Welshness and Choral Singing: Cognitive and Sociohistorical Aspects of Cultural Identity in North Wales

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Abstract: Connections between Welsh cultural identity ("Welshness") and choral singing derive from the 19th century, when music and literary competitions (eisteddfodau) were standardized, hymn singing sessions (cymanfoedd canu) were established and community choirs became popular throughout Wales. This paper aims to describe present-day Welshness and choir associations using insights from cognitive science (Rosch 1975; Lakoff 1987; Koch 2004; Evans 2007). Age and gender differences in Welsh identities are discussed and interpreted. Drawing from a variety of disciplines, this paper looks at music, meaningfulness, and cultural identity, and offers theoretical and methodological implications for future research.

Résumé: Les liens entre l'identité culturelle galloise (welshness) et le chant choral remontent au XIX^e^ siècle, lorsque les concours de musique et d'écriture (eisteddfodau) se sont standardisés, que les concerts de chants religieux (cymanfoedd canu) ont été instaurés, et que les chorales communautaires se sont popularisées à travers tout le Pays de Galles. Cet article cherche à décrire la welshness et les associations chorales d'aujourd'hui à partir des aperçus que nous donnent les sciences cognitives (Rosch 1975 ; Lakoff 1987 ; Koch 2004 ; Evans 2007), et discute également des différences d'âge et de genre dans les identités galloises. À partir d'une diversité de disciplines, cet article examine la musique, sa signification et l'identité culturelle, et propose des implications théoriques et méthodologiques pour des recherches futures.

How are song and choir associations manifested in present-day Welsh identities in North Wales? How and why do these identities develop? Are there patterns in the identities of varying social groups, e.g., people of different ages and genders,[1] and if so, why? Sociohistorical factors and theories about cognition are explored to answer these questions and shed light on choral singing and the creation of cultural identity in North Wales today.

The roots of present-day associations between Welsh cultural identity ("Welshness") and choral singing can be traced back to the 19th century,[2]

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when nationalism swept across Wales and several distinctively Welsh musical activities developed. For example, *eisteddfodau* (singular *eisteddfod*), Welsh music and poetry competitions, were standardized at this time and a National Eisteddfod was formed (1861). These competitions included popular choral events and concerts. Another important 19th-century activity was the *gymanfa ganu* (plural *cymanfoedd canu*), a gathering in which people sing hymns in four-part harmony. Accompanying the eisteddfod and the gymanfa ganu across Wales was the popularity of Curwen's tonic sol-fa notation.[3] All of these musical developments coincided with the growth of community and company choirs, causing the conductor Griffith Rhys Jones to famously name Wales "the Land of Song" in 1877. Gareth Williams calls the period from 1870 to the First World War "the Golden Age" of choral singing in Wales (1998: 31, 144-5).

Although choral fervour dwindled during and after the World Wars (cf. Mari A. Williams 2000: 141), Welshness and choral singing continued to be associated throughout the 20th century. Welsh films from the 1940s through the 1980s often featured choirs, particularly all-male choirs (Berry 1994: 5, 11, 217, 244-5, 247), known in English in Wales as "Male Voice Choirs" or "MVCs."[4] References to Welshness and choral singing abound in popular media to the present. Consider, for example, the BBC comedy *Blackadder* from the 1980s (Season 3, episode 5):

> Blackadder: Have you ever been to Wales, Baldrick?
>
> Baldrick: No, but I've often thought I'd like to.
>
> Blackadder: Well don't. It's a ghastly place. Huge gangs of tough, sinewy men roam the valleys, terrifying people with their close-harmony singing …

Present-day tourism literature also continues to showcase Welsh MVCs and label Wales with the "Land of Song" moniker (see Parker and Whitfield 2000; Steves 2014).

When I was in North Wales in 2008 and 2009, programs featuring choirs were often on television, particularly on the Welsh channel, S4C. S4C covers the annual National Eisteddfod, which is consistently one of their most-watched broadcasts of the year (BBC Cymru/Wales). They also broadcast coverage of the International Eisteddfod, including the festival's finale, the "Choir of the World Competition." Other popular programs include the choir competition show *Côr Cymru*, held every two years since 2003, and *Dechrau Canu, Dechrau Canmol*, a hymn-singing program that is essentially a televised gymanfa ganu, on air since 1961.

