A STUDY OF SOCIAL COMPARISONS AND THEIR

EFFECTS ON HIGH SCHOOL CHOIR DIRECTORS

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by

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

A STUDY OF SOCIAL COMPARISONS AND THEIR EFFECTS ON
HIGH SCHOOOL CHOIR DIRECTORS

presented by Laura Kitchel,

a candidate for the degree of doctor of philosophy,

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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Professor Carol Gilles

Dedicated to my family: Tracy, Isabel, and Violet,
for taking this journey with me.

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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to examine social comparison usage by high school choir directors, and possible attributes that may affect the types of comparisons that are utilized. Directors from four Midwestern states were invited to participate in a survey designed to answer research questions pertaining to the extent to which they engage in social comparisons, the different ways that they socially compare, and potential relationships between job attributes, perceived control, and social comparison types. Three hundred and sixty-three participants returned usable surveys for a response rate of 31.6%. Results indicated that directors were engaging in social comparison, mostly to seek information, problem solve, and validate opinions. These comparisons were upward assimilative, which research has found to have positive emotional outcomes, such as inspiration and admiration. Two attributes, perceived control and number of years taught, played a role in three comparison types, Upward Assimilation, Upward Contrast, and Downward Assimilation. A qualitative component of the survey confirms that the participants were engaging in upward assimilative behaviors, but also provide evidence that some directors experienced the negative effects of comparisons, as well. Future research to examine the possible effects and emotional outcomes of social comparison use by choir directors.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The need to assess one's own abilities and opinions is a universal human characteristic, and many times there are clear and definite ways to discover this information. A singer, for example, will be awarded a leading role if she is the best person to audition. There are also concrete ways that a choir director's performance is determined; ratings at contest, performance evaluations from administrators, or completion of a professional development class. However, these definitive results are not the only ways to judge a director's program or level of success. A good concert performance or increase in student enthusiasm for singing can also be markers of success, but how can a director measure these achievements? When a conclusive rank, order, or measurement does not exist, then how does a choir director know she is doing well? One answer to this question may lie in Festinger's theory of social comparison, which states that when there is not a definitive way to determine the rank or quality of one's performance, people will compare their abilities with those of others (Festinger, 1954).

It has been established that people have a need for information, therefore social comparisons are unavoidable and a part of people's daily lives (Festinger, 1954; Gilber, Giesler, & Morris, 1995). Choral music is a field that is primed for multiple types of social comparison because the music itself is very subjective in terms of personal taste and affect, and when performances and choral competitions are on public display they are open to others' evaluations. It is also a discipline where directors are given opportunities to interact with each other in potential hotbeds of social comparison, such as large or

small group contest, conferences, or district meetings. Because there are very few opportunities for a high school choir director to definitively determine the quality of her program, she may frequently look to other directors and performances, and measure her own success or failure by social comparison. Social comparison can be a powerful tool for discovering one's own ability or job performance, but frequent comparisons can have deep implications for happiness and well-being. Researchers have looked at these implications in other fields, but music education is lacking in social comparison research, despite its use by directors.

My research is designed to contribute to the understanding of how high school choir directors use social comparison to determine their teaching ability or overall quality of their program. It will also evaluate whether selected job demographics and perception of job control influence the types of comparisons that are utilized.

Background of the Problem

Comparing the abilities and opinions of the self to others is a common occurrence, but the ways that people compare and the comparison outcomes are complex and varied. People use social comparison for many different reasons, including gathering information about the self (Festinger, 1954), validations, self-esteem (Goethals, & Darley, 1977), inspiration (Taylor & Lobel, 1989), and intrinsic motivation (Mumm & Mutlu, 2011). Most often, people will compare themselves to others that are considered equal or slightly better (Festinger, 1954; Goethals, & Darley, 1977). The effects can be either positive or negative, depending on the comparison type and outside factors, such as perceived control and self-esteem. Characteristics like these play a large part in how the

comparisons are interpreted (Buunk, Collins, Taylor, Dakof, & Van Yperen, 1990; Smith, 2000).

Using social comparison has emotional outcomes for individuals (Smith, 2000), both positive and negative. Comparisons give people sought-after information about their abilities (Festinger, 1954; Goethals & Darley, 1977; Nosanchuk & Erickson, 1985; Tesser, 1988), and may raise their self-esteem and ego (Dijkstra, Kuyper, van der Werf, Buunk, & van der Zee, 2008; Goethals & Darley, 1977; Wills, 1981), but there are negative side effects as well, such as guilt or envy (White, Langer, Yariv & Welch, 2006; Wills, 1981). People sometimes even avoid comparisons because of their negative consequences (Brickman & Bulman, 1977; Wills, 1981). These positive and negative outcomes of comparison play a large role in how people create a self-concept for themselves and for their social groups (Burleson, Leach & Harrington, 2005; Festinger, 1950, Hagerty, 2000; Marsh & Hau, 2003; Miller, Turnbull & McFarland, 1988; Rajfel & Turner, 1986). This is especially true if it is a bonded group filled with similar others (Turnbull & McFarland, 1988), such as a group of choir directors in the same district that know each other and have similar job expectations.

These types of bonded groups have been found to exist in education, an environment that is filled with social comparisons (Dijkstra, Kuyper, van der Werf, Buunk, & van der Zee, 2008). According to the research, positive outcomes found for educators using social comparisons included inspiration, self-esteem, increased effort, and performance outcomes (Dijkstra, Kuyper, van der Werf, Buunk, & van der Zee, 2008; Kitchel, Smith, Henry, Robinson, Lawver, Park & Schell, 2012; Van Yperen, Brenninkmeijer & Buunk, 2006). Social comparison can also lead to negative outcomes

for teachers, such as burnout, poor job satisfaction, job stress, and lowered self-concept (Carmona, Buunk, Peiro, Rodrigues, & Bravo, 2006; Dijkstra et al. 2008; Kitchel et al. 2012). Negative comparison outcomes can also be increased based on the amount of control teachers do or do not believe they have over their classrooms (Kennedy, 2010).

Issues of comparison are exacerbated in the specific field of choral music education. School choir programs can be extremely competitive (Kelly & Heath, 2015), and because of the subjective nature of music, there are many times when directors are forced to compare themselves to others because there is no non-subjective way of knowing how successful they are. However, if social comparisons can have negative effects on artists and teachers (Carmona, Buunk, Peiro, Rodrigues, & Bravo, 2006; Dijkstra et al. 2008; Kitchel et al. 2012; Langer, Delizonna, and Pirson, 2010), then it is important to know what types of comparisons choir directors are making and the emotional outcomes directors might be feeling from them. There is currently very little research in this area, but social comparisons for choir directors could have profound effects on self-esteem or self-worth; therefore, it is an area that warrants further examination.

Statement of the Problem

This study is based on the assumption that choir directors, like other teachers, use social comparisons as a means of self-assessment, although anyone who has listened to directors' comments that are made after a choir's convention performance already knows anecdotally that social comparisons among high school choir directors are common. As has been described, social comparisons can have profound positive and negative effects on self-concept. Because not all choir programs are equal in size, resources, expectations,

or other attributes, teachers could be making poor social comparisons that lead to negative consequences. This study was designed to determine the degree to which high school choir teachers use social comparison, evaluate the kinds of comparisons being used, and describe how various attributes and perceived control may play a role in comparison types.

Research Questions

Four primary questions guided my work:

1. To what extent do high school choir directors engage in social comparison?

2. What are the different ways high school choir directors engage in social comparison?

3. How much control do high school choir directors perceive they have over their choral programs?

4. What are the relationships among types of social comparison, perceived control, and selected demographic variables?

Importance of the Study

This investigation will contribute to the existing body of knowledge regarding social comparison, specifically by adding information about how social comparisons are made within the specific group of high school choir directors. Ideally, this information will serve to help choral directors understand how they make comparisons, so that they can use these in positive ways that might lead to resilience instead of burnout.

Definition of Terms

  The following operational definitions were used to clarify terms in this study. The terms are either directly from social comparison literature, or synthesized from the literature.

1. *Social comparison* is the belief that people will compare themselves to others in order to fulfill the drive to evaluate their opinions and abilities (Festinger, 1954).

2. *Upward assimilation* is comparing to a better-off other resulting in positive emotional outcomes (Smith, 2000).

3. *Upward contrast* is comparing to a better-off other resulting in negative emotional outcomes (Smith, 2000).

4. *Downward assimilation* is comparing to a worse-off other resulting in negative emotional outcomes (Smith, 2000).

5. *Downward contrast* is comparing to a worse-off other resulting in positive emotional outcomes (Smith, 2000).

6. *Attributes* are the qualities, characteristics, or inherent part of someone or something.

7. A *similar other* is a person that resembles the self in regards to attributes.

8. A *choir director* is someone who leads a choir. The term "director" was chosen instead of "teacher," because the study was in regards to how comparisons are made as a director of public performances, not a classroom instructor.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

How does a high school choir director know she is doing well? It is possible to gather information from concrete markers, such as performance evaluations from a principal or rating sheets from competitions, but what about targets that are hard to measure, such as overall concert performance, or effective conducting styles? In situations where the measurement is subjective, it is likely that the choir teacher will measure herself against others, a psychological evaluation known as social comparison. It is important to understand this construct, because factors such as relevance, attributes, proximity, and the need for information make social comparisons unavoidable, occasionally unconsciously done, and a part of people's daily lives (Blanton & Stapel, 2008; Festinger, 1954; Gilber, Giesler, & Morris, 1995; Tesser, 1988).

This study was intended to provide researchers, directors, and educators with details about social comparison by gathering information on how comparisons are used and their effects on high school choir directors in the Midwest. Directors from Midwest states were invited to participate in a survey that addressed the research questions.

This chapter is organized into four main sections: (a) the definition and history of social comparison theory (b) social comparison usage (c) factors that influence social comparison (d) social comparison in the field of education.

Original Social Comparison Theory

Social comparison theory was born in 1954 with Leon Festinger's publication, *A Theory of Social Comparison Processes*. Festinger stated that people have a drive to

evaluate their opinions and abilities, and when there is no objective way to get the information they need, they will compare themselves to others. Festinger also had several corollaries based upon his main hypotheses, one of the most important being that people will tend to compare themselves with similar others. Further research has validated that similar attributes, such as gender, race, or intelligence matter a great deal in how people choose to socially compare (Buunk & Ybema, 1997; Collins, 2000; Goethals & Darley, 1977; Miller, Turnbull & McFarland, 1988).

Another major tenet of Festinger's original hypothesis states that when comparing abilities, people will compare themselves to someone slightly better, in order to gather information on how to improve. Information gathering for improvement was a large part of the original theory, and although this is still a main reason why people socially compare, researchers have since discovered that comparisons for information are only a small part of the overall picture.

These aspects of Festinger's original theory; comparisons to similar others and the desire to compare to someone slightly better for improvement, helped establish Social Comparison theory in the field of psychology, but further studies have also discovered that social comparison has many different uses, outcomes, and consequences. It is important then, that we look beyond Festinger's original theory to get a holistic picture of the drives, choices, and emotional effects of social comparisons.

Social Comparison Usage

People are naturally prone to notice and react to others around them. A person will even physically change her posture (a dominant person creates a submissive response in kind and vice versa) as a social response (Tiedens & Fragale, 2003). Making social

comparisons to others and adjusting behavior accordingly is a natural and common part of people's everyday lives (Blanton & Stapel, 2008; Festinger, 1954; Gilber, Giesler, & Morris, 1995), and is used for many different reasons. Social comparison has long been identified as a way for people to gather information (Festinger, 1954; Goethals & Darley, 1977; Taylor & Lobel, 1989), and help give people feedback in order to make behavior changes (Klein, 1997). People also need self-evaluations in order to validate important perceptions (Goethals & Darley, 1977), help sustain intrinsic motivation (Mumm & Mutlu, 2011), and maintain self-esteem (Beach & Tesser, 2000; Buunk & Ybema, 1997; Taylor & Lobel, 1989). Further research has shown that social comparisons have been found to be an important part of how people cope during times of stress (Aspinwall, 1997; Diener & Fujita, 1997; Gibbons, Benbow, & Gerrard, 1994; Wills, 1997). Not all social comparisons are used in the same way with the same intended result however, and there are many ways and reasons why people compare.

Comparison direction. To understand *why* social comparisons are used, it is important to understand *how* they are used. There are two directions in which people socially compare; upward (toward a better other) or downward (toward a worse-off other) and people can compare up or down at the same time (Taylor & Lobel, 1989). Both types of comparisons are used for validation, self-esteem (Goethals & Darley, 1977), evaluation of skills (Buunk & Ybema, 1997), and either direction can be triggered depending on whether a person is competing or cooperating (Garcia, Tor, & Schiff, 2013; Stapel, & Koomen, 2005). In other words, comparisons in either direction can make an individual feel good or bad (Mussweiler & Strack, 2000), and the preference for comparison direction depends on the extent to which one supports a positive self-concept

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(Buunk & Ybema, 1997), or positive affect (Emmons & Diener, 1985). It is important to understand that comparisons in either direction can have positive or negative effects, depending what is being focused on (Buunk, Collins, Taylor, Dakof, Van Yperen, 1990; Groothof, Siero, & Buunk, 2007; Wilson & Ross, 2000), how the information about the target is processed, and how a person feels about it (Mussweiler & Strack, 2000).

Emotional outcomes result from the direction of the comparison. For example, people shift to self-enhancement downward comparison when there is a threat to self-esteem or a need for self-enhancement (Hogg, 2000), and upward comparison for self-evaluations or future tasks in order to get information (Aspinwall, 1997; Hogg, 2000). Each direction has its ups and downs, positives and negatives, assimilative or contrastive natures, and the resulting emotional outcomes change based upon whether the focus is on the self or others (Smith, 2000). The following chart by Smith (2000), clearly displays the emotional outcomes of each comparison; upward assimilation, upward contrast, downward assimilation, and downward contrast (see Figure 2.1).
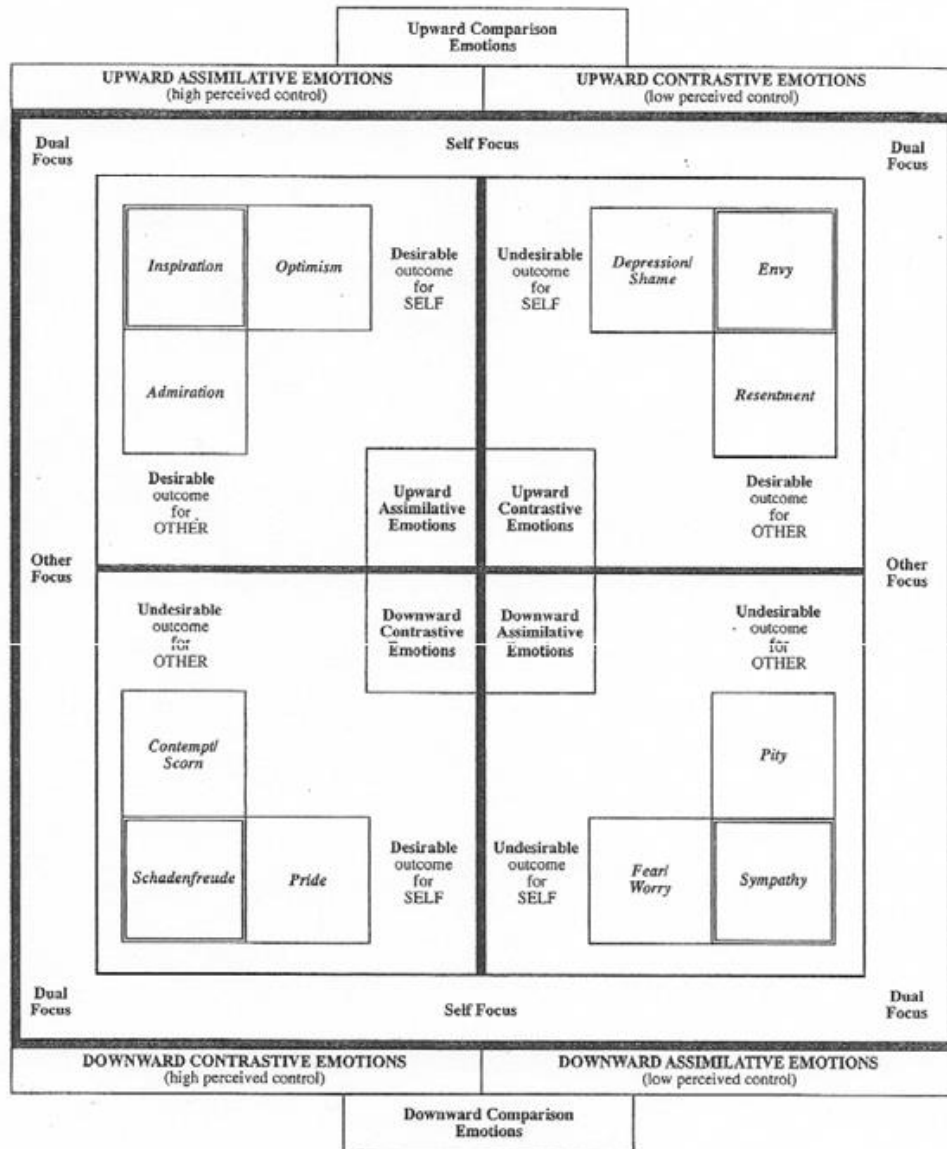
Figure 2.1 Smith's Chart of Comparison Direction and Emotional Outcomes

Positive Effects. One of the reasons that social comparisons are so common is because they can have positive emotional benefits. Upward assimilative comparisons can result in inspiration, optimism, and admiration (Smith, 2000), and make people feel good about what might happen in the future (Collins, 2000), especially when improvements are possible (Aspinwall, 1997). Individuals prefer upward comparisons when learning a skill or goal setting (Buunk & Ybema, 1997), because people using upward comparisons have

two motives: self-enhancement and self-evaluation for improvement (Collins, 2000). It is useful and less threatening to compare upward to someone with more experience; a person who can provide inspiration and information without loss of self-esteem (Buunk & Ybema, 1997). A student teacher for example, might use upward assimilative comparisons with a cooperating teacher, becoming inspired by what someone with more experience can do, and getting information about what kind of teacher to become in the future. Upward comparisons are most often used during information seeking, used less on ego enhancements, and used the least amount on ego defense (Nosanchuck & Erickson, 1985). The ego is most enhanced in upward comparisons when a person outperforms a superior target, but then questions of reliability can occur, especially with the possibility of unstable attributes (Alicke, 2000).

