesting at the end of the interview when he brought up starting a barbershop quartet. Here is Dylan's story:

### **My Music**

I compose music by myself. I love saying that...it makes me feel special. It's just a thing I have on my computer. I made a duet between clarinet and trumpet, and now I'm making an ensemble. I give lessons to some of my younger friends. I haven't listened to the radio in like two years, because I listen to classical music all the time, like band music, because I have no life (*laughs*). I guess country is my favorite music...Carrie Underwood, she's always been special for some reason. I read that she played an instrument, so I was like "Yeah!" I like the rhythms [and] how she ties in the drum part. Most of the time in country music or really any music not classical, they don't have good drum parts. It's really boring and stupid, but she kind of lets them have a little more freedom to do what they do. I love "Phantom of the Opera." I like it because of the organ...it's loud [and] it gives you chills. I listen to how in tune it is. I also like the Marine Hymn. I like instrumental music not because it has trumpets in it, but because of how the band is together and how nice it feels. I can hear all the instruments and it sounds really nice together. I just want to hear it again and again.

### **My Family**

I have four siblings. Three brothers and one sister. My sister's in band [and] she plays the flute. I don't like flute. My four year-old brother likes to play the piano with

me and he likes to sing, too. My seven year-old brother sings. He loves to sing. He'll sing any song that I'll play. He can sing *Ode to Joy* pretty good and the fight song. I told him he has to choose...if he's in choir, he has to watch it. I guess theoretically I'm encouraging about my brother's singing. In a way I am but in a way I'm not. I don't want him to be in band *or* choir. I want him to go into sports. I don't want to say he's not good because he's only seven [and] he has the potential, but I don't know if he'd be up for it [band or choir]. I don't want him to go into it and then drop out, and go "That's my brother, the dropout." I told my sister that she's not quitting either. My five year-old brother doesn't really like music – he's sports. See, my step-dad's not a music man...he doesn't get music. He never has. You ask him to play something and he goes (*shrugs shoulders*). He doesn't get piano. He doesn't get anything. He doesn't sing either. He was mad when I told him I was going to be in band because he wanted me to be in sports. "Sports not band." He wanted to be on the field, not halftime. My real dad got a major in music, but he doesn't teach music. He's a lawyer, which makes no sense. He doesn't sing, but once in a while [he'll] pick up my trumpet because that's what he use to play... but not really anymore. He just doesn't have the passion anymore like I do.

### **My Singing**

I guess in a way I feel uncomfortable singing. Sometimes it's the people's look on their face after you get done singing. They're like, "Oh my god!" and then other times it's "Oh, ok, you're good." I don't think I'm good. I don't know where I get it...I just am. We have to sing [in band] when we first get a piece of music, because when we're at festival for sight-reading, you play it last. You sing through it first...like four pitches maybe. This year I didn't go caroling with my family because I'm like "I don't want to

sing, I'll play my trumpet." I guess I have sung with my brother. I was trying to teach him a little bit of piano...just a scale (*half-sings: CDEFGABC*). He had wanted to sing it, so I was like "Repeat after the piano," and he would sing. It was sort of working out, [but] he figured it out for himself. I know he can sing at least two scales. I wasn't singing, I was just hitting the key. *He* was singing. I wasn't like, "Sing after me." I hum and whistle to classical music, but I don't do anything to modern music...I just listen to it. People are like, "I bet you're an amazing singer," and I'm like, nope. I get told I'm good a lot. Singing lessons might help me feel like I can sing. When I go low I tend to go really flat...it's hard to control it. If you're like 30 cents sharp, you're not going to sound as amazing as the person next to you who's probably in tune. Can you tune your voice? Wouldn't it just be naturally flat or sharp?

### **Other People Singing**

I've heard students tell other students they suck [at singing]. In fact, I've told people they suck at singing (*laughs*)...so that they will stop. Today I yelled at a person in band because he was singing and conducting and he sucks. He really sings and I'm like, "Go join choir!" I sort of like to listen to other people sing...certain people. If you're a beginner, I ain't listening to you. If you're, like, professional, I probably won't listen to you. But if you're a person I like and you're a singer, than I probably will listen to you. In music class, I sit next to [my friend] Annie and we had to sing. She was singing and I felt terrible because I was just suckish...I'm like (*sighs*), "I don't like this. I'm not as good as everyone else." I've heard music teachers go, "You suck, don't sing!" Mr. Russell, he's an elementary music teacher here. He's one of my mentors. This particular person was purposely screwing up though.

### **My Influences**

I had an Aunt who was an opera singer. She was amazing. She died. Her son took over and he's a really good singer. He does opera and jazz, or something like that. I'm not that close with him. He is amazing though. I picked the trumpet because this woman who was like a grandmother to me played trumpet and she died, so I kind of picked it in honor of her. I always loved how high she could go. It was amazing. I wanted to be like her one day. Mrs. Morris, the choir teacher, she's really good. Some days I wish I could get pitches like she does. I think I've heard her sing at least like six octaves...perfectly. I can't imagine going up that high. Annie [my friend] is amazing. She gets all the solos and stuff [in choir]. She has influenced how I feel about singing...good because she's so good but bad because I think I'm bad. Maybe because I'm around some good singers like my Aunt and my cousin, but maybe also because I'm in band and have a pretty big ego. I feel like band is better and choir is just here (*middle motion*) but band's like way up there (*high motion*). We [my choir friends and I] argue about singing because I'm not a big fan of singing, and they're in choir so they love singing.

### **My Opinion of Singing**

I have kind of a mutual opinion of singing, because I think it's good that some people can sing, but then I don't like it in a way. It's kind of like mixed feelings. You're a choir teacher. Singing is what you do every day, but did you play any instruments? I appreciate good singing. Not singing in general, just good singing. I HATE to sing. I don't want to say because I suck at it. Maybe it's because I just don't like it. I don't know it's confusing. I believe there are some people who can do it and then some people who should just talk the rest of their lives. God gave you bad vocal chords, well you're going



to have bad vocal cords. I respect singers that are good and teachers that can actually sing. I disrespect people who suck and people that just need to be quiet. I think most of my band friends feel the way I do, because I don't think they like singing. I don't think some choir kids like singing either, which makes no sense. Most people in my family like to sing because they're in the choir at church. There are some adults at church that hate singing, and then there's others that love it. My friend wants me to do a barbershop quartet. His grandpa was in one and he wants me to be in it. In a way I want to but in a way I don't. I know! A barbershop quartet! It's funny though. I don't know if I want to do it because it's the whole process of actually singing. I think they're amazing. That's the only singing that I look up online...barbershop.

### **Discussion**

When asked to describe singing, Dylan responded, "Singing is a way that you express your musical feeling through voice." He also stated, "I'm very picky with singing." Dylan described a singing experience with a friend in class by explaining, "When someone's really good and you're really bad and you're singing right next to each other it's like, *I don't want to sing. You're good, I'm bad.*" Another singing experience we discussed was caroling with his family. "I went twice with my Aunt. The first experience was good and the second one was bad. We had people open the door and just shut it again." These responses help answer the first research question: How do students describe their experiences with and perceptions of singing. As previously acknowledged, Dylan seemed to strongly identify with being an instrumentalist, and he highlighted some of the discourse between his classmates in band and his classmates in choir. Dylan's description of this discourse is an important element of his perception of singing,

as well as a possible window into the second research question: What do students describe as influences on their perceptions of singing?

“It’s about every day – band vs. choir – choir kids think band sucks and band kids think choir sucks. They don’t like how we sound because we can get as loud as we want. We don’t like how they sound because they’re always bad and off-tune and rude about it.”

Intonation seemed to influence a lot of how Dylan perceived people’s singing, including his own. When he mentioned that he liked Carrie Underwood, he followed by saying, “She [Carrie Underwood] is always in tune. I like that.” He also described a male composer’s intonation by stating, “He can sing every song he ever wrote perfectly in-tune. Tuneness is a very important thing to me, because if you’re not in-tune, you suck.” Dylan’s family played a role in shaping his perception of singing as well. “My Aunt...she was so good and I’m so bad.” He also explained, “I’m not like some people in my family...they just listen to the words. I listen to the actual music! Most people in my family like singing.” Still, Dylan’s instrumental identity seemed to be the biggest influence on his perception of singing.

“Certain [band] people – like the real addicts – instruments are their thing. That’s why whenever we sing, there’s always someone that says, ‘Hey that’s why we’re in band...because we suck at singing.’ Yeah, I think most people in band think they can’t sing. I don’t know. They just think they do.”

### **Kurt – 15 years old**

Similar to the previous student, Kurt is a sophomore band student, although it might be difficult to decipher his ‘traditional’ instrumental roots from my conversation with him. Kurt and I talked more about rock music and playing guitar. He proudly exclaimed early on, “I’m like a rock encyclopedia in my mind.” In fact, Kurt never told me what instrument he played in band.

When I asked him if he was involved in any music outside of school, he responded, "I taught myself guitar, does that count?" and proceeded to tell me how he started playing about two years ago. Kurt talked a lot about his dad. We discussed their vast array of musical interests and abilities. Kurt was one of only two students who described being told that he 'can't' sing. "Oh yeah, my sisters...they hear me mumbling along to ACDC and they're like, 'Kurt! You can't sing!' It's always been that way." At the end of the interview, I asked him if he had ever had an experience that made him feel like he *could* sing. His reply was, "I don't think there will ever be an experience like that." Here is Kurt's story:

### **My Music**

My dad had an acoustic guitar in the basement. I picked it up and started plucking some strings, trying to make some weird rhythm out of it. I had no idea what I was doing. For my fourteenth birthday, my dad got me a guitar book, some picks, and a tuner. So I tuned up his acoustic and taught myself how to play. I have one acoustic guitar and three electric guitars. I got my Les Paul for Christmas this year. My number one favorite [music] is ACDC. That kind of gives you a feel for what I like to listen to. My dad's a fan of them. I kind of grew up with it...anyone from the 60s, 70s, and 80s. It sounds good. I like Tom Petty, too. I like him for his songs and don't really pay attention to his sound. I like religious music, also. At my current church, I usually play the guitar with the choir. Our Vicar has me come over every once in a while and play my guitar with him. Me and my dad have only been going to our church for a little over a year. We go to a Lutheran church – it's a little traditional but we do some more contemporary stuff, too. I've been in probably almost every single Christmas play up until I was eight. I was a reader for the Christmas play this year [and] I played the drums.

### **My Family**

As a kid, like when I was four, I was in the garage with my dad. Before I switched to classic rock, I use to listen to country. My dad always had the country station on in the garage. Me and Dad have big debates. There's a show called *That Metal Show* on VH1 Classic. They have this thing called the 'throw down' where they list two people and they see which one's better. We always go for a brawl on who's better. They [the show] ask which album is better, better guitarist, etc. I like more foreign rock, like Scorpions or ACDC. My dad]likes to go more American. He's more of a fan of Van Halen or Stevie Ray Vaughan, or The Eagles. Those are all great bands, too, but he prefers to listen to those than the other foreign British invasion people. My dad can't sing to save his life (*laughs*). I remember me and my older sister in a play at my old church...I was probably about five or six. Me and my little sister and a group of other kids in our church all sang "Silent Night" and "Away in a Manger." My little sister's pretty good [at singing]. I don't remember if I liked it or not. I was grumpy as a kid. I remember my mom telling me that I was a sheep for one of the plays, but I wanted to be Joseph, so I was grumpy. My mom was in the church choir while I was growing up. I remember her singing a couple church songs in the kitchen while she was cooking supper. She doesn't sing as much as she use to. After we left our previous church, she just stopped.

### **My Singing**

I always new it [singing] wasn't my thing (*laughs*). I know I can't do it [sing]. When I was little I didn't like to sing. I don't really like to do it because it's too much to handle. Second of all, I can't do it (*laughs*). People like Bruce Dickenson or Rob Halford...no way do I wish I could sing like them. I don't think I ever could. I'm pretty

sure every opportunity I had [to sing] was optional. In elementary school when they set up these concerts to sing for our parents, I think I only went to one. I was in third grade. I was in the back, so I really didn't care. It wasn't too torturous. I didn't hate it but I didn't really have much fun. Yeah, I sing along to music I listen to by myself. I don't really enjoy it...well, I wouldn't...*(laughs)*. I don't mean to do it [sing], but it's kind of like muscle memory. Songs that I know that I listen to on a regular basis pop up [and] I just start humming and singing along with the lyrics.

### **Other People Singing**

I like to listen to other people sing. I like the way Rob Halford sings...he's really good. He's the lead singer of Judas Priest. Adults who know they can sing...well, sing. Like in the choir that I play my guitar with. They're all adults who know they can sing and been told by people they can sing, so they feel more comfortable [and] confident singing around people. I don't think I have ever heard anyone at school tell someone they can't sing. I know I've told someone they're bad at singing in a joking manner. It was not bad, just sort of mediocre. I mean, they weren't bad but they weren't good.

### **My Influences**

I don't know...I've just never really caught on to singing. To be honest, judgment is why I think I feel the way I do about singing. I guess in a way my sister's involvement in choir has impacted the way I feel about singing. I know when she messes up it drives me insane. Like when she doesn't get lyrics right to a song I correct her. She sings fairly well though. When she's really driving me crazy, I want to tell her that she's bad. A lot of people think she's pretty good though.

### **My Opinion of Singing**

My opinion of singing is neutral. When I tell someone they're good at singing, a lot of people my age repress themselves and say they suck. To feel more confident, I would tell people my age to hear themselves [or] record themselves singing and let them be the judge. I don't think that most adults feel the way I do about singing.

## **Discussion**

When asked to describe singing, Kurt responded, "Someone who goes out in public to do it." Another response that helps answer the first research question came when Kurt affirmed his lack of interest in singing by alluding to the opportunity to sing in the church play this year. "They would have let me sing, but I didn't want to." These responses address Kurt's perception of singing. With regards to his experiences with singing, Kurt explained, "I know from past experience that I can't sing...from what my peers told me and from what other people have told me." Kurt's mention of his peers is a significant memory of his singing experiences. He expressed a camaraderie based on singing inability among his friends. "Me and all my friends are bad at singing. Sometimes we'll just yell out lyrics to songs no matter what it sounds like." Although friends offered relief of his criticism towards his own singing, Kurt's family seemed to be a major influence on his perception of singing as well.

As previously stated, Kurt talked a lot about his dad. He described similarities to his dad with an endearing sentiment, therefore, when Kurt commented, "My dad and I both sound about the same singing," I wondered if he meant that as a positive or reassuring statement. Likewise, Kurt also compared his singing to that of his neighbor's, and notes his sister's acknowledgment that both boys cannot sing. "My sister tells my neighbor he can't sing. Me and my neighbor are pretty much the same person." Kurt's correlation here is fascinating to me. What I found particularly fascinating in my interview with Kurt was a statement he made describing his fear of

judgment. "Most of the time when I'm singing a song, people will stop me and start criticizing, saying I'm the most terrible voice in the world...something like that." I immediately was concerned as well as focused on how to appropriately probe for more details. Fortunately, he continued, "I've never heard anyone say that, but it's fear of judgment." This fear of judgment seemed to really influence Kurt's perception of his own singing.

### **Tia – 16 years old**

Tia is a high school junior who has spent more time on the soccer field than in any music classroom. Tia feels she identifies more with being an athlete than a singer. She tried choir in 6<sup>th</sup> grade and decided, "It wasn't for me." Her older sister, who has been in choir throughout middle and high school, is the opposite. Tia explained, "It's kind of like that's [singing] her [my sister] thing and this [athletics] is my thing." Tia expressed a deep appreciation for other people's singing. In addition to her sister, we discussed singers like Jason Aldean, Taylor Swift, and the character 'Rachel' on *Glee*. Tia also enthusiastically described music from her favorite band, The Script. Strategically presented third in this chapter, Tia's profile is where the continuum changes to an overall positive attitude towards singing. Although Tia claimed singing inability, she happily admitted that she likes to sing. Here is Tia's story:

#### **My Music**

I like Jason Aldean [and] Taylor Swift. I like country music because I can relate to a lot of those songs. I love country music, but my favorite group is The Script. They're like Maroon 5. I like The Script because it's calm...it's something to settle to. You can understand their music and follow along with it. It's not chaotic. The lead singer of The Script...I really like his voice...he's got a calm, mellow tone. Me and my sister had this

track when we were young – “The Wedding Song” – that’s what we called it. “Going to the chapel (*speaking in rhythm*)...” It’s an oldies song.

### **My Family**

My Aunt is actually a musici- (*slight pause*) well, she plays guitar and she writes her own music. Me and my sister would sing along with her. When my sister use to be in middle school, she was kind of a quiet singer and she never really sang around us. In high school, she’s singing a lot more...she sings at home now. She’s a lot more open. I’ve never really listened to her sing until maybe last year or so. Recently our [my sister and I] biggest music talk was when she was doing the talent show. She was trying to figure out how she could go from a high to a low range to match the other girl’s voice.

### **My Singing**

I did choir in 6<sup>th</sup> grade as like a ‘try it out’ type of thing. It wasn’t for me, but, I did sing back then...at least tried to. I kind of did it [choir] because my friends were doing it, but then I got more involved and I had a solo. I didn’t want to do it really. Actually, it was a duet. I dreaded it. We [my sister and I] always sing Christmas music around Christmastime...singing in the car just when we’re driving to school, and with my Aunt. The fact that I’m not good I guess makes me uncomfortable to sing. I’m more of the athletic type, so that’s how I excel...and good grades. When it comes to singing and being the center of attention where people are looking at you and expecting you, singing doesn’t come out the way that you want it to I guess.

### **Other People Singing**



I like to listen to other people sing. I enjoy it! I admire my sister's singing abilities. I've seen her improve a lot. I'm a big *Glee* fan, and I love Rachel's voice. I think she is the best singer ever. Yes! Yes, I do wish I could sing like her (*smiles*)!

### **My Influences**

My sister's involvement in choir has impacted how I feel about singing in a good way. Seeing how much my sister cares about it has had the biggest impact on how I feel about singing. It's become her thing...going to the concerts, seeing how involved she is, how much she talks about it in and out of school. My Aunt has too, because it's so important to her. It's not just music to her...it's a lifestyle. My friends are not the type of friends who have influenced how I feel about singing. I hang out with my soccer friends and we're all athletic.

### **My Opinion of Singing**

I have a positive opinion of singing, because I'm around it and it'd be hard to think of it as negative. Nothing negative comes out of something that connects emotions in such a good way. I probably have a negative attitude towards my singing. I know that I'm not good at it, so I just don't try...I just sing to sing. I think most people my age feel the way I feel about my singing. Maybe not my perspective on singing overall, but probably a negative attitude. I think teenagers have more of a shut-off attitude about it [singing]; either you like it or you don't. If it's not your thing, they just kind of turn the other way...there's not like a gray area. I think that adults have a better appreciation for music. Kids kind of limit what they think of it, and adults are listening to it more importantly.

### **Discussion**

Tia described singing as something that "...takes a lot of emotion. It's not just talking. You have to put feeling behind it; expression." This statement reflects her appreciation for singing. It was clear to me that Tia perceived singing as something special when she remarked, "It's not even like choir is a club. It's a special talent...it's more of a privilege to be in choir and be noticed that you can sing." With regards to her own singing experiences, Tia expressed multiple times that singing wasn't for her. She discussed being more drawn to athletics. "I like to sing. I'm just not the best at it. I've kind of always been good with sports, so I guess that's my area...I'm comfortable with that." It is from these responses regarding her experiences and perceptions of singing that I understood Tia as having a moderately negative attitude towards her own singing, but a positive opinion of singing overall.

When I asked Tia what has influenced how she feels about singing, she responded with admiration, "Just being around it [singing] and watching my sister develop in this musical kind of world." Tia also mentioned her Aunt's original music having an impact on her. Similar to her opinion of singing in general, Tia's comments about why she feels the way she does were positive, with the exception of a few comments she made about her own singing. Tia casually explained that her sister tells her she is bad at singing as a joke, but still "...she probably means it (*laughs*)." As previously stated, Tia identifies more with being an athlete than a singer. She distinguished a difference between her sister's singing ability [talent] and her own when she said, "My sister has the *other* talent...that people can go 'Oh, I can sing.' It's kind of more of a gift than a talent." Tia's identity as an athlete seemed to play a role in influencing her perception of her own identity as a singer, as well as her sister's.

**Hope – 17 years old**

If there is one student who shared a perspective I had not anticipated, it would be Hope. She expresses the values that her parents, upbringing, and faith taught her with pure conviction. Hope is a high school senior who spends a lot of her time at a Christian summer camp. We talked about her memories singing at camp and with her family in church. Like Tia, Hope has an older sister who was involved in choir and still regularly sings. "God has given us both different gifts. Mine is more artistic on paper, and hers is performing. We always joke if we were put together we'd be the perfect person." With regards to their appreciation for their sister's singing, Tia and Hope share many similarities. A major difference between these two students, however, is that Hope's sister seems to positively affirm Hope's singing ability. Another major difference can be found in who their friends are. Here is Hope's story:

### **My Music**

My favorite artist would be Manafest. It's a Christian band. They're not like gospel Christian, they're more like rock n' roll Christian. It's like, "Praise Jesus!" but this is how you feel when you do that. It's not like, "You have to do this, you have to do that." I feel like it's more where I am at as a Christian right now. It's not just "Praise Jesus!" It's "Praise Jesus even when you're going through this and this" ...so when you're going through these problems, you have something to look back on. It's also fun and upbeat. I also like Lecrae. He's a Christian rapper. As a child, I liked "Letters From War" by Mark Schultz, and "It's My Father's House." I liked the Christian little kid songs. We had this tape series with a toucan. It was a coloring book and everything so you could color along to the songs.

### **My Family**

I think my sister has the best voice because she sings beautifully, but she also has a soul and a purpose behind it. When she's praising God...that sticks out to me. You can see the connection. Normally I see her at camp in the summer, and she sometimes sings up front or in the back. It doesn't matter where she's standing, so you know it isn't for show...it's her true feelings. I can't remember the first time I heard my sister sing. When it constantly happens you can't go back to the first time...it's just been my life. I was born into her singing I guess. I think my parents know they're not the best singers, but they don't sing for the enjoyment of others. They sing to praise God, so in their eyes and in God's eyes, it's beautiful.

### **My Singing**

I like to sing, but it depends on the context. Some singing makes me uncomfortable...maybe I just don't feel like it's the right time. I like singing at camp, like in camp songs and in groups of people, but I don't like singing alone in front of people. I don't sound good (*laughs*). I don't think I've been in a situation where I felt 'forced' to sing. I never really put myself in that situation...I like singing inside my comfort zone. I don't sing that much, just in church. I mean, I've sung around my sister. We sing next to each other in church and at camp, and sometimes when we're listening to music. There was this one time when we wrote this poem and turned it into a song. It was about blueberries and strawberries...we were really young.

### **Other People Singing**

No, I don't feel uncomfortable around other people who are singing...um, do you know who my friends are (*laughs*)?! We were just talking about the musical at lunch today. We talked about the harmony one of my friends was doing out in the hallway. I've

heard a lot of bad singers, and maybe I've wanted to tell them that they are bad, but I was always the nice girl who wouldn't. Things that are hurtful I just try to tune out because I don't think it's right. Everyone at camp is supportive of anyone who wants to sing (*smiles*). There's this little boy who was just praising Jesus in his own way [and] people sang along with him. All songs and everyone who sings to praise Jesus, Jesus will enjoy and love. It doesn't matter if you're good or not, but it's easier on the ears if you're good.