One of the biggest choral programs in Britain was *Last Choir Standing*, a 16-episode competition on BBC 1 in 2008. The final show featured two Welsh choirs battling for the prize, catching the attention of 5.56 million viewers—a number that may represent a quarter of all British viewers for its time slot (Holmwood 2008). While it is true that this program followed on the heels of several other programs about choral singing in Britain, including BBC Radio 3's *Choir of the Year*, BBC 1's *Songs of Praise* (the English version of *Dechrau Canu, Dechrau Canmol*), and BBC 2's *The Choir*, it is notable that in this widely seen show, the top two choirs were Welsh. And given that the Welsh network so often shows programs about choirs, it is likely that television is strengthening connections between Welshness and choral singing for Welsh and non-Welsh people alike in the UK.[5]

The website *British Choirs on the Net* lists 2,734 British choirs that have websites and/or email contact information. It should be noted that these data are limited by the fact that only choirs that have websites or advertised email contacts are included. Nonetheless, the website shows that Wales currently has a higher number of choirs per capita (at least, appearing online) than either England or Scotland, and this difference is statistically significant.[6] It seems then that to the present day, Wales truly has had an abundance of choirs.

Historically, choirs have been associated specifically with the valleys of South Wales, and rightly so: choirs sprung up there at an astonishing rate during the 19th century and were fairly well documented (see Gareth Williams 1998, 2001). But there has also been a choral tradition in North Wales since that time, although there are fewer written records (cf. Owen 2009).[7] While choral singing does not belong exclusively to either North or South Wales, some singers in this research make strong regional distinctions when discussing Welshness, going so far as to imply a somewhat superior Welshness among the choirs of North Wales. It is unclear whether or not these distinctions are made because of the abundance of native Welsh speakers in North Wales or if other factors are involved.[8] However, participants in this study implied the latter by stressing that Welsh language ability was *not* what determined or defined Welshness.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that this article is based on research conducted solely among choral singers in North Wales, and their responses cannot be applied to other populations (e.g., singers in South Wales, or non-singers in any part of the country). Indeed, because of the individual nature of identity, it is both senseless and impossible to talk about Welshness as a singular concept, even within one region. Instead, this research aims to explain how both cognitive and sociohistorical factors might contribute to the creation of a cultural identity.

Theoretical Framework

Cultural identity is used here to describe perceived group membership through which a set of individuals share any number of cultural markers or signs. I am taking the basic definition of a sign from Charles Peirce, including a vehicle for meaning, what meaning/information is assigned to or accessed by that vehicle, and this process in the mind (see Buchler 1955). Individuals make associations, whether consciously or unconsciously, between chosen signs and perceptions of their own culture. Through similar personal experiences, they feel connected to others who share their signs. People vary in their efforts to create and develop a cultural identity (cf. Cohen 1997; Wallman 1998); and to some people, cultural identity is simply not a large part of how they see themselves. Moreover, certain signs may be ignored in favour of others, and in some cases, shared cultural signs may be minimal but fervently celebrated (cf. Barth 1998: 14). This process is individual- and context-specific (Johnstone 2011; cf. Wray et al. 2003), and as such, cultural identities vary, even among members of the same group. Furthermore, how those outside a group see those inside can also affect identity-creation.

Because cultural identity so often includes music and musical activities, identity studies abound in ethnomusicology (e.g., Waterman 1990; Sugarman 1999; Jones-Bamman 2006; and Román-Velázquez 2006). In 2010, Timothy Rice expressed his concerns over limitations in this research. Examining 16 articles about identity, he found that references to literature in ethnomusicology and theories about identity from other disciplines were both lacking. He specifically lamented the absence of theoretical discussion, and suggested that future work consider Thomas Turino's (1999) semiotic account of musical meaning (2010: 320, 322).

While it was never my intention to respond directly to Rice's criticisms, this paper does address some of his concerns. For example, I take from Turino the assertion that musical meaning is primarily indexical or associative (1999: 228; cf. Cross 2012: 322). But I have also found that theories from cognitive science illuminate much of the data I collected. I will briefly discuss my theoretical framework here, which offers suggestions as to how and why music and cultural identity are connected.