Positive emotional effects can also occur during downward comparisons. These types of comparisons can activate a better sense of well-being and self-esteem, especially when comparing oneself to someone who is doing worse (Groothof, Siero, & Buunk, 2007; Wills, 1981). Positive feelings from downward contrast include pride, schadenfreude, and contempt (Smith, 2000), although people with these traits can convey self-superiority and are viewed negatively by others, so they often hide their feelings of hubris (Hoorens, Pandelaere, Oldersma, & Sedikides, 2012). Also, people that strongly desire public prestige will be more likely to "blast" others or engage in downward contrastive behaviors in order to correct their image if they experience public failure (Cialdini & Richardson, 1980), an important point for directors whose choirs give public performances. Downward comparisons can also be used for diagnostics and give people information about how to avoid negative situations that happened to other people

(Aspinwall, 1997). For example, a teacher might use downward social comparisons to decide it is time to leave a job based on the negative outcomes of the other teachers around her.

Negative Effects. Unfortunately, social comparisons can also have negative effects. Frequent social comparisons can lead to destructive emotions such as guilt, defensiveness, regret, having unmet cravings, and behaviors, such as lying to protect the self and others (White, Langer, Yariv, & Welch, 2006). Frequent social comparison negatively predicted job satisfaction in studies on police officers (White, Langer, Yariv, & Welch, 2006), nurses (Buunk, Zurriaga, & Peiro, 2010), and people in caregiving professions (Miller, Stiff, & Ellis, 1988), especially when they were under stress (Buunk, Ybema, Gibbons, & Ipenburg, 2001). Upward contrastive comparison (seeing the contrast between the self and a better-off other) can lead to depression, shame, envy and resentment (Geurtz, Buunk, & Schaufeli, 1994; Lim, & Yang, 2015; Smith, 2000), as well as ego-deflation (Alicke, 2000), jealousy (Aspinwall, 1997; Massar & Buunk, 2010), and even interpersonal harming behaviors in work teams (Lam, Van der Vegt, Walter, & Huang, 2011). If a choir director makes consistent comparisons to colleagues that are more successful, or have higher paying jobs, negative feelings could occur. This is especially important in an age of social media, where social comparisons are readily available online. In studies regarding social media and social comparison, it was found that engaging in social media sites (such as Facebook) could lead to lower self-esteem, envy, and negative affect (Johnson & Knobloch-Westerwick, 2014; Lim, & Yang, 2015; Vogel, Rose, Okdie, Eckles, & Franz, 2015).

Downward comparison (seeing similarities between the self and a worse-off other) can also lead to negative emotional outcomes, such as fear, worry, sympathy, and pity (Smith, 2000). People respond to downward comparison when they have negative moods, immediate setbacks, or decreases in well-being (Aspinwall, 1997), and these are used more frequently by people with low self-esteem (Wills, 1981). Underperforming an inferior other is the most threatening situation for the ego (Alicke, 2000), and can make people give up trying to cope if they feel like they will become like the worse-off other (Wills, 1997). Active downward comparison can also create harm if the downward targets are unfortunate others or people that are considered "acceptable" to belittle, such as minorities or the elderly. Although this type of active downward comparison is not socially acceptable, it makes some people feel better, so they do it anyway (Cialdini & Richardson, 1980; Wills, 1981).

The adverse effects of social comparison can lead to negative behavior choices. In a study by John, Loewenstein, & Rick (2014), people were more likely to cheat at work when they became aware that others around them were making more money for the same job. Unfavorable information sharing and moods can also compound stress when people affiliate with others during times of difficulty due to the contagious nature of negativity (Buunk & Ybema, 1997). This emotional contagion can lead to the negative emotions of others affecting the self or vice versa (Kulik, & Mahler, 2000). The emotional outcomes of social comparisons are important for choir directors to understand, as directors are frequently placed in competitive social situations, such as large group contest or district/state choir auditions where comparisons arise.

Attributes. One of the most fundamental aspects of social comparison theory is that people compare themselves to others with similar attributes (Collins, 2000; Festinger, 1954; Goethals & Darley, 1977; Tesser, 1988), such as education level, race, career selection, or work ethic. People are especially likely to compare to similar-others that they have a bond with (Miller, Turnbull & McFarland, 1988), such as a colleague or friend. People also view their distinguishing traits, such as musical ability, as more important, and they strongly identify with people who share those traits (Miller, Turnbull & McFarland, 1988). Therefore, it follows that choir directors would be likely to make comparisons with other directors, especially if they knew each other. When the differences between people increase, the need to compare decreases (Festinger, 1954), so people will continuously look to find "similar others" when comparing. If a person is under stress for example, the "similar other" becomes one that is dealing with the same stress or uncertainty (Buunk & Ybema, 1997). Social comparisons are a strong predictor of satisfaction and the "comparison gap," (the distance between self and others), correlates with satisfaction and happiness (Diener & Fujita, 1997), providing further evidence that people are prone to compare to someone similar within close proximity.

However, if the field of focus becomes too narrow in a person's comparison with a similar other, they may become blinded to inequality. For example, in a study of income inequality (Major & Forcey, 1985), women were satisfied with their income when it was compared only with other women as opposed to men, and therefore overlooked the pay discrepancy between men and women. It is possible that choir directors could fall into this same trap if their comparison focus is too narrow, but comparisons with people that have large differences can also be troublesome, as they do

not provide enough information (Mussweiler & Strack, 2000). If a collegiate music education student were to compare his choral directing to Robert Shaw, for example, he would not find enough similarities to learn how to improve. It makes a difference who the similar other, or target comparison, is in order to evaluate attributes and make useful social comparisons.

Attributes have two types: there are stable attributes, such as education level, experience, and race, and unstable attributes, such as fatigue, alcohol, illness, or brief practice. Performance-related attributes make a difference in people's comparison (Smith & Arnkelsson, 2000), and level of competitiveness (Garcia, Tor, & Schiff, 2013). If two directors are making social comparisons, but one has just been to an intensive training session, or is conducting while ill, adequate comparisons become harder to make because the unstable attributes of the similar other (extra training or illness) have changed.

Self-Esteem and Coping. Some of the most frequent uses of social comparisons concern issues of self-image or self-esteem. The need to compare can come from a threat to the ego (Wills, 1981), because people are motivated to maintain a positive self-evaluation (Beach & Tesser, 2000). Engaging in social comparison can raise self-esteem (Alicke, 2000; Beach & Tesser, 2000; Buunk & Ybema, 1997; Taylor, Buunk, & Aspinwall, 1990; Taylor & Lobel, 1989), when situations arise that threaten ego and positive self-image, but the method of the comparison matters. Self-evaluation can be either raised or lowered by someone else's performance (Beach & Tesser, 2000), so people must engage in techniques that raise self-esteem instead of lowering it if they want to use social comparison for ego-enhancement. For example, it is useful and less

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threatening to compare upward to someone with more experience (Buunk & Ybema, 1997), so a young choir director might compare her conducting techniques to an older director to gather information about what she could work on for the future, instead of someone her own age who might make her feel behind in her skills.

Self-esteem is a part of overall self-concept and is molded by comparison feedback (Alicke, 2000; Taylor, Buunk, & Aspinwall, 1990). In Festinger's original work (1954), he theorized that the more important the opinion or ability is to the person, the stronger the need for comparison becomes. The Self-Evaluation Model (SEM) by Tesser (1988), took this concept further and explained how relevance and proximity play a major role in comparison and self-esteem. If a dimension is highly relevant, being a good choir director for example, it will make the emotional outcome of the comparison more meaningful (Alicke, 2000; Beach & Tesser, 2000; Tesser & Paulhus, 1983). The same is true of proximity. A choir director might have a stronger emotional outcome if a comparison of musical ability is with a good friend rather than a stranger (Alicke, 2000; Beach & Tesser, 2000; Tesser, 1988).

In fact, the need to maintain high self-esteem is such a strong motivator that studies have shown that people might make success more difficult for another if the task is relevant and the person is close (Beach & Tesser, 2000). The higher the personal relevance, the more likely someone is to sabotage the other person (Garcia, Song, & Tesser, 2010; Lam, Van der Vegt, Walter, & Huang, 2011; Tesser, 1988). These concepts have major implications for choir directors, assuming that most directors consider their jobs to have high relevance. Issues of self-esteem are important, but they are not the only reasons that people will choose to use social comparison.

Coping and self-protection are other major motivators for people to engage in social comparison (Aspinwall, 1997; Diener & Fujita, 1997; Gibbons, Benbow, & Gerrard, 1994; Wills, 1997), as people want to make comparisons when they are in uncertain, stressful, or emotionally exhausting situations (Buunk & Ybema, 1997), because comparisons can give needed information on how to choose coping mechanisms for future events (Aspinwall, 1997). For example, a choir director might use social comparison to help decide whether or not to take his choir to district contest. After the comparison, a director could decide his choir is in good shape compared to other choral groups and still has time to work hard and succeed, or his choir is behind other ensembles but still has time to withdraw from the contest and avoid the situation altogether. In this way, a person could choose his method of social comparison to engage in coping (Diener & Fujita, 1997).

Threat and stress also cause changes in how people choose to socially compare. People under threat tend to compare downward to raise self-esteem and compare upward for inspiration and information (self-improvement vs. self-enhancement) (Buunk & Ybema, 1997; Taylor & Lobel 1989). Threat also increases the need for affiliating with others that are also under threat due to the need to evaluate the current state, reduce fear, or increase cognitive and emotional clarity on how to properly respond (Kulik & Mahler, 2000).

During times of change for the worse, people can fluctuate between social comparison strategies (lower, increase, change comparisons), for self-protection (Gibbons, Benbow, & Gerrard, 1994). If a high school choir director is dealing with a new administration that is unsupportive after years of having a supportive administration,

a coping strategy might include a social comparison shift in thinking from, "I have it so much better than everyone else," to "At least my situation isn't as bad as someone else's." In this way, downward comparison can be an active cognitive form of coping that can prevent someone from rumination or depressive self-focus (Wills, 1997).

Social Comparison Fluidity. It is important to note that because social comparisons can be a cognitive process (Taylor & Lobel, 1989), they are fluid and constantly changing to suit the needs and desires of the person making the comparisons. If social comparisons have negative emotional consequences, people may actively avoid trying to make them (Brickman & Bulman, 1977; Gibbons, Benbow, & Gerrard, 1994), or avoid contact with people who are better (Brickman & Bulman, 1977; Garcia, Song, & Tesser, 2010). Some of these adjustments are further examples of coping mechanisms; if people are outperformed by social comparison, they can change the importance of the item (Beach & Tesser, 2000), or self-handicap (construct obstacles) to avoid negative emotional consequences when repeated comparisons to a suspected superior are inevitable and they are uncertain about the ability to outperform them (Alicke, 2000). Choir competitions can be an example of these type of situations. If a choir director feels her choir will do poorly in comparison to others, she may decide that contests are unimportant and stop taking her choirs to compete.

Range and skew are other important factors in how social comparison can change based upon emotional outcomes. In studies of income, happiness, and pay satisfaction, people were generally satisfied with the absolute value of their income until they became aware that everyone around them was making more (Hagerty, 2000; Harris, Anseel, & Lievens, 2008). It is possible that directors also feel the effects of range and skew, being

satisfied with their own choir programs until they become aware that other choir programs around them have more resources or support.

Fluidity is also frequent because people cannot always avoid social comparisons, even if they may want to, so sometimes a certain amount of "undoing" occurs after the comparison is made. The original effects do not always diminish (Blanton & Stapel, 2008; Gilber, Giesler, & Morris, 1995), so there is sometimes an issue of stereotype maintenance that occurs (Blanton, Christie & Dye, 2002). For example, if a choral contest judge believes that small choirs will never produce a good sound, then upon hearing an excellent small choir perform, the judge must "undo" his original opinion and try to overcome his stereotyping of small ensembles.

Direct social comparisons cannot always be made, in which case a "proxy comparison" takes place. The "proxy effect" is when a performance by a similar other is used to predict one's own outcome (Smith & Arnkelsson, 2000). They are best used when making future judgments on a task would be time-consuming, effortful, costly, or challenging, and when the self and the proxy have performed similarly on a previous task (Martin, 2000). If a choir director from a small school is trying to decide whether or not to take a competitive trip, she might look at a similar sized program, or "proxy program," that recently came back from one to see how successful their experience was before making a decision.

Factors that influence Social Comparison

Bias. Bias plays an important role in how social comparisons are perceived, processed, and used. For example, people believe they possess more positive characteristics than negative ones, so they tend to compare themselves to better people,

unless they have low self-esteem or negative self-views (Collins, 2000). This "better than average effect" means that people will evaluate themselves more favorably than their peers, or view others more positively or negatively depending on which direction reflects best on the self, making it difficult to alter self-image with social comparison (Alicke, 2000).

People also may be unrealistically optimistic about their futures, and thus rate their chances to be above average for positive events and below average for negative events. This "optimist bias" is most likely to occur when people have an emotional investment over a controllable event (Weinstein, 1980), however, the view that good outcomes are more likely to happen to oneself and bad outcomes are more likely to happen to others (Menon, Kyung, & Agrawal, 2009; Stock, Gibbons, Beekman, and Gerrard, 2015), sometimes makes it difficult for people to see clearly how to succeed in competitive tasks (Moore & Kim, 2003). In a study on optimist bias, people were willing to bet more of their own money when competing on an easy quiz, forgetting that everyone else was competing on the same easy quiz, making their own chances of winning low (Moore & Kim, 2003). Even in a non-competitive situation where risk is high, the chances of having a heart attack for example, people did not change their behavior if the risk was lower than their peers (Klein, 1997).

Attributes also play a major role in social comparisons, as does the bias known as "attribution error." This bias occurs when people place more weight on situational attributes when they look at the self, but place more weight on personal characteristics when they look at others (Kennedy, 2010). This is because positive emotional effects can happen during upward comparisons when the target's (better) performance is attributed to

increased effort, and during downward comparisons when the target's (better) performance was attributed to ability (Buunk & Ybema, 1997). This implies that social comparison can increase intentions to work harder, but only when high/low performance is explained clearly by effort (Van Yperen, Brenninkmeijer, & Buunk, 2006). For example, when a director hears a choir that is better than her own, if she is aware of how hard the other director worked to achieve a great choral sound, the comparison will be more positive, and might inspire her to work harder with her own choirs than if she feels the other director simply "got lucky." When people are out-performed, this bias can also allow for them to attribute the "genius factor" to the competition by granting the other more intelligence and ability in order to save their own self-image (Alicke, LoSchiavo, Zerbst, & Zhang, 1997). If the competition holds strong personal relevance however, being out-performed by a "superstar" can have a deflating effect (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997). It is possible to control for a certain amount of bias, but only when there is greater similarity between the self and the target (Menon, Kyung, Agrawal, 2009).

   Control. Perceived control and uncertainty are other factors in whether comparisons are interpreted as positive or negative (Buunk, Collins, Taylor, Dakof, & Van Yperen, 1990), because the amount of perceived control over a situation can change the emotional outcome of the comparison (Buunk & Ybema, 1997; Smith, 2000; Testa & Major, 1990). If people feel they have a lack of situational control, they may choose to use a downward comparison to make themselves feel better (at least someone is worse than me!). If the situation isn't going to change however, a downward comparison can lead to jealously of a constantly superior other, or can become frightening because it shows an unfavorable future (Aspinwall, 1997). Amount of perceived control also leads

to changes in behavioral outcomes. If perceived control over a situation is high, a person could gain optimism bias, making her more likely to work harder, whereas a perceived lack of control leads to pessimism bias, and she would be less likely to take action (Menon, Kyung, & Agrawal, 2009).

Groups. Social comparisons can be made between individuals, but the theory of social comparison is also about group dynamics and small interacting groups (Forsyth, 2000; Hoorens & Van Damme, 2012), therefore, associations play a large role in how comparisons are made and interpreted and people will often compare themselves to a group within a group (Smith & Arnkelsson, 2000). For example, a female choir director might compare herself only with other female directors, instead of all directors. People will also associate with groups out of the need to define their social identity (Smith & Arnkelsson, 2000). According to Hogg (2000), "Social identity theory is a theory that rests on people making social comparisons between in-group and out-group, or between self as in-grouper and other as out-grouper, in order to construct a sense of who they are and how they are evaluated." (pg. 401). Belonging to a group that is similar to the self, such as gender identity, race, or occupation (Miller, Turnbull, & McFarland, 1988; Smith & Arnkelsson, 2000), can help people derive a positive self-image, thereby fulfilling their need for a positive social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Belonging to a group, especially a work group, can also give a person information about their ability. Knowing one's own place in a work group is important, because the hierarchy at work affects how the responsibility of tasks is distributed, why one person's opinion might have more influence or weight, or a person's overall feeling of competence on the job (Smith & Arnkelsson, 2000).

Not all of the emotional outcomes of belonging to a group are positive, however. A group can have power over its members, and change opinions, attitudes, or pressure people to conform. If a group member has differing opinions, that member may even be excluded (Crandall, 1988; Festinger, 1950). In fact, Festinger's original publication on social comparison theory in 1954 covered the pressures of group conformity, explaining that the stronger attraction to group, the greater the pressure toward uniformity of ability or opinion. The behaviors of high status members will transmit via imitation to the lower status members (Crandall, 1988). This "normative influence" will pressure people to conform, even if the behavior is negative (Forsyth, 2000; Geurtz, Buunk, & Schaufeli, 1994). In a study on normative influence, it was found that women in college began binge eating after joining a sorority because these behaviors were the norm, and were a sign of status within the group (Crandall, 1988). These effects could potentially influence the opinions or behaviors of high school choir directors, as they are members of a distinct group.

Another negative aspect of belonging to a group comes in the form of pluralistic ignorance (Schroeder & Prentice, 1998). This occurs when people in a group make assumptions about what everyone else is doing and adjust their behavior accordingly. This could cause people to do things they don't want to because of incorrect feelings about how other people actually think; taking a choir to large group contest for example, because of an assumption that it's something everyone "should do." Social discussion is the only way to reduce pluralistic ignorance and correct assumptions (Schroeder & Prentice, 1998).