### **My Influences**

I think I feel the way I do about singing probably [because] the way I was raised, my surroundings and environment. You can be good or bad at singing...you weren't judged for the way you were. It was never, "Hope, you're such a bad singer. Stop singing to that song!" It was, "Hope, do you know what that song means? Do you know what you're doing right now? I'm very proud of you." My friends probably put me in a lot more situations to sing, because they're all singers...every one of them. I like new perspectives and how people view singing, or just how people view the world in general, because how you view one thing is how you view another.

### **My Opinion of Singing**

I think it's mutual. Sometimes singing is a distraction, but I guess because I want peace and quiet. I'm one of those (*laughs*) silent types. But then other times I like it. I don't think most people my age think about it [singing]. It's another thing in this world that doesn't pertain to them, so they're not going to think about it. There are lots of different groups of teenagers and adults, [so] it's hard to categorize them into 'this is what they most likely think [about singing].' But with the world that I can see, I don't know if they like it or not. It's obviously a billion dollar industry, so...they like listening

to it (*laughs*). I think with all the media and the environment that other people are growing up in, they don't see the natural beauty and how we need to praise God in everything that we do. I was always raised that there's the 'worldly' view and then there's the 'Godly' view. Even though we slip into the 'worldly' view we can still go back. I don't think a lot of teenagers or kids are being raised that there is this powerful love they can grab a hold of in any way, shape, or form. They're just raised with *Adventureland* and all those meaningless TV shows. I think that there's more [singing] involvement with the kids at church because they're all kid praise songs. God calls us to have a "child-like" faith, so theirs is more whole-hearted, open, and pure...they're not trying to hide anything from God. They're just being themselves. Adults are not innocent anymore. They have faced hard times and have had losses, and I feel like they want to hide them from God. Seeing them singing and worshipping God, I don't feel like they know what they're actually singing...more like going through the motions.

### **Discussion**

Hope described singing as, "Using an instrument that does not need to be provided for them. It's their own soul." Another perception she shared was, "I think if there's meaning behind the words, it gives it an extra umph." It was clear that Hope put more value on singing being spiritually meaningful than on ability when she explained, "It's [singing] a way to praise Jesus, and it's music to His ears no matter what it is." Although the majority of Hope's singing experiences take place in supportive settings (e.g. church, family), she expressed a hesitant confidence and offered an enlightening thought when I asked her if she would ever say she is 'good' at singing. "When you listen to people sing, you know how it's suppose to sound. And when you don't sound like that, it's because you're not good. It's not something you should be

ashamed of, because it's just singing...you can do something but you don't have to be good at it."

While other students described what they do and do not identify with as influences on their perceptions of singing, in addition to various people in their lives that have helped shape those identities, Hope is the only student who described her upbringing as being an influence on her perception of singing. "We [my sister and I] were raised in an environment where we all have talents that can shine...one wasn't better than the other. And as long as we use them all to praise God, then we're appreciated for that." This statement also reflects Hope's value of spiritually meaningful singing. When I asked her how she feels about her own singing, Hope replied, "I would say I'm a tone-deaf mule, but my sister says I can sing, so I don't know." Here was a significant influence on Hope's perception of her own singing: someone she admires said that she *can* sing.

### **Ken – 19 years old**

Ken laughed more than any other student in this study. "I can sing, I think...not trying to toot my own horn (*laughs*)."

Many of his responses ended like this. Ken grew up with four sisters, all of whom love to sing. When I asked him if he likes to listen to other people sing, he replied, "Well I have to deal with it at home (*laughs*)."

He proceeded to tell me how he willingly joins in. Ken is on the positive side of the continuum, even in regards to his own singing. He explained, "I like to sing, but I mainly went to band." Ken also plays the trumpet. Now a freshman in college, he is considering joining the campus band because of his memorable high school experiences. Ken offered insight on his light-hearted nature, as well as a theory on singing when he remarked, "I think that when people sing just to joke around, they can sing better than when they actually try." Here is Ken's story:

### **My Music**

I listen to a lot of film and game soundtracks. One of my favorites is John Williams. I love how he has different themes for different characters and places. I like to listen to Josh Groban and Celine Dion. I don't need to wish I could sing like them because I know I can't (*laughs*). I like that one [song] from *Titanic* (*laughs*)... "My Heart Will Go On." James Horner... a lot of his music sounds similar to John Williams'. What about the *Pokémon* theme song, does that count? I have a wide variety. It's just rap... some rap is kind of good but I'm not really a fan. My friends listen to heavy rock and rap. I don't like the 'screamo' singing, but I guess there are a couple songs that are ok. Slipknot has a couple good songs that I downloaded, but I don't like the heavy music. The main teenager music today is all hip-hop, R & B, and country... not so much classical or choir music.

### **My Family**

My sisters like to sing a lot. Sometimes my sisters sing just to be goofy. They'll be playing their iPod or whatever, or they'll think of a song and start singing it. Yeah, I appreciate my sisters' singing. My twin sister was upset because she didn't get class voice. I don't know why she didn't get it, to be honest. I don't hear them sing their true singing around me or anyone else because of nervousness, I think. It's kind of like I don't really like to play my trumpet around other people. When they're [my sisters] performing, they still have to get past their stage fright kind of. I can understand that because I have the same problem playing my trumpet... especially solos. As a child, I remember my mom sang and my sisters were in choir. My dad is a good singer I think. When I hear him sing 'for serious' I think he sounds pretty good. He might joke around



sometimes, too. My grandpa was a good singer and so was my other grandpa. I don't really remember my sisters 'seriously singing' when I was little.

### **My Singing**

I think singing runs in our family, well, of course. Singing is something I kind of share with my sisters. I definitely sing along to music, especially by myself. I sing when I fold my laundry or when I play my iPod, but that's when no one's in the same room (*laughs*)! I've sung in front of my sisters...well, just being silly. They might hear me singing in the bathroom, but I don't care. Now they know how much of a good singer I am (*laughs*). To be honest, I can't remember the last time they [my sisters] gave me a positive comment. They might say, "That sounds really good," and I'll walk around like, "I'm such a good singer...(*laughs*)" That might sound a little conceited. I do mostly humming because I listen to more instrumental music. I don't like to sing in public, at least not in a formal setting. If it was with friends I'd feel more comfortable doing it [singing]. My friends have heard me sing a little bit. I don't think I would 'seriously' sing...like actually try to sing it correctly [and] make it sound good. I think I could make it sound good, though. I can sing. Unless I'm tone-deaf...then I don't know if I can or not (*laughs*). I'm not preparing to go on *American Idol* or anything (*laughs*). Well, if you want me to identify 'I can't sing' in front of like a huge crowd of people, then that might be something...unless I can get over that stage fright.

### **Other People Singing**

I notice other people singing at church. I haven't noticed any really bad singing. Sometimes they might be out of tune, but the music is so loud that you can't hear yourself...even I worry about it. I sometimes think, "Oh my gosh, am I singing it out of

tune? I don't want to sing it badly!" Those people in front of me might hear me because their head is right here (*laughs*), but it doesn't keep me from singing. I don't want to throw anyone under the bus, [but] my sisters are quick to criticize people when they go to concerts. If it doesn't seem like the performer is actually trying, like not trying their best, my sisters might say stuff like "So and so didn't sing that very well," or "So and so can't sing." It's not directly to the person's face because that would be really rude, even though it still kind of is. Maybe they [the performer] are trying really hard, and they might think they sound good but they might actually not in other people's opinion. I criticize when I go to some concerts, too, like "That was a little out of tune there," or "They should have had a big crescendo at the end instead of dying out." I don't think I have ever told someone they're bad at singing...not to their face. I kind of feel uncomfortable around other people who are singing, but it's more because of the attention that gets drawn to the situation.

### **My Influences**

Why do I feel positively about it? Music has been my life. Not to be all melodramatic (*laughs*), but with band and at home. When I'm around my sisters, they listen to good music and it rubs off on me. It improves my musical tastes. I listen to good music, too. [And] just being at home with my mom...a good singer, always has been. My sisters' singing has kind of had an effect on me by making me think about doing it too. It [my sisters' singing] kind of made me appreciate musicals more. Now I actually enjoy going to theatre and musicals. I was contemplating trying out for a musical or something like that, or maybe being in choir. I also think that some of my band experiences contributed to my confidence. We sing in band...scales, breathing exercises, [and] stuff

like that. I'm willing to bet that sometimes people [in band] don't take it [singing] seriously, but not all of them...I think most of them take it pretty seriously.

### **My Opinion of Singing**

I have a positive opinion of singing. I think most people my age feel the way I do. They [my peers] probably think they're good singers. Some of them might know that they can't sing so they don't. It's kind of hard to imagine people saying they don't like to sing. When they're listening to music, they like to sing along or hum to it. Even if they can't, they just love singing along. Some people are bad singers, or they think they are, [and] some people think they're good singers and actually are good singers...which is probably the majority. There's people who are better than what they think they are, and there's people who are worse than they think they are.

### **Discussion**

One perception Ken has about singing is that nearly everyone does it. He claimed, "I bet everyone sings, even if they are bad at it...just to sing along to their own music." Ken also made multiple statements corresponding with Hope's belief that people can do something they may or may not be good at. Ken clearly describes his perception of his own singing by saying, "I think I'm a good singer, it's getting in front of people that I have trouble with...that's the barrier." Ken's confidence is hesitant yet embedded in the following thought. He considers what his friends would say about his singing and replies, "I think they would say I'm a good singer, not to 'toot my own horn.' Maybe they would say I'm a good singer just to be nice, but I would hope not." Singing seems to be a regular part of Ken's life – at the least, joking around with his sisters. Another experience he briefly described was singing in church. "At church when you sing, the whole crowd sings so I don't feel really bad. I know when I'm singing, everyone else is too."

Ken's experience singing in church may or may not contribute to his perception that nearly everyone sings, however, Ken's family is a major influence on his positive opinion of singing.

When I asked him if his sisters have had a positive impact on how he perceives singing, Ken responded, "Yeah, because of the vocal music they [my sisters] listen to a lot. It's sometimes made me like the same song." Ken also talked about the music he and his sisters listen to as being an influence on his perception of his own singing. "They're [professional singers] good singers and they're good singing rubs off on me." A similar application of this concept is demonstrated by Ken's statement, "I think we're [my family] all good singers...it runs in the family." His singing experiences *with* all of his immediate family members has significantly influenced Ken's perception of his own singing as well. "I'm probably not tone-deaf because no one has commented on how badly I sound when I sing (*laughs*)." Two other influences Ken described were being in band, and the television show *American Idol*. "Our band director said that people who play instruments are more likely to sing better because of the tuning." Ken explained an effect that *American Idol* has had on him by saying, "You hear all those different people and you think, 'Maybe I can sing like that.'" He also acknowledged something about the show that might contradict his theory that people sing better when they are joking around. "People go on there just to goof around and be on TV, so you don't really know if they actually can [sing] or not."

### **Tammy – 17 years old**

A high school senior with a vibrant personality, Tammy had the most positive things to say about singing. "If anyone ever asked me if I sang, I'd say within a millisecond, 'Yes, I do.'" Tammy also considers herself an athlete and is the youngest in her family. We talked about three of her four siblings' involvement in choir. She also has a close friend in choir whom she says

influences how she feels about singing. "We [my friend and I] have fun singing...I very much enjoy it." Like Ken, Tammy felt the need to not seem too confident as she explained, "I don't know if I'd say that I *can* sing, because I know I can...well I'm not trying too be confident...it just doesn't make me nervous to say yes when I really want to say no." The end of this statement, however, reflects her vibrant personality. Here is Tammy's story:

### **My Music**

I dink around on the piano...[I] put my dog next to me and play for him. I can't play like my brother, even though I wish I could because if I could I'd be playing that every day. When my brother plays the piano, he listens to it [the music] first on the computer and then plays it like he actually composed that kind of music. That caught my attention and got me interested in that kind of music, too. I really don't have a favorite kind of music. I like a lot of classical piano music though. That's an interesting thing about me you wouldn't really think. I find it relaxing. I like that kind of music because when you're studying, it's really inspirational and adds to the mood. I like to listen to it in our creative writing class...it helps me actually finish work (*laughs*). I like the remakes of songs today, just on piano. I usually go on Pandora and type in 'piano music' and listen to it. I don't really know the artist. I also like listening to country. I listen to a lot of it [country music] with my dad. We jam to it in the car on the way to school. I like Adele, too...and *Glee*. Again, that's probably something you'd think you wouldn't get from me, but I am a *Glee* fan. I like *Glee* because of how they sing and mix it up a little...how they have different versions...like when it's suppose to be a guy singing, they have girls singing it. It gives it a different taste. I also like acoustic music a lot. Sometimes when you hear singers play acoustic, it's just one instrument and the voice. I like that a lot

because you don't have to worry about trying to hear the music...I just like hearing the voice and guitar.

### **My Family**

Since being involved in choir, I have seen my brother's personality grow and how outgoing he is. He use to be very introverted in elementary. When middle school came with plays and choir, he was more into those classes [and] became more extrovert over time. I saw the process through middle and high school...he was more open and confident. My two sisters are ten years older than I am [and] they sang a lot. They both were in choir. My mom would try to sing around the house (*laughs*)...she'd be funny about it [singing] though. Sometimes when she's serious, it's a pretty high-pitched voice and my dad would be like "What?!"...she tries though. My dad is funny about it other than [in] church when he's serious. At home he just giggles when he sings. Yeah, I feel a little awkward when my parents are singing (*laughs*), but they [sometimes] get me to be funny about singing. My other brother sings. He mostly likes rock and screamo music. He has fun with it too, but I don't think he would be as open as I am. I've heard him sing and it wasn't horrible...I think it was pretty good. Everyone kind of sees him as a critical person, so I think he would be more critical of other people singing. I'm not really around anyone who is overtly critical of singing though.

### **My Singing**

I like to sing. I think it's just my personality...I can't control it. I feel like the difference between me and other people is that I'm not afraid to be that open or wild. I'm at that stage where I don't want to stop having fun [and] it's easy to not care what people think. I'm not someone who doesn't want to admit that they can sing. I just kind of built

the confidence of singing. If someone asks me if I can sing, I'm going to say yes. Then they'll ask, "Well can you sing me something?" and I'll be like, "Maybe later." It feels weird when there's someone you don't know very well and they ask you to sing, [and] I don't really want to sing a song that I don't know very well. I always sang solo for my sisters because they'd always want to hear me sing. I'd sing with them but they'd stop and I'd be like "Why'd you stop?!" My friends are like, "Sing it girl!" and then I'm like, "Ok..." and I do, but I don't feel forced to. A couple weeks ago, my friends were over at my house and I got on the computer played this song "Valentine." I started singing it [and] my friends were like, "You need to be in choir or something because you just can't have this voice and not put it to use." My friend that's in choir was talking to me about how to use my stomach when I sing and stuff.

### **Other People Singing**

I would say that I like to listen to other people sing, [but] it depends if they sing in choir or if they don't...because on *American Idol*, some people are very good singers and I like hearing them. But when it's those awkward people, and they make the singing awkward, then I don't want to watch it. I force myself to watch just to see what happens. Sometimes I feel uncomfortable around other people who are singing. It just depends on how they sing...my personal opinion if they're good or not. My friend [who's in choir] sings around me a lot. I don't mind it because I get use to it and I like it. Sometimes we sing together and sound weird a cappella (*laughs*). I think he's very good at singing.

### **My Influences**

My sisters first influenced me, and my brother the rest...kind of like 50/50. All of them being involved in choir has impacted me in a good way. I heard stories about choir

where you do these cool exercises...*(laughs)*. I know if I were to sing for a school, I'd like to have fun. I've seen my brother have fun. I noticed he changed in a good way, and I kind of looked up to how confident he was with his singing and his acting. My friend who's in choir influences me about my singing and how much I like it...because we have fun singing, too. I've developed that good comfort zone with him.

### **My Opinion of Singing**

I have a positive attitude toward singing. Sometimes when I sing, I let a lot of my feelings out...in a good manner. Like when I'm in a good mood, I can express it just by singing a good, happy song. And the thought of me knowing myself...like, I'm not trying to sound like I have good self-esteem...but I think I can sing pretty decent. I have a feeling there's fewer people like me. Most people my age don't sing...it's only a certain amount...like 25-35%. The rest just don't. I think the nervousness they get probably keeps other students from singing. That whole factor of being in front of people, like giving a report. Or, how people are going to think if they do sing...that initial reaction in their brain of how they're going to feel when someone hears them; the judgment. They're afraid of people thinking it's not good enough. I think more adults sing than teenagers, because it's the whole process of not caring and just singing.

### **Discussion**

When asked to describe singing, Tammy responded, "Singing is something that comes from inside you and you want to express out to everyone around you." Tammy feels that singing is something you are better at if you like to sing and are having fun. Her perception of a friend's singing is explained by the statement, "He [my friend] really likes it [singing], so that helps make him really good I think." This perception is also evident in a comment Tammy made when



discussing her brother's fun experiences in choir. "I think the only way you can sing to your best of abilities is if you're having fun." Throughout the interview, Tammy highlighted several positive singing experiences, such as singing with her sisters and with her friend who is in choir. The only experience Tammy talked about negatively was singing with everyone in church. Like Ken, Tammy brought up not being able to hear herself and saw this as more of a bad thing than good. "Church music experience is a good thing. It's not really my taste...I can't hear myself sing because you know everyone else is singing too." A meaningful perspective that Tammy discussed was her perception of other people's singing, in that she feels that it isn't her 'place' to be critical. She explained, "It's not my job to tell someone they are not good...I'm not a professional singer. I just sing. Everyone can sing, they just have their own ways of singing and how it sounds."

Family and friends who inspire her to sing are a significant influence on Tammy's perceptions of singing. "When my sisters would come home from college they would sing. That's why I kind of got interested in singing. I was like, 'I just want to be like you...sing pretty like you.'" Tammy acknowledges the impact of her friend in choir by describing, "I feel comfortable singing around my friend from being around him a lot. If he can sing in front of me, then I can sing in front of him." Tammy's reasoning for her friend's involvement in singing is made clear in the statement, "When I know people that sing, I can tell that they enjoy it. If they didn't enjoy it, then why would they do it?" A prominent influence on Tammy's perception of her own singing is her vibrant personality and desire to have fun. She explained, "It shouldn't matter what other people think about me. All that matters is how I think about myself and if I have fun." Lastly, Tammy confirms her own influences and offers insight on what might influence other people.

“I hear people say, ‘Oh I can’t sing,’ a lot. Those people don’t have much confidence. They probably had a bad time where they were scarred for life and won’t sing again because of how people reacted to it, how their family reacted to it, or how they themselves reacted to it.”

### **Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the stories of Dylan, Kurt, Tia, Hope, Ken, and Tammy. These students’ profiles were presented in an order based on a continuum that reflects their attitudes toward singing. Dylan and Kurt expressed the most criticism, Tia and Hope were moderately critical and positive, and Ken and Tammy expressed the most all-around positivity towards singing. The next chapter will discuss four themes emerging from the students’ stories. These themes stem from findings based on cross-student analysis and application of the research questions.

## Chapter Five: Themes Based on Cross-Student Analysis

This chapter will discuss themes stemming from the data, as well as referencing previous research that connects and supports these findings. As previously explained, six headings were developed to provide a structure for student profiles. *My Music, My Family, My Singing, Other People Singing, My Influences, and My Opinion of Singing* were headings that emerged as preliminary themes and used to unify the presentation of students' stories. Organizing the narrative data into these preliminary themes helped broaden the scope for the next layer of analysis. This final step in the analytical process resulted in four underlying themes that parallel the research questions. These themes are: a) students described negative and positive experiences with singing, b) students described negative and positive perceptions of singing, c) students described their musical interests, family background, previous singing experiences, and their overall opinion of singing as influences on their perceptions of singing, and d) students described other elements of their identities as influences on their perceptions of singing.

### Theme 1: Negative and Positive Singing Experiences

All students in this study described elements of both negative and positive singing experiences. Negative experiences included singing next to someone who is a 'better' singer (Dylan), never 'catching on' to singing as a child (Kurt, Tia, Hope), and singing with a large group making it difficult to hear oneself (Ken, Tammy). Unlike other findings (Abril, 2007; Whidden, 2010), students in this study did not describe any of their own singing experiences as causing severe emotional pain or humiliation. Tammy, however, acknowledged that being 'scarred for life' is a negative singing experience that some people *might* have. When further questioned about their worst singing experiences, Kurt and Tia responded the most negatively as shown below:

**Q:** Would you say that it [singing in an elementary school program] was an OK experience, or did you hate every minute of it?

**Kurt:** Well I was in the back, so I really didn't care. It wasn't too torturous. I didn't hate it but I didn't really have much fun.

**Q:** When you were in choir, were you ever uncomfortable with singing?

**Tia:** I had a solo and I didn't want to do it. Actually, it was a duet...I dreaded it...even just [the] dress rehearsal...and performing. It wasn't for me.

Students described a variety of positive singing experiences, such as caroling with family (Dylan, Tia), singing at church (Kurt, Hope), singing in band (Ken), and singing with friends (Tammy). As explained in the previous chapter, these experiences can roughly be distributed on a continuum. Dylan and Kurt described the fewest positive singing experiences – only caroling and church plays – while Ken and Tammy described the most instances, whether with family, friends, or singing alone for their own enjoyment (Chong, 2010; Richards & Durrant, 2003; Stephens, 2012). Tia and Hope were in the middle of this continuum, though their experiences were still unique. For example, Tia described enjoying her choir experience for social reasons (Tan & Woei-Chee, 2003) and Hope described spiritually meaningful singing as worship in church (Wheaton, 1998).

## **Theme 2: Negative and Positive Perceptions of Singing**

Analysis showed that students made three distinctions when describing their perceptions of singing: a) perceptions of what singing is, b) perceptions of their own singing, and c) perceptions of other people's singing. These distinctions are addressed in the interview protocol and are consistent with findings from other studies focused on perceptions of singing (Cuddy,

Balkwill, Peretz, & Holden, 2005; Monks, 2003; Stephens, 2012). As the theme suggests, this study revealed negative and positive perceptions for all three distinctions.