Research on musical meaning has often drawn from linguistics for theories and terminology (Nettl 1958; Bright 1963; Nattiez 1990; Agawu 1991). More recently, experimental work in cognitive science and psychology is broadening our understanding, suggesting that music's open-endedness allows for more personal interpretation (see Patel 2008, 2012 for an overview). As such, individual, episodic memories often contribute to musical meaning

(cf. Juslin and Västfjäll 2008).[9] When we also consider that music activates brain regions associated with emotion, and that it releases pleasure hormones (Menon and Levitin 2005), we can understand why music can be particularly powerful.

Many studies of meaning in music have focused on instrumental music in order to avoid the confounding variable of linguistic meaning (cf. Patel 2008; Rebuschat et al. 2012). However, for many people, it is song—i.e., music with words—that is most significant to their cultural identities. One of the trickiest questions Rice asks is how music differs from cultural expressions rooted in language (e.g., poetry) in contributing to cultural identity (2010: 323). Is music more or less meaningful because it generally has less precise meanings than language-based expressions? How do lyrics—as a combination of language and music—complicate this discussion?

We know that language is more tailored to retrieving specific knowledge, while music is less precise. However, we also know that both linguistic and non-linguistic information tap into the conceptual system, resulting in a rich tapestry of meaning—some very specific, some shared, some idiosyncratic and highly individual (cf. Evans 2007). In a series of experiments, Thompson and Russo (2004) found evidence for a powerful relationship between music and lyrics. They found that music enhances the emotional quality of lyrics, that familiar lyrics are rated as more meaningful when sung as opposed to being spoken, and that repeated exposure to a song increases the perceived meaningfulness of the lyrics (2004: 59-61). Song combines the affective, unspecified, and associative nature of music with the layers of meaning afforded by language. Thus, by combining music and language, we may be giving the words more room for personal interpretation (cf. Cross 2012: 325).

But the nebulousness of the words themselves may also provide less specific guidance toward meaning, because poetry—like music—accesses the conceptual system in less conventionalized ways. This also leaves more room for novel interpretation, drawn perhaps from individual experience (cf. Coulson and Oakley 2005; Turner 2006). As such, it may be that lyrics allow for the accessing of a greater range of associations than that afforded by typical written or spoken language. But even when lyrics are less abstract, the role of episodic memory in musical meaning can still give the words a highly personal meaningfulness.

Because cultural contexts can further guide musical meaning, and since music can be a basis for affiliation (cf. Cross 2012: 321), it is no surprise that music is so ubiquitous in cultural identities worldwide. In 2009, Lerner et al. found that the amygdala, which has an important role in emotional memory (Piore 2012: 42) and in establishing the emotional context of sounds, is more

activated by music when the music is combined with film and also when the participants' eyes are closed. Perhaps the combination of visual cues and music—or in the case of closed eyes, the combination of *imagined* visual cues and music—allows for a richer network of associations. This might explain in part how and why songs are so meaningful in specific contexts.

But it is not just song that gets associated with cultural identity. In the case of the identities discussed here, choral membership is also seen as a sign of Welshness. How do such phenomena get linked to a particular culture? Cognition research shows us that whatever gets jointly attended to in experience—in this case, Welshness and choral singing—becomes linked in memory (Pacton and Perruchet 2008). We know that these links occur at the neural level. That is, concepts that are jointly activated can become linked together via connections between the neurons supporting these concepts (see Koch 2004). The popular idiom "neurons that fire together, wire together" succinctly explains this process (see Klein 1999). Concepts become wired together and form a unit or network. For example, neurobiologist and consciousness researcher Christof Koch explains that a neuron fired when presented with "Bill Clinton" excites cells that represent the concepts of "presidency" and "the White House," which are also linked to neurons that recall his distinctive voice (2004: 241).