Stereotyping can also occur between groups. This can create negative outcomes if a damaging stereotype becomes legitimized and other people "buy in" to the idea (Blanton, Christie & Dye, 2002). A choral example might be the idea that women are not capable of directing men's choirs. A rise in self-esteem can occur however, when the person in the lesser group outperforms someone in the advantaged group (Blanton, Christie & Dye, 2002). This rise in self-esteem occurs even if the person was outperformed as a whole, as long as the person outperformed someone in the advantaged group.

Favorable self-esteem can also occur during intergroup comparisons when a positive distinctiveness is secured (Hogg, 2000), so a choir director might feel a rise in self-esteem when comparing her classroom success to that of an English or math teacher, due to her distinctiveness among other teachers, but there might also be internal tension because of the need to see the self as distinct from the in-group (Blanton, Christie & Dye, 2002). In fact, if a person doesn't feel positive in her group, she will either leave the group or strive to make the group more positively distinct. This can lead to negative behaviors, such as competition with other groups, or discrimination (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Group and collective mindsets, such as "we" or "us," lead so social comparison assimilations within the group, whereas individual mindsets, such as "I" or "me," lead to social comparison contrasts, as does thinking of the self as distinctive (Stapel & Koomen, 2001).

Social Comparison in Education

Social Comparison in the Classroom. Schools are not immune to social comparisons and their effects. In fact, they are full of social comparisons, with research

showing that students as young as fourth grade were comparing themselves and their performances to others (Dijkstra, Kuyper, van der Werf, Buunk, & van der Zee, 2008). Social comparisons were also found to be linked to impostor feelings in students ages 10 to 12 (Chayer & Bouffard, 2010), and in a study about social comparisons and the Big Fish Little Pond Effect (BFLPE), March & Hau (2003), found that it was better for students' academic self-concept to be the best in a small environment than average or bad in a big one, perhaps a positive finding for educators in small schools.

Music programs are not immune to comparisons, either. In a publication comparing music programs in nationally ranked schools (Kelly & Heath, 2015), differences between each program were described in detail, including the types of competitions and auditions that took place. Comparisons can allow music students to perceive their abilities in reference to others (Hendricks, 2015), but have also shown to lead to competition, and harm motivation in the classroom when external rewards were given for achievement (Garcia, Tor, & Schiff, 2013; Hanus & Fox, 2015). This is an important point for choir directors who frequently have competition in their classrooms in the form of auditions, or solo placements, or contests. Competitions have been shown to activate contrastive comparisons (Stapel & Koomen, 2005), which can have negative emotional outcomes. In fact, emphasizing competition in the music classroom has shown to negatively harm student motivation (West, 2013).

Students are not the only people that are dealing with social comparisons in schools. Research regarding social comparison theory has major implications for teachers and school environments. Teachers are constantly around other educators (either better or worse), in a situation where forced comparisons occur (Diener & Fujita, 1997), and the

ability to attain professional success may be related to how good the people around them are (Buunk & Ybema, 1997). Success, or lack thereof, at work can also affect well-being and have health consequences (depression or stress), perhaps a reason why music teachers have reported leaving their jobs to take a new position with more professional prestige (Hancock, 2016).

Perceived control also plays a role in whether social comparisons are interpreted as positive or negative (Buunk, Collins, Taylor, Dakof, & Van Yperen, 1990), so many negative outcomes could arise regarding a person's perceived ability to control their own professional success. The issue of a teacher's lack of perceived control was broached in an article by Kennedy (2010), who argued for the need to look beyond teacher attributes and start looking at all of the aspects of the teaching situation that are outside of the teachers' control, such as time, materials, reform clutter, work assignments, and daily interruptions. Loss of perceived control in a teaching situation could quickly lead to negative social comparisons, such as burnout.

Social Comparison and Teacher Burnout. Research on social comparisons have shown that empathetic, caregiving people in work situations have issues dealing with burnout (Buunk, Gibbon, Dijkstra, Krizan, in press; Miller, Stiff, & Ellis, 1988). While people that are depressed can engage in downward contrasts in order to maintain mental health and boost self-esteem (Buunk & Ybema, 1997; Johnson & Knobloch-Westerwick, 2014), teachers must be careful not to begin making comparisons with downward assimilation or upward contrast, as those behaviors have a correlation with teacher burnout (Carmona, Buunk, Peiró, Rodríquez, & Bravo, 2006). This is particularly true with teachers that are older because people in their mid-career are more likely to feel

negative health issues because of social comparison and job success. Young people still feel like they have time to achieve job attainment, so social comparison does not always have the same negative effect (Buunk & Ybema, 1997).

As a profession, teachers require emotional social support to avoid burnout (Kahn, Schneider, Jenkins-Henkelman, & Moyle, 2006; Taylor, Buunk, & Aspinwall, 1990), and music teachers are no exception, as they have also reported feelings of emotional exhaustion (Hancock, 2016; McLain, 2005). Every year, 6% of music educators leave the workforce, and 10% move to other positions (Hancock, 2009), with attrition being the highest for music teachers under the age of 30 (Hancock, 2008). There are many causes of teacher attrition, including intensive bureaucratic demands, paperwork, grading, meetings, and non-instructional activities (Castro, Kelly, & Shih, 2010), poor, unsupportive leadership, a lack of mentorship (Anderson & Olsen, 2006), and the effects of external testing (Brunetti, 2006). Many teachers cite having a heavy workload as a common cause of burnout (Day, 2008), and the more extreme a situation, the further it tests a teacher's commitment to the profession (Day & Gu, 2007).

People are more likely to engage in social comparisons in times of stress and emotionally exhausting situations (Buunk & Ybema, 1997), but if the comparisons are upward contrast or downward assimilation, then feelings of depression, envy, shame, worry, and fear could occur (Smith, 2000). Negative behaviors could also arise, such as lying (White, Langer, Yariv, & Welch, 2006), interpersonal harming at work (Lam, Van der Vegt, Walter, & Huang, 2011), and giving up (Wills, 1997). All of these feelings and behaviors play a role in teacher attrition, therefore it is important to study the negative emotional effects of social comparisons on educators.

Social Comparison and Teacher Resilience. In order to understand the issues of burnout and attrition, researchers have begun studying what attributes teachers have that help them remain at schools, regardless of their stressful situations, a characteristic known as resilience. "Resilience in teachers is the capacity to manage the unavoidable uncertainties inherent in the realities of teaching" (Gu & Day, 2013, pg. 39), or put simply, the ability to cope (Mansfield, Beltman, Price, & McConney, 2012). It is important to understand and foster resilience in educators during their stressful phases because students with resilient teachers have been found to be more likely to achieve results at or above the expected level, regardless of the type of school they attend (Day, 2008).

There are many commonalities between positive social comparisons and factors that inspire resilience, one of which is mentorship, an example of upward assimilation for the mentee. In resiliency, this can take the form of positive relationships. These relationships are both personal and professional in nature (Day & Gu, 2007), and include both students and colleagues (Gu & Day, 2013). A study by Tait (2008), found that teachers gained resiliency by having functional relationships with students, parents, colleagues and administration. Teachers also need to have a positive relationship with their administration. Strong school leadership was one of the most important factors found in teacher resilience (Gu & Day, 2013), because teachers respond well to good leadership and support from principals (Brunetti, 2006). Support from administration includes getting recognition—teachers require recognition for their achievements from school leadership in order to develop resilience (Gu & Day, 2013; Malloy, 2007). Recognition and work success can also inspire comparisons that are downward

contrastive, which lead to feelings of pride (Smith, 2000), and self-esteem (Groothof, Siero, & Buunk, 2007; Wills, 1981).

A supportive school climate, along with the feeling of belonging to a staff community, can be resilience building factors (Gu & Day, 2013), but resilient teachers have been reported to seek out a climate of support from other teachers and colleagues (Gu & Day, 2013; Brunetti, 2006; Yost, 2006). This could be a direct example of upward assimilative behavior, as resilient teachers have been found to seek help and advice from other teachers and administrators (Tait, 2008), and collaborate in different ways, typically with like-minded peers and mentors (Anderson & Olsen, 2006; Malloy & Allen, 2007), an example of similar attributes playing a part in relationships and comparisons. Having a supportive environment gives teachers the ability to seek advice from trusted mentors (Mansfield, Beltman, Price, & McConney, 2012), which is most essential for teachers working in high need areas (Gu & Day, 2013). Many teachers may desire working with mentor teachers (Yost, 2006), and if their assigned mentor does not help, resilient teachers have been found to seek out "adopted" mentors that will encourage and advise (Castro, Kelly, & Shih, 2010). These social comparison behaviors can lead to inspiration, optimism, admiration (Smith, 2000), and positive feelings about the future (Collins, 2000). Help and mentorship through upward assimilation could lead to changes in teaching strategies, which is important because the most resilient teachers may be the ones that try different methods and ways of problem solving (Castro, Kelly, & Shih, 2010).

Social Comparison and Teacher Identity. There are different ways that researchers have begun to qualify teacher resilience. Teachers that have a strong self-

efficacy, or perceive that they are effective, have been found to have resilient qualities (Day, 2008; Gu & Day, 2013), and resilience and persistence are related to teacher efficacy (Yost, 2006). A study by Day (2008), found that teachers need to have their professional, situational, and personal identities in balance. Professional identities reflect how educators complete expectations of what makes up a good teacher; situational identities reflect the specific school context and can change with local conditions, and personal identity reflects what happens outside work and deals with family and social roles. The more out of balance these identities, the more resiliency a teacher must have.

A positive identity can begin when teachers have a sense of control in their classrooms. Perceived control over teaching methods and choices (Day & Gu, 2007; Malloy & Allen, 2007) can help give teachers resilience because teachers desire meaningful participation in their schools and want their individual voice to be heard (Malloy & Allen, 2007). Perceived control also plays a major role in how social comparisons are made and interpreted (Buunk, Collins, Taylor, Dakof, & Van Yperen, 1990; Buunk & Ybema, 1997; Smith, 2000; Testa & Major, 1990), so it is possible that lack of control can lead to negative social comparison outcomes which can also affect identity.

Bandura (1977) postulated a self-efficacy model that had four components: a) mastery experience, b) physiological and emotional states, c) vicarious experiences, and d) social persuasion. Social persuasion and emotional states have aspects in common with the cognitive fluidity of how social comparisons are made. Bandura's component of verbal persuasion stated that others can have an effect on self-efficacy by sharing what to expect, or convincing others that they can succeed, similar to aspects of upward

assimilation. Bandura's component of emotional states, or emotional arousal, states that negative emotions, such as stress or fear can influence self-efficacy. If a negative emotional outcome is activated by a downward comparison, it might affect self-efficacy as well.

Musician identity. All of the afore mentioned qualities of resilience and identity can be applied to music teachers, however music teachers have a variety of unique and specific issues that are different from other teachers. These issues are different due to "assignment type, assigned grade level, percentage of work time for planning, percentage of students with IEPs and the likelihood of being required to teach in a second field" (Gardner, 2010 pg. 115). Music teachers may be more likely to hold part-time positions and travel between buildings, which means they are reporting to different administrators and attending multiple faculty meetings (Gardner, 2010). Music teachers also report being expected work additional hours due to rehearsals, festivals, performances, and travelling (Hancock, 2008). They also may have to deal with administrators that have a perception of music as an extracurricular activity or as a respite for "academic" teachers (Masden & Hancock, 2002), as well as a lack of support and resources given to choir teachers while teaching high-needs students, or students with IEPs (Gardner, 2010). Music teachers also reported feeling that they have a lack of influence over school-wide policies (Gardner, 2010), and may frequently have to advocate and lobby for program respect and funding (Scheib, 2003), another example of perceived control. Being a director of ensembles as well as advocating for the academic pursuit of music education can lead to role overload as well as the massive amount of tedious tasks music teachers have to deal with, such as fundraising, travelling, scheduling performances, or recruiting

efforts, in addition to balancing the needs of a music program versus the needs of a family (Scheib, 2003).

A positive identity is important for choir directors, as it leads to self-efficacy. In fact, this is so important for music teachers that Steele (2010), argued that self-efficacy is one of the three characteristics a music teacher needs in order to be effective. Unfortunately, it is possible that future music teachers could have more difficulty than other types of teachers in finding their identity and creating high self-efficacy. Roberts (1993), found that the existing cultures in schools of music negatively influence music teacher development regarding self-efficacy.

It is important to remember that choir directors are not just teachers, but musicians as well. Isbell (2008) investigated pre-service teachers and the conflicting identities of teacher and musician and found that pre-service teachers' identities as a musician were distinctly different than their identities as a teacher and constructed in different ways. Choir directors are also a small, distinct group within a larger group of educators, allowing for similar attributes in comparisons and implications for group inclusion. People have a need to be accepted by a group (connectedness) as well as the need for self-esteem (status), and work stress threatens both of these (Buunk & Ybema, 1997).

It has been shown that music teachers have role stress due to tension between their teaching-self and musician-self (Scheib, 2003), and musicians rely on musical self-assessment and feedback regarding creativity (Priest, 2006), so it is important to look at the small amount of research that has been done regarding social comparisons and artists. In a study on students in a residential art program, the students made positive changes to

their self-concept when they reported seeing other peers as inspirations (Burleson, Leach, & Harrington, 2005), a clear example of upward assimilation. However, in another study, participants that used social comparisons while creating art felt worse about their drawings than those that did not (Langer, Delizonna, & Pirson, 2010). In another study, musicians were found to use social comparisons regarding their performances, but only to a small extent, preferring to base their evaluations on internal expectations as opposed to the people around them (Denton & Chaplin, 2016). Clearly, there are contrasting comparison results from these studies, and more research is needed on musicians' use of social comparison before extrapolations can be made between these results and how choir directors may be affected by social comparisons.

It is possible that social comparison has wide reaching and lasting effects on teacher burnout, resiliency, and self-efficacy, therefore it is important to understand how choir directors are using, perceiving, and experiencing social comparison. An important related study for high school choir directors might be a study about high school agriculture teachers and social comparison (Kitchel, Smith, Henry, Robinson, Lawver, Park, & Schell, 2012). This study found that most of their teachers engaged in positive upward social comparisons, were inspired, and felt good about their jobs. The teachers that felt inferior to others were less satisfied and the teachers that engaged in downward contrast had negative feelings regarding teachers that were not doing as good a job as they were. The teachers that showed signs of burnout were the ones who used negative comparisons and dealt with feelings of envy. These results are important for choir directors because the article states that agriculture teachers have the unique ability to socially compare because of competitions, district meetings, and conferences. These

actually may not be unique to agriculture teachers—high school choir directors have the same opportunities, therefore studies such as this should be replicated in the field of music.

Summary

Social Comparison theory established the concept that people will make comparisons with each other for information regarding abilities and confirmation of opinions. Since then, research has found that people will socially compare to others with similar attributes for many other reasons, such as elevation of self-esteem, establishing a social identity, and as a coping mechanism. Social Comparison is a complex and layered construct, with factors such as bias and control affecting comparison outcomes. Even though Social Comparison has been heavily researched since Festinger's original publication in 1954, including research with teachers of various content areas, there has been no research regarding the use or effects of social comparison on music teachers.

CHAPTER THREE

Method

This purpose of this study was to investigate the extent to which high school choir teachers were using social comparison, the different ways directors socially compared, and the relationship among job attributes, perceived control, and types of social comparison. Research in social comparison theory has existed primarily in the field of psychology, but engaging in social comparison can yield different emotional outcomes which can have an impact in many areas, such as education. For example, negative social comparisons have been linked to burnout and job stress in teachers and positive social comparisons can lead to feelings of inspiration and optimism. Further, no research exists on social comparison and high school choir directors specifically, so an investigation seemed warranted. This study was intended to provide researchers, choral directors, and music educators with information regarding the use of social comparisons made in the field of choral music education. The findings of this study may advance information on the positive and negative effects of social comparison in order to provide high school choir directors ways to use and understand different social comparisons for favorable emotional outcomes.

Research Design

This research study was descriptive, utilizing an author-designed survey instrument, partially based on the Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Scale (Buunk & Gibbons, 1999) and a comparison orientation chart by Smith (2000). An online, electronic survey was used to expedite the process of data collection from a large population across a regional area (Fink, 2009). The online survey allowed the collected

36

data to be downloaded into a database for analysis and for weekly reminders to be sent to participants who had not completed the survey.

 Participants

The purpose of this study was to determine how high school choir directors were using social comparison. I chose participants from the Midwest region because of personal familiarity with several of the states and the assumed regional similarities. A request was sent for teacher emails through the department of education for the following states: Ohio, Michigan, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Missouri, and Minnesota. The education departments from Missouri and Indiana replied with the email lists of current high school choir directors, and the education departments from the other states were either unable to give out the needed information or did not respond. Using an online search of schools by county, links to publically available school websites were found that included the emails of high school choir teachers from Ohio and Michigan. In total, 1056 choir directors' email addresses were identified across four states: Missouri, Indiana, Ohio, and Michigan, and recruitment invitations were sent to all. An email reminder dispatched weekly to non-responders. From the total emails sent ($n = 1056$), 334 usable surveys were returned, a response rate of 31.6%, which is an average response for online instruments (Shih & Fan, 2009). It was determined that surveys would be deemed "useable" if no more than two items were missing. There was a clear delineation between "usable" and "unusable" on the returned surveys. Participants either chose not to answer (or missed) a single item or two, or they skipped entire sections completely, therefore the surveys missing only two items or less were considered acceptable for use.

In addition, presidents from the American Choral Director's Association (ACDA) and National Association for Music Education (NAfME) were contacted in the same seven states whose department of education had initially been contacted. Each president was asked to either post a survey link on a social media site or email the link directly to members. The survey link was emailed to NAfME members in Iowa and posted to ACDA social media sites in Missouri and Iowa. The survey was also distributed to ACDA members in Illinois, Michigan, and Minnesota, but the correspondents did not specify how the link was shared. It is impossible to know how many people saw the survey link from this type of distribution, but the effort yielded 29 usable survey responses. This brought the total number of survey responses to 363.