**Perceptions of what singing is.** When designing the interview protocol, I tried to find the best way to directly ask students the research questions. One of the best ways was to first ask students what they think singing is. Dylan, Tia, Hope, and Tammy described singing with positive inflections and connotations. Their positive perceptions of what singing is echo findings from previous research emphasizing self-expression (Chong, 2010; Durrant & Himonides, 1998; Richards & Durrant, 2003; Stephens, 2012). Kurt was the only student who answered this question with negative inflections and connotations. Kurt's concept that singing exists or 'counts more' in public is consistent with Stephens (2012) and Wheaton (1998). Ken's answer is not included below because this question was unintentionally skipped in his interview. The following are shortened student responses to this key research question:

**Q:** In general, how would you describe what singing is?

**Dylan:** "Singing is a way that you express your musical feeling through voice."

**Tia:** "I think it takes a lot of emotion. You have to put feeling behind it."

**Hope:** "Using an instrument that does not need to be provided for them. It's their own soul."

**Tammy:** "Singing is something that comes from inside."

**Kurt:** "Someone who goes out in public to do it."

**Perceptions of their own singing.** Stephens (2012) revealed participants' self-efficacy and attitude as factors in their perceptions of singing. This finding is most evident in the current study's student responses regarding their own singing. Dylan and Kurt were the only two students who identified with both 'I can't sing' and 'I don't like to sing.' Self-efficacy and

attitude towards singing are inherent in these two statements. Tia, Hope, Ken, and Tammy all identified with the statement 'I like to sing,' however only Ken and Tammy affirmed a positive perception of their own singing by identifying with the statement 'I can sing.' Interestingly, all students described negative elements of their own singing. The following statements summarize these negative elements:

**Dylan:** "I hate singing. I don't think I'm good."

**Kurt:** "When I was little, I didn't like to sing. I can't do it."

**Tia:** "I'm just not the best at it. I know that I'm not good at it."

**Hope:** "When I was little, I wasn't a good singer. I don't sound good."

**Ken:** "It's getting in front of people that I have trouble with."

**Tammy:** "I haven't felt that confidence to sing by myself in front of family."

As previously noted, Ken and Tammy described positive perceptions of their own singing. They were the only two students who identified with both 'I can sing,' and 'I have a positive opinion of singing.' Although Tia and Hope claimed to enjoy some singing, they described having a 'neutral' (Tia) or 'mutual' (Hope) opinion of singing, as did Dylan ('mutual') and Kurt ('neutral'). No student described having a 'negative' opinion of singing overall. These findings are consistent with other research (Stephens, 2012; Wheaton, 1998) revealing that participants are more negative about their own singing [self-efficacy] than their overall opinion of singing [attitude].

**Perceptions of other people's singing.** Dylan, Kurt, Hope, and Ken described negative perceptions of other people's singing, including some peers and family members. The following statements summarize these students' negative perceptions of other people's singing:

**Dylan:** "If you're a beginner, I ain't listening to you."

**Kurt:** "My dad can't sing to save his life."

**Hope:** "I've heard a lot of bad singers."

**Ken:** "Some people are bad singers."

All students described positive perceptions of other people's singing. For instance, students acknowledged their admiration for at least one singer. Professional singers who were acknowledged include Carrie Underwood (Dylan), Rob Halford (Kurt), Taylor Swift (Tia, Tammy), and Josh Groban (Ken). Other singers who were acknowledged as 'really good' include the student's sibling (Tia, Hope), other family members (Dylan, Kurt, Ken), and friends or classmates (Dylan, Tammy). While there is presumably literature on perceptions of professional singers, the scope of research reviewed in this study does not address students' perceptions of other people's singing. Previous research has focused more on participants' perceptions of their own singing (Richards & Durrant, 2003; Stephens, 2012; Wheaton, 1998; Whidden, 2010).

### **Theme 3: Musical Interests, Family Background, Singing Experiences and Opinions as Influences**

As students discussed their experiences with and perceptions of singing, in addition to what has most impacted them, it was evident that powerful narrative data would contribute to answering the second research question: *What do students describe as influences on their perceptions of singing?* Students described their musical interests, family background, previous singing experiences, and their overall opinion of singing as influences on their perceptions of singing. Cross-case analysis was an important tool in helping to connect this data. The following tables were designed to reflect connections made between students, as well as support the themes presented in this chapter. Table 1 displays similar interview responses shared by multiple students. Table 2 displays identifying influences that connect student perceptions.

Table 1

*Similar Interview Responses Shared By Multiple Students*

	Dylan	Kurt	Tia	Hope	Ken	Tammy
Laughed about their own singing		X	X	X	X	
Selected a professional 'best singer'	X	X	X			X
Identified sports as 'other' activity	X		X			
Identified band as 'other' activity	X				X	
Identified 'comfort zone'				X		X
Identified 'confidence'		X			X	X
Identified 'judgment'		X				X
Identified <i>American Idol</i>	X				X	X
Identified <i>Glee</i>			X			X
Identified other TV show		X		X		

Table 2

*Identifying Influences That Connect Student Perceptions*

	Dylan	Kurt	Tia	Hope	Ken	Tammy
I have a negative opinion of singing						
I don't like to sing	X	X				
I have been told I am bad at singing		X	X			
I have a neutral opinion of singing		X	X			
I can't sing	X	X	X	X		
I have a mutual opinion of singing	X			X		
I have been told I am good at singing	X			X	X	X
I like to sing			X	X	X	X
Biggest influence on singing: sibling(s)			X	X	X	X
I have a positive opinion of singing					X	X
I can sing					X	X

**Musical Interests.** Students described a variety of musical interests that influenced their perceptions of singing. Favorite genres students discussed listening to include Classical (Dylan, Ken), Rock (Kurt), Country (Tia, Tammy), and Contemporary Christian (Hope). Some students also expressed their interest in musical television shows, such as *American Idol* and *Glee* (see Table 1). Other musical elements that students described as interests include good intonation (Dylan, Ken), meaningful lyrics (Kurt, Hope), mellow tone quality (Tia), and acoustic arrangements (Tammy). When asked who they thought has the best voice or is the best singer,



the majority of students selected a professional (see Table 1). These responses include a music teacher (Dylan), Rob Halford (Kurt), 'Rachel' [Lea Michele] on *Glee* (Tia), and Taylor Swift (Tammy). Hope was the only student who selected her sister as the 'best singer.' Although the question regarding who is the 'best singer' was unintentionally skipped in his interview, Ken is the only student who included his musical interests as the biggest influence on his perceptions of singing. His responses are described below:

**Q:** What do you think has had the biggest impact on how you feel about singing?

**Ken:** I think *American Idol* has had an effect. You get to hear all those different people singing and you think, 'Maybe I can sing like that.'

**Q:** In other words, why do you think you feel the way you do about singing?

**K:** Because music has been all in my life, not to be melodramatic (*laughs*), but with band and at home. It improves my musical tastes.

**Family Background.** A consistent finding of this study and other research (Abril, 2007; Stephens, 2012; Whidden, 2010) was the influence that family background and involvement had on participant perceptions. Students whom identified 'I like to sing' also identified their sibling(s) as the biggest influence on their perceptions of singing (see Table 2). Family influences other than students' sibling(s) included Aunt (Dylan, Tia), Father (Kurt), upbringing (Hope), and overall family culture (Ken, Tammy). While most family backgrounds were positive influences, some negatively influenced students' perceptions of their own singing. Ken and Tia both described being told by their siblings that they are bad at singing. They also both identified 'I can't sing' (see Table 2). Similarly, Dylan described being negatively influenced by his Aunt's singing with regards to his perception of his own singing. With regards to their perceptions of

singing overall, Tia and Hope described their family backgrounds as having the biggest positive influence. These negative and positive biggest influences are summarized below:

**Q:** What do you think has had the biggest impact on how you feel about singing?

**Dylan:** My Aunt. She was so good and I'm so bad.

**Tia:** Seeing how much my sister cares about it. Just being around and watching her develop in this musical kind of world.

**Hope:** Probably the way I was raised...my surroundings and environment.

**Singing Experiences.** Previous research (Heyning, 2011; Pascale, 2002; Stephens, 2012; Whidden, 2010) indicates a connection between singing experiences and perceptions. This connection is clear among some students in this study. Kurt and Tia responded the most negatively about their singing experiences and perceptions of their own singing ('I can't sing'). Ken and Tammy responded the most positively about their singing experiences and perceptions of their own singing ('I can sing'). Adversely, Dylan and Hope have been told they are good at singing and still identified with 'I can't sing' (see Table 2). This finding is consistent with Mizener (1993) and Wheaton (1998) in that positive experiences with singing sometimes do not transfer into positive self-perceptions or opinions of singing. Interestingly, Kurt was the only student who alluded to previous singing experiences as the biggest influence on his perceptions of singing. His response is described below:

**Q:** What do you think has had the biggest impact on how you feel about singing?

**Kurt:** I've just never really caught on to singing. People will stop me and start criticizing, saying I'm the most terrible voice in the world...something like that.

I've never heard anyone say that, but it's fear of judgment. I know from past experiences that I can't sing...from what other people have told me.

Another connection to consider under this theme might be between students' singing experiences and their overall opinion of singing. For instance, Kurt and Tia have been told that they are bad at singing and both described having a 'neutral' opinion of singing (see Table 2). Dylan, Hope, Ken, and Tammy have all been told they are good at singing, however, only Ken and Tammy described having a 'positive' overall opinion of singing (see Table 2). Unknowingly differentiating their responses from Kurt and Tia, Dylan and Hope described having a 'mutual' opinion of singing (see Table 2). These connections are furthered explored and applied to the theme in the proceeding section.

**Overall Opinion of Singing.** All students described their overall opinion of singing as an influence on their perceptions of singing. Ken and Tammy's 'positive' opinion of singing naturally had a positive influence on many of their perceptions. This pattern was not reflected in other responses because no students described having a 'negative' overall opinion of singing (see Table 2). The divisive nature of Dylan, Kurt, Tia, and Hope's 'neutral' or 'mutual' opinion connotes elements contributing to negative *and* positive influences on their perceptions of singing. This division reflects contradicting perceptions that were described by some of these students. The following responses demonstrate their contradictions:

**Q:** Would you say that you have a positive or a negative opinion of singing?

**Dylan:** Kind of mutual, because I think it's good that some people can sing, but also bad because I think I'm bad. It's kind of like mixed feelings.

**Tia:** I have a positive opinion because I'm around it and it'd be hard to think of it as negative. I probably have a negative attitude [toward my singing].

**Hope:** I think it's mutual. Sometimes I think it's unnecessary and a distraction. But then other times I like it.

These contradicting responses and opinions are consistent with findings in other research (Mizener, 1993; Tan & Woei-Chee, 2003), suggesting that some students focus more on their interest or opinion than on their perceived lack of ability. For instance, Tia and Hope both identified with 'I can't sing' but also 'I like to sing' (see Table 2). Dylan described admiration for 'good' singers as a positive influence on his perceptions of other people's singing, but described this as a negative influence on perceptions of his own singing. It also strikes me that Kurt sometimes laughed about his own singing, yet described being influenced by his fear of 'judgment' (see Table 1). While the previous examples are contradictory in nature, Tammy is the only student to clearly explain that her positive opinion of singing is the biggest influence on her perceptions of singing. Her response is summarized below:

**Q:** What do you think has had the biggest impact on how you feel about singing?

**Tammy:** Just knowing that sometimes when I sing, I let a lot of my feelings out. When I'm in a good mood, I can express it just by singing a good song. I like to express it to myself and sometimes to my friends.

#### **Theme 4: Other Elements of Students' Identities as Influences**

The previous theme illustrates students' self-described biggest influences on their perceptions of singing: musical interests (Ken), family background (Dylan, Tia, Hope), previous singing experiences (Kurt), and overall opinion of singing (Tammy). The final theme presented in this chapter stems from my interpretation of students as individuals with unique elements contributing to their identities. These unique or 'other' elements were embedded in student responses and sometimes seemed to influence their perceptions of singing (see Table 1). Being an instrumentalist (Dylan, Kurt, Ken), athletic (Tia), Christian (Hope), and 'wild' (Tammy) are elements of students' identities that are discussed as influences on their perceptions of singing.

**The instrumentalists.** Dylan and Ken could talk about instrumental music for hours. In fact, both interviews ran over an hour probably because a lot of time was first spent talking about their instrumental music interests. When I asked Dylan about his favorite music, he responded, "I listen to classical music all the time...like band music, because I have no life (*laughs*)."

This statement could be interpreted that band *is* Dylan's life. Ken had a similar response when asked why he feels the way he does about singing. Ken's response implied that band has been a significant part of his life. Ken also expressed an important element of his family's identity with the comment, "I think we're all good singers...it runs in the family." Many of Dylan's comments reflected his value of instrumental music. This value is demonstrated in his comments regarding my musical background. "You're a choir teacher, singing is what you do every day, but did you play any instruments?" It is because of these examples that I interpreted Dylan and Ken's descriptions of being instrumentalists as influences on their perceptions of singing.

Kurt expressed a different element of being an instrumentalist: rock guitarist. As stated earlier, Kurt only talked about guitar and never told me what instrument he played in band. Kurt's focus was being a 'rock encyclopedia'. While most students mentioned *American Idol* and *Glee*, Kurt discussed a rock show on VH1 called *That Metal Show* (see Table 1). When I asked him if he ever wished he could sing like Rob Halford, he responded "*(laughs)* No. No way. People like Bruce Dickenson or Rob Halford...I could never sound like them." It was interesting to me that Kurt expressed so much interest and knowledge of rock music, yet expressed disinterest in singing as well as overall singing inability. To Kurt, being a 'rock encyclopedia' primarily involved playing guitar. This is my reasoning behind the interpretation of Kurt's distinction as a rock guitarist and the possible influence on his perceptions of singing.

**The athlete, the Christian, and the 'wild' one.** Tia, Hope, and Tammy directly referenced these elements of their identities as influences on their perceptions of singing. When I asked Tia if she admires her sister's singing abilities, she responded, "I do, um, I'm more of the athletic type, so that's how I excel." Tia's thought process seemed to lead her to an identification as an 'athlete' instead of a 'singer' like her sister. When I asked Hope if she ever wished she could sing like her sister, her reasoning provided a meaningful explanation of other elements of her identity. "No, because I feel like God has given us both different gifts. Mine is more artistic and hers is performing." As previously described, Hope's responses were uniquely rooted in her faith and upbringing, both of which she described as influences on her perceptions of singing.

Of all the students, Tammy seemed to identify with singing the strongest. She described many positive singing experiences with family and friends, in addition to a positive opinion of singing and elements of her personality as influences on her perceptions. When I asked her what sets her apart from students who do not identify with singing, she responded, "I think it's just my personality. The difference between me and some other people is that I'm not afraid to be that open or that wild." I interpreted this statement as Tammy considering singing to be 'open' or 'wild,' thus affirming a perception of singing influenced by her personality.

**Identities discussion.** Some research has been dedicated to musical identities (Green, 2011; Hebert, 2009; MacDonald, Hargreaves, & Miell, 2002; Thompson & Campbell, 2010). Upon proposing the current study, I did not anticipate the influences of students' identities to be a consistent finding, nor did I design the research questions or interview protocol to reflect this consideration. Gender is another element of students' identities that was not explored in this study, though student sampling reflects three males and three females. Interestingly, students were unintentionally grouped by gender in the discussion of this theme. Dylan, Ken, and Kurt all

have strong instrumental backgrounds that seemed defining in my conversations with them. As described above, Tia, Hope, and Tammy brought uniquely different elements of their identities to our conversations. The final theme presented in this chapter acknowledged other elements of students' identities as influences on their perceptions of singing.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter was to discuss various themes stemming from the narrative data and reference previous research that connects and supports these findings. Four themes emerged from student responses based on the research questions: a) students described negative and positive experiences with singing, b) students described negative and positive perceptions of singing, c) students described their musical interests, family background, previous singing experiences, and their overall opinion of singing as influences on their perceptions of singing, and d) students described other elements of their identities as influences on their perceptions of singing. Three subthemes helped define students' negative and positive perceptions of singing: a) perceptions of what singing is, b) perceptions of their own singing, and c) perceptions of other people's singing. Tables were created to illustrate similar interview responses (Table 1) and identifying influences that connect student perceptions (Table 2). Students' self-described biggest influences on their perceptions were discussed. Conversely, other elements of students' identities – instrumentalist, athletic, Christian, and 'wild' – were also acknowledged as influences on their perceptions of singing.

## Chapter Six: Summary

### Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore perceptions of singing among selected high school students who were identified as 'non-singers.' Two research questions that guided this study were: a) How do students describe their experiences with and perceptions of singing? and b) What do students describe as influences on their perceptions of singing?

### Brief Review of Literature

Qualitative models in general education that focus on student perceptions and attitudes discuss benefits of using interviews to gather student input. These benefits include the 'flavor' of student responses (Barr & Herzog, 2000), understanding students' experiences and perceptions as factors influencing their motivation (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001) and the effectiveness of using in-depth interviews and rich narratives to describe student perceptions and attitudes (Nye, 2008).

Studies within music education that focus on student perceptions and attitudes towards singing acknowledge grade level, gender, school culture, and general singing interest as influences of music students' perceptions and attitudes towards singing (Mizener, 1993; Tan & Woei-Chee, 2003). Researchers found a decline in positive attitudes towards singing in higher grade levels and males (Mizener, 1993), as well as increased positive perceptions of singing in students presented with a choice to sing (Tan and Woei-Chee, 2003).

There is a growing body of research on a variety of 'non-singers,' including university students (Chong, 2010; Stephens, 2012), future teachers (Abril, 2007; Heyning, 2011), and general adults (Pascale, 2002; Richards & Durrant, 2003; Wheaton, 1998; Whidden, 2010). By surveying university students about their perceptions of singing, Chong (2010) and Stephens (2012) found that participants had overall positive attitudes towards singing. Singing experiences



(Abril, 2007; Chong, 2010; Heyning, 2011; Richards & Durrant, 2003; Stephens, 2012; Whidden, 2010), home environment (Stephens, 2012; Whidden, 2010), singing self-efficacy (Abril, 2007; Heyning, 2011; Stephens, 2012; Wheaton, 1998), and singing attitudes (Abril, 2007; Stephens, 2012) have been discussed as influences of perceptions of singing. Some positive singing experiences have been identified as agents of change regarding negative attitudes towards singing (Heyning, 2011; Whidden, 2010).

Pascale (2002) and Whidden (2010) propose a change in the constructs of 'singer' and 'non-singer.' After conducting in-depth research on aesthetic and cultural constructs of singing, Pascale incorporated concepts of inclusion with 'traditional' concepts such as distinctions and standards to develop the philosophy that both aesthetics can coexist in the same singing community. Whidden built on this philosophy, offering that it is possible to change one's construct of self as 'non-singer' to that of 'singer' through positive singing experiences.

## **Method**

This study employed a qualitative interview design to collect data from six student 'non-singers.' Purposeful sampling was used to select Dylan, Kurt, Tia, Hope, Ken, and Tammy. These students ranged in age between 14 and 19 years old. A protocol was developed and used to guide one 60-minute interview with each student. These interviews were conducted at two similar high schools in Michigan during January and February 2012. Data was transcribed, reduced, and coded for themes. 'Profiles' were created to tell each student's story and were presented with the unifying headings *My Music*, *My Family*, *My Singing*, *Other People Singing*, *My Influences*, and *My Opinion of Singing*. The following four themes emerged as findings: a) students described negative and positive experiences with singing, b) students described negative and positive perceptions of singing, c) students described their musical interests, family

background, previous singing experiences, and their overall opinion of singing as influences on their perceptions of singing, and d) students described other elements of their identities as influences on their perceptions of singing.

### **Summary of Findings**

Student profiles were presented in an order based on a continuum that reflected their attitudes toward singing. Dylan and Kurt expressed the most criticism. Dylan primarily discussed his band experiences and friends, of which his instrumental identity was the biggest influence on his perception of singing. Although friends offered relief of his criticism towards his own singing, Kurt's family seemed to be the major influence on his perceptions of singing. Kurt likened his singing inability to his dad's inability. A fear of judgment also seemed to really influence Kurt's perception of his own singing. Both Dylan and Kurt expressed 'I can't sing' and 'I don't like to sing' responses.

Tia and Hope were both moderately critical and positive. Tia expressed multiple times that singing wasn't for her and she discussed being more drawn to athletics, an identity that influenced some of her perceptions of singing. Tia's comments about her attitude towards singing were positive, except for comments about her own singing. Hope was the only student who described her upbringing as being an influence on her perceptions of singing. It was clear that Hope put more value on singing being spiritually meaningful than on ability. Tia and Hope described their admiration of their sisters' singing as the biggest influence on their perceptions of singing. Interestingly, they both expressed 'I can't sing' and 'I like to sing' responses.

Ken and Tammy expressed the most all-around positivity towards singing. One perception Ken had about singing was that nearly everyone does it. Singing seemed to be a regular part of Ken's life and his family was a major influence on his positive opinion of singing.

Although, Ken discussed the effect that *American Idol* has had on him as being the biggest influence on his perceptions of singing. Tammy felt that singing was something you are better at if you like to sing and are having fun. An important perspective that Tammy shared was her perception of other people's singing, in that she feels that it isn't her 'place' to be critical. Tammy describes her vibrant personality and desire to have fun as being the biggest influences on her perceptions of singing. Both Ken and Tammy expressed 'I can sing' and 'I like to sing' responses.

The following four themes emerged from these responses: a) students described negative and positive experiences with singing, b) students described negative and positive perceptions of singing, c) students described their musical interests, family background, previous singing experiences, and their overall opinion of singing as influences on their perceptions of singing, and d) students described other elements of their identities as influences on their perceptions of singing. Three subthemes also helped define students' negative and positive perceptions of singing: a) perceptions of what singing is, b) perceptions of their own singing, and c) perceptions of other people's singing. Students' self-described biggest influences on their perceptions were discussed. Conversely, other elements of students' identities – instrumentalist, athletic, Christian, and 'wild' – were also acknowledged as influences on their perceptions of singing.

### **Implications for Music Teachers**

In deciding what to address as implications of this study, it was helpful to focus on what I have learned from the students involved. I wanted to capture the essence of the defining lessons I learned as a music teacher facilitating this study. What would each student want music teachers to know about the experiences, perceptions, and influences they described? It seemed effective to frame the following implications from the perspectives of the students involved in this study:

- (Dylan): Understand that student perceptions of singing can be complex and paradoxical. Students might express negative perceptions of their own singing and of other people singing, but still express positive perceptions of what singing is.
- (Kurt): Invest in learning about the singing perceptions and musical backgrounds of students' parents. This can provide insight on student constructs and identification as a 'non-singer.'
- (Tia): Make choir students aware of the influence they can have on their 'non-singer' siblings' perceptions of singing. Expect them to be a positive influence rather than a negative one.
- (Hope): Don't assume that 'non-singers' are always 'non-singers.' Sometimes 'non-singers' like to sing but it depends on the context.
- (Ken): Acknowledge the positive influence that TV shows such as *American Idol* and *Glee* can have on student perceptions of singing.
- (Tammy): Celebrate the interest in singing among students who are not involved in school choir. Furthermore, affirming this interest can positively influence their singing confidence.

The above points are general implications for music teachers that have been creatively framed from the perspective of each of the students in this study. The following teaching applications might also be drawn: a) harness students' negative comments about their own or others' singing in the classroom, b) incorporate conversations about family musical backgrounds during parent-teacher conference opportunities, c) cultivate inclusion, silence inappropriate criticism, and remind students that they should always lead by example, d) create organic opportunities for non-choir students to engage in singing, e) use assignments centered on popular

music TV shows to make connections to concepts learned in class, and f) seek out students who love to sing but are not in choir and offer support of their musical interests.

Additionally, I considered elements of this study that were surprising to me. Students were sincerely willing and interested to talk to me about singing. Most went on about professional singers they love, positive singing memories as a child, or admiration for a family member's singing. This spoke volumes to me about the positivity of these students' attitudes, resulting in the following implication for music teachers:

- Recognize that student 'non-singers' often have positive attitudes towards singing in general and it is encouraging that no student in this study expressed having a negative opinion of singing (see Table 2).