Over time, repeated associations give rise to a richer network and, importantly, create a subjective experience of something that is coherently meaningful, although perhaps difficult to describe due to its eclectic nature. Nevertheless, bigger, more varied networks provide more information for meaning creation. Therefore, the more associations one makes, the richer the conceptual network will be, resulting in more meaningfulness. Koch writes: "This implies that a brain with more explicit representations for sensory stimuli or concepts has the potential for a richer web of associations and more meaningful qualia than a brain with fewer explicit representations" (2004: 241). This process of building associations is not only important for understanding the meaningfulness of music, but it may also explain why the data in this study show significant differences between adult and youth Welshness. Through experience, networks grow increasingly varied and richer. Therefore, it follows that the adults would have larger and more varied networks—and thus, a more developed sense of meaningfulness—for the concept "Welshness." Such a concept can also be described as a cognitive model (cf. Evans 2007). Casting Welshness as a cognitive model suggests that it is an abstraction that emerges from a body of knowledge largely dependent on personal experiences. As such, its meaningfulness is dependent upon concepts that have been bundled together for that given individual.

Adults' perceptions of Welshness in North Wales—as I observed them—are also consistent with prototype effects. Prototype Theory stipulates that our understanding of a concept is constrained by the fact that we perceive some members of a category as more representative of that category than others within it (Lakoff 1987: 41-44; cf. Rosch 1975). For example, cognitive psychologist Eleanor Rosch found in one of her early experiments (1975) that participants rated robins and sparrows as better examples of the category "bird" than flamingos or emus or penguins, even though these all belong equally, in principle, to the same category.

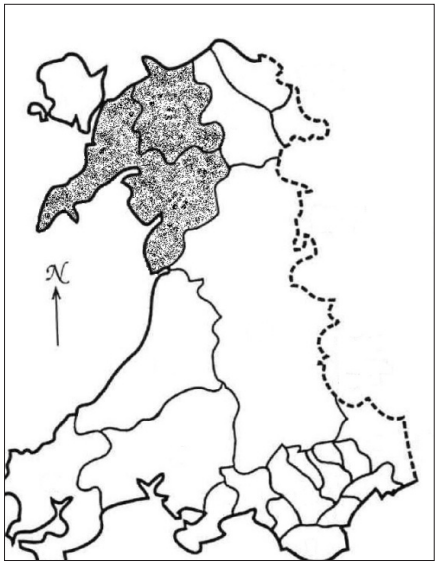

Fig. 1. Primary fieldwork location for the present research. Map of Welsh counties used with permission, courtesy of Gareth Hicks.

In the present study, I found that cultural identity is also perceived in such a way. Certain cultural signs (e.g., choral singing) and even individual people are seen as better exemplars of Welshness than others. This is in line with previous research I conducted on an Italian-American community in Northeast Ohio (Johnstone 2011), where participants also made graded distinctions about cultural identities: people were described to me as being "really," "very" or "strongly" Italian. In the present research, this identity-by-degree manifested itself as soon as interviews began; interviewees described certain people as being "more Welsh" than others, and certain cultural traits seem to be viewed in the same light.

Data Collection

Research for this study was conducted in 2008 and 2009 in North Wales. Data collection included observation, interviews, conversations and participation at various choir rehearsals and concerts. Fieldwork was concentrated in Gwynedd and Conwy counties, with additional choirs from Anglesey, Denbighshire and Ceredigion also participating. A map showing the area in which this fieldwork was conducted (shaded region) appears in Fig. 1.

Within this body of data, there are two primary sources of information: interviews with men, women and teens from three different choirs, and questionnaires completed by members of these choirs and six others. In all, I collected 85 questionnaires and conducted 50 interviews. Youth participants ranged in age from 14 to 18, while women were primarily in their forties and fifties, although I do not have exact age information for many of them. The men were the oldest, with an average age of 62.3.

There are caveats in this research. Obviously, one cannot wholly understand models of Welshness using participants' explanations—especially when so many of their answers seemed to suggest that Welshness is ineffable. Traditional methods of discussion fall short of differentiating between what is in an individual's mind and his/her articulation of these things (cf. Feinberg and Genz 2012; Hamrick and Rebuschat 2014).

One of the other potential problems is my role as the researcher. I found that older male singers were eager to talk, while my efforts among the female adults were much less fruitful. Moreover, some people's perception of me and the project notably changed when my husband was introduced into a fieldwork situation. For example, there were women who were less receptive to me before they found out I was married (I do not wear a ring or other outward symbol of my marital status). As such, I suspect that my ability to collect data would have been different if I were male, and I believe it would have been somewhat more limited if I were a single female alone in Wales.