The distribution of participants across the states indicates that the highest number of responses came from the state of Missouri, followed by Indiana, Michigan and Ohio (see Table 3.1). This is most likely because the contact information for directors in Missouri and Indiana came from the State Departments of Education and were therefore more complete and accurate than the public information found from the internet searches for Michigan and Ohio. The surveys distributed across social media sites were not tracked, so the states are listed as "unknown."

Table 3.1
Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n = 363)

Characteristic	*N*	%	Valid %
State			
Missouri	142	39.1	42.5
Indiana	84	23.1	25.1
Michigan	63	17.4	18.9
Ohio	45	12.4	13.5
Unknown	29	8.0	-
Gender			
Female	200	55.1	55.1
Male	158	43.5	43.5
Prefer not to respond	5	1.4	1.4
Education Level			
Bachelor	87	24.0	24.0
Bachelor +15	48	13.2	13.3
Master	145	39.9	40.1
Master +15	71	19.6	19.6
Doctorate	9	2.5	2.5
Education Specialist	2	.6	.6
Missing	1	.3	-

Survey Instrument

This study examined social comparison across a number of Midwestern states, so a cross-sectional survey design was utilized in data collection (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014). There were three major sections of the survey based on the research questions. The first section was designed to determine the extent to which high school choir directors socially compare, the second part of the survey gathered data about how high school directors socially compare, and the third major section of the instrument included a number of demographic questions in order to answer the research questions about whether there were relationships among amount of perceived control, job attributes, and social comparison. There was also a space at the end of the survey for open-ended comments. Data were collected using an online survey instrument through

the University of Missouri (Qualtrics Lab, Inc., 2011). This version was chosen due to its availability and accessibility to graduate students at the university.

Perceived Control. At the beginning of the survey, choir directors were asked three questions regarding perceived control. Because amount of perceived control affects comparison direction and emotional outcome (Buunk, Collins, Taylor, Dakof, & Van Yperen, 1990, Buunk & Ybema, 1997; Smith, 2000), a baseline was needed. There were three items, each with a 5-point Likert-type scale, with responses ranging from *very low* to *very high*. Participants were asked to rate the amount of control they feel they have over the following:

- Solving problems you face at work.

- Creating the kind of program you would like to have.

- Teaching the way you feel is best.

Adapted Iowa Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure. The next section of the survey instrument used in this study was based on the Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure (INCOM). The INCOM was developed to assess the extent and frequency with which individuals compare themselves to others (Buunk & Gibbons, 1999). The scale has 11 questions assessed on a 5 point Likert scale. Questions 1-6 deal with ability comparisons, and questions 7-11 deal with opinion comparisons. The original INCOM scale was a reliable measure with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from .77 - .85 (Buunk & Gibbons, 1999), and has been used in many studies on social comparison since its original use (Buunk, Gibbons, Dijkstra, & Krizan, in press).

The original 11 items were reworded slightly in order to make the measure appropriate for high school choir directors, and was therefore renamed INCOM-C for this

study. The original authors of the measure, Buunk and Gibbons, were contacted and gave their approval for these changes. The Likert-type scale remained on a 5-point spectrum, ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. Figures 3.1 and 3.2 outline the changes:

Ability Comparisons

Item	INCOM	INCOM-C
1	I often compare how my loved ones (boy or girlfriend, family members, etc.) and doing with how others are doing	I often compare how my choirs are doing in comparison to other directors' choirs
2	I always pay a lot of attention to have I do things compared with how others do things	I always pay a lot of attention to how I direct choirs compared with how others direct choirs
3	If I want to find out how well I have done something, I compare what I have done with how others have done	If I want to find out how well I have done something, I compare what I have taught with what other choir directors have taught
4	I often compare how I am doing socially (e.g., social skills, popularity) with other people	I often compare how my choirs are doing musically to the musicality of other choirs
5	I am not the type of person who compares often with others	I am not the type of person who compares often with other choir directors
6	I often compare myself with other with respect to what I have accomplished in life	I often compare myself with other choir directors with respect to what I have accomplished with my choirs

Figure 3.1. Outline of ability comparison items by INCOM and INCOM-C

Opinion Comparisons

Item	INCOM	INCOM-C
7	I often like to talk with others about mutual opinions and experiences	I often like to talk with other choir directors about mutual opinions and experiences
8	I often try to find out what others thing who face similar problems as I face	I often try to find out what other choir directors think who face similar problems as I face
9	I always like to know what others in a similar situation would do	I always like to know what other choir directors in a similar situation would do
10	I never consider my situation in life relative to that of other people	If I want to learn more about something, I try to find out what other choir directors think about it
11	I never consider my situation in life relative to that of other people	I never consider my work situation relative to that of other choir directors

Figure 3.2. Outline of opinion comparison items by INCOM and INCOM-C

Smith's Descriptive Structure. The second half of the survey instrument was based on Smith's (2000) chart of social comparisons, explaining the different ways that people compare and the emotional outcomes for each direction. This chart had been successfully used in constructing a survey instrument for a study of high school agricultural teachers (Kitchel, Smith, Henry, Robinson, Lawver, Park, & Schell, 2012). According to Smith (2000), there are four types of comparison directions: upward assimilation, upward contrast, downward assimilation, and downward contrast. Due to the nature of the types of comparisons, the second half of the survey instrument had four constructs with four items in each construct, for a total of 16 items that were in assorted order on the survey. Each of the items was developed based on Smith's (2000) chart and the emotional outcomes listed for each construct as well as related literature on upward and downward social comparison outcomes. The items on a survey in agriculture

education (Kitchel, et. al, 2012), also were used as a model, and each item was rated with a 5-point Likert-type scale, with responses ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. The four items per construct used in this study included:

Construct: upward assimilation

- Seeing another choir director that is more successful than me encourages me to raise myself to their level.

- Other choir directors' superior qualities inspire me in a positive way to improve myself.

- Seeing a choir program that is better than mine gives me information on how I might improve my own program.

- Choir directors that are more successful than I excite and/or challenge me to do better.

Construct: upward contrast

- When I see other choir directors (that have similar years of experience as me) doing well, it makes me feel bad about my own program.

- When I hear other great high school choirs, I feel discouraged.

- Seeing high school choir programs that have high student involvement makes me envious.

- I feel that I have to justify my teaching style to choir directors that appear more successful than me.

Construct: downward assimilation

- When I see directors struggle to fix the problems in their choirs, I feel I can relate to their situation.

- When I hear other directors talk negatively about their jobs, I identify with their problems.

- Seeing more experienced choir directors struggle with their choir programs makes me feel depressed about my own future.

- The only teachers that understand my problems are the ones who have programs with bigger issues than mine.

Construct: downward contrast

- When I hear choirs make a lot of musical mistakes, it makes me feel glad the singers aren't mine.

- When I hear other directors complain about their jobs, I think they haven't been creative enough to find the solutions to fix their problems.

- I tend to disregard the opinions of teachers that have programs of poor quality.

- I only want to network with teachers that are good at their jobs.

Attributes. Attributes play a major role in how social comparisons are made (Buunk & Ybema, 1997; Collins, 2000; Diener & Fujita, 1997; Festinger, 1954; Goethals & Darley, 1977; Miller, Turnbull & McFarland, 1988), therefore, the final section of the survey asked a variety of demographic questions in order to look at the relationships among job attributes and comparison types. (See Table 3.2).

Table 3.2

Attributes of Respondents (*n* = 363)

Attribute	*N*	%	Valid %
Type of Director			
Head director	343	94.5	95.0
Assistant director	18	5.0	5.0
Missing	2	.6	-
Levels Taught			
High school and another level	203	55.9	56.2
High school only	140	38.6	38.8
High school and other	18	5.0	5.0
Missing	2	.6	-
School Location			
Rural	186	51.2	51.5
Urban	30	8.3	8.3
Suburban	101	27.8	28.0
Small City	44	12.1	12.2
Missing	2	.6	-
School Size			
0-200	44	12.1	12.1
201-500	107	29.5	29.5
501-800	62	17.1	17.1
801-1000	40	11.0	11.0
1001+	110	30.3	30.3
Number of Years Taught	*M* = 15.48		
	SD = 10.46		
	Range = 1 – 45		

Pilot Testing

The survey instrument was pilot tested by 15 participants involved in music education at different levels: pre-service teachers about to go into student teaching, retired high school choir directors, graduate students in music education, and current choir directors at a level other than high school. High school choir directors were avoided for the pilot test so that they could participate in the final study. Pilot test participants were asked to take the online version of the study and provide any suggestions or feedback. The reliability of the survey instrument was tested in two ways; a test-retest for

the INCOM-based questions, and an internal reliability test for the four comparison

constructs.

Each participant was asked to take the survey twice in order to permit calculation

of test-retest reliability on the 11 INCOM-C questions (see Table 3.3). Each of the items

received an acceptable percent agreement on the two versions of 73% or higher

(Nunnally, 1978).

Table 3.3
Reliability Estimates Based on the INCOM-C Measure

Item	Percent Agreement
I often compare how my choirs are doing in comparison to other directors' choirs	100%
I always pay a lot of attention to how I direct choirs compared with how others direct choirs	87%
If I want to find out how well I have done something, I compare what I have taught with what other choir directors have taught	73%
I often compare how my choirs are doing musically to the musicality of other choirs	80%
I am not the type of person who compares often with other choir directors	87%
I often compare myself with other choir directors with respect to what I have accomplished with my choirs	73%
I often like to talk with other choir directors about mutual opinions and experiences	93%
I often try to find out what other choir directors think who face similar problems as I face	100%
I always like to know what other choir directors in a similar situation would do	87%
If I want to learn more about something, I try to find out what other choir directors think about it	93%
I never consider my work situation relative to that of other choir directors	87%

The construct items on the survey were taken once by participants, and tested for

internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha, with an acceptable level of .7 or higher

(Field, 2014), set a priori. The coefficient for the upward assimilation construct was .49

on the first test, so the items were rewritten and tested again by the pilot participants.

Table 3.4 displays the second version that met the standard for use in this survey.

Table 3.4
Reliability Estimates Based on Smith's Constructs

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha
Upward assimilation	.91
Upward contrast	.88
Downward assimilation	.70
Downward contrast	.76

Procedures

Prior to survey distribution, the informed consent, recruitment letter, and reminder email were submitted to the internal review board (IRB) at the University of Missouri for approval. Participants were informed that all data would remain confidential in both the recruitment letter (Appendix A) and informed consent (Appendix B). After all of the documents were approved by the IRB (Appendix C) they were uploaded into Qualtrics. The first page of the survey was the informed consent letter. Upon choosing to enter the survey, the participant confirmed consent.

Invitations to participants were sent out over email. In the message, the purpose of the study, confidentiality, intention of results, and a Uniform Resource Locator (URL) link were included.

The online survey was open to participants for 5 weeks, with a reminder sent to non-participants on a weekly basis up to 4 weeks (Appendix D). The survey link that was distributed by the presidents of ACDA and NAfME on various social media sites stayed open for 7 weeks, as different states posted the link at different times during the data collection process. (For the entire survey, see Appendix E).

Data Analysis

The data were uploaded from Qualtrics into the statistical analysis software program, SPSS. Items that had been reversed coded on the survey were recoded in the positive direction.

Research questions (1) To what extent do high school choir directors engage in social comparison? and (2) What are the different ways high school choir directors engage in social comparison? both involved interval level data, so descriptive statistics were used. Mean, standard deviation, and range were all used to calculate the closed response questions.

Research question (3) How much control do high school choir directors perceive they have over their choral programs? also involved interval level data, but the three questions were combined to create a construct over perceived control. A post hoc analysis resulted in a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .77. Mean and standard deviation were also calculated.

For question (4) What are the relationships among types of social comparison, perceived control, and selected demographic variables? Pearson Product Moment correlations were calculated between the 11 INCOM-C items and the construct of perceived control, and the four constructs of comparison directions and the construct of perceived control. Finally, a multiple regression was calculated allowing the researcher to examine how the combined independent variables influenced the dependent variable. In particular, a hierarchical regression was calculated because perceived control was a clear influencer based on previous literature, and the other attributes had less direct evidence (Field, 2014).

Survey Comments

The last question in the survey was a space for open-ended responses from participants. Eighty-four comments were left but 34 comments were unrelated to social comparison, including requests for results and well-wishing. In total, 50 total comments were coded using a three-part procedure (to see all comments, see Appendix F). Codes were assigned, combined into themes, and then the data were displayed, a system borrowed from grounded theory (Creswell, 2007). Keyword coding was used to establish categories rather than assigning predetermined codes to the data, with number of incidents being the unit of analysis. The categories were combined into themes, and another doctoral student in music education with qualitative experience also coded the comments to establish reliability. The interrater reliability was 80% after comparing our assigned codes, sufficient to establish reliability (Miles & Huberman, 1994). After the first round of coding, I conferred with the doctoral student until all of the codes were in 100% agreement.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

The purpose of this study was to provide high school choir teachers with information regarding the uses and types of social comparison. Data were gathered from high school choir directors from states in the Midwest. Invitations were sent to 1,056 teachers with a response rate of 31.6%, and another 29 useable surveys were garnered by utilizing social media sites for a total of 363 responses ($N = 363$).

Demographics

Along with the demographic items collected during the survey (see Table 3.2), five additional questions were asked in order to compare the relationship of attributes to types of social comparison, because attributes play a role in how social comparisons are used and processed (Table 4.1). The results from these questions show that the majority of the participants were from Missouri (23.1%), over half of the participants taught classes besides high school choir (60.8%), and the large majority were considered the head choral director at their school, (94.5%). It was a well-educated sample, with 62.5% having master's degrees or higher. Teachers in rural and suburban areas comprised 80% of the sample, and while there was a wide range of school sizes represented, the two largest categories were enrollments of 201-500 (29.5%), and 1000+ (30.3%). The number of years taught ranged from 1 to 45, with a mean of 15.48 and a standard deviation of 10.46, showing a wide range of experience levels.

Table 4.1
Attributes of Respondents (*N* = 363)

Characteristic	*N*	%	Valid %
Type of Director			
Head director	343	94.5	95.0
Assistant director	18	5.0	5.0
Missing	2	.6	-
Levels Taught			
High school only	140	38.6	38.8
High school and another level	203	55.9	56.2
High school and other	18	5.0	5.0
Missing	2	.6	-
School Location			
Rural	186	51.2	51.5
Urban	30	8.3	8.3
Suburban	101	27.8	28.0
Small City	44	12.1	12.2
Missing	2	.6	-
School Size			
0-200	44	12.1	12.1
201-500	107	29.5	29.5
501-800	62	17.1	17.1
801-1000	40	11.0	11.0
1001+	110	30.3	30.3

Social Comparison Uses

Survey items 11 through 21 were from the INCOM-C measure and were designed to

answer research question one: "To what extent do high school choir directors engage in

social comparison?" In order to understand the means from a Likert-type scale, the class

boundaries were calculated; subtracting 0.50 from the lower class limit and adding 0.50

to the upper class limit for each class interval (Colwell & Carter, 2012).

The 11 items ranged from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree* on a 5-point

Likert-type scale. The mean of nine items fell into the limits of "agree," and only two

items had a mean in the limits of "neither agree or disagree." Those items were "If I

want to find out how well I have done something, I compare what I have taught with

what other choir directors have taught," (*M* = 3.31; *SD* = 1.20) and "I am not the type of

person who compares often with other choir directors," ($M = 3.40$; $SD = 1.21$). The first six items dealt with abilities and the final 5 items dealt with opinions. The two items with a neutral mean were within the questions regarding abilities (Table 4.2). Note that the numbers of responses per item differ slightly because some participants skipped one or two of the questions.

Table 4.2
Descriptive Statistics for INCOM-C Items

Item	N	M	SD
Abilities			
I often compare how my choirs are doing in comparison to other directors' choirs.	363	3.98	.980
I always pay a lot of attention to how I direct choirs compared with how others direct choirs.	363	3.93	.997
I often compare how my choirs are doing musically to the musicality of other choirs.	363	3.61	1.125
I often compare myself with other choir directors with respect to what I have accomplished with my choirs.	362	3.51	1.084
I am not the type of person who compares often with other choir directors.*	363	3.40	1.216
If I want to find out how well I have done something, I compare what I have taught with what other choir directors have taught.	363	3.31	1.201
Opinions			
I often try to find out what other choir directors think who face similar problems as I face.	363	4.25	.896
I often like to talk with other choir directors about mutual opinions and experiences.	362	4.24	.915
I always like to know what other choir directors in a similar situation would do.	363	4.15	.906
If I want to learn more about something, I try to find out what other choir directors think about it.	361	3.93	.956
I never consider my work situation relative to that of other choir directors.*	363	3.79	1.070

Note. Scale: 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *somewhat disagree*, 3 = *neither agree or disagree*, 4 = *somewhat agree*, 5 = *strongly agree*.
* Item was reverse coded, but data were converted here to facilitate comparison

Survey items 22 through 37 were designed to answer research question two: "What are the different ways high school choir directors engage in social comparison?" The 16 items were divided into four constructs: upward assimilation, upward contrast, downward assimilation, and downward contrast, based on Smith's (2000), chart of social comparison. (See Appendix E for the complete survey). The four items comprising each construct were averaged to provide one score for each person per construct. Descriptive statistics indicated that one of the constructs, upward assimilation, fell under the limits of "somewhat agree," two constructs, upward contrast and downward assimilation, feel under the limits of "neither agree nor disagree," and the construct of downward contrast fell under the limits of "somewhat disagree" (Table 4.3). For descriptive statistics on each of the 16 comparison items, see Appendix F.

Table 4.3

Item	N	M	SD
Upward assimilation	363	4.06	.66
Upward contrast	363	2.63	.95
Downward assimilation	363	2.65	.62
Downward contrast	363	2.42	.74

Note. Scale: 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *somewhat disagree*, 3 = *neither agree or disagree*, 4 = *somewhat agree*, 5 = *strongly agree*.

Research question three: "How much control do high school choir directors perceive they have over their choral programs?" dealt with the construct of perceived control assessed by items six through eight on the survey. The three items were on a 5 point Likert-type scale, ranging from *very low* to *very high,* and combined to create a single construct of control, which indicate "high" based on the limits ($M = 3.90$; $SD = .78$). For descriptive statistics on each question of control, see Appendix H.