A final implication of this study stems from Pascale's (2002) philosophy of singing and what I feel is demonstrated in the stories of Hope and Tammy. I would have greatly benefited from discovering this philosophy earlier in my career because it has truly changed the way I interact with students, colleagues, and parents. It is my belief that the following implication is an essential item for music teachers to add to their agenda:

- Music teachers should be aware of *can* and *can't* language inside their classrooms, as well as what they observe in their buildings. It is possible that by tolerating these limited perceptions of ability, teachers enable students and others to identify with constructs of *either* 'singer' *or* 'non-singer.' Instead, music teachers can work to instill the concept of a continuum regarding singing [musical] abilities by not tolerating the use of *can* and *can't* language in their interactions with students, colleagues, and parents.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

A particularly frustrating experience that I encountered during this study was the search for similar studies involving 'non-singers.' As the review of literature reflects, it was relatively easy to find studies that involved general adults (Pascale, 2002; Richards & Durrant, 2003; Wheaton, 1998; Whidden, 2010) and college students (Abril, 2007; Chong, 2012; Heyning, 2011; Stephens, 2012). I was especially unable to find an interview study that mirrored mine involving adolescents, with the exception of venturing outside of music (Barr and Herzog, 2000; Ives and Broaddus, 2001; Nye 2008). Therefore, the body of research on 'non-singers' would benefit from more studies that focus on younger participants such as middle or high school students.

Similarly, I chose to explore the singing perceptions of 'non-singers,' as did Chong, 2010, Stephens (2012), and Wheaton (1998). Findings typically revolved around participant self-efficacy, experiences, influences, and attitudes regarding singing. These findings often overlapped and were discussed as parts of one another, making it difficult to isolate such elements. Investigating and reporting findings on one of these elements would offer clarity and possibly improve future inquiries. It could also be interesting to explore less traditional elements that often appeared in findings, such as unintentional participation (i.e. crowd sing-alongs, birthdays) and secret participation when alone (i.e. car, shower).

The element of family background was an influential finding in this study and others (Abril, 2007; Stephens, 2012; Whidden, 2010). As discussed in Tia and Hope's stories, one aspect of this finding is the influence of a 'singer' sibling on a 'non-singer' sibling. Is singing participation impacted? Are 'non-singer' siblings influenced by 'singer' sibling identities? Further investigation of sibling influences might be helpful in understanding 'non-singer' perceptions of singing.

What I am about to suggest next may be considered inconsequential to the general platform of academia. However, as a teacher trying to compare similar findings with similar participants in similar classrooms, I am quick to acknowledge international regions [cultures] when reviewing literature. It is because of this that I feel disappointed that U.S. studies are underrepresented in this paper (Abril, 2007; Stephens, 2012; Wheaton, 1998). Is there little interest in 'non-singers' among researchers in the United States? Essentially, I do not believe this to be true, although I would encourage any interested researchers to contribute to the seemingly small body of U.S. studies focused on 'non-singers.'

Lastly, in considering Pascale (2002) and Whidden's (2010) research that heralds a change in the constructs of singing, I wondered what music teachers would say about current constructs of singing. How would music teachers describe what singing is? How would they describe what singing is not? Do music teachers observe shifts in student constructs of singing? Do they encourage or facilitate such shifts? In the spirit of Pascale and Whidden, I would suggest the need for a study that examines the constructs of singing among music teachers. Participants of particular interest might include secondary choral and instrumental music teachers, as well as teacher educators.

In conclusion, the following are suggestions for further research gleaned by findings in this study and others: a) continued study of adolescent 'non-singers', b) studies clearly focusing on isolated elements of 'non-singer' singing perceptions, c) studies exploring less traditional elements of singing participation, d) further investigation of sibling influences, e) continued study of 'non-singers' within the context of the United States, and f) a study that examines secondary choral and instrumental music teacher constructs of singing.

## **Reflection**

This study aimed to gather input from high school students who 'don't' sing. Four out of the six students involved described elements of their identification as a 'non-singer' (Dylan, Kurt, Tia, and Hope). The other two students – Ken and Tammy – described unexpected and relatively confident participation in singing. Although student 'non-singers' were the intended participants, I am thankful for Ken and Tammy's unique contributions to this study. Presenting all six students' attitudes towards singing on a continuum would not have been possible without representation at both ends and along the middle. Through this process, I continue to understand that many aspects of psychology and music are not 'black and white.'

An integral difference between 'I don't sing' and 'I can't sing' has also become clear to me since beginning this research. 'I don't sing' mostly reflects attitude or choice, whereas 'I can't sing' is inherently linked to perception of ability [self-efficacy]. This led me to consider which statement most influences a lack of participation in singing. Do 'non-singers' remove themselves from singing because they don't want to sing, or, because they feel they 'can't'? It is apparent that 'I can't sing' [self-efficacy] is overwhelmingly more at the heart of 'non-singer' identities (Abril, 2007; Pascale, 2002; Richards & Durrant, 2003; Stephens, 2012; Wheaton, 1998; Whidden, 2010), although this is certainly not always the case. In this study, Dylan was the only student who seemed to identify more with 'I don't [like to] sing' than 'I can't sing.' Kurt, Tia, and Hope's identifications as 'non-singers' seemed rooted in their statements of 'I can't sing.' These findings have helped inform my belief that the difference between 'I don't sing' and 'I can't sing' is an essential distinction for the study of 'non-singers.'

There is hardly a need for research on 'non-singers' in some societies because singing is something that everyone does (Pascale, 2002). I have experienced this 'construct' in two cultures that have been part of my life; one overseas and one in the United States. When I told people in



South Africa that I taught music while I lived there for a few months in 2006, they would inquire about the instruments I played and dismissed that I primarily sang. It seemed as though singing wasn't 'enough' to qualify me as a musician because singing appeared to be a commonality in South African cultures. My students and colleagues there informed me that everyone sings because no one dares to say they 'can't.' My experiences with inclusive singing in the U.S. have mostly occurred in the context of barbershopping. I realize that this 'culture' or 'society' is purely based on a singing activity similar to most other choirs, however, the extent of the inclusive nature of barbershop surpasses my experiences in several choirs throughout my life. With the philosophy 'You can sing too!'<sup>8</sup>, barbershoppers advocate that singing is something everyone *can* participate in regardless of ability or experience. Observing the impact of this philosophy within the barbershopping culture has profoundly shaped what I strive to advocate and represent as a music educator.

In closing, I would like to offer the following hypothetical conversation:

**Stranger:** So, what do you do for a living?

**Music Educator:** I teach music.

**Stranger:** That's so cool! What kind of music?

**Music Educator:** Mostly high school choir.

**Stranger:** Oh man, I can't sing to save my life!

**Music Educator:** Of course you can.

**Stranger:** Nope. My family says I'm tone-deaf.

**Music Educator:** Hmm. A lot of people say that, but I've never met anyone who actually was tone-deaf. In fact, I've never met anyone who could talk but couldn't sing.

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<sup>8</sup> Barbershop Harmony Society website and bumper-sticker slogan. ([www.barbershop.org](http://www.barbershop.org))

**Stranger:** Well when you put it that way, I guess it makes sense.

**Music Educator:** Everyone can sing...some people just haven't figured that out yet.

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### Appendix A: Blank Interview Protocol

**Interviewer:** First and foremost, thank you for agreeing to talk to me about singing today. Your willingness to do so offers great perspective on my work as a music educator and researcher. Secondly, this interview is about you and what you have to say regarding your own experiences and opinions. I am here only to record your responses and keep our conversation on the topic. I am not here to judge what you have to say or try to get you to say something you don't want to. Throughout the interview, I will review your responses with you to make sure I record them correctly and honestly. Do you have any questions or are you ready to get started?

#### Demographics

**Interviewer (I):** Please state your age and what grade [year] you will be in this fall.

**I:** Are you currently involved in any music classes outside of school like guitar or piano lessons?

#### Focused Life History (previous experiences with singing)

**I:** What kind of music do you like to listen to, or who is your favorite music artist/performer?

**I:** Can you describe why you like this music or what you like about it?

**I:** Would you say that you like to listen to other people sing?

**I:** In general, how would you describe what singing is?

**I:** Who do you think has the best voice or is the best singer ever?

**I:** Do you ever wish you could sing like them?

**I:** Can you think of a time that you have had a conversation about singing or music with a friend or family member?

**I:** Can you explain what you were talking about (singer, band, type of music, etc.)?

**I:** Do you have any memories of people singing to you or around you as a child?

**I:** Do you remember any songs you liked as a child?

**I:** How do you see your siblings' singing experiences?

**I:** Can you think of a time when you have sung *with* your sibling or other family members?

**I:** Describe the situation where you were singing.



**I: Can you think of a time when you have sung *in front of* your sibling or other family members?**

**I: Describe the situation where you were singing.**

**I: Have you been in a situation where you felt “forced” to sing?**

**I: Can you describe the situation with regards to by whom, the setting, for what, etc.?**

Details of Experience (elaborate on perceptions of experiences with singing)

**I: You were selected for this interview because your sibling gave me the impression that you don't sing, especially in front of other people. Is this true?**

**I: Would you ever say that you like to sing?**

**I: Overall, would you identify with the phrase, “I don't like to sing,”?**

**I: How would you describe what it is about singing that makes you not like to do it or feel uncomfortable about it?**

**I: Do you ever feel awkward or uncomfortable around other people who are singing?**

**I: If so, can you describe a situation where this has been the case and explain why?**

**I: Overall, would you identify with the phrase, “I can't sing.”?**

**I: Has anyone ever told you you're bad or not good at singing?**

**I: Have you heard anyone tell someone else that they are bad or not good at singing?**

**I: Have you ever told someone they're bad or not good at singing?**

**I: Do you ever sing along to music you listen to, especially by yourself?**

Reflection on Meaning (influences on perceptions of singing)

**I: Over the course of this interview, we have talked about your previous singing experiences, current involvement or lack thereof, and overall opinions about singing. Keeping in mind everything we have discussed so far, what do you think has had the biggest impact on how you feel about singing?**

**I: In other words, why do you think you feel the way you do about singing?**

**I: Has your sibling's involvement in choir impacted the way you see or feel about singing at all?**

**I: Would you say that any other family members have influenced how you feel about singing?**

**I: Would you say that any friends have influenced how you feel about singing?**

**I: Overall, would you say that you have a positive or a negative opinion of singing?**

**I: Do you think that most people your age feel the way you do about singing?**

**I: Can you give me an example or explain why you think so?**

**I: Do you think that most adults feel the way you do about singing?**

**I: Can you give me an example or explain why you think so?**

**I: This interview was based on the following over-arching questions:**

- 1) How do you describe your experiences with singing?**
- 2) How do you describe your perceptions of singing?**
- 3) What do you describe as influences on your perceptions of singing?**

**Do you think we have covered these in our conversation, and/or is there anything you think we should add?**

**I: Those are all of the questions I have today. Thank you so much for your participation in this interview!**

## Appendix B: Completed Protocol Document (Dylan)

**Interviewer: First and foremost, thank you for agreeing to talk to me about singing today. Your willingness to do so offers great perspective on my work as a music educator and researcher. Secondly, this interview is about you and what you have to say regarding your own experiences and opinions. I am here only to record your responses and keep our conversation on the topic. I am not here to judge what you have to say or try to get you to say something you don't want to. Throughout the interview, I will review your responses with you to make sure I record them correctly and honestly. Do you have any questions or are you ready to get started?**

**I teach choir at Fruitport.**

Oh a singer, I see.

**Yes, but please don't let that have any effect on what you say.**

People can sing, as long as they're good they're fine. But if they suck they need to stop.

### Demographics

**Interviewer (I): Please state your age and what grade [year] you will be in this fall.**

I'm 14 and I am in 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

**I: Are you currently involved in any music classes outside of school like guitar or piano lessons?**

I compose music by myself. I love saying that...it makes me feel special. It's just a thing I have on my computer. I just make ensembles, I made a duet between clarinet and trumpet, and now I'm making an ensemble. And then I give lessons to some of my younger friends. Not at this school but other schools...clarinet and a few trumpet lessons.

### Focused Life History (previous experiences with singing)

**I: What kind of music do you like to listen to, or who is your favorite music artist/performer?**

That's kind of challenging because I haven't listened to the radio in like two years, because I listen to classical music all the time...like band music, because I have no life (*laughs*). I guess theoretically country. I love "Phantom of the Opera." It just gives you chills. I also like the Marine Hymn.

**Whose country music comes to mind that you like?**

I guess Carrie Underwood...she's always been special for some reason. I think because I read that she played an instrument, so I was like "Yeah!" Three thumbs up.

**I: Can you describe why you like this music or what you like about it?**

Instrumental music...not because it has trumpets in it, but because of how the band is together and how nice it feels. I like how I can hear all the instruments and it sounds really nice together. I just want to hear it again and again. I think I like "Phantom of the Opera" because of the organ...it's all loud and stuff. I listen to how in tune it is. I'm not like some people in my family...they just listen to the words. I don't listen to the words, I listen to the actual music!

**Why do you think you like Carrie Underwood's music?**

I don't know...kind of the rhythms...how she ties in the drum part. Most of the time in country music or really any music not classical...they don't have good drum parts...it's really boring and stupid. But she kind of lets them have a little more freedom to do what they do. And how her vocals are...she's always in tune. I like that.

**I: Would you say that you like to listen to other people sing?**

Sort of. I do...certain people. If you're a beginner, I ain't listening to you. If you're, like, professional, I probably won't listen to you. But if you're a person I like and you're a singer, than I probably will listen to you. I'm very picky with singing.

**I: In general, how would you describe what singing is?**

Singing is a way that you express your musical feeling through voice, using more vibrato feeling and connecting the words and less staccatos.

**I: Who do you think has the best voice or is the best singer ever?**

Mrs. Martino, the choir teacher...she's really good. And this one guy composer...he can sing every song he ever wrote perfectly and in-tune. Tuneness is a very important thing to me, because if you're not in tune you suck. If you're like 30 cents sharp, you're not going to sound as amazing as the person next you who's probably in tune. Can you tune your voice? Wouldn't it just be naturally flat or sharp?

**I always tell my students that half of singing is listening. We talk about intonation a lot, so yes.**

**I: Do you ever wish you could sing like them?**

Some days I wish I could get pitches like she does. Like, I think I've heard her sing at least like six octaves...perfectly. And I can't imagine going up that high. When I go low I tend to go really flat...it's hard to control it.

**I: Can you think of a time that you have had a conversation about singing or music with a friend or family member?**

Yes, just about every day.

**I: Can you explain what you were talking about (singer, band, type of music, etc.)?**

One time we were talking about this one marching band and how you have to audition just to be in it. We argue about singing because I'm not a big fan of singing, and they're in choir so they love singing. Also, in fact today, I yelled at a person in band because he was singing and conducting and he sucks. He really sings and I'm like, "Go join choir!" It's about every day...a band vs. choir thing. Choir kids think band sucks and band kids think choir sucks. They don't like how we sound because we can get as loud as well want. We don't like how they sound because they're always bad and off-tune and rude about it...stuck up.

**Do you know some people in choir that are good?**

Annie. She is amazing. She gets all the solos and stuff.

**I: Do you have any memories of people singing to you or around you as a child?**

Yeah. My teachers did. I had an Aunt who was an opera singer...she was amazing. She died. Her son took over and he's a really good singer, and he does opera and jazz or something like that. I'm not sure, I'm not that close with him. He is amazing though.

**Have you ever heard your parents sing?**

My dad, no. Oh no, he doesn't get music at all. Well, it depends. My step-dad doesn't get music. My real dad does. My real dad got a major in music, but he doesn't teach music...he's a lawyer, which makes no sense.

**Does he ever do music anymore?**

Kind of. He doesn't sing, but once in a while use to pick up my trumpet because that's what he use to play, but not really anymore. He just doesn't have the passion anymore like I do.

**Is he the reason why you picked the trumpet?**

No. I picked the trumpet because this woman who was like a grandmother to me played trumpet and she died, so I kind of picked it in honor of her. I always loved how high she could go...it was amazing...I wanted to be like her one day.

**I: Do you remember any songs you liked as a child?**

All the lullabies.

**I: How do you see your siblings' singing experiences?**

I have four siblings. Three brothers and one sister. My sister's in band...she plays the flute. I don't like flute. My seven year-old brother sings. My four year-old brother likes to play the piano with me and he likes to sing, too. My five year-old brother doesn't really like music...he's sports. See my step-dad's not a music man...he doesn't get music, he never has. You ask him to play something and he goes...*(shrugs shoulders)*. He doesn't get piano...he doesn't get anything.

**What about singing?**

He doesn't sing either. He was mad when I told him I was going to be in band because he wanted me to be in sports. Sports not band. He wanted to be on the field not half-time.

**So you would say that you have one brother who is really into singing?**

Yeah, he loves to sing. He'll sing any song that I'll play.

**Are you encouraging about it?**

I guess theoretically. In a way I am but in a way I'm not...because really I don't want him to be in band or choir...I want him to go into sports...because he's not really, well I don't want to say he's not good because he's only seven...he has the potential, but I don't know if he'd be up for it. I don't want him to go into it and then drop out, and go "That's my brother, the dropout." I told my sister that she's not quitting either.

**How do you perceive your brother's singing? What do you like? What don't you like?**

I like when he sings stuff without words. When he sings stuff with words he goes terrible. He'll go through octaves on accident and stuff. He can sing "Ode to Joy" pretty good...and the fight song. I told him he has to choose...I told him if he's in choir he has to watch it.

**I: Can you think of a time when you have sung *with* your sibling or other family members?**

Yes.

**I: Describe the situation where you were singing.**

Caroling with my Aunt. I went twice...the first experience was good and the second one was bad. We had people open the door and just shut it again. But the first time they were like "Oh! Carolers!" This year I didn't go because I'm like "I don't want to sing, I'll play my trumpet."

**Well how did you feel about the overall group singing?**

It was good.

**I: Can you think of a time when you have sung *in front of* your sibling or other family members?**

No. Wait, I guess I have sung with my brother. I was trying to teach him a little bit of piano...just a scale (*half-sings fast: CDEFGABC*). He was trying to get it because he had wanted to sing it, so I was like "Repeat after the piano," and he would sing, and it was sort of working out. He just sort of figured it out for himself. I know he can sing at least two scales.

**I: Describe the situation where you were singing.**

I wasn't singing, I was just hitting the key...HE was singing. I wasn't like "Sing after me..."

**I: Have you been in a situation where you felt "forced" to sing?**

No. Well yeah...band.

**I: Can you describe the situation with regards to by whom, the setting, for what, etc.?**

We have to sing when we first get a piece of music, because when we're at festival and you have music out for sight-reading, you play it last...you sing through it and stuff first.

**For the most part, is that like 'band singing' that's not really on pitch? It's not like the band actually sounds like a choir...(demonstrates)**

I hope not. Yeah, it's like four pitches maybe. We play instruments...not vocal cords.

**Did you feel like you had to sing when you went caroling?**

No. Well, the first to two years I think I kind of did because my parents were just getting it together. This year...I didn't go. I was like, "You guys have fun, I'm going to stay home and practice."

**And you just really didn't want to go because you just...**

...don't like to sing.

Details of Experience (elaborate on perceptions of experiences with singing)

**I: You were selected for this interview because your sibling gave me the impression that you don't sing, especially in front of other people. Is this true?**

*(nods head)*

**I: Would you ever say that you like to sing?**

No!

**I: Overall, would you identify with the phrase, "I don't like to sing,"?**

Yes. No, I HATE singing.

**I: How would you describe what it is about singing that makes you not like to do it or feel uncomfortable about it?**

I don't know, it's just that part of it...I just, I don't want to say because I suck at it...maybe it's just because I just don't like it. I don't know it's confusing.

**Do you feel like it ever hurts your ears when you try to do it?**

No. I'm use to 107 instruments in my ears, so I'm pretty use to it.

**Do you feel uncomfortable singing?**

I guess in a way. Sometimes it's the people's look on their face like after you get done singing, they're like "Oh my god," and then other times it's "Oh, ok, you're good," and then other times when someone's like really good and you're really bad and you're singing right next to each other and you have to sing, it's like "I don't want to sing. You're good, I'm bad."

**Do you think that it's easy to assume that you're bad?**

Yes. I don't know where I get it, I just am. I don't think I'm good.

**I: Do you ever feel awkward or uncomfortable around other people who are singing?**

Yes.

**I: If so, can you describe a situation where this has been the case and explain why?**

Yes, it was in music class. I sit next to Annie and we had to sing some dumb song. And she was singing and I felt terrible because I was just like suckish.

**And you think she's so good?**

Yeah. I'm like, ugh *(sighs)* I'm like, "I don't like this...I'm not as good as everyone else."

**I: Overall, would you identify with the phrase, "I can't sing."?**

Yes.

**I: Has anyone ever told you you're bad or not good at singing?**

No, I get told I'm good...a lot.

**Then why do you feel like you can't sing?**

I just can't...it's kinda weird, like, I'll hum and whistle and stuff and people are like "I bet you're an amazing singer..." and I'm like, nope.

**I: Have you heard anyone tell someone else that they are bad or not good at singing?**

Yes, many times. Many times.

**Can you give me an example?**

Music teachers. I've heard music teachers go, "You suck, don't sing!" Robuck...he's an elementary music teacher here. He's one of my mentors.

**Why do you think he would tell people that they're bad?**

Well this particular person was purposely screwing up. But I've heard students tell other students they suck too.

**Like for real, or in more of a joking fashion?**

For real. In fact, I've told people they suck at singing (*laughs*).

**Do you feel like these are people that need to be told that they're not good?**

Yes, so that they will stop, and I don't have to hear them screech.

**But you've never been told that you're bad at it?**

(*shakes head*)

**I: Have you ever told someone they're bad or not good at singing?**

Yes.

**I: Do you ever sing along to music you listen to, especially by yourself?**

No. Well, I listen and I hum, but I don't like get all into it. Classical music I hum and whistle, but like modern music I don't even do anything to...I just listen to it.

Reflection on Meaning (influences on perceptions of singing)

**I: Over the course of this interview, we have talked about your previous singing experiences, current involvement or lack thereof, and overall opinions about singing. Keeping in mind everything we have discussed so far, what do you think has had the biggest impact on how you feel about singing?**

My Aunt. She was so good and I'm so bad.

**So do you feel like with her being so good that it separates the "really good" singer from a lot of other people? Because they're so good, you just think "I know I'm not as good as they are."**

Yes. Exactly.

**I: In other words, why do you think you feel the way you do about singing?**

It's kind of mixed. It's maybe because I'm around some good people that are singing like my Aunt and my cousin, but it maybe also because I'm in band and have a pretty big ego. Since I'm in band, I feel like band is better and choir is just here (*middle motion*) but band's like way up there (*high motion*).

**Do you feel like you identify with being a trumpet player at this point much more than being a singer?**

Yes.

**I: Has your sibling's involvement in choir impacted the way you see or feel about singing at all?**

No.

**I: Would you say that any other family members have influenced how you feel about singing?**

Yeah.

**I: Would you say that any friends have influenced how you feel about singing?**

Well, Annie I guess. That's about it. Good because she's so good but also bad because I think I'm bad.