However, I do not think that gender provided a barrier to my research with the teenagers. Instead, a combination of age, language and origin were factors that may have made the participants apprehensive. For example, my inquiries initiated the use of English, which otherwise is rarely part of their rehearsals. I was also older than them, but not as old as their directors. And perhaps most notably, the fact that I am an American may have made them hesitant to talk with me, simply because Americans rarely come to this rural part of Wales.

Most of the adult participants, on the other hand, seemed to be rather excited about having an American visitor. The director introduced me in English and all participants spoke with me in English. However, most were native Welsh speakers. And although I did study Welsh that year out of respect and interest, I certainly did not achieve the fluency needed to use it in regular conversation, and the short period I lived in Wales would not have afforded me the time needed to learn Welsh well enough to conduct fieldwork in it anyway. Nonetheless, the fact that I cannot speak Welsh may be considered a detriment to my overall observational abilities.

Despite these limitations, I wanted to get participants talking about being Welsh in order to look for patterns in how people discuss their own cultural identity. After several adults said to me: "That guy is *really* Welsh," and "Well, we're one of the most Welsh choirs in North Wales," I began to respond with: "Are some people more Welsh than others?" One major caveat is that by asking them this question, I might have inadvertently encouraged them to think of Welshness as a graded concept. Moreover, individuals' concepts of Welshness might be so bound up with certain salient factors (language, for instance) that they do not even realize why they think about Welshness in the way that they do. However, it is notable that many participants made these comments without any prompting from me. Furthermore, many also specified that salient factors (e.g., language) are *not* what make someone Welsh. Through these conversations, specific signs of Welshness—and their importance—emerged through distinctive patterns in the data, which show differences by age and gender.

Results and Discussion: Age Differences

Potential prototype effects were related to the age of the participants: only adults seem to have a graded sense of Welshness. 95% of adult participants said that some people are more Welsh than others, and most added an emphatic qualifier, such as "Absolutely!" and "Without a doubt!" The teens, on the other hand, were much more inclusive. When asked if some people are more Welsh than others, they all seemed baffled by the question. The majority said "No" with just as much emphasis as the adults had said "Yes." In all, 59% of the teenagers said "No," and 41% said "Maybe." Teen responses included: "That doesn't even make sense!" and "No … no … it's not competitive."

There is empirical evidence for age-related prototype effects (Blewitt and Durkin 1982; Glass et al. 2012), but differences in methods complicate the application of those studies to my interpretations here. Why then are the teens in this research so much more inclusive than the adults when it comes to Welshness? This might be explained by the theories of cognition presented earlier in this paper. Being younger, the teens have had fewer opportunities to make associations between signs and a sense of Welshness. A less explicit Welshness may be responsible for statements like: "Well, we're all Welsh." I am reminded of one teenager in particular who, when asked if some people are more Welsh than others, sharply said, "No! I've *never* thought about that!" Perhaps considering what it means to be Welsh is less common for younger people, or it may not be something they can or will articulate. In any case,

gradations do not appear to be part of their concepts of Welshness.

While the data support these cognitive explanations, they are inconclusive; sociohistorical factors may also explain the differences between adult and teen Welshness. For instance, the teens are much more isolated than the adults. Take for example a salient sign of Welshness like language. Even though Welsh is a minority language in Wales, with only 21% of the population able to speak it, it would not seem so in the Bangor area where the teens live. While the adults have had a lifetime of living and working among people who do not share common signs (e.g., their native language), the teens are surrounded by fellow Welsh speakers in an extremely rural corner of the country.

In addition to their isolation, the teens' place in history also contributes to there being little or no need for them to be defensive about their identity. They were born after the civil campaigns to gain notoriety for Welsh distinctiveness. While many of these campaigns fought for official status for the Welsh language, there were others as well, including legislation to slow the influx of non-Welsh—mostly English—people into North Wales by limiting rights to buy property.[10] For the entirety of their lives, the teens have known Welsh-language radio, television and road signs, in addition to laws ensuring that the Welsh language is compulsory in all schools. While the adults fought for their distinctiveness during decades of Anglicization, the teens inherited the benefits and comforts that came from this struggle. It is not surprising then that they might have a less fervent sense of Welshness.