Correlations of Perceived Control with INCOM-C Ratings

To begin answering research question four: "What is the relationship among social comparison, perceived control and selected demographic variables?" Pearson Product Moment correlations were calculated between each of the 11 INCOM-C items and the construct of perceived control (the average of all three control items) (Table 4.5). Only one item, "If I want to find out how well I have done something, I compare what I have taught with what other choir directors have taught," had a significant but weak negative relationship (-.138, $p < .05$) between social comparison and perceived control. No other comparisons were significant.

Table 4.5
Correlation Among INCOM-C Items and Perceived Control

Item	Control (r)
If I want to find out how well I have done something, I compare what I have taught with what other choir directors have taught.	-.138*
I always pay a lot of attention to how I direct choirs compared with how others direct choirs.	-.098
I often compare myself with other choir directors with respect to what I have accomplished with my choirs.	-.091
I often try to find out what other choir directors think who face similar problems as I face.	.065
I often like to talk with other choir directors about mutual opinions and experiences.	.050
I often compare how my choirs are doing musically to the musicality of other choirs.	-.032
I never consider my work situation relative to that of other choir directors.	-.030
I always like to know what other choir directors in a similar situation would do.	-.012
If I want to learn more about something, I try to find out what other choir directors think about it.	.012
I often compare how my choirs are doing in comparison to other directors' choirs.	-.009
I am not the type of person who compares often with other choir directors.	.001

*$p < .05$

Correlations of Perceived Control with Social Comparison Constructs

   A Pearson Product Moment correlation was calculated to examine possible

relationships between each of the four comparison direction constructs and the construct

of perceived control (Table 4.6). Results indicated that downward assimilation and

upward contrast had a moderate negative relationship with perceived control, upward

assimilation had a mild positive relationship, and downward contrast showed no

relationship.

Table 4.6
Correlation Among Social Comparison Constructs and Control

Construct	Control (r)
Downward assimilation	-.421*
Upward contrast	-.353*
Upward assimilation	.152*
Downward contrast	.004

*$p < .05$

Regression Analysis for Social Comparison Constructs, Perceived Control,

and Attributes

   Prior research has shown that that perceived control and various attributes help to

determine comparison direction and outcomes. Thus, in order to fully answer research

question four, regression analyses were calculated to determine relationships between

social comparison directions, perceived control, and selected attributes (type of director,

levels taught, school location, school size, and number of years taught).

   First, nominal data having more than two categories needed to be grouped (Table

4.7). During the grouping, divisions as close to 50% as possible were attempted. Number

of years taught was included in the category of attributes, but was not grouped, because

the responses had been obtained as interval data.

Table 4.7
Category Groupings

Attribute	Grouping
Type of Director	Head Director = 0
	Assistant Director = 0
Level Taught	High School Choir Only = 0
	High School and Other = 1
School Location	Rural = 0
	Non-Rural = 1
School Size	0-500 = 0
	501+ = 1

A regression was then calculated between each comparison direction, upward

assimilation (Table 4.8), upward contrast (Table 4.9), downward assimilation (4.10), and

downward contrast (4.11), and the five combined attributes.

Table 4.8
Regression of Upward Assimilation Construct and Attributes

Attribute	*M*	*SD*
I am considered:		
An assistant choir director	4.25	.65
A head choir director	4.06	.65
The High School where I teach is considered mostly:		
Urban	4.17	.72
Suburban	4.10	.76
Small City	4.09	.71
Rural	4.05	.57
I Teach:		
High School Only	4.12	.69
High School and Another Level	4.05	.62
High School and Other	3.93	.78
The Enrollment at my High School is:		
0-200	4.03	.52
201-500	3.96	.65
501-800	4.09	.67
801-1000	4.09	.59
1001+	4.16	.75

Table 4.9

Regression of Upward Contrast Construct and Attributes

Attribute	*M*	*SD*
I am considered:		
An assistant choir director	2.85	.95
A head choir director	2.63	2.63
The High School where I teach is considered mostly:		
Rural	2.76	.93
Urban	2.59	1.02
Small City	2.56	.90
Suburban	2.46	.99
I Teach:		
High School and Another Level	2.74	.97
High School Only	2.53	.92
High School and Other	2.40	1.02
The Enrollment at my High School is:		
0-200	2.92	.91
201-500	2.74	.98
501-800	2.65	.97
801-1000	2.54	.88
1001+	2.45	.95

Table 4.10

Regression of Downward Assimilation Construct and Attributes

Attribute	M	SD
I am considered:		
An assistant choir director	2.72	.62
A head choir director	2.65	.62
The High School where I teach is considered mostly:		
Urban	2.79	.69
Rural	2.70	.60
Small City	2.65	.54
Suburban	2.55	.67
I Teach:		
High School and Another Level	2.69	.62
High School and Other	2.63	.75
High School Only	2.61	.61
The Enrollment at my High School is:		
0-200	2.93	.52
201-500	2.68	.60
501-800	2.60	.70
801-1000	2.61	.55
1001+	2.58	.64

Table 4.11

Regression of Downward Contrast Construct and Attributes

Attribute	*M*	*SD*
I am considered:		
An assistant choir director	2.56	.79
A head choir director	2.41	.74
The High School where I teach is considered mostly:		
Small City	2.58	.69
Suburban	2.43	.81
Urban	2.39	.72
Rural	2.38	.72
I Teach:		
High School Only	2.55	.77
High School and Another Level	2.38	.71
High School and Other	1.90	.51
The Enrollment at my High School is:		
0-200	2.32	.69
201-500	2.40	.67
501-800	2.37	.81
801-1000	2.52	.76
1001+	2.47	.78

Finally, a hierarchical regression model was run to explain variance in the four social comparison constructs, upward assimilation, upward contrast, downward assimilation, and downward contrast. Field (2014) identified assumptions that must be true in order to draw conclusions about a population when using regression data. Three of these assumptions were calculated and checked before the regression occurred. The first assumption is that the variable type must be categorical or quantitative in nature. The covariates—amount of perceived control, number of years taught, levels taught, school location, school size, and type of director—were verified to be categorical or quantitative data, therefore, the assumption was met.

The second assumption is in regards to normal distribution of error. As recommended by Field (2014), there was a visual inspection of P_P plots for each construct, upward assimilation, upward contrast, downward assimilation, downward

contrast, and perceived control all indicated no issues with normality, therefore, assumptions were met.

The third assumption is the assumption of no perfect multicollinearity. To test for this assumption, Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) statistics were calculated on the four constructs (Table 4.4). No perfect multicollinearity was found, as all VIF values were less than 10 (Field, 2014), therefore, assumptions were met.

Table 4.12
VIF Statistics for Multicollinearity

	Upward Assimilation	Upward Contrast	Downward Assimilation	Downward Contrast
Perceived control	1.01	1.01	1.01	1.01
Number of years taught	1.07	1.07	1.07	1.07
Levels taught	1.44	1.44	1.44	1.44
School location	1.36	1.36	1.36	1.36
School size	1.46	1.46	1.46	1.46
Type of director	1.04	1.04	1.04	1.04

In hierarchical regression, predictors are entered in a predetermined order and this model was chosen due to the known predictor of perceived control in social comparison, based upon the research literature. The five other potential predictors were identified as attributes. Perceived control was entered into the first regression block, and the remaining five possible predictors were entered simultaneously in the second regression block, given that no literature supported the influence of one independent variable over another (Field, 2009).

For each model, calculations and reports were generated on unstandardized beta coefficient (B) and its accompanying standard error, the coefficient of determination (R^2), t-value, significance (p), adjusted R^2 and F statistic.

Upward Assimilation. The upward assimilation construct was regressed against the construct of perceived control in Model 1. The overall model was significant, $F = 8.693$ (1, 335, $p < .05$); the variable of perceived control explained a significant (adjusted $R^2 = .022$) proportion of the variance. In Model 2, the attributes of number of years taught, levels taught, school location, school size, and type of director were added. The overall model was significant, $F = 5.384$ (7, 329, $p < .05$); the contribution of variables explained a significant (adjusted $R^2 = .084$) and larger proportion of the variance. Among the independent variables in Model 2, only number of years taught ($t = -4.630$) and perceived control ($t = 3.197$) were significant contributors to the overall model.

Table 4.13

Hierarchical Regression of Attributes on Upward Assimilation Social Comparison (Model 2), when Controlling for Perceived Control (Model 1) (n = 363)

Variable	Model 1				Model 2			
	B	*SE B*	*t*	*p*	*B*	*SE B*	*t*	*p*
(Constant)	3.57	.177	20.27	.000	3.76	.20	18.453	.000
Perceived control	.131	.044	2.948	.003	.138	.043	3.197	.002
Number of years taught					-.015	.003	-4.630	.000
Levels taught					-.108	.068	-.169	.886
School location					.040	.079	.504	.614
School size					.106	.082	1.279	.202
Type of director					.099	.157	.629	.530
R		.159				.321		
R²		.025				.103		
Adjusted R²		.022				.084		
F		8.693				5.384		
		*				*		

*$p < .05$

Upward Contrast. The second construct, upward contrast, was regressed against the construct of perceived control in Model 1. The overall model was significant, $F = 48.515$ (1, 335, $p < .05$); the variable of perceived control explained a significant (adjusted $R^2 = .124$) proportion of the variance. In Model 2, the attributes of number of years taught, levels taught, school location, school size, and type of director were added. The overall model was significant, $F = 10.043$ (7, 329, $p < .05$); the contribution of variables explained a significant (adjusted $R^2 = .159$) proportion of the variance. Among the independent variables in Model 2, only perceived control ($t = -6.637$) and number of years taught ($t = -3.362$) were significant contributors to the overall model.

Table 4.14

Hierarchical Regression of Attributes on Upward Contrast Social Comparison (Model 2), when Controlling for Perceived Control (Model 1) (n = 363)

	Model 1				Model 2			
Variable	*B*	*SE B*	*t*	*p*	*B*	*SE B*	*t*	*p*
(Constant)	4.343	.248	17.507	.000	4.641	.290	15.988	.000
Perceived control	-.434	.062	-6.965	.000	-.408	.062	-6.637	.000
Number of years taught					-.016	.005	-3.362	.001
Levels taught					-.022	.116	-.186	.852
School location					-.131	.112	-1.172	.242
School size					-.138	.117	-1.176	.240
Type of director					.079	.223	.315	.753
R		.356				.420		
R²		.127				.176		
Adjusted R²		.124				.159		
F		48.515*				10.043*		

$*p < .05$

Downward Assimilation. The third construct, downward assimilation, was

regressed against the construct of perceived control in Model 1. The overall model was

significant, $F = 70.239$ (1, 335, $p < .05$); the variable of perceived control explained a

significant (adjusted $R^2 = .171$) proportion of the variance. In Model 2, the attributes of

number of years taught, levels taught, school location, school size, and type of director

were added. The overall model was significant, $F = 11.914$ (7, 329, $p < .05$); the

contribution of variables explained a significant (adjusted $R^2 = .185$) proportion of the

variance. Among the independent variables in Model 2, only perceived control ($t = -$

8.063) and number of years taught ($t = -2.727$) were significant contributors to the overall

model.

Table 4.15
Hierarchical Regression of Attributes on Downward Assimilation Social Comparison
(Model 2), when Controlling for Perceived Control (Model 1) (n = 363)

	Model 1				Model 2			
Variable	*B*	*SE B*	*t*	*p*	*B*	*SE B*	*t*	*p*
(Constant)	3.935	.156	25.285	.000	3.998	.184	21.706	.000
Perceived control	-.327	.039	-8.381	.000	-.315	.039	-8.063	.000
Number of years taught					-.008	.003	-2.727	.007
Levels taught					-.003	.074	-.042	.966
School location					.053	.071	.748	.455
School size					-.088	.074	-1.182	.238
Type of director					-.046	.142	-.324	.746
R		.416				.450		
R^2		.173				.202		
Adjusted R^2		.171				.185		
F		70.239				11.914		

$*p < .05$

Downward Contrast. The third construct, downward contrast, was regressed against the construct of perceived control in Model 1. The overall model was not significant, $F =$ .000 (1, 335, $p < .05$), nor was Model 2 when the attributes of number of years taught, levels taught, school location, school size, and type of director were added $F = 1.026$ (7, 329, $p < .05$).

Table 4.16
Hierarchical Regression of Attributes on Downward Contrast Social Comparison (Model 2), when Controlling for Perceived Control (Model 1) (n = 363)

	Model 1				Model 2			
Variable	*B*	*SE B*	*t*	*p*	*B*	*SE B*	*t*	*p*
(Constant)	2.447	.208	11.765	.000	2.727	.248	11.005	.000
Perceived control	-.001	.052	-.010	.992	-.006	.053	-.108	.914
Number of years taught					-.001	.004	-.132	.895
Levels taught					-.212	.099	-2.141	.033
School location					-.048	.095	-.500	.617
School size					-.085	.100	-.853	.394
Type of director					.177	.190	.929	.353
R		.001				.149		
R²		.000				.022		
Adjusted R²		-.003				.001		
F		.000				1.062		

*$p < .05$

The hierarchical regression models indicated that two variables, perceived control and number of years taught, were significant contributors to the variance associated with upward assimilation, upward contrast, and downward assimilation. No overall significance was found for the downward contrast model.

Qualitative Content

The final question in the survey was a space for open-ended responses from participants. In total, 50 total comments were coded using a three-part procedure borrowed from grounded theory analysis (Creswell, 2007). First, codes were assigned using line by line keyword coding to establish categories, rather than assigning predetermined codes. Several comments were long and had several different codes. Next, the categories were combined into themes with frequency being the unit of analysis. Another doctoral student in music education with qualitative experience also coded the comments to establish reliability. After the first round of coding, interrater reliability was 80%, sufficient to establish reliability (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The doctoral student and I then discussed the remaining codes until we reached 100% agreement. In the end, five major themes were identified: (a) Program Quality, which had eight contributing comments, (b) Administrative Stress, which had eight contributing comments, (c) Experience, which had 10 contributing comments, (d) Context, which had 13 contributing comments, and (e) Comparison Types, which had 19 contributing comments.

Program Quality. One common theme revolved around the amount of hard work the directors had put into their programs and/or the changes they had made in order to improve their programs for the future. They spoke of overcoming obstacles to make their program better and their ability to persist through hardships, the success they (and their students) have had, and their continuous reach for improvement. This theme was named Program Quality, because every comment was made in direct regard to the directors' program. Although there were no specific comments regarding comparison, this theme seemed related to downward contrast, as the directors seemed to want to justify how their

programs had become better than before they arrived (better than the "other" teacher before them), how they had overcome an obstacle that perhaps a "proxy other" might not have, or to tell how they have been successful in ways that others may not have been:

- "I consider myself a master teacher who has made my program successful in spite of all the hardships."

- "I try to remind myself of how far the music program has come as a while since I began teaching at my school."

- "When I started, there were only 10 kids in Concert Choir, now we average over 50. That is at a high school with a total enrollment of about 280."

- "I've produced 44 professional musicians in 14 years."

Administrative Stress. Another common theme revolved around workload, lack of support, and poor administrators that impacted job performance. This theme was labeled Administrative Stress, as all comments were regarding difficult administrative duties, over-work, or people that had power to make decisions regarding their job. This theme seemed directly related directly to the issue of perceived control, a known factor in how comparisons are made and processed. Although the majority of directors involved in the survey seemed to feel high job control, the directors that did not were clearly experiencing negative emotional outcomes:

- "In other jobs I have held, there have been issues with administrators or co-workers, causing work to be stressful and unfulfilling."

- "It can be difficult to work with administrators who have little understanding of value for the field."

- "I feel as though the 5 years I have spent in this current district has been the root cause of my dissatisfaction with the teaching profession in general."

- "The lack of support and total upheaval of/impact on our programs makes it difficult to feel positive about teaching."

Experience. Directors also mentioned the number of years they had been teaching, how their experience level made a difference in how they taught, or how aspects of teaching had changed over time. All of the comments regarding time or gained knowledge were combined into the theme titled, Experience. The attribute of experience is related to number of years taught; a variable that played a significant role in the directors' social comparison, so it was not surprising to find the qualitative comments corroborating its importance and impact:

- "Teaching is very cool, but I'm old and have a really good salary. I'm not sure that you can teach and pay the bills anymore."

- "I am almost retired in a school district that has been experiencing major financial upheaval. 5 years ago I would have answered several questions differently."

- "I am at the state of teaching where I do more mentoring to young teachers. I think my years of experience show I'm too old and set in my ways to get too offended from others' successes or failures."

- "Many of your questions would be answered dramatically differently at different stages in my career."

Context. Directors also commented on how school size, school type, and job description impacted their respective teaching jobs and the ways that they engaged in social comparison. Directors at small schools and rural settings addressed issues

regarding lack of comparison opportunities and communal support. The attributes of school size, levels taught, type of director, and type of school were all combined into the theme, Context, as directors seemed to imply that individual job types matter in regard to social comparison. It is interesting to note that on the survey, job attributes such as school setting or size showed no significance or relationship in the correlation or regression models, but created one of the larger qualitative theme in the comments. Perhaps this is an indication that qualitative research is needed in this area. Examples of their comments included:

- "I am the only choir teacher at a small school, so choir is not the only thing I teach. I rarely have the opportunity to network, talk, or hear other choirs, so comparing myself is practically impossible as the opportunity never presents itself."

- "Teaching in a small rural school, I see a lot of directors, band and choir, who suffer from what I call the "If Only" syndrome. We would be better if only the school would give me this or that."

- "I am at a small, private Christian school in the midst of an area with 3 very large schools with very established choral programs. I have learned that my situation is different because we don't have nearly the amount of students to pull from as a large public school."

- "I began my choir program in an extremely urban school last year……The discouraging part of my job is not feeling like I can overcome the immense obstacles of the school environment to benefit my students."

Comparison Types. Many directors that provided comments that described their experiences with social comparison, both in positive and negative ways. Comments that were directly related to comparison or comparison types were grouped into the theme, Comparison Types. An interesting discovery from the qualitative component was that although the majority of the directors claimed to engage in upward assimilation with positive emotional outcomes, several examples showcased the negative side of social comparisons and how the directors were dealing with negative emotions. Because the survey did not ask questions regarding the emotional outcomes of social comparison, it was interesting to see this emerge as a theme within the comments. There were some specific examples of comparison types as well as some general comments regarding the reality of dealing with feelings after comparisons are made:

- "I have struggled with the comparison issue for my entire career."