**I: Overall, would you say that you have a positive or a negative opinion of singing?**

Kind of mutual, because I think it's good that some people can sing, but then I don't like it in a way. It's kind of like mixed feelings. That's just because you're a choir teacher...singing is what you do every day, but...did you play any instruments?

**Yeah, I played trumpet and I play piano.**

**So would you say that you appreciate singing?**

Yeah, well, good singing. Not singing in general, just good singing.

**Do you think that singing is something that you can or cannot do?**

Can't. Yeah, I can't do it. I believe there are some people who can do it and then some people who should just talk the rest of their lives.

**Do you think that someone can easily learn how to play an instrument with the right practice?**

You might be able to. Yeah, I believe you can if you try really hard.

**But that doesn't apply to singing? It's just black or white...can or can't?**

Yeah. God gave you bad vocal cords, well you're going to have bad vocal cords!

**I: Do you think that most people your age feel the way you do about singing?**

No. Well I don't think so. I think most people...most people in my family like singing. I think most of my band friends feel the way I do. I don't think they like singing. I don't think some choir kids like singing either, which makes no sense.

**I: Can you give me an example or explain why you think so?**

Because the whole ego thing...like with the band and the choir. Certain people...like the real addicts...instruments is their thing. That's why whenever we sing, there's always someone that always says "Hey, that's why we're in band..because we suck at singing."

**So do you think that most people in band think that they can't sing?**

Yeah.

**Why?**

I don't know. They just think they do. Well, there's some people who like to sing.

**Well, there's a difference between not liking singing and then really thinking that you're bad. Would you say that you're more towards...**

...not liking it.

**Yeah, it seems like you don't really know if you're really bad.**

Mhmm.



**I: Do you think that most adults feel the way you do about singing?**

I don't know. Most people in my family like to sing because they're in the choir at church. There are some adults at church that hate singing, and then there's others that love it.

**I: Can you give me an example or explain why you think so?**

(skipped)

**I: This interview was based on the following over-arching questions:**

- 1) How do you describe your experiences with singing?
- 2) How do you describe your perceptions of singing?
- 3) What do you describe as influences on your perceptions of singing?

**Do you think we have covered these in our conversation, and/or is there anything you think we should add?**

Yes, a lot.

I respect singers that are good and teachers that can actually sing. And I disrespect people who suck and people that just need to be quiet the rest of their lives.

**What would it take for you feel like you "could" kind of sing?**

Singing lessons.

**Can you imagine singing with any of your friends?**

Not really. Well actually, my friend wants me to do a barbershop quartet. Because his grandpa was in one and he wants me to be in it...and in a way I want to but in a way I don't. (*I react!!!*) I know! A barbershop quartet! It's funny though. I don't know if I want to do it because it's the whole process of actually singing. I think they're amazing. That's the only thing singing that I look up online...is barbershop.

**I: Those are all of the questions I have today. Thank you so much for your participation in this interview!**

**Appendix B: Completed Protocol Document (Kurt)**

**Interviewer:** First and foremost, thank you for agreeing to talk to me about singing today. Your willingness to do so offers great perspective on my work as a music educator and researcher. Secondly, this interview is about you and what you have to say regarding your own experiences and opinions. I am here only to record your responses and keep our conversation on the topic. I am not here to judge what you have to say or try to get you to say something you don't want to. Throughout the interview, I will review your responses with you to make sure I record them correctly and honestly. Do you have any questions or are you ready to get started?

Demographics

**Interviewer (I):** Please state your age and what grade [year] you will be in this fall.  
15, and I'm in 10<sup>th</sup> grade.

**I:** Are you currently involved in any music classes outside of school like guitar or piano lessons?

I taught myself guitar, does that count?

**Yes.** How long have you been playing guitar?

About two years.

Focused Life History (previous experiences with singing)

**I:** What kind of music do you like to listen to, or who is your favorite music artist/performer?

Well my number one favorite is ACDC. That kind of gives you a feel for what I like to listen to. Anyone from the 60s, 70s, and 80s. I'm like a rock encyclopedia in my mind.

**I:** Can you describe why you like this music or what you like about it?

I kind of almost grew up with it. Mostly just the way it sounds – it sounds good.

**Would you say that you parents like ACDC?**

Yeah, my dad's a fan of them.

**I:** Would you say that you like to listen to other people sing?

Yeah.

**I:** In general, how would you describe what singing is?

Someone who goes out in public to do it.

**I:** Who do you think has the best voice or is the best singer ever?

Well, I like the way Rob Hellford, he's really good. He's the lead singer of Judas Priest.

**I:** Do you ever wish you could sing like them?

(laughs) No. No way.

**Is it too far out there or you just don't think you ever could?**

I don't think I ever could. People like Bruce Dickenson or Rob Hellford...I could never sound like them.

**I: Can you think of a time that you have had a conversation about singing or music with a friend or family member?**

Yep, me and Dad have big debates. There's a show called "*That Metal Show*" on VH1 Classic. They have this thing called the showdown where they list two people and they see which one's better. And me and Dad always go for a brawl on who's better. They asked the audience...they go everywhere...they ask which albums better, better guitarist, etc.

**What kind of style does your dad go for as opposed to you?**

I like more foreign rock, like Scorpions or ACDC. He likes to go more American. He's more of a fan of Van Halen or Stevie Ray Vaughan, or The Eagles. Those are all great bands, too, but he prefers to listen to those than the other foreign British invasion people.

**Do you think you like the bands that you do because of the songs, the lyrics, or more of the sound of the band?**

I guess it's a little of both. Like Tom Petty. I like him for his songs and not really pay attention to his sound, I just like his songs.

**I: Can you explain what you were talking about (singer, band, type of music, etc.)?****I: Do you have any memories of people singing to you or around you as a child?****Did your dad ever sing at home?**

(laughs) My dad can't sing to save his life. Um, my mom was in the church choir while I was growing up. I remember her singing in the kitchen while she was cooking supper...singing a couple church song.

**Does she still sing?**

Not really, not as much as she use to. After we left our previous church, she just stopped.

**Did you like how they sounded?**

Yeah. Yeah. I like religious music, also.

**Was it all adults? Was there an opportunity for you to sing with them?**

No. At my current church, I usually play the guitar with the choir. Like, our Vicar has me come over every once in a while and play my guitar with them. We go to a Lutheran church – it's a little traditional but we do some more contemporary stuff too.

**Do you like playing your guitar with the choir?**

Yeah.

**Is that why you started learning guitar?**

Well, my dad had an acoustic guitar that was in the basement. I picked it up and started plucking some strings trying to make some weird rhythm out it. I had no idea what I was doing. For my fourteenth birthday, my dad got me a guitar book, some picks, and a tuner. So I tuned up his acoustic and taught myself how to play. I have one acoustic guitars and three electric guitars. I got my Les Paul for Christmas this year.

**Have you ever been to the Rock n' Roll Hall of Fame?**

I have – my grandparents took me two summers ago. I loved it.

**Les Paul "Doodle"** – I spent 25 minutes plucking those strings. Les Paul is from Wisconsin.

**I: Do you remember any songs you liked as a child?**

As a kid, like when I was four, I was in the garage with my dad. Before I switched to Classic Rock and stuff I use to listen to country. So my dad always had the country station on in the garage. There's this song about flowers on the walls – it's fairly old. It's from like the 90s. Oh, I loved that song as a kid. It was like a one-hit wonder. Oh I loved that song.

**I: How do you see your siblings' singing experiences?**

**I: Can you think of a time when you have sung *with* your sibling or other family members?**

I remember me and my older sister at my old church. I was probably about five or six...for the Christmas play. Me and my little sister and a group of other kids in our church...we all sang "Silent Night" and "Away in a Manger". To be honest I don't remember if I liked it or not. I was grumpy as a kid. I remember my mom tell me that I was a sheep for one of the plays, but I wanted to be Joseph, so I was grumpy.

**Ok, so you've sung in some church plays...**

I've been in probably almost every single Christmas play up until I was like eight. Me and my dad have only been going to our church for a little over a year. I was a reader for the Christmas play this year.

**Did you have the chance to sing?**

No. I played the drums. They would have let me sing, but I didn't want to.

**I: Describe the situation where you were singing.**

**I: Can you think of a time when you have sung *in front of* your sibling or other family members?**

Can't say I do.

**I: Describe the situation where you were singing.**

**I: Have you been in a situation where you felt "forced" to sing?**

Nope. Pretty sure every opportunity I had/have was optional. In like elementary school when they set up these concerts to sing for their parents...I never went to those...I think I only went to one. I was in third grade. It was a spring thing called "Schools Out".

**Would you say that it was an OK experience, or did you hate every minute of it?**

Well I was in the back, so I really didn't care. It wasn't too torturous. I didn't hate it but I didn't really have much fun.

**Would you say by then you kind of felt like singing wasn't your thing?**

I always new it wasn't my thing.

**I: Can you describe the situation with regards to by whom, the setting, for what, etc.?**

Details of Experience (elaborate on perceptions of experiences with singing)

**I: You were selected for this interview because your sibling gave me the impression that you don't sing, especially in front of other people. Is this true?**

(laughs) Yes.

**I: Would you ever say that you like to sing?**

When I was little I didn't like to sing, so...no.

**I: Overall, would you identify with the phrase, "I don't like to sing,"?**

Yeah.

**I: How would you describe what it is about singing that makes you not like to do it or feel uncomfortable about it?**

It...yeah, I don't really like to do it because it's too much to handle. Second of all, I can't do it. (laughs)

**I: Do you ever feel awkward or uncomfortable around other people who are singing?**

**Like if people are singing "Happy Birthday" to someone around you, what do you do...what's your instinct?**

Yeah I just join in...just don't really care about the singing...I just enjoy the event.

**Do you feel uncomfortable playing the guitar with a group of people who are singing?**

No

**I: If so, can you describe a situation where this has been the case and explain why?**

**I: Overall, would you identify with the phrase, "I can't sing."?**

Yeah. I cannot do it.

**I: Has anyone ever told you you're bad or not good at singing?**

Yeah. Oh yeah.

**Like who?**

My sisters.

**Have they been telling you that for a while or is this a recent thing?**

It's always been that way. They hear me mumbling along to ACDC and they're like, "Kurt! You can't sing!"

**Do you think that they can?**

My little sister's pretty good.

**I: Have you heard anyone tell someone else that they are bad or not good at singing?**

Yeah.

**Like who?**

My sister tells my neighbor he can't sing. Me and my neighbor are pretty much the same person.

**Is he around your age?**

Yeah, I think he's 13.

**Have you ever heard anyone at school tell someone they can't sing?**

I don't think so.

**I: Have you ever told someone they're bad or not good at singing?**

In a joking manner...

**Did you really think that they were kind of bad, even though it came across as joking? Or weren't they really that bad...**

It was not bad, just sort of mediocre. I mean, they weren't bad but they weren't good.

**I: Do you ever sing along to music you listen to, especially by yourself?**

Yeah.

**Do you enjoy that?**

I don't really...well, I wouldn't...(laughs). Well I don't mean to do it, but it's kind of like muscle memory. Songs that I know that I listen to on a regular basis just pop up...I just start humming along and singing along with the lyrics.

Reflection on Meaning (influences on perceptions of singing)

**I: Over the course of this interview, we have talked about your previous singing experiences, current involvement or lack thereof, and overall opinions about singing. Keeping in mind everything we have discussed so far, what do you think has had the biggest impact on how you feel about singing?**

I don't know...

**So, we've talked about your taste in music, some of your family's background (your mom, dad, sisters)...those might be some examples that could kind of have an impact on you. Would you say that anyone in your family has had an impact on how you feel about singing? Or any of your church musical or school experiences? Any big "turn-off" moment?**

Not really. I've just never really caught on to singing.

**I: In other words, why do you think you feel the way you do about singing?**

To be honest, judgment. Most of the time when I'm like singing a song...judgment, people will like stop me and start criticizing...saying I'm the most terrible voice in the world...something like that. I've never heard anyone say that, but it's fear of judgment.

**I: Has your sibling's involvement in choir impacted the way you see or feel about singing at all?**

In a way...I know when she messes up it drives me insane. Like when she doesn't get lyrics right to a song I correct her. She sings fairly well though. When she's really driving me crazy, I want to tell her that she's bad. A lot of people think she's pretty good though.

**I: Would you say that any other family members have influenced how you feel about singing?**

My mother in choir...

**Do you feel like your appreciate it because of her?**

Yeah, not really...

**Has your mom ever made you feel like you can't sing?**

It doesn't really have anything to do with her. I just...can't do it.

**What about your dad?**

Well we both sound about the same singing.

**I: Would you say that any friends have influenced how you feel about singing?**

No, I don't think so.

**If you felt like you were good at singing, do you think you might feel comfortable singing around them?**

Well, me and all my friends are bad at singing. Sometimes we'll just start out and just yell out lyrics to songs, no matter what it sounds like.

**Are these friends mostly boys your age?**

Yeah.

**I: Overall, would you say that you have a positive or a negative opinion of singing?**

Neutral.

**I: Do you think that most people your age feel the way you do about singing?**

Yeah.

**I: Can you give me an example or explain why you think so?**

Um, well, a lot of people my age...when I tell someone they're good at singing, they repress themselves and say they suck.

**What about anyone else your age being involved in singing? Do you think that it's kind of the same for a lot of people your age...like in band...who feel the same way you do?**

A handful of us.

**I: Do you think that most adults feel the way you do about singing?**

No.

**I: Can you give me an example or explain why you think so?**

Well people my age – they keep repressing themselves. People who are adults who know they can sing...well, sing. Like in the choir that I play my guitar with. They're all adults who know they can sing and been told by people they can sing, so they feel more comfortable...confident singing around people then people my age.

**What do you think it would take for more people your age to feel more confident about singing?**

Tell them to hear themselves...record themselves singing.

**Oh, so let them be the judge...**

Yeah.

**Do you think that singing is something that you can or cannot do?**

I know I can't do it. I know that from past experience that I know I can't sing. From what my peers told me, from what other people have told me.

**Have you ever had an experience that has kind of counteracted that attitude? Like, made you feel like you could sing?**

Yeah, I don't think there will ever be an experience like that.

**I: This interview was based on the following over-arching questions:**

- 1) How do you describe your experiences with singing?
- 2) How do you describe your perceptions of singing?
- 3) What do you describe as influences on your perceptions of singing?

**Do you think we have covered these in our conversation, and/or is there anything you think we should add?**

Yeah. No, I think this was great – it's a good interview the way it is...I enjoyed it.

**I: Those are all of the questions I have today. Thank you so much for your participation in this interview!**

## Appendix B: Completed Protocol Document (Tia)

**Interviewer:** First and foremost, thank you for agreeing to talk to me about singing today. Your willingness to do so offers great perspective on my work as a music educator and researcher. Secondly, this interview is about you and what you have to say regarding your own experiences and opinions. I am here only to record your responses and keep our conversation on the topic. I am not here to judge what you have to say or try to get you to say something you don't want to. Throughout the interview, I will review your responses with you to make sure I record them correctly and honestly. Do you have any questions or are you ready to get started?

### Demographics

**Interviewer (I):** Please state your age and what grade [year] you will be in this fall.

I'm 16, and I'm in 11<sup>th</sup> grade.

**I:** Are you currently involved in any music classes outside of school like guitar or piano lessons?

Um, no I am not.

### Focused Life History (previous experiences with singing)

**I:** What kind of music do you like to listen to, or who is your favorite music artist/performer?

I love country music, but my favorite artist or group is The Script – it's like, calm music. They're like Maroon 5.

**What kind of country music do you like?**

I like Jason Aldine, Taylor Swift...I like country music that I can relate to. Because I feel like country music is like the people's music, rather than rap music...that's more bad things I guess.

**I:** Can you describe why you like this music or what you like about it?

I like country music because I can relate to a lot of those songs. I like The Script because it's calm, it's not...you can like understand their music and follow along with it...it's just something to like settle to. It's not chaotic.

**I:** Would you say that you like to listen to other people sing?

I do.

**I:** In general, how would you describe what singing is?

**What does someone do when they sing? What does it take for someone to sing?**

I think it takes a lot of emotion, you have to put emotion into it, it's not just talking...you have to put feeling behind it...expression.

**I:** Who do you think has the best voice or is the best singer ever?

Wow. I'm a big Glee fan, and I love Rachel's voice.

**Can you think of a boy whose voice you think is the best?**

The lead singer of The Script...I really like his voice...he's got like a calm, mellow tone.

**I:** Do you ever wish you could sing like them?

Yes! Yes, I do! (smiling)



**I: Can you think of a time that you have had a conversation about singing or music with a friend or family member?**

Yes. Yeah...my sister.

**I: Can you explain what you were talking about (singer, band, type of music, etc.)?**

Well recently our biggest music talk was when she was doing the talent show. She was trying to figure out how she could go from a high to a low range to match the other girl's voice.

**I: Do you have any memories of people singing to you or around you as a child?**

Um, my Aunt is actually a musici-...well, she plays guitar and she writes her own music, and me and my sister would sing along with her. She writes her own Christian music.

**I: Do you remember any songs you liked as a child?**

Me and my sister had this track – “The Wedding Song” – that’s what we called it. “Going to the chapel...” (speaks in rhythm)...it’s like an oldies song.

**I: How do you see your siblings’ singing experiences?**

I’ve seen her improve a lot. When she use to be in middle school, she was kind of a quiet singer, and she never really sang around us, but now, in high school, she’s singing a lot more...she sings at home now. She’s a lot more open. I’ve never really like listened to her sing until just kind of recently, maybe last year or so.

**Do you admire your sister’s abilities?**

I do, um, I’m more of the athletic type, and so that’s how I excel, and good grades. But my sister...she’s got the *other* talent, that people can’t just really go “Oh, I can sing”...it’s kind of like more of a gift than a talent.

**I: Can you think of a time when you have sung *with* your sibling or other family members?**

We always sing Christmas music around Christmastime...singing in the car just when we’re driving to school...and with my Aunt.

**I: Describe the situation where you were singing.**

**I: Can you think of a time when you have sung *in front of* your sibling or other family members?**

Um, I actually did choir in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, as like a try it out type of thing, and it wasn’t for me, but, I did sing back then...at least tried to.

**So has your sister heard you sing?**

Yeah. Yeah.

**I: Describe the situation where you were singing.**

**I: Have you been in a situation where you felt “forced” to sing?**

No, not that I recall, no.

**Or when you were in choir were you ever uncomfortable with singing every day?**

Well, I kind of did it more ‘cause my friend were doing it...but then, you know, got more involved and I had a solo and I didn’t want to do it really. Actually, it was a duet...we sang a Pocahontas song...I dreaded it...even just like dress rehearsal...and performing...it wasn’t for me.

**I: Can you describe the situation with regards to by whom, the setting, for what, etc.?**

Details of Experience (elaborate on perceptions of experiences with singing)

**I: You were selected for this interview because your sibling gave me the impression that you don't sing, especially in front of other people. Is this true?**

That is true. (laughs)

**I: Would you ever say that you like to sing?**

Um, I like to sing...I'm just not the best at it.

**I: Overall, would you identify with the phrase, "I don't like to sing,"?**

No.

**I: How would you describe what it is about singing that makes you not like to do it or feel uncomfortable about it?**

Just the fact that I'm not good I guess. I've kind of always been good with sports, so I guess that's my area...I'm comfortable with that. When it comes to like singing and being the center of attention where people are looking at you and expecting you, and like, singing doesn't come out the way that you want it to I guess.

**Do you feel like being a "singer" has been much more a part of your sister's identity than yours?**

Yes.

**Do you think that because of that, it's been easier for you to have an identity elsewhere, like with athletics?**

I think so. It's kind of like that's her thing and this is my thing.

**I: Do you ever feel awkward or uncomfortable around other people who are singing?**

No, I enjoy it!

**I: If so, can you describe a situation where this has been the case and explain why?**

**I: Overall, would you identify with the phrase, "I can't sing,"?**

Yes! (laughs) Yes.

**I: Has anyone ever told you you're bad or not good at singing?**

Um, my sister always says whenever I'm singing, it's more of like a joke, but she probably means it (laughs).

**I: Have you heard anyone tell someone else that they are bad or not good at singing?**

**I: Have you ever told someone they're bad or not good at singing?**

**I: Do you ever sing along to music you listen to, especially by yourself?**

Yes.

Reflection on Meaning (influences on perceptions of singing)

**I: Over the course of this interview, we have talked about your previous singing experiences, current involvement or lack thereof, and overall opinions about singing. Keeping in mind everything we have discussed so far, what do you think has had the biggest impact on how you feel about singing?**

Seeing how much my sister cares about it. It's become her thing. Going to the concerts, seeing how involved she is, how much she talks about it in and out of school.

**Do you feel like that has increased your appreciation of it? You mean that as a good thing, yeah?**

Yeah, like it's not even like choir is like a club...it's like a special talent, you know, like it's more of a privilege feel to be in choir and be noticed that you can sing.

**I: In other words, why do you think you feel the way you do about singing?**

Just being around it and watching my sister develop in this musical kind of world.

**I: Has your sibling's involvement in choir impacted the way you see or feel about singing at all?**

Yeah, in a good way.

**I: Would you say that any other family members have influenced how you feel about singing?**

My Aunt has. Because it's so important to her – she grew up singing, and the chance that she might lose that, it becomes that much more important to her. It kind of makes you appreciate it more, it's not just like music to her...it's like a lifestyle to her.

**Yeah, I mean, that whole sing-songwriter...**

It's like a different aspect of music...it's like original.

**I: Would you say that any friends have influenced how you feel about singing?**

Mm, not mine, not the type of friends who... I hang out with my soccer friends and we're all athletic.

**I: Overall, would you say that you have a positive or a negative opinion of singing?**

I have a positive opinion, because I'm around it and it'd be hard to think of it as negative. Nothing negative comes out of it, that connects emotions in such a good way.

**Would you say that you have a positive or negative attitude toward your singing?**

I probably have a negative attitude. I just know that I'm not good at it, so I just don't try...I just sing to sing.

**I: Do you think that most people your age feel the way you do about singing?**

Maybe more of the way I feel about my singing – maybe not like my perspective on overall singing – but probably a negative attitude.

**I: Can you give me an example or explain why you think so?**

Um, just because...I think teenagers have more of like a shut-off attitude about it. Either you like it or you don't...just with like everything in general. If it's not your thing they just kind of turn the other way. So...there's not like a grey area.

**I: Do you think that most adults feel the way you do about singing?**

I think that adults have a better appreciation for music, because there wasn't as many distractions – like it was more real. They didn't have the internet or even much television. Listening to the radio was what to do. They paid attention to music more.

**Do you think that more adults know more about music than teenagers?**

Probably, yeah, I mean kids kind of limit what they think of it, and adults are listening to it more importantly, it's just the overall sound of it.

**I: Can you give me an example or explain why you think so?**

**I: This interview was based on the following over-arching questions:**

- 1) How do you describe your experiences with singing?
- 2) How do you describe your perceptions of singing?

**3) What do you describe as influences on your perceptions of singing?**

**Do you think we have covered these in our conversation, and/or is there anything you think we should add?**

I do – nope.

**Was this interview harder or easier than you thought it would be?**

Easier.

**Anything else you were afraid of, or thought we would cover and didn't?**

No, I thought I would be more nervous but I'm actually more comfortable.