The adults did attempt to explain the reasons for their exclusiveness. However, many had trouble articulating why some people are more Welsh than others, even though they were certain that this is true. Language ability was mentioned as a sign of Welshness by some adult male singers, but in each case, the singer said explicitly that it is not the only factor in making someone more Welsh than someone else. Also notable is that just as many men did not mention language at all, and one said that choirs in South Wales were less Welsh than those from North Wales even though the former sing in Welsh; this may imply that there is a geographical distinction *despite* language ability.

The women were unanimous in their conviction that some people are more Welsh than others. Several suggested that Welshness is bound up with musicality, including musical training from a young age, high performance standards and growing up with the choral tradition. As with the men, female singers asserted that Welshness is definitely determined by more than just Welsh language ability. Adult singers in this research conclude that language alone cannot determine one's degree of Welshness; nevertheless, just how much of a factor language actually is remains unclear.

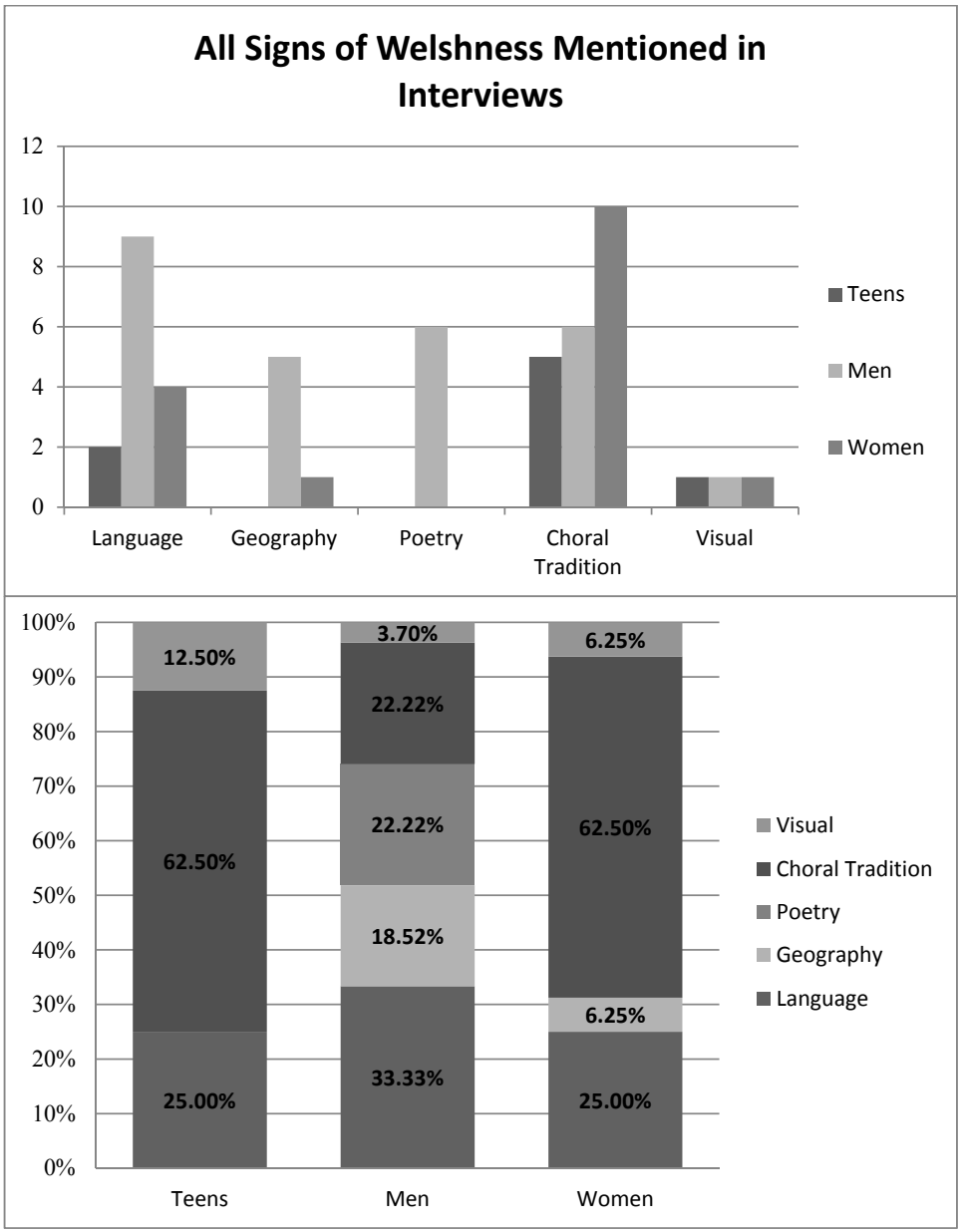

Fig 2. These charts show any and all Welshness markers mentioned by interviewees, in raw numbers (top) and by percentages (bottom). Choral singing was mentioned the most overall across all groups, and it made up the majority of the signs mentioned by the teens and the women. The teens are the youngest group, followed by the women, who are middle-aged; the men are the oldest (most are over age 60). Both quantity and variety of signs increased with the age of the participants.

What is most immediately obvious among the teens' responses is that despite sharing Northernness, and Welsh as a native language, with the adults, their Welshness is markedly different. For one, the majority of teenage singers do not think it is even possible for someone to be more Welsh than another. It is also notable that even the teens who did answer affirmatively said so hesitantly, and all included lengthy explanations in which they hedged their opinion. Several shook their heads no, and/or otherwise showed signs of being unsure before slowly saying things like: "Um … I don't know … I guess?" Therefore, although the latter were counted in the affirmative, the fact that these were so uncertain is important.

The other notable distinction between the adults and teens concerns both the quantity and variety of Welsh signs mentioned in interviews. The teenagers expressed few distinctive markers of Welshness (cf. Scourfield et al. 2006). On the contrary, the men—who were the oldest participants—expressed the most and greatest variety of signs. The women expressed more signs than the teens, but fewer than the men. As such, the quantity and variety of signs appears to increase with the age of the participants (Fig. 2).