- "I've never thought about how this could be affecting me, but after completing your survey, I realize that it very much does."

- "Sometimes I am in awe and feel lifted and encouraged, while other times it does make me feel defeated."

- "In many conversations that I have at conventions, and even over beer and cigars here locally, I have found other high school directors reveling in their successes over other schools, or mired in their disappointment in their inability to 'win' over others' programs."

Of the specific types of comparison examples that directors gave, upward assimilation was addressed most often, with examples of collaboration, mentorship, and learning. This corroborates the finding in the survey that most of the directors reported engaging mostly

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in upward assimilative behaviors. Some of the comments provided conformation of the connection between upward assimilation and positive emotional outcomes:

- "I find advice and consultation from teachers in similar situations to be the most helpful and constructive. Their advice is uplifting and encouraging."

- "Being able to interact with other choir directors with all different types of programs cultivates ideas and solutions to make my program better."

- "I love to learn from others who have more experience than me."

- "For the directors that live by me, I consider them my mentors and I look up to them and they come in from time to time and work with my kids."

- "At this point in my career I don't regularly communicate with a lot of other choir directors, but when I do it's almost always positive, supportive, and involves collaboration and group brainstorming."

Upward contrast was also addressed by directors within the comments, even though it did not appear from the survey that many directors were using upward contrastive behaviors. The comments, however, clearly showed the negative emotional outcomes of these comparisons, such as envy, jealousy, or depression:

- "I am envious of better directors based on their style or methods not necessarily the choir's level of mastery."

- "I do get jealous when I see on social media people with whom I went to college going off and getting their masters and being on track to teach at the University level."

- "Choir seems to be the 'get your elective credit' class. I wish I was a better choir teacher."

The emotional effects of downward contrast were also represented in the comments. This is of particular note, because downward contrast was the only construct that did hold significance when regressed with control and attributes. Perhaps there are other attributes or factors that are having an effect on this type of comparison, and further research should investigate this. The emotional outcomes from downward contrast showed up in the comments in the form of pride and contempt:

- "I also feel that many new teachers get discouraged because they don't always understand the amount of time, work and discipline that is required on their part in order to have a successful program."
- "I am nicknamed 'Maverick' or 'the Maverick' because I do things so separately from other choir directors. I have no desire to compete. I despise show choir."

The qualitative results from the open-ended comments both confirmed and contrasted with the quantitative results of the survey. There were comments from the themes of Experience, Contrast, and Administrative Stress, that verified the notion that control and attributes (such as number of years taught) play a role in social comparisons, but there were also comments that spoke of using social comparison types that did not appear as significant on the survey, such as downward contrast. It is possible that fewer directors are using comparisons with negative emotional outcomes, but the results of using them made directors want to share their experiences; perhaps why there was a larger representation of negative outcomes in the comments than in the survey results. This also shows a desire on the part of the directors to explain their difficult situations, which provides an argument for why qualitative research on this topic is needed in the future.

Summary

Results of this study indicated that these choir directors did engage in social comparison. As a whole, they perceived a 'high' sense of job control and felt that they were engaging mostly in upward assimilative behaviors. Based on the statistical regression analysis, the attributes of control and number of years taught were significant factors in explaining variance in upward assimilation, upward contrast, and downward assimilation. The qualitative themes revealed that directors are looking at attributes such as experience, job context, and administrative stress when socially comparing, and gave descriptive examples of the different kinds of comparison directions and their positive and negative emotional outcomes.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to provide researchers and educators with details about social comparison by gathering information about the extent to which comparisons are used by high school choir directors and how they may be related to several selected factors and attributes. A purposive sample of 363 high school choir directors in the Midwest was used and descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to analyze the data. The following research questions guided my study:

1. To what extent do high school choir directors engage in social comparison?

2. What are the different ways high school choir directors engage in social comparison?

3. How much control do high school choir teachers perceive they have over their choral programs?

4. What are the relationships among types of social comparison, perceived control, and selected demographic variables?

Research Question One

Summary of Findings

Research question one was posed to determine the extent to which high school choir directors engaged in social comparison. As a whole, this study's participants' responses indicated that they did engage in social comparison, according to their scores on the adapted version of the Iowa Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure (INCOM-C). Nine of the 11 items regarding social comparison were "agreed" upon by

the directors and none of the items had a mean that fell in the category of "disagree" or "strongly disagree." The directors seemed more concerned with comparing their opinions than abilities with others, because the items dealing with opinions had higher means, although there was evidence that directors were making both types of comparisons. None of the items had a mean that fell into the category of "strongly agree," indicating that although high school choir directors admitted to engaging in social comparison, they did not perceive that they were doing it frequently or to a large degree.

Conclusions

These findings show that high school choir directors are not exempt from the use of social comparison to evaluate their opinions and abilities. The fact that directors were more interested in opinions over abilities might indicate that they are information seeking or validating opinions, as opposed to ego-enhancing or coping. Using social comparison for information gathering might reveal that the directors were mostly feeling cooperation over competition (Garcia, Tor, & Schiff, 2013; Stapel, & Koomen, 2005), and had positive self-concepts (Buunk & Ybema, 1997), therefore did not need to engage in comparisons as a threat to self-esteem (Hogg, 2000).

Qualitative evidence based on written comments supported the determination that high school directors had been using social comparison, and several directors told stories describing their experiences. One director had been conscious of his comparisons, "I have struggled with the comparison issue for my entire career," whereas another had been unaware, "I've never thought about how this could be affecting me, but after completing your survey, I realize that it very much does." This aligns with previous research stating that social comparisons are unavoidable and a common part of people's everyday lives

(Festinger, 1954; Gilber, Giesler, & Morris, 1995), even if people are unconscious of it (Blanton, Christie & Dye, 2002).

<div align="center">**Research Question Two**</div>

Summary of Findings

The intent of research question two was to determine the different ways that high school choir directors engaged in social comparison. Four comparison directions were established, based on a chart by Smith (2000); upward assimilation, upward contrast, downward assimilation, and downward contrast, each with its own set of distinct emotional outcomes. Overall, the directors from this sample "somewhat agreed" that they were engaging in upward assimilation, and "somewhat disagreed" that they were engaging in downward contrast. The other constructs of upward contrast and downward assimilation both had means that indicated neutral responses, "neither agree or disagree."

Conclusions

It can be concluded that out of the four constructs, high school choir directors perceived that they were mostly engaging in upward assimilative comparison behavior. Literature states that upward assimilative behavior is often used when people are information-seeking (Aspinwall, 2000; Buunk & Ybema, 1997; Collins, 2000; Festinger, 1954; Nosanchuck & Erickson, 1985), which corroborates the findings from question one. Upward assimilation comparisons have positive emotional benefits (Collins, 2000; Smith, 2000), and the qualitative responses echoed this response, with directors mentioning the need for information and the positive emotional outcomes of upward assimilative comparisons. Social comparisons are also made among interacting groups (Forsyth, 2000; Hoorens & Van Damme, 2012), and one of the directors pointed out the

benefit of gathering information through multiple comparisons; "Being able to interact with other choir directors with all different types of programs cultivates ideas and solutions to make my program better." The emotional outcomes of upward assimilation comparisons and information gathering were also stated. One director commented, "I find advice and consultation from teachers in similar situations to be the most helpful and constructive. Their advice is uplifting and encouraging." Another director wrote, "At this point in my career I don't regularly communicate with a lot of other choir directors, but when I do it's almost always positive, supportive, and involves collaboration and group brainstorming."

These findings were very positive for the sample of high school choir directors, because teacher resiliency can occur through the maintaining of good relationships (Gu & Day, 2013; Tait, 2008), and upward assimilation social comparison uses can foster those connections. Resilient teachers have also been shown to seek help and advice (Tait, 2008), a hallmark of upward assimilative behavior. Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy model also proposes that the verbal persuasions of others can influence self-efficacy. There is evidence that participants were using upward social comparison to maintain positive relationships and were getting advice and encouragement from others, therefore resiliency and high self-efficacy could be the outcome.

The survey item scored for the overall sample of directors did not indicate that they were engaged in other types of comparisons in the survey, however there was qualitative evidence to the contrary. Envy, an emotional outcome that can occur during upward contrastive comparisons, was referenced by several directors. Two examples were, "I am envious of better directors based on their style or methods, not necessarily

the choir's level of mastery," and, "I do get jealous when I see on social media people with whom I went to college going off and getting their masters and being on track to teach at the University level." Resentment, another outcome of upward contrastive comparisons, was acknowledged by this statement by one participant, "I struggled knowing that, for the size of school that we were, we were the worst program in the conference and district."

Bias plays a role in social comparison, so some of this discrepancy could be fueled by "optimist bias," or the view that bad outcomes are more likely to happen to other people (Menon, Kyung, & Agrawal, 2009; Stock, Gibbons, Beekman, and Gerrard, 2015). Perhaps these directors viewed their lives as more positive than others. It's also possible that range and skew could be a factor. Research has shown that sometimes people are satisfied until they become aware of others around them (Hagerty, 2000; Harris, Anseel, & Lievens, 2008), and slightly over half of the participants (51.2%) were from rural schools. Perhaps being in a smaller or isolated environment limited the participant's capacity for social comparison. Another possibility is that directors' responses are consistent with previous research stating that people actually use comparisons with negative outcomes but are unwilling to admit it, because certain types of comparisons are deemed socially inappropriate (Cialdini & Richardson, 1980; Wills, 1981). Perhaps it is as one director stated, "[The survey] is digging at some often not talked about ideas." It is interesting to note that downward contrast has the most socially inappropriate emotional outcomes; scorn, contempt, Schadenfreude, and pride, and was the only construct that directors marked that they "somewhat disagreed" using.

The qualitative comments did show some examples of this downward contrast, however. There was a comment describing pride, "I am nicknamed 'Maverick' or 'the Maverick' because I do things so separately from other choir directors," and scorn, "I also feel that many new teachers get discouraged because they don't always understand the amount of time, work and discipline that is required on their part in order to have a successful program." Scorn showed up again in this director's comment, "I believe that music 'contests,' even those which are disguised as festivals whereby choirs win or lose are largely useless, and have damaged music education almost irreparably."

It is possible that the qualitative comments left by directors could be an aberration and an opinion shared only by a few, but it is equally likely that teachers either perceive they are engaging in one type comparison but are actually engaging in several, or that the survey simply could not tell the whole story. As one director stated, "Some of your questions can be difficult to answer. The question could be answered differently depending on the situation you are discussing." Some comparison types have negative emotional outcomes and if directors are using them, they could be leading to burnout and low self-efficacy. Potentially, research to investigate different comparison directions, perhaps qualitative in nature, should be completed to fully understand how directors are engaging in comparison types.

<div align="center">

Research Question Three

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Summary of Findings

Research question three was related to the amount of control the directors perceived they had over their choral programs. Perceived control, and the emotional response to it, is a major contributing factor in how social comparison is interpreted

(Aspinwall, 1997; Buunk, Collins, Taylor, Dakof, & Van Yperen, 1990; Buunk & Ybema, 1997; Menon, Kyung, & Agrawal, 2009; Smith, 2000). Therefore, the amount of perceived control was used as a construct for the purposes of this study. Overall, results indicated that these directors perceived that they had a "high" amount of control.

Conclusions

Upward comparisons are most often used when a person perceives he has control (Buunk & Ybema, 1997; Taylor & Lobel 1989), and the results of this study reflect the literature; the directors scored indicated a "high" sense of control, and also that they mostly engaged in upward assimilative comparisons. Amount of perceived control can also lead to behavioral changes, such as working harder (Menon, Kyung, & Agrawal, 2009), and has shown to be an influence in teacher resiliency (Gu & Day, 2007; Malloy & Allen, 2007).

It is a positive finding that the participants reported a "high" amount of control, but once again, the qualitative comments did not necessarily reflect the quantitative results. One of the themes that emerged from the analysis was Administrative Stress, reflecting comments that spoke of heavy workload, lack of support, and poor administrators, all variables that have been shown to lead to teacher burnout (Anderson & Olsen, 2006; Castro, Kelly, & Shih, 2010; Day, 2008). The stress caused from these factors was revealed in the comment made by this director, "It has been very difficult to watch as decisions that are out of my control have been implemented time and time again on this department. The program is definitely not the same as it was," or as this director said, "In other jobs I have held, there have been issues with administrators or co-workers, causing work to be stressful and unfulfilling." There was also a comment regarding lack

of control from legislation, "The biggest factors discouraging teachers in [home state] are the constant teacher-bashing from our legislature and the increased workloads created by ever-changing evaluations and horrendous amounts of standardized testing."

Although there were no items regarding administrative stress added into the construct of perceived control, they are issues that create stress for directors (Beltman, Mansfield, & Price, 2011; Gardner, 2010; Gu & Day, 2013; McLain, 2005, Scheib, 2003), and could possibly lead to comparison issues. More research should be done in this area to explore connections between administrative stress, perceived control, and comparison types.

Research Question Four

Summary of Findings

Research question four addressed the relationship between social comparison types, perceived control, and selected attributes of the participants. People have a tendency to compare themselves to a similar other, therefore attributes play a large role in how social comparisons are made and interpreted (Buunk & Ybema, 1997; Collins, 2000; Diener & Fujita, 1997; Festinger, 1954; Goethals & Darley, 1977; Miller, Turnbull & McFarland, 1988; Mussweiler & Strack, 2000). A hierarchical regression was used with the variable of perceived control added into the first block and five attributes of high school choir directors—number of years taught, levels taught, school location, school size, and type of director—added into the second block. They were regressed with the four social comparison directions, upward assimilation, upward contrast, downward assimilation, and downward contrast. Four models were produced based on the four directional types of comparisons. Three of the four models, upward assimilation, upward

contrast, and downward assimilation indicated that the variables of perceived control and the attribute number of years taught played a significant role in social comparisons. However, the proportion of variance accounted for by some of these analyses was small.

Upward Assimilation. The results of the upward assimilation regression indicated overall significance in Model 1 and Model 2. In Model 1, the variable of perceived control explained a small but significant 2.2% proportion of the variance. In Model 2, the variables of perceived control and attributes combined explained a significant 8.4%, however only perceived control and number of years taught were significant contributors to the overall model.

The regression explained that greater levels of perceived control were associated with increased likelihood that the directors engaged in upward assimilative behaviors, corroborating the results of research question three. The greater amount of variance in Model 2 attributable to the variable, "number of years taught" indicated that there was an inverse relationship, in that the longer someone had taught, the less likely it was that they engaged in upward assimilative behaviors. One reason for this could be that workers who are at the beginning of their career are more likely to be inspired by upward comparisons, because they still feel like they have time to attain work success (Buunk & Ybema, 1997). Another possibility could be that young directors are doing more information seeking regarding how to be successful than an experienced teacher. Comments regarding upward assimilation expressed how number of years teaching affected this type of comparison, "Now that I've taught 16 years, I don't seek advice from other directors as much as I used to. In my early years though, I am grateful for those veteran teachers who took the time to help me," and "I am at the stage of teaching where I do more mentoring

to young teachers. I think my years of experience show I'm too old and set in my ways to get too offended from others successes or failures."

Upward Contrast. The regression analysis for upward contrast also resulted in overall significance in Model 1 and Model 2. In Model 1, the variable of perceived control explained a significant 12.4% proportion of the variance. In Model 2, the variables of perceived control and attributes combined explained a significant 15.9%, however, again, only perceived control and number of years taught were significant contributors to the overall model.

The participants in the survey perceived they had job control and engaged in upward assimilative comparisons. These results indicated that perceived control was positively related to upward contrast comparison. The longer a director had taught actually lessened upward contrastive behaviors.

Emotional outcomes of upward contrastive behaviors are depression, shame, envy, and resentment (Smith, 2000) and can cause stress, (Buunk & Ybema, 1997), ego deflation (Alicke, 2000), and negative emotional contagion (Kulik, & Mahler, 2000), all factors that can lead to teacher burnout (Carmona, Buunk, Peiró, Rodríquez, & Bravo, 2006). These negative emotional outcomes did not appear to be reflected in the quantitative results of the survey, but once again, there was evidence of negative comparison consequences indicated in some of the qualitative comments made by directors. As one wrote, "The other directors in my conference and district have always been very supportive, but I have found it difficult to be around their programs because I am jealous and feel inadequate. I also honestly perceive singers and choir directors as very judgmental, so I have been less inclined to build close relationships with them

during my teaching career," and another said, "Advice from teachers of much larger programs can sometimes be discouraging, but of course it depends on the person delivering the advice."

Downward Assimilation. The downward assimilation regression analysis was the third to result in overall significance in Model 1 and Model 2. In Model 1, the variable of perceived control explained a significant 17.1% proportion of the variance. In Model 2, the variables of perceived control and attributes explained a significant 18.5%, however only perceived control and number of years taught were significant contributors to the overall model. The results of this analysis explained the highest proportions of variance as compared with the other two regression analyses.

The variable of perceived control played a significant role in whether the participants engaged in downward assimilative behaviors, indicating that greater perceived control was related to decreased likelihood of participants' use of downward assimilation comparisons. These types of comparisons can lead to fear and worry when the focus is on the self, and pity and sympathy when the focus is on others (Smith, 2000); all negative emotional outcomes. Overall, the directors surveyed did not perceive they were engaging in this type of comparison, and there were no qualitative comments giving examples to the contrary.

Downward Contrast. The results of the downward contrast regression indicated no overall significance in Model 1 or Model 2. Results of the survey indicated that directors "somewhat disagreed" that they engaged in downward contrast, which can be positive, considering the negative emotional outcomes that can occur from downward contrastive comparisons (Smith, 2000). It is interesting to consider that although

downward contrast can be deemed socially unacceptable (Cialdini & Richardson, 1980; Wills, 1981), it can also lead to ego-recovery or self-protection (Aspinwall, 1997; Diener & Fujita, 1997; Gibbons, Benbow, & Gerrard, 1994; Groothof, Siero, & Buunk, 2007; Hogg, 2000; Wills, 1997). Downward contrast can also induce pride (Smith, 2000), and might prevent someone from engaging in rumination or depressive self-focus (Wills, 1997), so if directors are comparing their program quality to others through downward contrast, positive emotional outcomes can occur. Because there are benefits to using downward contrast in social comparisons, more research should be done on this area so directors can be more aware of the benefits.