**I: Those are all of the questions I have today. Thank you so much for your participation in this interview!**

### Appendix B: Completed Protocol Document (Hope)

**Interviewer: First and foremost, thank you for agreeing to talk to me about singing today. Your willingness to do so offers great perspective on my work as a music educator and researcher. Secondly, this interview is about you and what you have to say regarding your own experiences and opinions. I am here only to record your responses and keep our conversation on the topic. I am not here to judge what you have to say or try to get you to say something you don't want to. Throughout the interview, I will review your responses with you to make sure I record them correctly and honestly. Do you have any questions or are you ready to get started?**

#### Demographics

**Interviewer (I): Please state your age and what grade [year] you will be in this fall.**

I am 17 and I am a senior.

**I: Are you currently involved in any music classes outside of school like guitar or piano lessons?**

No.

#### Focused Life History (previous experiences with singing)

**I: What kind of music do you like to listen to, or who is your favorite music artist/performer?**

Um, my favorite artist would be Manafest. It's a Christian band. They're not like gospel Christian, they're more like rock n' roll Christian. It's like praise Jesus, but it's like this is how you feel when you do that. It's not like you have to do this, you have to do that. I like La Craix, he's a Christian rapper.

**I: Can you describe why you like this music or what you like about it?**

I feel like it's more where I am at as a Christian right now. It's not just praise Jesus, it's praise Jesus even when you're going through this and this, so when you're going through these problems you have something to look back on and be like I know. And it's also fun and upbeat.

**I: Would you say that you like to listen to other people sing?**

Um, if they're good. I mean all songs and everyone who sings to praise Jesus, Jesus will enjoy and will love, so it doesn't matter if you're good or not, but it's easier on the ears if you're good.

**But overall you like vocal music?**

Yes. I like instrumental music too when I do my homework.

**I: In general, how would you describe what singing is?**

They are using an instrument that does not need to be provided for them. It's their own soul.

**I: Who do you think has the best voice or is the best singer ever?**

I would say I think my sister, because she sings beautifully but she also has a soul and a purpose behind it. I think if there's meaning behind the words it gives it an extra umpf.

**I: Do you ever wish you could sing like them?**

No, because I feel like God has given us both different gifts. Like mine is more artistic and on paper and with math and science, and hers is performing. We always joke if we were put together we'd be the perfect person.

**I: Can you think of a time that you have had a conversation about singing or music with a friend or family member?**

We were just talking about the musical at lunch today.

**I: Can you explain what you were talking about (singer, band, type of music, etc.)?**

We talked about the harmony one of my friends was doing out in the hallway. We also talked about the order of the scenes and songs.

**I: Do you have any memories of people singing to you or around you as a child?**

I don't personally, but my mom says that she use to sing to me.

**What is your first memory of your sister singing around you?**

It's just so, like when it constantly happens you can't go back to the first time...because it's just been my life. I mean, she's probably, I was born into her singing I guess.

**So her singing has been a big part of your childhood?**

Yeah.

**I: Do you remember any songs you liked as a child?**

I liked "Letters From War" by Mark Schultz, and "It's My Father's House"...I liked that. I remember when the group came to a festival and I sat on my dad's shoulders to see. I remember that. I liked the Christian little kid songs. We had this tape series with this toucan and it was a coloring book and everything so you could color along to the songs. I think they were kids singing.

**I: How do you see your siblings' singing experiences?**

I think that she is a very strong singer, because I know she did loose her voice for quite a while, and having the persistence to get it back. It's beautiful right now...better than ever I think. I think she hurt her throat in a performance that she did, and just regaining her strength back.

**Is there anything that sticks out about anything you've seen her be a part of?**

When she's praising God when she sings. That sticks out to me, because you can see the connection. Normally I see her at camp in the summer, and she sometimes sings up front or in the back. It doesn't matter where she's standing, so you know it isn't for show...it's her true feelings.

**I: Can you think of a time when you have sung *with* your sibling or other family members?**

Yeah.

**I: Describe the situation where you were singing.**

I mean yeah, we would sing next to each other in church and at camp, and on buses to do all the camp songs. There was this one time when we wrote this little poem and turned it into a song. It was about blueberries and strawberries...we were really young.

**I: Can you think of a time when you have sung *in front of* your sibling or other family members?**

Just me? I don't know if when it's just me, but, I mean, I've sung around her before, like when we're listening to music.

**I: Describe the situation where you were singing.**

(skipped)

**I: Have you been in a situation where you felt "forced" to sing?**

Um, no, I don't think so. I mean, I never really put myself in that situation, and therefore I haven't been in that situation.

**I: Can you describe the situation with regards to by whom, the setting, for what, etc.?**  
(skipped)

Details of Experience (elaborate on perceptions of experiences with singing)

**I: You were selected for this interview because your sibling gave me the impression that you don't sing, especially in front of other people. Is this true?**

Yeah.

**I: Would you ever say that you like to sing?**

Depends on the context. I like singing at camp, like in camp songs and in groups of people, but I don't like singing alone in front of people.

**I: Overall, would you identify with the phrase, "I don't like to sing,"?**

Hmm. I mean I like singing inside my comfort zone.

**I: How would you describe what it is about singing that makes you not like to do it or feel uncomfortable about it?**

**Does some singing make you feel uncomfortable?**

I don't know, maybe I just don't feel like it's the right time.

**I: Do you ever feel awkward or uncomfortable around other people who are singing?**

No.

**You can deal with people singing around you?**

Um, do you know who my friends are?! (*laughs*)

**I: If so, can you describe a situation where this has been the case and explain why?**  
(skipped)

**I: Overall, would you identify with the phrase, "I can't sing."?**

I mean, I would say I'm a tone-deaf mule or any animal that was driven over by a car, but my sister says I can sing, so I don't know. I think she just says that because she's my sister and she loves me. Or maybe I've gotten a little bit better over the years, but I don't know.

**Why do you think you fall more into the category of the tone-deaf side versus the "Yep, I'm good at singing" side?**

Because I don't sound good? (*laughs*) I mean, when you listen to people sing you know how it's suppose to sound, and you don't sound like that...it's because you're not good. I mean, it's not something you should be ashamed of because it's just singing, it's not like, it's not my life. It's like you can do something but you don't have to be good at it. Although, I don't sing that much, so...just in church.

**I: Has anyone ever told you you're bad or not good at singing?**

(*laughs*) When I was little. I don't remember the situation, I just wasn't a good singer. I feel bad for the elementary music teachers.

**I: Have you heard anyone tell someone else that they are bad or not good at singing?**

No, I don't think so. Maybe, but I tuned it out or was like, this is not a conversation you should get involved in. Things that are hurtful I just try to tune out because I don't think it's right.

**Is everyone supportive at camp of anyone who wants to sing?**

Ohh...yes. (*smiling*) There's this little boy who was just praising Jesus in his own way...they sang along with him. I wasn't there, but we hear about it all the time.

**I: Have you ever told someone they're bad or not good at singing?**

Probably. I don't remember exactly, but I've heard a lot of bad singers, and maybe I've wanted to tell them that they are bad, but I was always the nice girl who wouldn't tell them that they're bad.

**I: Do you ever sing along to music you listen to, especially by yourself?**

Um, sometimes, I kinda sing it.

Reflection on Meaning (influences on perceptions of singing)**I: Over the course of this interview, we have talked about your previous singing experiences, current involvement or lack thereof, and overall opinions about singing. Keeping in mind everything we have discussed so far, what do you think has had the biggest impact on how you feel about singing?****I: In other words, why do you think you feel the way you do about singing?**

Probably the way I was raised, like my surroundings and my environment. You can be good or bad at singing...you weren't judged for the way you were. It's a way to praise Jesus, and it's music to His ears no matter what it is. So, that was always nice...it was never, "Hope, you're such a bad singer. Stop singing to that song!" It was, "Hope, do you know what that song means? Do you know what you're doing right now? I'm very proud of you."

**I: Has your sibling's involvement in choir impacted the way you see or feel about singing at all?**

There was this one time when one of the moms of the students came up to me and chewed me out for my sister and I was like, what is going on? That made me realize that the environment that I'm in was the best one for me, because she was talking about how my sister got all this attention and how "Aren't you jealous or mad that your parents just love her more," and all this. I'm sitting there like, "You don't even know me. I should call the cops right now. *(laughs)* Go away!" It was just like I was raised in an environment where we weren't...where one wasn't better than the other. We were raised in an environment where we all have talents and they all can shine, and as long as we use them all to praise God, then we're all appreciated for that.

**I: Would you say that any other family members have influenced how you feel about singing?**

Umm, my grandpa likes Elvis.

**Any observations about your parents singing or how they see their own singing?**

I mean, I think my parents know that they're not the best singers, but again, they don't sing for the enjoyment of others. They sing to praise God, so in their eyes and in God's eyes it's beautiful.

**I: Would you say that any friends have influenced how you feel about singing?**

They probably put me in a lot more situations to sing, because they're all singers...every one of them. So I mean, I like new perspectives and like how people view singing and all that jazz, or just how people view the world in general, because how you view one thing is how you view another.

**I: Overall, would you say that you have a positive or a negative opinion of singing?**

I think it's mutual. Sometimes I think it's unnecessary and sometimes a distraction, but I guess that's just me being ignorant and mean...because I want peace and quiet...because I'm one of those *(laughs)* silent types. But then other times I like it.

**I: Do you think that most people your age feel the way you do about singing?**

Probably not.

**I: Can you give me an example or explain why you think so?**

I think with all the media and the environment that other people were growing up in, they don't see the natural beauty and how we need to praise God in everything that we do. I was always raised that there's the 'worldly' view



and then there's the 'Godly' view. Even though we slip into the 'worldly' view we can still go back. I don't think a lot of teenagers or kids are being raised with that connotation that there is this powerful love out there that they can grab a hold of in any way, shape, or form. They're just raised with "Adventureland" and all those meaningless TV shows.

**How do you think most of the students in this school feel about singing?**

Mmm, I don't think they think about it. I mean I don't know if they have negative connotations or positive...I just think that it's another thing in this world that doesn't pertain to them, so they're not going to think about it.

**I: Do you think that most adults feel the way you do about singing?**

I think that there are lots of different groups of teenagers and adults and all this stuff that it's hard to categorize them into 'this is what they most likely will think.' But with the world that I can see, I don't know...I don't know if they like it or not. It's obviously a billion dollar industry, so...they like listening to it (*laughs*).

**Do you see any differences between the younger people in your church congregation or at camp and the older people and how they interact with worship singing?**

I think that there's more involvement with the kids because there all kid praise songs. I feel like God calls us to have a "child-like" faith, so theirs is more whole-hearted and giving and just open and innocent and pure, that their not trying to hide anything from God while they're praising him, they're just being themselves. While adults...are not innocent anymore, and they have faced hard times and troubles and have had losses, and I feel like they want to hide them from God. Like just with seeing them singing and worshipping God, I don't feel like they know what they're actually singing...more like going through the motions.

**I: Can you give me an example or explain why you think so?**

(skipped)

**I: This interview was based on the following over-arching questions:**

- 1) **How do you describe your experiences with singing?**
- 2) **How do you describe your perceptions of singing?**
- 3) **What do you describe as influences on your perceptions of singing?**

**Do you think we have covered these in our conversation, and/or is there anything you think we should add?**

(*nods*) Hmmm, no. (*laughs*)

**I: Those are all of the questions I have today. Thank you so much for your participation in this interview!**

### Appendix B: Completed Protocol Document (Ken)

**Interviewer:** First and foremost, thank you for agreeing to talk to me about singing today. Your willingness to do so offers great perspective on my work as a music educator and researcher. Secondly, this interview is about you and what you have to say regarding your own experiences and opinions. I am here only to record your responses and keep our conversation on the topic. I am not here to judge what you have to say or try to get you to say something you don't want to. Throughout the interview, I will review your responses with you to make sure I record them correctly and honestly. Do you have any questions or are you ready to get started?

#### Demographics

**Interviewer (I):** Please state your age and what grade [year] you will be in this fall.

I'm 19 and I'm a college freshman.

**I:** Are you currently involved in any music classes outside of school like guitar or piano lessons?

No, I'm not anymore. I've been meaning to, but I keep forgetting about it. I was going to do the university band.

#### Focused Life History (previous experiences with singing)

**I:** What kind of music do you like to listen to, or who is your favorite music artist/performer?

Well, one of my favorites is John Williams. I listen to a lot of film and game soundtracks. Only one country band, mostly...Rascal Flatts. I don't know, I have a wide variety...it's just rap...some rap is kind of good I guess but I'm not really a fan. Hip-hop...some is good, but I'm not really a heavy listener.

**I:** Can you describe why you like this music or what you like about it?

I don't know, it just has that...his style, like, just the way he writes it. And, it's so thematic, and popular...I guess its kind of part of the mainstream. I love how it's so thematic and it has different themes for different characters and places and whatnot.

**I:** Would you say that you like to listen to other people sing?

What do you mean, like on records or just people in person?

**Either...**

Well I have to deal with it at home (*laughs*). Sometimes my sisters just sing just to be goofy. They'll be playing their iPod or whatever, or they'll think of a song and they'll start singing it.

**Would you say that you appreciate your sisters' singing?**

Yeah.

**Do you like to listen to any professional singers?**

Yeah, Josh Groban...Celine Dion.

**I:** In general, how would you describe what singing is?

**I:** Who do you think has the best voice or is the best singer ever?

**I:** Do you ever wish you could sing like them?

I don't need to because I know I can't (*laughs*). Yeah, kind of...I guess.

**I: Can you think of a time that you have had a conversation about singing or music with a friend or family member?**

Um yeah, I was just doing it yesterday...it was kind of insulting (*laughs*).

**I: Can you explain what you were talking about (singer, band, type of music, etc.)?**

I don't know what the song is called that my sister was listening to in the car, and it's a good song, I have to admit...but, I don't know, I kind of just started making fun of it.

**Because of the music or the lyrics, or both? Or the way that someone was singing it?**

Kind of both, and the way that they were singing. But, it's a good song. It's like one of those songs that you would listen to if you were driving down the road...like kind of a country song.

**What did your sister say about it?**

She was just kind of like, "That's not what he sounds like!"

**I: Do you have any memories of people singing to you or around you as a child?**

Well, my mom sang. And my sisters were in choir. I don't know, I don't really remember my sisters like, seriously singing when I was little.

**I: Do you remember any songs you liked as a child?**

That one from *Titanic*... (*laughs*) "My Heart Will Go On." We watched *Titanic*...James Horner...a lot of his music sounds similar to John Williams'. What about the Pokemon theme song...does that count?

**Sure. Any other baby songs, even?**

I don't know, like, lullabies? "Itsy Bitsy Spider..." (*laughs*)

**I: How do you see your siblings' singing experiences?**

They like to sing a lot, obviously. I don't really hear them sing like their true singing around my dad or me or anyone else, because I think nervousness...or, it's kind of like I don't really like to play my trumpet around other people. I think singing runs in our family, well, of course. Well, I like to sing too, but I just mainly went to band, but I was contemplating trying out for a musical or something like that, or maybe being in choir.

**Well you can always sing!**

I sing when I fold my laundry or when I play my iPod, but that's when no one's in the same room! (*laughs*)

**What sticks out about any of your sisters' singing experiences?**

Their senior choir solos. When they're performing they still have to get past their stage fright kind of, and I can understand that definitely because I have the same problem.

**Playing your trumpet?**

Yeah, especially solos.

**Can you think of any negative singing experiences your sisters have had?**

Like they messed up or something? Not really. Well, when the seniors voted for class voice or whatever, my sister was upset because she didn't get it.

**Why do you think she didn't get it?**

I don't really know, to be honest.

**I: Can you think of a time when you have sung *with* your sibling or other family members?**

Well when we got that PlayStation game...a singing one...we played that for a little while. But not usually.

**I: Describe the situation where you were singing.**

(skipped)

**I: Can you think of a time when you have sung *in front of* your sibling or other family members?**

Yeah, well just like being silly.

**I: Describe the situation where you were singing.**

They might hear me singing in the bathroom, but I don't care. Now they know how much of a good singer I am. (*laughs*) I do mostly humming because I listen to more instrumental music, although I listen to a lot of vocal stuff too.

**I: Have you been in a situation where you felt "forced" to sing?**

Yeah...that "Chocolate Rain" song. It's on YouTube...it's kind of a funny song, but, I just started singing it, I just like to imitate it, and they were like "Sing it Ken...sing 'Chocolate Rain' because you do it so well." (*laughs*)

**I: Can you describe the situation with regards to by whom, the setting, for what, etc.?**  
(skipped)

Details of Experience (elaborate on perceptions of experiences with singing)

**I: You were selected for this interview because your sibling gave me the impression that you don't sing, especially in front of other people. Is this true?**

Yep.

**I: Would you ever say that you like to sing?**

I like to sing.

**I: Overall, would you identify with the phrase, "I don't like to sing,"?**

Well if it means I don't like to sing in public, then yeah (*laughs*)...at least not in a formal setting.

**If people were singing in a big group setting like "Happy Birthday" or something, would you join in?**

Yeah.

**Could you see yourself leading a group of your friends in singing "Happy Birthday" or something?**

Yeah. If it was with friends I'd feel more comfortable doing it.

**Have there been other times when people have specifically asked just you to sing?**

Not like 'seriously' sing.

**Ok, would you 'seriously' sing?**

I don't know...I don't think I would.

**What do you mean 'seriously' sing?**

Like actually try to sing it correctly...make it sound good.

**Do you think that you could make it sound good?**

Mmmhmm (*nods head*)

**I: How would you describe what it is about singing that makes you not like to do it or feel uncomfortable about it?**

(skipped)

**I: Do you ever feel awkward or uncomfortable around other people who are singing?**

Kind of, but it's more because of the attention that gets drawn to the situation. At church when you sing the whole crowd sings, I don't feel really bad...like, I know when I'm singing everyone else is singing. You can't really hear yourself, so you might sing something out of tune without knowing, so I kind of think about that sometimes.

**And it doesn't keep you from singing all of the time?**

*(shakes head)*

**Do you ever notice other people around you singing? Do you hear them?**

Yeah. A little bit.

**Have you heard anyone that has been really 'bad' singing around you?**

*(pause)* I'm trying to think of some bad singers that I've heard.

**Would you say that you typically haven't noticed any really bad singing when you sing at church?**

*(nods)* Well...yeah.

**So for the most part most of it sounds pretty good?**

Yep. I can sometimes hear people around me singing...like in front of me or something.

**And it sounds ok?**

*(nods)* Sometimes they might be out of tune, but it's again because...even I worry about it...the music is so loud that you can't hear yourself sing, so I sometimes think, "Oh my gosh, am I singing it out of tune? I don't want to sing it badly!" Because those people in front of me might hear me because their head is right here. *(laughs)*

**I: If so, can you describe a situation where this has been the case and explain why?**

*(skipped)*

**I: Overall, would you identify with the phrase, "I can't sing."?**

No. I can sing...I think. Not trying to be like, tootin' my own horn. *(laughs)* Well, if you want to say or identify "I can't sing" again, in front of like a huge crowd of people, then that might be something...unless I can get over that stage fright.

**If you took away any of the nerves, stage fright, etc., would you say that based on your musical ability, that you can sing?**

I think so, unless if I'm tone-deaf...then I don't know if I can or not. *(laughs)*

**Why do you think you probably aren't tone-deaf?**

Um, because no one has commented on how badly I sound when I sing if they hear me. *(laughs)* Or they might have but I didn't pay attention to it, or just ignored it or forgot.

**I: Has anyone ever told you you're bad or not good at singing?**

They might have, I just might have probably forgotten about it.

**But nothing that stuck to your memory?**

No.

**Anyone in your family? Your sisters ever casually make comments about your singing?**

Yeah, it's sometimes kind of sometimes joking, like, I can't remember the last time they gave me a positive comment to be honest...but they might say like "That sounds really good," and I'll walk around like "I'm such a good singer..." *(laughs)* that might sound a little conceited.

**Do your sisters more often than not joke about your singing...like, "Stop, you don't know how to do that..." ?**

It's just when I'm goofing around...they're like "Stop, that's annoying."

**Do you think they know you can sing better than that...like when you're being goofy?**

I think that when people sing just to joke around, I think they can sing better than when they actually try.

**So would you say that in some way, singing is something you kind of share with your sisters?**

(nods)

**I: Have you heard anyone tell someone else that they are bad or not good at singing?**

(laughs) I don't want to throw anyone under the bus. Well, like, legitimately sounds bad...? Well with my sisters already being in choir, they're quick to criticize people when they go to concerts. I criticize when I go to some concerts, too, like...that was a little out of tune there, or they should have done this in that spot, or they should have had a big crescendo at the end instead of dying out.

**What does it take for any of your sisters to say that someone is bad at singing?**

Just if it doesn't seem like they're actually trying, like they're not trying their best or something. Maybe they are trying really hard, and they might think they sound good but they might actually not in other people's opinion.

**So you have been somewhere when you've heard one of your sisters say that someone is bad...**

Yes. When they'll get home from a concert, they'll say stuff like "So and so didn't sing that very well," or "So and so can't sing..." but it's not directly to the person's face because that would be really rude, even though it still kind of is.

**I: Have you ever told someone they're bad or not good at singing?**

I don't think I have...not to their face. I have criticized someone and said they were a bad singer behind their back. I don't want to be mean to them! It was more their tone quality I guess.

**I: Do you ever sing along to music you listen to, especially by yourself?**

Yes, definitely.

**Can you tell me a little bit about any kind of singing you've done in band?**

Well we sing in band...scales and what not, breathing exercises...stuff like that. Our band director said that people who play instruments are more likely to sing better because of the tuning.

**What are some observations of your peers' singing in band?**

I'm willing to bet that sometimes people don't take it seriously, but not all of them...I think most of them take it pretty seriously.

Reflection on Meaning (influences on perceptions of singing)**I: Over the course of this interview, we have talked about your previous singing experiences, current involvement or lack thereof, and overall opinions about singing. Keeping in mind everything we have discussed so far, what do you think has had the biggest impact on how you feel about singing?**

I think *American Idol* has had an effect, kind of, only because that's like a singing show. You get to hear all those different people singing and you think, well maybe I can sing like that. I mean, I'm not preparing to go on *American Idol* or anything, but...

**Would you say that your sisters have had a positive impact on how you see singing?**

Yeah, because of the vocal music they listen to a lot...they're good singers and they're good singing rubs off on me or whatever. It's sometimes made me like the same song because they sounded really good...like a Carrie Underwood song...it's like their musical tastes are kind of rubbing off on me in a positive way.

**Have your sisters made you appreciate singing more than you would normally?**

Not necessarily. It's kind of had an effect on me by making me think about doing it to, like with the musicals.

**Why do you think you first thought, “Yeah, maybe I want to be involved in that too,” instead of “There’s no way I could do that”? Would you say that you just have enough confidence to lean more on the positive side of wanting to do it rather than the negative side of not wanting to do it?**

Yeah, I can think of myself doing it. I mean, I think I’m a good singer, it’s getting in front of people that I have trouble with...that’s the barrier.

**Do you think that any of your band experiences contributed to your confidence regarding singing?**

Yeah.