Conclusions

Of the directors surveyed, the variable of perceived control was the most relevant factor in the relationship between social comparison types and attributes. Higher perceptions of control were associated with engagement in positive social comparisons, such as upward assimilation with favorable emotional outcomes, and with less engagement in social comparisons with negative emotional outcomes, such as upward contrast and downward assimilation. The number of years taught also played a significant role in the relationship between attributes and social comparison types. More years of teaching was associated with higher levels of engagement in social comparisons with positive emotional outcomes, especially upward assimilation, and less likelihood of using social comparison with negative emotional outcomes, such as upward contrast and downward assimilation.

It is possible that other attributes play a part in how comparisons are made among directors, but were not examined in this study. Because Context emerged as a theme in

the director comments, it is clear that aspects of their job are something directors think and are concerned about. Further research should be done to determine what aspects matter most to high school choir directors and how these variables are playing a part in their social comparisons.

Implications

This study has several important implications for current high school choir directors. Because social comparisons are going to happen no matter what (Blanton & Stapel, 2008; Festinger, 1954; Gilber, Giesler, & Morris, 1995), it's important to make them work in positive ways. Upward comparisons are best because of their emotional outcomes of inspiration and optimism (Smith, 2000), and the results from this study have shown that young directors are using this type of comparison the most. Therefore, they should embrace this natural tendency to information-seek by finding mentors with more experience that will provide information without loss of self-esteem (Buunk & Ybema, 1997). These results also have implications for mentors, because if mentors are aware of their ability to encourage upward assimilative behaviors in their mentees and foster the positive emotional benefits from them, they can help lay the groundwork for positive comparisons and teacher resiliency. Research has shown that positive professional relationships make teachers more resilient (Day & Gu, 2007; Tait, 2008), so finding ways to use upward assimilations and encourage young teachers to develop them can have multiple beneficial outcomes.

This study also showed that directors who had high perceived control were more likely to engage in comparisons with positive outcomes, but social comparisons can also help directors that have low perceived control and might be feeling the effects of burnout.

Downward contrast can be beneficial for coping and self-esteem building, and can activate a better sense of well-being (Groothof, Siero, & Buunk, 2007; Wills, 1981), and feelings of pride (Smith, 2000). It can also stop negative behaviors, such as rumination (Wills, 1997), or provide diagnostics on how to avoid bad situations that other directors are going through (Aspinwall, 1997). This type of comparison might be useful for more experienced directors that want positive comparison outcomes, but are less likely to use upward assimilation. Downward contrast can be a difficult comparison to navigate, because it can also lead to socially unacceptable emotions, such as schadenfreude or contempt (Smith, 2000), but as long as directors are aware of how this comparison works, they can make use of the positive outcomes and avoid the undesirable ones.

There are also implications from this study for directors that are currently engaged in negative comparisons, such as upward contrast or downward assimilation, and are feeling the effects of depression, envy, resentment, fear, or worry (Smith, 2000). Although most of the directors in our study did not claim to be dealing with these emotions, some of the comments revealed that several directors were feeling these negative effects, so it is important for directors to understand how to deal with their outcomes. First, directors should remember that social comparisons are flexible and easily changed based on the situation, so moving personal focus away from a negative comparison item (Buunk, Collins, Taylor, Dakof, Van Yperen, 1990; Groothof, Siero, & Buunk, 2007; Wilson & Ross, 2000), or changing the importance of an item could help a director begin to cope (Beach & Tesser, 2000; Diener & Fujita, 1997). Another possibility would be to avoid contact with people that are better, or comparison situations

altogether because people can be more satisfied when they are unaware of what others around them are doing (Hagerty, 2000; Harris, Anseel, & Lievens, 2008).

Ultimately, the more information directors have regarding social comparison, the more likely they will be to make the appropriate types of comparisons in every situation for the best attainable outcomes. By simply understanding how comparisons work, directors can begin to take control of their social comparisons and choose ones that have beneficial outcomes instead of making unconscious or destructive comparisons. Arming directors with comparison knowledge enhances their ability to make the fluidity of social comparison work in their emotional favor. Further research in this area can help provide directors with the most beneficial and current information.

Limitations

This study used a purposive sample of high school choir directors across the Midwest. Caution should be used when interpreting the results of this study beyond the population, however. Participants from only four states. Missouri, Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio, provided the majority of the responses. Also, Missouri had the largest percent of tracked responses, 42.5%, so there is not an even distribution of responses from all four states.

There was also an uneven response rate for type of school. Half of the responses came from choir directors at rural schools, 51.5%, and only 8.3% of responses came from urban schools. The results of the study are therefore skewed in favor of rural directors, which could have affected the findings.

Caution should also be used when interpreting results from the Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure (INCOM-C) in this study. The INCOM is a well-

established tool for measuring social comparison, but the items were slightly adapted for choir directors, which could have affected the reliability.

Recommendations for Future Research

More research is needed about the use of social comparisons and their effects on high school choir directors. Administrative stress emerged as a theme within the comments, so it would be interesting to investigate how particular administrative issues contribute to director stress, especially because it appeared that administrative stress played a role in amount of perceived control. Administrative stress was not added into that construct for this study however, so it is recommended that questions over administrative stress are added into a perceived control construct in future research.

It would also be helpful to include different characteristics regarding school context as possible attributes that might affect comparison, especially because there was a discrepancy between the number of comments directors made about the context of their job situation and the lack of significant demographic variables found in the regression models. Perhaps more demographic questions would clarify this disparity in future research.

Replicating this study in other music areas would also be a worthy endeavor. Band directors with competitive marching seasons might produce different comparison results because of added levels of competitiveness. The same might be true for choir directors with competitive show choirs. Looking at social comparisons with groups that are in close proximity, such as a collegiate voice studios, might also produce interesting research. This study could also be replicated for general music teachers, or other types of educators. Because this particular study is also skewed in the direction of rural directors,

a study with urban directors might produce different results regarding perceived control or find different attributes to be significant, therefore resulting in different uses of the various comparison types.

It is also clear that there are many other variables playing a part of a directors' choice to compare in a particular direction. Perceived control and number of years taught only accounted for 8.4% of the variance in upward assimilation, 15.9% in upward contrast, and 18.5% in downward assimilation. This begs the question, what is accounting for the rest of the variance? Only future research can begin to determine the other variables that are playing a role in the comparison direction of high school directors.

Many of the numerical results obtained in the survey had contrasting evidence found in the director comments. It is possible that although many of the directors did not seem to feel the negative effects of social comparisons, the directors that did were under a great deal of stress. A qualitative study would be able to gather deeper evidence of how directors are dealing with some of the negative impacts of social comparison. It could also be true that survey items are not able to tell the entire story the way that a qualitative study could. Giving directors a fuller, deeper picture of social comparison would be helpful in moving forward with this kind of research. Perhaps this choir director said it best; "I would think it might be more useful to allow short answer or essay vs. multiple choice where we are limited in being able to explain the basis of our answer."

Concluding Statement

This study has shown that high school choir directors are using social comparison as a tool for gaining knowledge and assessing their job performance. Therefore, directors should have an understanding of social comparisons and their effects in order to harness

the benefits of positive comparisons, such as resilience and high self-efficacy, and avoid the adverse effects, such as burnout, of their negative emotional outcomes. Ongoing research for directors in this area can provide a better understanding of how comparisons work and the best way to implement them for maximum job satisfaction.

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APPENDIX A

Dear Choral Director:

If are currently directing a high school choir, I hope you will consider participating in my survey. I am a doctoral candidate in music education at the University of Missouri, working on a research project entitled "A Study of Social Comparisons and their Effects on High School Choir Directors."

The online survey comprises several rating scales, designed to examine attitudes and feelings about social comparisons among high school directors, as well as several items to help describe the participants. It will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. All survey responses will be completely anonymous, with no way for me to identify respondents.

The results are intended to assist current choral directors in learning about social comparisons and help directors use them for positive emotional outcomes. It will also help inform pre-service teachers about social comparisons so they enter the workforce with the knowledge on how to approach them. I also anticipate publishing the results in a refereed research journal and discussing them in conference presentations.

If you wish to participate in the study, please click on the link below. The beginning of the survey form will include the informed consent statement. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Missouri Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

Please feel free to address any questions you may have about this research to me (xxxxxx@xxxx.xxxxxxxx.xxx). If you have friends who fit into this target group and you think would like to participate as well, please feel free to send them my contact information or forward this message to them.

Thank you very much for considering this request,
Laura S. Kitchel
Doctoral Candidate
University of Missouri
Columbia, MO
xxxxxx@xxxx.xxxxxxxx.xxx

Click here to be taken to the online survey:

https://missouri.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_6eShnSbaTRcGuXP

Thank you for choosing to participate in this research project, entitled "A Study of Social Comparisons and their Effects on High School Choir Directors." Please only complete this survey if you currently direct a high school choir.

The purpose of this research study is to examine the ways that high school choir directors are using social comparisons and their positive and/or negative effects. The results are intended to assist current choral directors in learning about social comparisons to help directors use them for positive emotional outcomes. It will also help inform pre-service teachers about social comparisons so they enter the workforce with the knowledge on how to approach them.

The survey that follows should take less than 10 minutes to complete. It is unlikely you will experience any risks from participation in this study. Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. While I hope you will complete the whole survey, you will be free to decline to answer any items, as you choose. You may remove yourself from the research at any point without penalty.

Your responses to the survey questions will be completely anonymous – there will be no way for me to connect survey responses with respondents. Your answers to the survey will be downloaded only to the researchers' computers, and will be password protected.

The survey link will be active from January 16 to March 17, 2017. I would greatly appreciate it if you would complete this at your earliest convenience.

If you have any questions, you may contact me at xxxxxx@xxxx.xxxxxxxx.xxx. If you wish to speak with someone not associated with this study, please contact my advisor, Dr. Wendy Sims at xxxxx@xxxxxxxx.xxx. Questions about your rights as a research participant may be addressed to the University of Missouri Institutional Review Board (IRB) at xxx-xxx-xxxx.

Thank you very much,
Laura Kitchel
Doctoral Candidate
University of Missouri

By clicking the >> button to enter the survey, you are providing your informed consent to participate in this research project.

IRB Approval Letter

Institutional Review Board
University of Missouri-Columbia

190 Galena Hall; Dc074.00
Columbia, MO 65212
573-882-3181
irb@missouri.edu

March 28, 2017

Principal Investigator: Laura Sterling Kitchel
Department: School of Music

Your Exempt Application to project entitled A Study of Social Comparisons and their Effects on High School Choir Directors was reviewed and approved by the MU Institutional Review Board according to the terms and conditions described below:

IRB Project Number	2008120
IRB Review Number	224776
Initial Application Approval Date	March 28, 2017
IRB Expiration Date	March 28, 2018
Level of Review	Exempt
Project Status	Active - Open to Enrollment
Exempt Categories	45 CFR 46.101b(2)
Risk Level	Minimal Risk

The principal investigator (PI) is responsible for all aspects and conduct of this study. The PI must comply with the following conditions of the approval:

1. No subjects may be involved in any study procedure prior to the IRB approval date or after the expiration date.
2. All unanticipated problems and deviations must be reported to the IRB within 5 business days.
3. All changes must be IRB approved prior to implementation unless they are intended to reduce immediate risk.
4. All recruitment materials and methods must be approved by the IRB prior to being used.
5. The Annual Exempt Form must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval at least 30 days prior to the project expiration date. If the study is complete, the Completion/Withdrawal Form may be submitted in lieu of the Annual Exempt Form
6. Maintain all research records for a period of seven years from the project completion date.
7. Utilize all approved research documents located within the attached files section of eCompliance. These documents are highlighted green.

If you are offering subject payments and would like more information about research participant payments, please click here to view the MU Business Policy and Procedure:
http://bppm.missouri.edu/chapter2/2_250.html

March 1, 2017

Dear (teacher name),

This is a reminder of our request for you to fill out the online survey for the research project "A Study of Social Comparisons and their Effects on High School Choir Directors." It would be very helpful to have your response.

The survey should take about 10 minutes to complete. Please go to the link at the bottom of the included message, below. The survey will remain open for 2 additional weeks.

If you have already responded to the survey, thank you for your time! Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Thank you very much,
Laura Kitchel
Doctoral Candidate
University of Missouri

Click here to be taken to the online survey

APPENDIX E

Job Satisfaction/Control

Thank you for choosing to participate in this research project, entitled "A Study of Social Comparisons and their Effects on High School Choir Directors." Please only complete this survey if you currently direct a high school choir.

The purpose of this research study is to examine the ways that high school choir directors are using social comparisons and their positive and/or negative effects. The results are intended to assist current choral directors in learning about social comparisons to help directors use them for positive emotional outcomes. It will also help inform pre-service teachers about social comparisons so they enter the workforce with the knowledge on how to approach them.

The survey that follows should take less than 10 minutes to complete. It is unlikely you will experience any risks from participation in this study. Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. While I hope you will complete the whole survey, you will be free to decline to answer any items, as you choose. You may remove yourself from the research at any point without penalty.

Your responses to the survey questions will be completely anonymous – there will be no way for me to connect survey responses with respondents. Your answers to the survey will be downloaded only to the researcher's computer, and will be password protected.

The survey link will be active from January 16 to March 17, 2017. I would greatly appreciate it if you would complete this at your earliest convenience.

If you have any questions, you may contact me at lskp8b@mail.missouri.edu. If you wish

to speak with someone not associated with this study, please contact my advisor, Dr.
Wendy Sims at simsw@missouri.edu. Questions about your rights as a research
participant may be addressed to the University of Missouri Institutional Review Board
(IRB) at 573-882-9585.

Thank you very much,
Laura Kitchel
Doctoral Candidate
University of Missouri

By clicking the >> button to enter the survey, you are providing your informed consent to
participate in this research project.

I currently direct a high school choir.

○ Yes

○ No

Rate the level of satisfaction you feel regarding the following:

	Very Dissatisfied	Moderately Dissatisfied	Neither Satisfied or Dissatisfied	Moderatel Satisfied
Support you receive from your administrators.	○	○	○	○
Resources you receive from your school.	○	○	○	○
Kinds of classes that you teach.	○	○	○	○
Overall satisfaction with your job.	○	○	○	○

Rate the amount of control you have over the following:

	Very Low	Low	A Moderate Amount	High	Very High
Solving problems you face at work.	○	○	○	○	○
Creating the kind of program you would like to have.	○	○	○	○	○
Teaching the way you feel is best.	○	○	○	○	○

Rate the frequency with which you consider the following:

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always
Leaving your current position to teach at a different school.	○	○	○	○	○
Leaving the teaching profession.	○	○	○	○	○

Social Comparisons

Most people compare themselves from time to time with others. For example, they may compare the way they feel, their opinions, their abilities and/or their situation with those of other people. There is nothing particularly "good" or "bad" about this type of comparison and some people do it more than others. I would like to find out how often you compare yourself with other choir directors. To do that, indicate how much you agree with each statement below, by using the following scale:

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Str A
I often compare how my choirs are doing in comparison to other directors' choirs.	○	○	○	○	
I always pay a lot of attention to how I direct choirs compared with how others direct choirs.	○	○	○	○	
If I want to find out how well I have done something, I compare what I have taught with what other choir directors have taught.	○	○	○	○	
I often compare how my choirs are doing musically to the musicality of other choirs.	○	○	○	○	

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Str A
I am not the type of person who compares often with other choir directors.	○	○	○	○	
I often compare myself with other choir directors with respect to what I have accomplished with my choirs.	○	○	○	○	

Indicate how much you agree with each statement below, using the following scale:

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	S
Seeing another choir director that is more successful than me encourages me to raise myself to their level.	◯	◯	◯	◯	
The only directors that understand my problems are the ones who have programs with bigger problems than mine.	◯	◯	◯	◯	
I tend to disregard the opinions of directors that have programs of poorer quality than mine.	◯	◯	◯	◯	
Seeing high school choir programs that have high student involvement makes me envious.	◯	◯	◯	◯	
Other choir directors' superior qualities inspire me in a positive way to improve myself.	◯	◯	◯	◯	
When I hear other directors talk negatively about their jobs, I identify with their problems.	◯	◯	◯	◯	

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	S
When I hear great high school choirs, I feel discouraged about my own choir.	◯	◯	◯	◯	
When I hear choirs make a lot of musical mistakes, it makes me feel	◯	◯	◯	◯	

110

Demographics

I identify as:

○ Male

○ Female

○ Other

○ Prefer not to respond.

I am considered:

○ A head choir director at my school.

○ An assistant choir director at my school.

I teach:

○ Only High School.

○ High School and another level (Middle School or Elementary).

○ Other. [   ]

The High School where I teach is considered mostly:

○ Rural

○ Urban

○ Suburban

○ Small City

111

The enrollment in my High School is:

○ 0-200

○ 201-500

○ 501-800

○ 801-1000

○ 1001+

The number of years I have taught (including this year):

[   ]

My current education level is:

○ Bachelor Degree

○ Bachelor Degree + 15

○ Master Degree

○ Master + 15

○ Doctorate

○ Educational Specialist

I teach in the following state:

○ Ohio

○ Indiana

○ Michigan

○ Missouri

Block 5

Comments:

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APPENDIX F

Q15 - Comments:

Comments:

I question the term/phrase(s) "successful, more/less successful" each building has its own personality and strengths and weaknesses. I speak from experience when I say that what works in one building may not have the same effect in another building. More often "success" boils down to the teacher's ability to meet the students where they are and determine appropriate and satisfying steps toward improvement. Success is relative to the students needs and abilities, prior experiences and the game plan for the end result over the period of a quarter, a year or even a four or five year overall experience for the individual, as wells as the ensemble(s). At the end of the day teaching music is not about the number of awards or honors that you receive as a teacher. Teaching music (or anything, really) is about touching the lives of young humans and helping them to begin to realize their full potential.

I am the only choir teacher at a small school, so choir is not the only thing I teach. I very rarely have the opportunity to network, talk, or hear other choirs, so comparing myself is practically impossible as the opportunity never presents itself... Not sure how "valid" my comments are.

I am only part-time, which only sometimes equates to a lighter workload. For example, I direct a musical and conduct concerts. I do not direct 60% of a musical or program 60% of a concert. That leads to a lot of work-life frustration.

The biggest factors discouraging teachers in Michigan are the constant teacher-bashing from our legislature and the increased work loads created by ever-changing evaluations and horrendous amounts of standardized testing.

I have taught in Indiana for 7 years and part of my struggle is getting to know other choir directors in the area.

but as for me,I consider myself a master teacher who has made my program successful in spite of all the hardships!

Even though I am satisfied with my current position at the high school where I teach, I have been in several other positions in the the the past that left me less than satisfied, for various reasons. In other jobs I have held, there have been issues with administrators or co-workers, causing work to be stressful and unfulfilling. I have found that as long as I stay focused on the students and the overall goal we are collectively trying to accomplish, it keeps me focused on why I am doing what I am doing.

I have a lot of support from teachers in the surrounding area and this year I am back in my hometown where I went to middle and high school, singing in the same programs. Last year I was in a very small rural school district with much less support. My experience here is much better and the feeder program is much more solid than it was in my last school.

It can be difficult to work with administrators who have little understanding or value for the field. There are few standards in terms of adequate budgeting. School district try to make all classes fit into the same box. Schools and district also do not make decisions that positively impact music programs. I wish that administrators were more informed about the benefits to encouraging music education in their schools.

I wish I could figure out a way to get more students involved in choir; choir seems to be the "get your elective credit" class. I wish I was a better choir teacher.

I have struggled with the comparison issue for my entire career. It is often comparing apples to oranges because no program or community or body of students is the same. At the end of it all, if I am trying my best to improve then I have to "let it go" and be satisfied with my effort. I usually feel that if I am better, the students are better. It is very rarely "their fault" if things are not going well. 'Attitude reflect leadership, Captain." - Remember the Titans

No additional comments

hope i did this correctly and it was of some help. sorry it took me so long. got the flu bug

Good luck with your research!

Thanks for conducting this survey. Will you share your results with us?

When you include the words "always" or "never" it makes it more difficult to answer your question. How does one "somewhat" agree with an absolute question? Either I always do it, or I don't.

Woot.

I teach high school choir. The 8th Grade Choir is optional and joins the HS Choir class every other day. I also teach

the 6-12 band program. I find advice and consultation from teachers in similar situations to be the most helpful and constructive. Their advice is uplifting and encouraging. Advice from teachers of much larger programs can sometimes be discouraging, but of course it depends on the person delivering the advice.

It was difficult to answer your questions because I almost NEVER talk to other directors from others schools. There are almost zero opportunities for me to do so except for competitions that involve my school and then I am usually tied up working with my students (accompanying, etc.).

Teaching is very cool, but I'm old and have a really good salary. I'm not sure that you can teach and pay the bills anymore.

I have a very successful program built over the last 15 years. 67 in HS Choir & 75 in 7th & 8th Choir, 28 in 6th Choir

I have taught K-12 throughout my years of teaching. This is only my third year at the high school.

I feel like I am a very blessed director, I have great administrative, board and parental support for my program. I also feel that many new teachers get discouraged because they don't always understand the amount of time, work and discipline that is required on their part in order to have a successful program.

I love teaching music. I know many directors face budget and scheduling issues with choir plus fighting social stigma (the nerd factor) when recruiting students. Teaching in a small rural school I see a lot of directors, band and choir, who suffer from what I call the "If Only" syndrome. We be better if only the school would give me this or that. In other words, there is always an excuse not to succeed and rarely a reason to succeed. The challenge we sometimes face is to not only educate the children, but also the administration and community on what it takes to create a successful program. This takes time, communication, and a positive approach. I know it is easier said than

done, but it is essential in building any program or maintaining a successful program. Just sayin' you know.

I am at the stage of teaching where I do more mentoring to young teachers. I think my years of experience show I'm too old and set in my ways to get too offended from others successes or failures. ? But I always like to get new ideas.

I believe that music "contests," even those which are disguised as festivals whereby choirs win or lose are largely useless, and have damaged music education almost irreparably. I teach in a region that music contests are rampant, and many directors use the competition to drive the culture of their music programs. This, I believe, leads to students who are eager to walk away from their instrument after high school and abandon the notion of "lifelong learning" for which we are required by our many mission statements. In many conversations that I have at conventions, and even over beer and cigars here locally, I have found other high school directors reveling in their successes over other schools, or mired in their disappointment in their inability to "win" over others' programs. Nobody has ever proven to me that competition helps to drive more music in communities, or better musical choices in the collective mainstream, or has turned out American maestros to man the most important, musical posts (choral, instrumental, orchestral) in the U.S. and beyond. I dare anyone to show me where, and in what arena, it matters that "my choir/band beat your choir/band." It certainly hasn't translated into presenting or offering the most important aspect, reason, requirement, or responsibility for which music exists in the first place - to seek and offer beauty to a world that desperately needs it. And no amount of "wins" or trophies or caption awards will bring that about. Directors who understand the importance of beauty, and its need will...and those directors are hard to find anymore. I could go on and on. Want to talk? - Mark Duray, Director of Fine Arts, Guerin Catholic HS

I think of a choral music education community should inspire others to step outside of their daily routine, even though getting out of a rut is difficult. We should help each other out, we do the same thing!

I am happy to participate in this study. The first few questions were related to my satisfaction with my current job, admin support, etc. I feel as thought my current experience has been largely negative as far as "admin support" goes, and I believe that directly relates to my responses to the questions addressing my thoughts of "leaving teaching," and "leaving the district for another place to teach." I feel as though the 5 years I have spent in this current district has been the root cause of my dissatisfaction with the teaching profession in general. First 10 years of teaching = mostly positive!! Last 5 years = mostly negative. I hope this helps in understanding my answers.

I have only taught choir for 3-4 years. 1st year it was considered an extra-curricular activity.

Thanks

I'm interested in seeing the results

Good Luck. Blessings as you pursue your degree.

Good Luck to you on your research!

The choir I teach currently only has 3 members, but I am looking to change the program to an after school activity to get more numbers.

Some of your questions can be difficult to answer. The question could be answered differently depending on the situation you are discussing. An example could be, I am envious of better directors based on their style or methods not necessarily the choirs level of mastery. I would think it might be more useful to allow short answer or essay vs. multiple choice where we are limited in being able to explain the basis of our answer.

Many of these questions felt repetitive. And depending on where they were placed with other quesiotns, I had to read carefully or risk answering incorrectly. Consider reordering these quesitons, and check that they are not being stated multiple times.

I am doing good things in my high school program, but I think I am better at Jr. High/Middle School. I learn a lot from other high school directors in my area. Very good support system!

There are only RARE occasions in which there is the luxury of being able to collaborate or compare programs with others...I answered from the perspective of seeing performances of other schools online or on a few occasions throughout the school year. Thank you.

I am at a small, private Christian school in the midst of an area with 3 very large school with very established choral programs. I have learned that my situation is different because we don't have nearly the amount of students to pull from as a large public school. But through the years, I am thankful to see my students grow musically and attain far more than I thought was a possibility at such a small school. I am very thankful for their dedication, hard work and willingness to go where I lead them!

My choir is an extra-curricular activity that usually only meets during the first semester to prepare for a Christmas Concert. I work at a private school with several elective options. In my 3 years teaching here I have taught a choir class of less than 10 for 2 semesters; even then the classes were a combination of Musical Theatre or Applied Voice.

Thanks

Are you going to publish?

I began my choir program in an extremely urban school last year. There are so many challenges that we face, but

we have made great strides. Overall, being around and talking with great directors inspires me to better my own teaching, but does not discourage me. The discouraging part of my job is not feeling like I can overcome the immense obstacles of the school environment to benefit my students.

Sometimes, I do become discouraged when my choirs do not perform at the level that I think they are capable of achieving. When that happens, I try to remind myself of how far the music program has come as a whole since I began teaching at my school.

Something to think about: Often, the most direct point of comparison I have with my choir is not other choirs from other schools, but the band program in my own school. I learn as much from the band directors I work with here as I learn from choir directors in other districts.

Thank you for your research; I wish you the best as you conduct all you do.

I teach in Arizona, which wasn't listed.

Most people would look at my career and say that I have had a successful career. We have performed at ACDA events. I have conducted two state honors choirs...etc. However, seven years ago, we had a change over of administration. This administration has a completely new philosophy regarding public education. This program has really suffered since then. It has been very difficult to watch as decisions that are out of my control have been implemented time and time again on this department. The program is definitely not the same as it was. The trouble is that most schools are facing financial hardship so they are not willing to pay for experience. I have interviewed in other districts. They are always impressed with my credentials but choose a candidate that is fresh out of college so that they don't have to pay them as much. Consequently, people like me become trapped in their current situations. I wanted you to be aware of my situation because it is this experience has prompted my responses to your questions. Thanks!

Being able to interact with other choir directors with all different types of programs cultivates ideas and solutions to make my program better. Do I compare my program with others? Yes. Do I talk with other directors about what they are doing in their program? Absolutely. I continue to grow as an educator having these talks and comparisons. Does that mean I think negatively about my programs or myself as a director? No. We need positivity in this profession for our programs and for ourselves. If we didn't have that, why teach? We're not teaching for the money - we are teaching because we LOVE what we do!

Interesting questions! I hope you will provide the results to the folks who responded, if you are able.

It would be interesting to analyze the data by where teachers were in their career regarding years of experience . Many of your questions would be answered dramatically differently at different stages in my career. Additionally, vocal music programs have changed dramatically over the years. The rise of Showchoirs and some schools focusing entirely on that to the elimination of traditional choral singing, has led to a dichotomy within the profession which divides both audiences and teachers. The continual acceptance of and desire for superficiality and entertainment by the public has allowed Showchoir programs to thrive and to be viewed as the best way to run a program. This, despite the fact that an overwhelming majority of students I have encountered from showchoir programs knew nothing about the elements and skills of music such as key signatures, note names, and sightreading. There is unbelievable pressure from administrators and parents to develop a showchoir program and ignore true music education. Therefore, comparisons to other teachers and programs are far too often a comparison of apples to oranges since the entire philosophy of why your program exists is so different.

I am almost retired in a school district that has been experiencing major financial upheaval. 5 years ago I would have answered several questions differently

Comments concerning administrative support are based on rather recent years. I have taught in this district over 20 years, and we have had MANY administrative changes in the past 8, with each wanting to "leave their mark" whether changes were needed or not. The lack of support and total upheaval of/impact on our programs makes it difficult to feel positive about teaching. On the other hand, EVERY MOMENT with my students is still amazing and fulfilling work! Thank you!

I have taught at my school for 16 years. When I started there were only 10 kids in Concert Choir, now we average over 50. That is at a high school with a total enrollment of about 280. My administrators are very supportive of my program as well as the community. Now that I've taught 16 years, I don't seek advice from other directors as much as I used to. In my early years though, I am grateful for those veteran teachers who took the time to help me.

The questions regarding how it feels to hear a choir and watch a director who is better were difficult to respond to because I can go either way. Sometimes I am in awe and feel lifted and encouraged, while other times it does make me feel defeated. I think generally I am positively affected by choirs with students who are obviously joyful in their music making.

I have only taught at 1 school, and I have been here for 7 years. When I started teaching I was the fifth teaching in 4 years. The program was a mess due to the turnover. I struggled knowing that, for the size of school that wewere, we were the worst program in the conference and district. The first 3 years were especially hard, but I felt better once I felt like I got the program to somewhere near 'mediocre." We're still not the best, but I think the kids and the community are proud of the program. The other directors in my conference and district have always been very supportive, but I have found it difficult to be around their programs because I am jealous and feel inadequate. I also honestly perceive singers and choir directors as very judgmental, so I have been less inclined to build close relationships with them during my teaching career. It is helpful to look back at where the program was when I started, and also to look at how different the demographics, class offerings, and communities are in other programs.

In addition to concert choirs, and theory, I teach competitive show choirs. The show choir environment brings out a highly competitive nature among most directors, I believe.

Best wishes.

Master +30

Excellent Survey I would be interested in knowing the statistics.

I love to learn from others who have more experience than me. I am always trying to find new ways to approach teaching. In the music realm it's easy for people (me included) to get insecure quickly. I wish that wasn't the case because we are all working for the same cause and creating communities of music. I wish there were more clinics for choir directors to go to learn from others.

I am nicknamed "Maverick" or "the Maverick" because I do things so separately from other choir directors. I have no desire to compete. I despise show choir. Yet I've produced 44 professional musicians in 14 years. I just do things

differently.

Thanks, interesting to consider these items.

I am interested in the results of this research. Of particular interest would be how you plan to quantify the survey results. I like your topic and your angle. It is digging at some often not talked about ideas. Thanks and I'll stay anonymous until you have all of your data. Will be in touch

After teaching in larger schools in Illinois with large programs, I have chosen to teach at the k-12 level in a very small school. I enjoy working with all ages and also enjoy "training" my musicians from a very young age. I believe this is a way to build a strong program.

Thank you for investing in choral music research! I hope you will share your paper/findings with us.

I teach in Illinois.

Thanks!! Would we be able to read your work when it is finished? I would be very interested. The job of a choir director in a high school is like being on an island ---

I teach in a private Catholic school

Good luck with your project! I hope you get a good response rate... I think this is an important topic. I've never even thought about how this could be affecting me, but after completing your survey, I realize that it very much does.

I have a wonderful network of other choral director friends, and we enjoy bouncing ideas off each other, but we are all so supportive and honest with one another and I don't believe compare each other, because we all live far apart. For the directors that live by me, I consider them my mentors and I look up to them and they come in from time to time and work with my kids. Other directors that are younger than me, I am always here to help and to answer questions if they need it. I hope this helps!

I find that most high school directors in my state are very ambitious and concerned with making a name for themselves. I am not ambitious in that way at all. My only ambition is making my choir the best they can be here in our own little corner. Sometimes I feel pressure to be ambitious, but my family takes priority over the district/state stuff. I already put a ton of time into just school. It's not worth it to "make a name" for myself.

Good luck on your research!

Good Luck! Will you provide the survey takers with your results? I am interested to see and hear more about it.

I hope this is a successful study for you.

Good Luck with your reserch

Best of luck to all you new teachers. Carry on. Don't give up!

I teach in a high poverty suburban school, 100% free and reduced lunch, 95% black

I have one of the best jobs I have ever heard of. I worked really hard to get here, and was ready when the opportunity presented itself.

I would love to see the results of this survey...I am a private school teacher which may have reflect on my responses.

Great questionaire to help me think about working with others in my position and learning from all.

I enjoyed taking your survey and wish you the best of luck. I would be interested to hear more about your thesis when it is finished. Best of luck.

At this point in my career I don't regularly communicate with a lot of other choir directors, but when I do it's almost always positive, supportive, and involves collaboration and group brainstorming. I do get jealous when I see on social media people with whom I went to college going off and getting their masters and being on tracks to teach at the University level, but I'm also happy with my own choices and think the more music and music educators there are in the world the better.

Best to you

Descriptive Statistics over Comparison Direction

Item	N	M	SD
Seeing another choir director that is more successful than me encourages me to raise myself to their level.	363	3.99	.903
The only directors that understand my problems are the ones who have programs with bigger problems than mine.	363	1.94	.908
I tend to disregard the opinions of directors that have programs of poorer quality than mine.	363	2.30	1.093
Seeing high school choir programs that have high student involvement makes me envious.	363	3.29	1.248
Other choir directors' superior qualities inspire me in a positive way to improve myself.	362	4.07	.810
When I hear other directors talk negatively about their jobs, I identify with their problems.	363	3.05	1.125
When I hear great high school choirs, I feel discouraged about my own choir.	361	2.48	1.211
When I hear choirs make a lot of musical mistakes, it makes me feel glad the singers are not mine.	363	2.25	1.130
When I see other choir directors that have similar years of experience as I have doing well, it makes me feel bad about my own program.	363	2.32	1.227
I only want to network with directors that are good at their jobs.	363	2.51	1.178
When I see directors struggle to fix the problems in their choirs, I feel I can relate to their situation.	362	3.74	.931
Seeing a choir program that is better than mine gives me information on how I might improve my own program.	362	4.19	.718
I feel I have to justify my teaching choices to choir directors that appear more successful than I am.	363	2.45	1.196
When I hear other directors complain about their jobs, I think they have not been creative enough to find the solutions to fix their problems.	361	2.63	1.062
Seeing more experienced choir directors struggle with their choir programs makes me feel depressed about my own future.	363	1.90	.986
Choir directors that are more successful than me excite and/or challenge me to do better.	362	4.02	.818

Note. Scale: 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *somewhat disagree*, 3 = *neither agree or disagree*, 4 = *somewhat agree*, 5 = *strongly agree*.

APPENDIX H

Descriptive Statistics over Questions of Control

Item	N	M	SD
Solving problems you face at work.	363	3.85	.877
Creating the kind of program you would like to have.	361	3.65	1.064
Teaching the way you feel is best.	361	4.21	.891

Note. Scale: 1 = *very low*, 2 = *low*, 3 = *a moderate amount*,
4 = *high*, 5 = *very high*.

VITA

Laura S. Kitchel attended Bowling Green State University in Ohio, earning a Bachelor of Music in Music Education degree in 1999. After three years of teaching secondary choral and general music in Archbold, Ohio, and three years of teaching secondary choral and general music in Jefferson City, Missouri, she received a Master's of Choral Conducting from the University of Kentucky in Lexington, Kentucky, in 2007. Ms. Kitchel then completed three years of teaching middle and secondary choral music at Lexington Christian Academy in Lexington, Kentucky, and three years of teaching secondary choral and general music in Moberly, Missouri.

Ms. Kitchel will complete a Doctor of Philosophy in Learning, Teaching, and Curriulum, with an emphasis in Music Education in 2017, from the University of Missouri in Columbia, Missouri, where she taught courses including choral rehearsal technique, Women's Chorale, Concert Chorale, music student teaching seminar, and assisted with the University Singers.

She has served as a guest conductor, adjudicator, clinician, and accompanist for many choral groups and has published in *Missouri School Music Magazine*. Ms. Kitchel has also had investigations accepted for poster presentations for Missouri state conferences, and has given sessions for ACDA conferences in both Kentucky and Missouri over assessments for the performance classroom.

Ms. Kitchel plans to continue her involvement in public school music education, focusing her research on social comparisons in the choral classroom.