**I: In other words, why do you think you feel the way you do about singing?**

Because music has been all in my life, not to be melodramatic (*laughs*), but with band and at home...like, why do I feel positively about it? It’s like what I said earlier...when I’m around my sisters, they listen to good music and it rubs off on me. It improves my musical tastes...and I think I listen to some good music, too. Or, just being at home with my mom...a good singer...always has been.

**I: Has your sibling’s involvement in choir impacted the way you see or feel about singing at all?**

It kind of made me appreciate musicals more. Now I actually enjoy going to theatre and musicals.

**I: Would you say that any other family members have influenced how you feel about singing?**

(*shakes head*)

**We haven’t talked much about your dad...would he say that he can sing?**

Well, he’s a good singer I think. When I do hear him sing for serious I think he sound pretty good. He might joke around sometimes, too. But yeah, I think we’re all good singers...like, it runs in the family. My grandpa was a good singer and so was my other grandpa.

**I: Would you say that any friends have influenced how you feel about singing?**

Well the kind of music they listen to is heavy rock and rap. I don’t like the “screamo” singing, but I guess there are a couple songs that are ok. Slipknot has a couple good songs that I downloaded, but I don’t like the heavy music.

**Have any of your friends heard you sing a little bit...to music or whatever?**

I think so, yeah.

**Do you think they would say that you’re good at singing?**

I think they would, not to again “toot my own horn.” Or, maybe...I don’t know...I was just thinking they would say I’m a good singer just to be nice, but I would hope not.

**I: Overall, would you say that you have a positive or a negative opinion of singing?**

Positive.

**I: Do you think that most people your age feel the way you do about singing?**

Like a positive opinion of singing?

**Specifically about their own singing...**

Yeah, I do. They probably think they’re good singers...they probably have a positive opinion of their singing. Or some of them might know that they can’t sing so they don’t.

**So imagine me standing in the hallway and asking every student that passes by me “Do you like to sing,” or “Do you think you can sing?” What do you think they would say?**

They say probably...yeah. Or if they were being really honest and knew they couldn’t, you know...

**I: Can you give me an example or explain why you think so?**

(skipped)

**I: Do you think that most adults feel the way you do about singing?**

Well, I bet everyone sings, like, even if they are bad at it, but...just to sing along to their own music.

**Would you say that it's hard to imagine people saying that they don't like to sing?**

Kind of.

**Do you think that most people like to sing?**

Well when they're listening to their music they like to sing along to it, or hum to it. Even if they can't, they just love singing along.

**Do you think that people can or can't sing? Do you think that singing is something that people either can or can't do?**

*(laughs)* Just look at *American Idol!* No... Well, people go on there just to goof around and be on TV, so you don't really know if they actually can or not. People are tone-deaf, aren't they?

**Yes, but a very small percentage of people. To be honest, there are way more people who claim to be tone-deaf than who really are. Less than .5% actually are tone-deaf.**

Some people are bad singers, or they think they are. Or some people think they're good singers and some people actually are good singers, which is probably the majority.

**Do you think there are people out there who are probably better than what they think?**

Yeah. There's people who are better than what they think they are, and there's people who are worse than they think they are.

**I: Can you give me an example or explain why you think so?**

(skipped)

**I: This interview was based on the following over-arching questions:**

- 1) How do you describe your experiences with singing?
- 2) How do you describe your perceptions of singing?
- 3) What do you describe as influences on your perceptions of singing?

**Do you think we have covered these in our conversation, and/or is there anything you think we should add?**

I think we pretty much answered those questions.

**Any final thoughts about overall teenagers and singing? Any situations that have to do with people talking about singing?**

The main teenager music today is all hip-hop, R & B, and country...not so much classical or choir music.

**I: Those are all of the questions I have today. Thank you so much for your participation in this interview.**

This is like the first interview I've ever done, so it's good practice. *(laughs)*



## Appendix B: Completed Protocol Document (Tammy)

**Interviewer: First and foremost, thank you for agreeing to talk to me about singing today. Your willingness to do so offers great perspective on my work as a music educator and researcher. Secondly, this interview is about you and what you have to say regarding your own experiences and opinions. I am here only to record your responses and keep our conversation on the topic. I am not here to judge what you have to say or try to get you to say something you don't want to. Throughout the interview, I will review your responses with you to make sure I record them correctly and honestly. Do you have any questions or are you ready to get started?**

### Demographics

**Interviewer (I): Please state your age and what grade [year] you will be in this fall.**

I am 17 years-old and I am a twelfth-grader.

**I: Are you currently involved in any music classes outside of school like guitar or piano lessons?**

Nope.

### Focused Life History (previous experiences with singing)

**I: What kind of music do you like to listen to, or who is your favorite music artist/performer?**

Well, I really don't have a favorite. Like, I like to listen to a lot of piano music though. That's an interesting thing about me, you wouldn't really think.

**Pretty often? Do you find it relaxing?**

Yeah. When my brother isn't home. I just pop it in and I'm like ok.

**Does it remind you of him?**

A little, but not really, I just like to listen to it for how soothing it is. Classical piano...but also the remakes of songs today just on piano. I usually just go on Pandora and type in 'piano music' and listen to it. I don't really know the artist.

**Any other kind of music you like to listen to?**

I like listening to country. I usually listen to a lot of it with my dad. We sometimes jam to it in the car on the way to school. And you know, just the occasional radio stations. I like Adele, too. And Glee is one of my favorites. Again, that's probably something you'd think you wouldn't get from me, but I am a Glee fan.

**I: Can you describe why you like this music or what you like about it?**

I like Glee because of how they sing it and mix it up a little. Like how they have different versions...like when it's suppose to be a guy singing it they have girls singing it. It gives it a different taste.

**What else can you describe about the piano music that you like?**

When my brother plays it, he listens to it first on the computer and then he'll play it like he actually composed that kind of music. That very much caught my attention and got me interested in that kind of music, too. I like that kind of music because when you're studying I think it's really inspirational and adds to the mood. I like to listen to it in our creative writing class...it helps me actually finish work (*laughs*).

**Do you ever play the piano at home?**

Yeah, I dink around. Like, I can't play like my brother, even though I wish I could because if I could I'd be playing that every day. But you know, I play chopsticks sometimes. I put my dog next to me and play for him.

**I: Would you say that you like to listen to other people sing?**

Yeah... Well, here, let me rephrase that. It depends, like, it just depends if they actually do sing in choir or if they don't... because like on *American Idol*, I'll just go off that, some of they people on there are very good singers and I like hearing them. But when it's those awkward people, and they make the singing awkward, then I don't want to watch it. But I force myself to watch it just to see what happens. But I guess overall I do like listening to people who sing.

**What about in person? Is there anything awkward about that?**

No, like, my friend sings around me a lot and I don't mind it because I get use to it, plus I like it. Sometimes we kind of sing together and sound weird a cappella (*laughs*).

**Would you say that your friend is a good singer?**

Yeah, I think he's very good at singing. I was really excited when he sang at that one assembly. He really likes it, so that helps make him really good I think.

**I: In general, how would you describe what singing is?**

Well I'd say that singing is something that comes from inside you, and something that you want to express out to everyone around you. It's just not words of talking, it's just... it's mostly words of expression and words of happiness or sometimes sorrow, depending on how it goes. So basically music to me is something that you express and something that you reach inside you and let that come out of your mouth. Sometimes in good ways and sometimes in bad ways, but usually music has its ways of expressing or having meanings.

**I: Who do you think has the best voice or is the best singer ever?**

This is a good question... you have to make it difficult! I honestly have to say, Taylor Swift. I think her voice is actually really good. I think, out of all, Taylor Swift. When I read her lyrics and listen to the music, I feel like she's actually lived it and she knows what to write about because she's been in that certain spot and writes about it. I saw a documentary on her and I loved it.

**As far as her voice goes, do you think she could sing just about any song and make it sound good?**

No. She only has one certain voice and that's a country voice. I've honestly thought about it too, like if she sang an Adele song, how she would sing it, and she should just stay with the country music. It's what she's known for and that's how I've seen her as a country music singer, so, I don't think I could ever see her singing anything else... I think I'd feel kinda weird about it, because I'd be like that's not her! Her singing is country.

**I: Do you ever wish you could sing like them?**

(sighs) Um, no... because she's country and look at my ethnicity. You think a Filipino would sing a country song? (*laughs*) Like, I could, but I don't think it would look good. Like Darius Rucker... I believe he's a very good singer, but at first when I heard him sing I'm like, oh, this has to be a white person singing it, and then I look at his picture and was really surprised he's black. At first it just didn't fit, I was like that can't be him, but he was actually really good at country. And usually when you see a guy like Darius Rucker you'd like he'd be in the hip-hop industry, but nope, other way around... total opposite of hip-hop.

**If you could put yourself into singing any kind of music, what would it be? Anything at all?**

There's this one artist that I'm very interested in. I forgot what her name is, but the song is called "Valentine." A girl sings it. It's not hip-hop, nor is it country, it's just like a nice little café kind of song. I like acoustic music a lot. Sometimes when you hear singers playing acoustic, it's just mostly one instrument and the voice, and I like that a lot because you don't have to worry about trying to hear the music. I just like hearing the voice and guitar.

**I: Can you think of a time that you have had a conversation about singing or music with a friend or family member?**

Yes. This was actually just a couple weeks ago. My friends were over at my house.

**I: Can you explain what you were talking about (singer, band, type of music, etc.)?**

I got on the computer and I played that song "Valentine" and I started singing it. My friends were like "You need to be in choir or something because you just can't have this voice and not put it to use." And my friend that's in choir was talking to me about how to use my stomach when I sing and stuff.

**I: Do you have any memories of people singing to you or around you as a child?**

My two sisters...they are like ten years older than I am. They sang a lot...They both were in choir. I remember when my sisters would come home from college and on the way to the store they would sing and it was just so good. That's why I kind of got interested in singing, because of my sisters. You know at that young age you're like "I just want to be just like you...I want to sing like you...pretty like you."

**Do you feel like your sisters had more of a first influence on you than your brother?**

Well they had the first, and then my brother just like the rest. Kind of like 50/50.

**How would you describe your parents' musical involvement? Singing or anything?**

(laughs) My mom would try to sing around the house...she'd be funny about it though. Sometimes when she's serious about it it's a pretty high-pitched voice and my dad would be like "What?!"...she tries though. My dad is funny about it, of course other than church when he's serious, but when he's at home it's just giggles when he sings. But they get me to be funny about singing too sometimes when I'm with friends and stuff.

**I: Do you remember any songs you liked as a child?**

Christina Aguilera. It was my kind of music at the time. I remember she was very good...she had that nice voice where she hit any note and it could sound really good.

**I: How do you see your siblings' singing experiences?**

His personality growth and how outgoing he is now. He use to be very introverted like in elementary, and then when middle school came with the plays and choir, I think as he was more into those classes and more involved with drama, he became more extrovert just over time. You know...he started having more fun...and I just saw the process over the years through middle and high school...he was more open and confident. I noticed he changed in a good way, and I kind of looked up to how confident he was with his singing and his acting.

**What is one of your favorite performances of his that you've seen?**

Footloose. I liked that one a lot. He was very funny in that one when he did his little dance.

**I: Can you think of a time when you have sung *with* your sibling or other family members?**

Well except for church...I never really sang with my sisters. I always sang solo because they'd always want to hear me sing. I'd sing with them but they'd stop and I'd be like "Why'd you stop?!"

**I: Describe the situation where you were singing.**

Sometimes my brother would sing and play the piano and sometimes I'd sing with him but most of the time he didn't notice it.

**I: Can you think of a time when you have sung *in front of* your sibling or other family members?**

Um, no. By myself? No...like, I just kind of always join in with them. I haven't felt that kind of confidence to sing by myself in front of family and stuff. I'm working on it though.

**I: Describe the situation where you were singing.**

(skipped)

**I: Have you been in a situation where you felt "forced" to sing?**

No. Well...yes and no.

**I: Can you describe the situation with regards to by whom, the setting, for what, etc.?**

Like with my friends they're like "Sing it girl!" and then I'm like "Ok..." and I do, but really I don't feel forced to.

Details of Experience (elaborate on perceptions of experiences with singing)

**I: You were selected for this interview because your sibling gave me the impression that you don't sing, especially in front of other people. Is this true?**

Well...kind of. Not really.

**What do you think sets you apart from other participants in this study as far as actually being involved with singing a little bit on the side with friends and what not?**

I think it's just about my personality. Like I really can't control it. I kind of feel like the difference between me and some other people is that I'm not afraid to be that open or that wild. I'm at that stage where I don't want to stop having fun.

**Is it easy to not care what people think?**

Yeah. Through the years of high school I have realized that it shouldn't matter what other people think about me, all that matters is how I think about myself. And if I have fun, which I do.

**I: Would you ever say that you like to sing?**

Yeah, I like to sing.

**I: Overall, would you identify with the phrase, "I don't like to sing,"?**

(skipped)

**I: How would you describe what it is about singing that makes you not like to do it or feel uncomfortable about it?**

(skipped)

**I: Do you ever feel awkward or uncomfortable around other people who are singing?**

Yeah, it just depends on how they sing. Either my personal opinion if they're good or not. I'm not saying that anyone can't sing. Like, everyone can sing but they just have their own ways of singing and how it sounds and the tone of it.

**I: If so, can you describe a situation where this has been the case and explain why?**

**Do you ever feel awkward when your parents are singing?**

*(laughs)* Yeah, a little.

**Do you ever feel awkward when people are singing around you at church?**

No. Church music experience is a good thing. It's not really my taste, because I can't hear myself sing 'cause you know everyone else is singing too.

**I: Overall, would you identify with the phrase, "I can't sing,"?**

No.

**Good. Congratulations.**

*(laughs)* Thank you.

**I: Has anyone ever told you you're bad or not good at singing?**

No.

**I: Have you heard anyone tell someone else that they are bad or not good at singing?**

Not yet, so no I have not. I think my brother keeps it to himself whenever he thinks people are bad at singing.

**So for the most part, you aren't really around anyone who is overtly critical of people's singing.**

Yeah.

**I: Have you ever told someone they're bad or not good at singing?**

No. It's not my job or my opinion to tell someone they are not. Because I have my days when I feel like I'm not a good singer, but I really know that I feel like I am. Again, it's not my place or any part of a title I have to tell someone "You suck," or "You're not good at singing." Because I'm not a professional singer. I wouldn't know what the right notes or the right keys, tones you need to have to be a good singer. I just sing. So, it's just like to me I have no duty or I have no title of telling someone that they can't sing.

**I: Do you ever sing along to music you listen to, especially by yourself?**

(skipped)

Reflection on Meaning (influences on perceptions of singing)

**I: Over the course of this interview, we have talked about your previous singing experiences, current involvement or lack thereof, and overall opinions about singing. Keeping in mind everything we have discussed so far, what do you think has had the biggest impact on how you feel about singing?**

Just knowing that sometimes when I can sing I let a lot of my feelings out...in a good manner. Like when I'm in a good mood, I can express it just by singing a good, happy song. And then you know, just you know the thought of me knowing as myself...like, I'm not trying to sound really having like a good self-esteem, but I think I can sing at least pretty decent, and know that I can, I just like to express it and kind of show it by myself and sometimes to my friends.

**I: In other words, why do you think you feel the way you do about singing?**

(skipped)

**I: Has your sibling's involvement in choir impacted the way you see or feel about singing at all?**

In a good way it has. Like I heard good stories about choir where you do these cool exercises, you do these high notes and shake your body (*laughs*). I've seen him have fun. And I know if I were to sing for a school, I'd like to have fun while singing, because I think the only way I feel like you can sing to your best of abilities is if you're having fun...like fun while singing.

**I: Would you say that any other family members have influenced how you feel about singing?**

Yeah. My two sisters.

**I: Would you say that any friends have influenced how you feel about singing?**

Yeah, my friend that's in choir influences me about my singing and how much I like it. Because we have fun singing, too. There's these times when we can joke around and sing one part and have fun singing it. I just very much enjoy it.

**Do you feel really comfortable singing around him?**

Yeah. It's just that from being around him a lot, and you know, if he can sing in front of me, then I feel like I can probably sing in front of him because he sings around me. I've developed that good comfort zone with him.

**I: Overall, would you say that you have a positive or a negative opinion of singing?**

I have a positive attitude toward singing.

**I: Do you think that most people your age feel the way you do about singing?**

I honestly do not know that answer, because I've never asked anyone near my age how they felt. When I know people that sing I can just tell that they actually do enjoy it. Because if they didn't enjoy it then why would they do it?

**Would you say that most people your age sing?**

Not really. It's only like a certain amount. You know like, 25-35% of us that do, and the rest that just don't. But that's just me.

**I: Can you give me an example or explain why you think so?****So if you were to guess, what do you think keeps other students from singing?**

Just the nervousness they probably get from singing. Because you know, that whole factor of being in front of people and that nervousness you get. It's like giving a report in front of everyone. Like they get nervous, you know, like their afraid of saying something wrong, or, in this case singing, and people thinking it's not going to be good enough, and people are going to be like "Oh, that was horrible." So I feel like that's why people most likely probably don't sing...because of that nervousness that they have when they're in front of people, or how people are going to think if they do sing. Just that whole initial reaction in their brain of how they're going to feel when that person hears them sing and them thinking that it's probably going to be horrible...the judgment.

**I: Do you think that most adults feel the way you do about singing?****Or, what do you think might be a difference between how people your age feel about singing and adults?**

I think there's a difference to me because like, we both, like my parents and I, we're both born in different eras you know, like they have their songs with punk and rock, and we have our songs of alternative and hip-hop. But, I think it's different because there's different ways of singing a different song...like they sing like the old version, and we sing the new version with more rhythm. It's just that different stage of age where musical tastes matter.

**Do you think that most adults sing?**

Yeah. I think more adults sing more than teenagers. Just because I feel like it's just the whole process of not caring and just sing.

**I: Can you give me an example or explain why you think so?**

(skipped)

**I: This interview was based on the following over-arching questions:**

- 1) How do you describe your experiences with singing?
- 2) How do you describe your perceptions of singing?
- 3) What do you describe as influences on your perceptions of singing?

**Do you think we have covered these in our conversation, and/or is there anything you think we should add?**

Yeah.

**This whole study is about so much more than trying to figure out why people aren't in choir. I think that it's awesome that you're like "Yeah! I sing!" and you aren't in choir. I want there to be more people who are like you...who willingly admit to singing just casually, and have at least a shred of confidence to feel comfortable doing that. Do you think that based on your peers, there are fewer people like you or are there actually more people like you?**

I have a feeling there's fewer people like me. If anyone ever asked me if I sang I'd say within a millisecond "Yes, I do." It's just, I don't know if I'd like say that I can sing because I know I can...well I'm not trying to be self-confident...it just doesn't really make me nervous to say yes when I really want to say no. I'm just not someone who

doesn't want to admit that they can sing. I just kind of built the confidence of singing, if someone asks me if I can sing I'm going to say yes. And they'll ask, "Well can you sing me something?" And I'll be like, "Maybe later." I don't really want to sing a song that I don't know very well. It feels weird when there's someone that you don't know very well and they ask you to sing.

**One of my favorite things about parent/teacher conferences is asking parents about their musical background. More often than not, I hear "Oh I'm not musical," or, "Oh I can't sing." Have you been around a situation where you've heard someone say that?**

Yeah. I hear it a lot. Those people don't have much confidence. I feel like if they say that then they probably had a bad time where they're scarred for life and they won't sing ever again because of how the people that heard it reacted to it, or how their family reacted to it, or how they themselves reacted to it.

I really truly can only sing by myself if I want it to sound good.

My other brother sings. He has fun with it too, but I don't think he would be as open as I am about it. I've heard him sing and it wasn't horrible, I mean, I think it was pretty good. Everyone kind of sees him as a critical person, so yeah, I think he would be more critical of other people singing. He mostly likes rock and screamo music. He'd rather do the drums, he's just very vibrant and into his music. I think it's fun. He air drums and I kind of sneak in and watch him.

**I: Those are all of the questions I have today. Thank you so much for your participation in this interview!**

**Appendix C: Bulleted Lists****Dylan**

- 14 year-old male, 9<sup>th</sup> grade
- Plays trumpet in band, composes via computer software
- Likes classical music, film music, and Carrie Underwood
- Sophisticated answers, descriptions, opinions. "I'm very picky with singing."
- Describes singing as, "A way that you express your musical feeling through voice, using more vibrato feeling and connecting the words and less staccatos."
- Family influences: Aunt (opera singer) and her son (opera, jazz), father (music major, plays trumpet a little, does not sing) step-father (no music background, pushes sports more), 4 siblings – 3 of which participate in music (sister in band, 2 brothers sing)
- Friend influences: Annie (compares himself to her, admires her talent "Good because she's so good but also bad because I think I'm bad."), his band friends tease the choir kids "We don't like how they sound because they're always bad and off-tune and rude about it...stuck up."
- Other influences: choir teacher (range)
- Indirectly wishes he could sing like his favorite singers
- "People can sing, as long as they're good they're fine. But if they suck, they need to stop."
- Cites music vs. sports identity: "My five year-old brother doesn't really like music...he's sports."
- Caroling experience...pretty positive, just didn't want to go after a few years
- Identity: trumpet "Since I'm in band, I feel like band is better and choir is just here (*middle motion*) but band's like way up there (*high motion*)."
- "I hate singing. I don't know, it's just that part of it...I just, I don't want to say because I suck at it...maybe it's just because I just don't like it. I don't know it's confusing.
- Feels uncomfortable singing because of the judgment/comparison: "...when someone's like really good and you're really bad and you're singing right next to each other and you have to sing, it's like "I don't want to sing. You're good, I'm bad."
- Do you think that it's easy to assume that you're bad? "Yes. I don't know where I get it, I just am. I don't think I'm good."
- Identifies with both 'I don't like to sing,' and 'I can't sing.'
- Has anyone ever told you you're bad or not good at singing? "No, I get told I'm good...a lot."
- He tells people they bad at singing
- Cites one of his 'mentor' music teachers telling a student they are bad at singing.
- Hums and whistles along to music
- Claims siblings' involvement in singing has had no impact on him
- Mutual opinion of singing (positive and negative)
- Believes that singing is something you either can or cannot do
- Peers feel the same way? Band friends YES, family NO
- Adults feel the same way? I don't know...family NO, adults at church YES
- What would it take for you feel like you "could" kind of sing? "Singing lessons."



**Kurt**

- 15 year-old male, 10<sup>th</sup> grade
- Plays tuba in band, and guitar on his own and at church
- Likes ACDC
- Describes singing as “Someone who goes out in public to do it.”
- Does not wish he could sing like his favorite singers
- Mentioned *That Metal Show* on VH1
- Lacks confidence... “I could never...”
- Family influences: father (musical tastes, guitar, non-singer), sisters (affirm his inability...at least one is in choir), mother (sings in church choir)
- Friend influences: “I don't think so. Me and all my friends are bad at singing.”
- Involved in church music (guitar)
- Identity: “I always knew it [singing] wasn't my thing.”
- Laughed when asked about his own singing (or not singing)
- Definitely a 'non-singer'...does NOT like to sing, says he 'can't'
- Sings along to music alone...can't help it...muscle memory
- Claims no real influences, “I've just never really caught on to singing.”
- Afraid of judgment when it comes to singing
- Neutral opinion of singing
- Peers feel the same way? YES “When I tell someone they're good at singing, they repress themselves and say they suck.”
- Adults feel the same way? NO “Like in the choir I play with...they're all adults who know they can sing and been told by people they can sing so they feel more confident singing around people then people my age.”
- Believes he cannot sing
- “I know that from past experiences that I know I can't sing...from what my peers told me, from what other people have told me.”
- Identifies with both 'I don't like to sing,' and 'I can't sing.'
- His sisters tell him he is bad at singing.

**Tia**

- 16 year-old female, 11<sup>th</sup> grade
- Was in choir in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, "...a try it out type of thing, and it wasn't for me, but I did sing back then...at least tried to."
- Likes The Script and country music
- Describes singing as, "I think it takes a lot of emotion, you have to put emotion into it, it's not just talking...you have to put feeling behind it...expression."
- Family influences: sister (shared interest in singing, positive), Aunt (plays guitar and sings)
- Friend influences: Claims her friends have not impacted this because "we're all athletic."
- Cites *Glee*
- She wishes she could sing like her favorite singers
- Identity: athletic...being a 'singer' is much more part of her sister's identity
- Do you admire your sister's abilities? "I do, um, I'm more of the athletic type, and so that's how I excel, and good grades. But my sister...she's got the *other* talent, that people can't just really go "Oh, I can sing"...it's kind of like more of a gift than a talent."
- Does not identify with being a 'singer' – "it wasn't for me."
- Laughed when asked about her own singing (or not singing)
- Confidence: "I like to sing...I'm just not the best at it."
- Singing makes her feel uncomfortable sometimes because, "Just the fact that I'm not good I guess. I've kind of always been good with sports, so I guess that's my area...I'm comfortable with that. When it comes to like singing and being the center of attention where people are looking at you and expecting you, and like, singing doesn't come out the way that you want it to I guess."
- Sincerely enjoys and appreciates others' singing
- Does NOT identify with 'I don't like to sing.'
- Identifies with 'I can't sing.'
- Sings along to music alone and with her sister
- Admires her sister's involvement in choir: "Yeah, like it's not even like choir is like a club...it's like a special talent, you know, like it's more of a privilege feel to be in choir and be noticed that you can sing."
- Her sister has had a positive impact on how she feels about singing
- Positive opinion of singing: "because I'm around it and it'd be hard to think of it as negative."
- Would you say that you have a positive or negative attitude toward your singing? "I probably have a negative attitude. I just know that I'm not good at it, so I just don't try...I just sing to sing."
- Peers feel the same way? Maybe the way I feel about my singing...negative...more of a "shut-off" attitude about it. Maybe not my perspective on overall singing.
- Adults feel the same way? YES "I think that adults have a better appreciation for music, because there wasn't as many distractions – like it was more real. They didn't have the internet or even much television. Listening to the radio was what to do. They paid attention to music more."

**Hope**

- 17 year-old female, 12<sup>th</sup> grade
- No formal music background
- Likes Christian music; Manafest, La Craix
- Describes singing as, "They are using an instrument that does need to be provided for them. It's their own soul."
- Does NOT wish she could sing like favorite singer: "Because I feel like God has given us both different gifts. Mine is more artistic and on paper and with math and science, and hers is performing."
- Family influences: Sister ('singer' always singing, doesn't remember a time when she wasn't, she affirms her singing ability), parents encouraged all singing in a praise context. "You weren't judged for the way you were."
- Friend influences: Choir friends "They probably put me in a lot more situations to sing."
- Sang with sister growing up – church songs
- Forced to sing? "I never really put myself in that situation..."
- Like to sing? "Depends on the context. I like singing at camp, like camp songs and in groups of people, but I don't like singing alone in front of people."
- Does NOT identify with 'I don't like to sing.'
- "I would say I'm a tone-deaf mule, but my sister says I can sing, so I don't know."
- Claims that everyone at camp is supportive of anyone's singing
- Kind of sings along to music alone
- "It was just like I was raised in an environment where we weren't...where one wasn't better than the other. We were raised in an environment where we all have talents and they all can shine, and as long as we use them all to praise God, then we're all appreciated for that."
- Mutual opinion of singing. "Sometimes I think it's unnecessary and sometimes a distraction...because I want peace and quiet...I'm one of those silent types. But then other times I like it."
- Peers feel the same way? "Probably not. I think with all the media and the environment that other people were growing up in, they don't see the natural beauty...I don't think they think about it. I mean I don't know if they have negative connotations or positive...I just think that it's another thing in this world that doesn't pertain to them, so they're not going to think about it."
- Adults feel the same way? "I think that there are lots of different groups of teenagers and adults and all this stuff that it's hard to categorize them into 'this is what they most likely will think.' But with the world that I can see, I don't know...I don't know if they like it or not. It's obviously a billion dollar industry, so...they like listening to it (*laughs*)."

**Ken**

- 19 year-old male, Freshman college student
- Played trumpet in band in HS
- Likes John Williams, other film/game music, Rascal Flatts, Josh Groban
- Describes singing as – N/A ☹
- Sophisticated answers, descriptions, opinions. “I love how it’s so thematic…”
- Family influences: 3 sisters who sing (around it a lot!), mother (use to sing). “I think singing runs in our family. I like to sing too.”
- Friend influences: some band friends don’t take singing seriously, but some do…his friends would probably say he’s good at singing.
- He sort of wishes he could sing like his favorite singers, although, “I don’t need to because I know I can’t.” (laughs)
- Somewhat identifies with singing…especially ‘comic’ singing (i.e. karaoke video game, imitate funny songs). “I like to sing.”
- Identifies with ‘I don’t like to sing’ in public…laughs about it
- Cites ‘seriously’ sing: “I don’t think I would” if people asked him to. What do you mean ‘seriously’ sing? “Like actually try to sing it correctly…make it sound good.”
- Claims he could make it sound good though
- Feels comfortable singing in a group. “At church when you sing the whole crowd sings, I don’t feel really bad…like, I know when I’m singing everyone else is singing.”
- Does not notice ‘bad’ singing around him at church…most of it sounds pretty good.
- Does NOT identify with ‘I can’t sing.’ He says, “I can sing…I think. Not trying to be like, tootin’ my own horn. (laughs)
- Cites tone-deafness: Why do you think you probably aren’t tone-deaf? “Because no one has commented on how badly I sound when I sing if they hear me.”
- He can’t remember anyone telling him he is ‘bad’ at singing.
- Sings along to music alone and with his sisters
- Cites *American Idol* – “You get to hear all those different people singing and you think, well maybe I can sing like that.”
- “I think I’m a good singer, it’s getting in front of people that I have trouble with…that’s the barrier.”
- Claims that his singing experiences in band have contributed to his confidence.
- Siblings’ involvement in choir has impacted his appreciation of musicals.
- Positive opinion of singing.
- Peers feel the same way? Probably – “They probably think they’re good singers…they probably have a positive opinion of their singing. Or some of them might know that they can’t sing so they don’t.
- Adults feel the same way? “Well, I bet everyone sings, like, even if they are bad at it, but…just to sing along to their own music.”
- Says he thinks most people like to sing along to their own music
- Regarding *American Idol*: “Well, people go on there just to goof around and be on TV, so you don’t really know if they actually can or not.”
- Says there are people who are better than they think they are (and worse).

**Tammy**

- 17 year-old female, 12<sup>th</sup> grade
- Played flute in band for three years in middle school, dinks around on the piano
- Likes contemporary and classical solo piano music, country, Adele, Taylor Swift, and *Glee*.
- Cites *American Idol*, too: “because like on *American Idol*, I’ll just go off that, some of they people on there are very good singers and I like hearing them. But when it’s those awkward people, and they make the singing awkward, then I don’t want to watch it. But I force myself to watch it just to see what happens.”
- Family influences: brother (sings and plays piano), 2 sisters were in choir (memories as a child of them singing around her), mother and father not very serious about singing
- Friend influences: good singer friend sings a lot around her, they sing together sometimes, friend that is in choir affirms her singing ability
- Describes singing as, “...something that comes from inside you, and something that you want to express out to everyone around you.”
- “I kind of looked up to how confident he was with his singing and his acting.”
- Often sang/sings with brother and sisters: “I haven’t felt that kind of confidence to sing by myself in front of family and stuff. I’m working on it though.”
- Likes to sing...different identity as a ‘singer’ than most of the participants
- Regarding other people’s singing in general: “Yeah, it just depends on how they sing. Either my personal opinion if they’re good or not. I’m not saying that anyone can’t sing. Like, everyone can sing but they just have their own ways of singing and how it sounds and the tone of it.”
- Does NOT identify with ‘I can’t sing.’ - No one has ever told her she is ‘bad.’
- “I’m not trying to sound really having like a good self-esteem, but I think I can sing at least pretty decent, and know that I can, I just like to express it and kind of show it by myself and sometimes to my friends.”
- Positive opinion/attitude toward singing.
- Cites the judgment people are afraid of when singing in front of someone. “Just that whole initial reaction in their brain of how they’re going to feel when that person hears them sing and them thinking that it’s probably going to be horrible...the judgment.”
- Identity: “I have a feeling there’s fewer people like me. If anyone ever asked me if I sang I’d say within a millisecond “Yes, I do.” It’s just, I don’t know if I’d like say that I can sing because I know I can...well I’m not trying to be self-confident...it just doesn’t really make me nervous to say yes when I really want to say no. I’m just not someone who doesn’t want to admit that they can sing. I just kind of built the confidence of singing, if someone asks me if I can sing I’m going to say yes.
- Regarding why people think they ‘can’t’ sing: “I feel like if they say that then they probably had a bad time where they’re scarred for life and they won’t sing ever again because of how the people that heard it reacted to it, or how their family reacted to it, or how they themselves reacted to it. “

## Appendix D: IRB Approval

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### eResearch Notification: Initial Study Approval

1 message

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[eresearch@umich.edu](mailto:eresearch@umich.edu) [eresearch@umich.edu](mailto:eresearch@umich.edu)

Tue, Nov 15, 2011 at 11:43 AM Reply-To: [eresearch@umich.edu](mailto:eresearch@umich.edu)  
To: [bowmansl@umich.edu](mailto:bowmansl@umich.edu)



Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board • 540 East Liberty Street, Suite 202, Ann Arbor, MI 48104-2210 • phone (734)

936-0933 • fax (734) 998-9171 • [irbhsbs@umich.edu](mailto:irbhsbs@umich.edu)

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**To:** Sarah Bowman  
**From:** Richard Redman  
**Cc:** Colleen Conway

**Subject:**Initial Study Approval for [HUM00055976]

**SUBMISSION INFORMATION:**

Study Title: 'I don't sing: Exploring perceptions of selected high school students' Full Study Title (if applicable):

Study eResearch ID: [HUM00055976](#)

Date of this Notification from IRB:11/15/2011

Review:Expedited

Initial IRB Approval Date: 11/14/2011

**Current IRB Approval Period:11/14/2011 - 11/13/2013**

**Expiration Date:** Approval for this expires at **11:59 p.m. on 11/13/2013**

**UM Federalwide Assurance (FWA): FWA00004969 expiring on 11/17/2011**

**OHRP IRB Registration Number(s): IRB00000246**

**HUM00055976 No more than minimal risk**

**NOTICE OF IRB APPROVAL AND CONDITIONS:**

**The IRB HSBS has reviewed and approved the study referenced above. The IRB determined that the proposed research conforms with applicable guidelines, State and federal regulations, and the University of Michigan's Federalwide Assurance (FWA) with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). You must conduct this study in accordance with the description and information provided in the approved application and associated documents.**

**APPROVAL PERIOD AND EXPIRATION:**

The approval period for this study is listed above. Please note the expiration date. If the approval lapses, you may not conduct work on this study until appropriate approval has been re-established, except as necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to research subjects. Should the latter occur, you must notify the IRB Office as soon as possible.

**IMPORTANT REMINDERS AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION****FOR INVESTIGATORS APPROVED STUDY DOCUMENTS:**

You must use any date-stamped versions of recruitment materials and informed consent documents available in the eResearch workspace (referenced above).

Date-stamped materials are available in the "Currently Approved Documents" section on the "Documents" tab.

**RENEWAL/TERMINATION:**

At least two months prior to the expiration date, you should submit a continuing review application either to renew or terminate the study. Failure to allow sufficient time for IRB review may result in a lapse of approval that may also affect any funding associated with the study.

**AMENDMENTS:**

All proposed changes to the study (e.g., personnel, procedures, or documents), must be approved in advance by the IRB through the amendment process, except as necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to research subjects. Should the latter occur, you must notify the IRB Office as soon as possible.

**AEs/ORIOs:**

You must inform the IRB of all unanticipated events, adverse events (AEs), and other reportable information and occurrences (ORIOs). These include but are not limited to events and/or information that may have physical, psychological, social, legal, or economic impact on the research subjects or other.

Investigators and research staff are responsible for reporting information concerning the approved research to the IRB in a timely fashion, understanding and adhering to the reporting guidance ([http://www.med.umich.edu/irbmed/ae\\_orio/index.htm](http://www.med.umich.edu/irbmed/ae_orio/index.htm)), and not implementing any changes to the research without IRB approval of the change via an amendment submission. When changes are necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subject, implement the change and report via an ORIO and/or amendment submission within 7 days after the action is taken. This includes all information with the potential to impact

**the risk or benefit assessments of the research.**

**SUBMITTING VIA eRESEARCH:**

**You can access the online forms for continuing review, amendments, and AEs/ORIOs in the eResearch workspace for this approved study (referenced above).**

**MORE INFORMATION:**

**You can find additional information about UM's Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) in the Operations Manual and other documents available at:**

**[www.research.umich.edu/hrpp](http://www.research.umich.edu/hrpp).**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard W. Redman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small mark above the 'i' in Richard.

**Richard Redman  
Chair, IRB HSBS**



**Appendix E: Assent to Participate in a Research Study (14-17 year olds)**  
**EXPLORING PERCEPTIONS OF SINGING**

Researcher: Sarah L. Bowman, Graduate Student, School of Music, Theatre, & Dance,  
University of Michigan

Thesis Advisor: Colleen Conway, Ph.D., School of Music, Theatre, & Dance,  
University of Michigan

**Overview and purpose**

You are invited to be part of a research study that looks at high school students' opinions and attitudes about singing. This study is especially designed to get feedback from 'non-singers' (students who do not regularly sing). The overall purpose of this study is to help music teachers understand teenagers' musical interests and behaviors. You are being asked to participate in this study because your brother or sister recommended you as a good candidate based on the topic. This study is being conducted as part of a master's degree program.

**Description of your involvement**

If you agree to be part of this study, you will be asked to participate in one face-to-face interview. The interview will last about 60-90 minutes and will take place at Fruitport High School. During this interview, we will discuss your musical experiences and opinions on singing. The researcher would like to audio-record your interview with a digital voice recorder to make sure the conversation is recorded accurately. You can still participate in this study even if you do not agree to be recorded.

**Benefits**

Although you may not directly benefit from being in this study, music teachers will benefit from hearing what you have to say about singing.

**Risks and discomforts**

There are minimal risks of this study. If you feel uncomfortable answering any question, you can choose to not answer. Also, you can choose to stop your participation in the interview at any time.

**Confidentiality**

Your confidentiality will be protected throughout this study. Your interview responses will only be identified with a pseudonym instead of using your real name (a pseudonym is a fake name). The researcher plans to present or publish the results of this study. These results will not include any information that would identify you or your family. The only people who might come across your real name are people who are responsible for making sure this research is done safely and properly. This includes music education faculty from the University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre, & Dance, but probably only the researcher's thesis advisor, Dr. Colleen Conway. The audio file of your interview will be stored on a password-protected laptop until a written copy of the conversation has been created using pseudonyms. This audio file will most likely be kept for five years or more, and could be used in further research about attitudes towards singing.

**Voluntary nature of the study**

Participating in this study is completely voluntary and entirely up to you. Even if you choose to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. If you decide to withdraw early, any data collected will still be used in the study unless you request otherwise.

**Contact Information**

If you have questions about this study, you may contact Dr. Colleen Conway, University of Michigan, School of Music, Theatre, & Dance at (734) 615-4105, or email: conwaycm@umich.edu. If you have any questions for the researcher, please contact via email BOWMANSL@umich.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, want any further information, or want to ask questions or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher, please contact the University of Michigan Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board, 540 E. Liberty St. Ste. 202, Ann Arbor, MI 48104-2210, (734) 936-0933 [or toll free, (866) 936-0933], irbhsbs@umich.edu.

**Consent**

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in the study. You will be given a copy of this document and the researcher will keep a copy for the study records. Be sure that questions you have about the study have been answered and that you understand what you are being asked to do. You may contact the researcher if you think of a question later.

*I agree to participate in this study.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

*I agree to have my interview audio-recorded.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Appendix F: Parent Permission Letter****[Date]**

Dear Parent/Guardian:

I am a graduate student of the University of Michigan, School of Music, Theatre, & Dance, and I would like to invite your child to participate in a research study. The study is called *'I don't sing': Exploring perceptions of selected high school students*. You and your child are being contacted because your current or previous choir student suggested that their sibling might be a good candidate for this study. In addition to your child, I plan to ask four or five other students between the ages of 14 and 18 to participate in this study. This study is being conducted for my master's degree.

If you agree, your child would be asked to participate in one face-to-face interview. The interview will last about 60-90 minutes. This interview will take place at Fruitport High School. As the title of this study suggests, the interview will mostly be a conversation with your child about his/her musical experiences and opinions on singing. I would like to audio-record the interview with a digital voice recorder to make sure the conversation is recorded accurately. Your child may still participate in the research even if you or he/she decides not to be recorded.

Although your child may not directly benefit from being in this study, I think that people in the music profession – especially teachers – will benefit from hearing his/her perspective and what he/she has to say about singing. There are minimal risks associated with this study. If your child feels uncomfortable answering any particular question, he/she may choose to not answer. Also, he/she may choose to stop their participation in the interview at any time.

Know that your child's confidentiality will be protected, and his/her responses will only be identified by pseudonyms. To protect confidentiality, your child's real name and the names of any family or friends will not be used in the research. Also, in order to protect true confidentiality, you will not be allowed to review any of your child's responses from the interview. I plan to present or publish the results of this study. These results will not include any information that would identify your child or your family. The audio file of your child's interview will be stored on a password-protected personal computer until a written word-for-word copy of the discussion has been created using pseudonyms. The audio file will be kept indefinitely for further research about attitudes towards singing. People who are responsible for making sure this research is done safely and properly, such as music education faculty from the University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre, & Dance (primarily my thesis advisor, Dr. Colleen Conway) are the only people who might come across your child's real name for organizational purposes.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Even if your child decides to participate now, he/she may change his/her mind and stop at any time. If your child decides to withdraw early, any data collected will still be used in the study unless he/she requests otherwise. I sincerely hope that you will allow your child to share his/her perceptions, experiences, and

attitudes toward singing with me. Upon your consent, I will call or email your child to set up an interview time.

If you have questions about the study, you may contact Dr. Colleen Conway, University of Michigan, School of Music, Theatre, & Dance at (734) 615-4105, or email: conwaycm@umich.edu. If you have any questions about your child's participation in this study, please contact the researcher via email at BOWMANSL@umich.edu.

If you have questions about your child's rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information about these rights, ask questions or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher, please contact the University of Michigan Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board, 540 E. Liberty St. Ste. 202, Ann Arbor, MI 48104-2210, (734) 936-0933 [or toll free, (866) 936-0933], irbhsbs@umich.edu.

Sincerely,

Sarah L. Bowman  
University of Michigan  
School of Music, Theatre, & Dance  
Fruitport High School Choirs  
(231)865-3101 ext. 2134  
sbowman@fruitportschools.net

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### Parental Permission

By signing this document, you are agreeing to allow your child, \_\_\_\_\_, to be part of the study *'I don't sing': Exploring perceptions of selected high school students*. Your child's participation is completely voluntary. If you allow your child to be part of the study, you may change your mind and withdraw your approval at any time. Your child may choose not to be part of the study, even if you agree, and may refuse to answer an interview question or stop participating at any time.

You will be given a copy of this document for your records and one copy will be kept with the study records. Be sure that questions you have asked about the study have been answered and that you understand what your child will be asked to do. You may contact the researcher if you think of a question later.

*I give my permission for my child to participate in this study.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

*I give my permission for the interview with my child to be audio-recorded.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Appendix G: Consent to Participate in a Research Study (18+ year-olds)**  
**EXPLORING PERCEPTIONS OF SINGING**

Researcher: Sarah L. Bowman, Graduate Student, School of Music, Theatre, & Dance,  
University of Michigan  
Thesis Advisor: Colleen Conway, Ph.D., School of Music, Theatre, & Dance,  
University of Michigan

**Overview and purpose**

You are invited to be part of a research study that looks at high school students' opinions and attitudes about singing. This study is especially designed to get feedback from 'non-singers' (students who do not regularly sing). The overall purpose of this study is to help music teachers understand teenagers' musical interests and behaviors. You are being asked to participate in this study because your brother or sister recommended you as a good candidate based on the topic. This study is being conducted as part of a master's degree program.

**Description of your involvement**

If you agree to be part of this study, you will be asked to participate in one face-to-face interview. The interview will last about 60-90 minutes and will take place at Fruitport High School. During this interview, we will discuss your musical experiences and opinions on singing. The researcher would like to audio-record your interview with a digital voice recorder to make sure the conversation is recorded accurately. You can still participate in this study even if you do not agree to be recorded.

**Benefits**

Although you may not directly benefit from being in this study, music teachers will benefit from hearing what you have to say about singing.

**Risks and discomforts**

There are minimal risks of this study. If you feel uncomfortable answering any question, you can choose to not answer. Also, you can choose to stop your participation in the interview at any time.

**Confidentiality**

Your confidentiality will be protected throughout this study. Your interview responses will only be identified with a pseudonym instead of using your real name (a pseudonym is a fake name). The researcher plans to present or publish the results of this study. These results will not include any information that would identify you or your family. The only people who might come across your real name are people who are responsible for making sure this research is done safely and properly. This includes music education faculty from the University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre, & Dance, but probably only the researcher's thesis advisor, Dr. Colleen Conway. The audio file of your interview will be stored on a password-protected laptop until a written copy of the conversation has been created using pseudonyms. This audio file will most likely be kept for five years or more, and could be used in further research about attitudes towards singing.

**Voluntary nature of the study**

Participating in this study is completely voluntary and entirely up to you. Even if you choose to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. If you decide to withdraw early, any data collected will still be used in the study unless you request otherwise.

**Contact Information**

If you have questions about this study, you may contact Dr. Colleen Conway, University of Michigan, School of Music, Theatre, & Dance at (734) 615-4105, or email: conwaycm@umich.edu. If you have any questions for the researcher, please contact via email BOWMANS�@umich.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, want any further information, or want to ask questions or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher, please contact the University of Michigan Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board, 540 E. Liberty St. Ste. 202, Ann Arbor, MI 48104-2210, (734) 936-0933 [or toll free, (866) 936-0933], irbhsbs@umich.edu.

**Consent**

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in the study. You will be given a copy of this document and the researcher will keep a copy for the study records. Be sure that questions you have about the study have been answered and that you understand what you are being asked to do. You may contact the researcher if you think of a question later.

*I agree to participate in this study.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

*I agree to have my interview audio-recorded.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date