Once again, with experience and the building of a concept or cognitive model for Welshness, it follows that adults would have more markers in mind, the so-called "explicit representations" that give rise to "more meaningful qualia" or awareness of the concept, as explained by Koch above (2004: 241). But, as with the issue of exclusiveness versus inclusiveness, there are sociohistorical factors that may also explain the abundance of cultural signs among the men's responses, beyond their age and potentially richer cognitive models. First, as members of the stereotypical Welsh choir type, the men might be more reflective about distinctiveness beyond just choral singing; in other words, they might take choral singing for granted (an "of course I sing in a choir; that's just what Welsh men do" mentality). This may cause them to spend time thinking about what *other* signs—besides choral singing—make a person Welsh. Second, the men are convinced that the MVC is a dying institution (a point I will discuss later in this paper). It may be that perceiving the potential demise of Male Voice Choirs has caused them to think about what other signs they have to signify their own distinctiveness.

Beyond these discussions of Welshness, I wanted to determine how specific music might be involved in these identities. When I asked participants to choose one song that best represents their own Welsh identity, I fully expected an enormous variety of songs; however, my goal was to look for patterns. In order to code these data, I labelled the songs based on lyrical content, because of lyrics' strength in guiding musical meaning (although this is not the whole picture, of course). I found that all of the chosen songs fit into

one of the following four categories: 1. nationalistic—in this case, there are specific references made to the Welsh language and/or Welsh landscape in the lyrics; 2. religious; 3. nationalist and religious combined; and 4. traditional love songs. The results show that songs as signs of Welshness also demonstrate differences based on age of the listener.

In fact, a statistical test called an analysis of variance, or ANOVA, was run on these data in order to see whether the differences in the types of songs chosen across groups were significant. The results of the ANOVA showed a main effect of age on song type, indicating that the different age groups did differ significantly in the types of songs they chose.[11] This implies that even with all other factors—gender, birthplace, language abilities—removed or held constant, there are significant differences between participants of different ages in the types of songs they chose. The results are presented in Fig. 3.

The reasons why songs were chosen also revealed reliable differences based on song type, suggesting that lyrical content and the Welsh language are

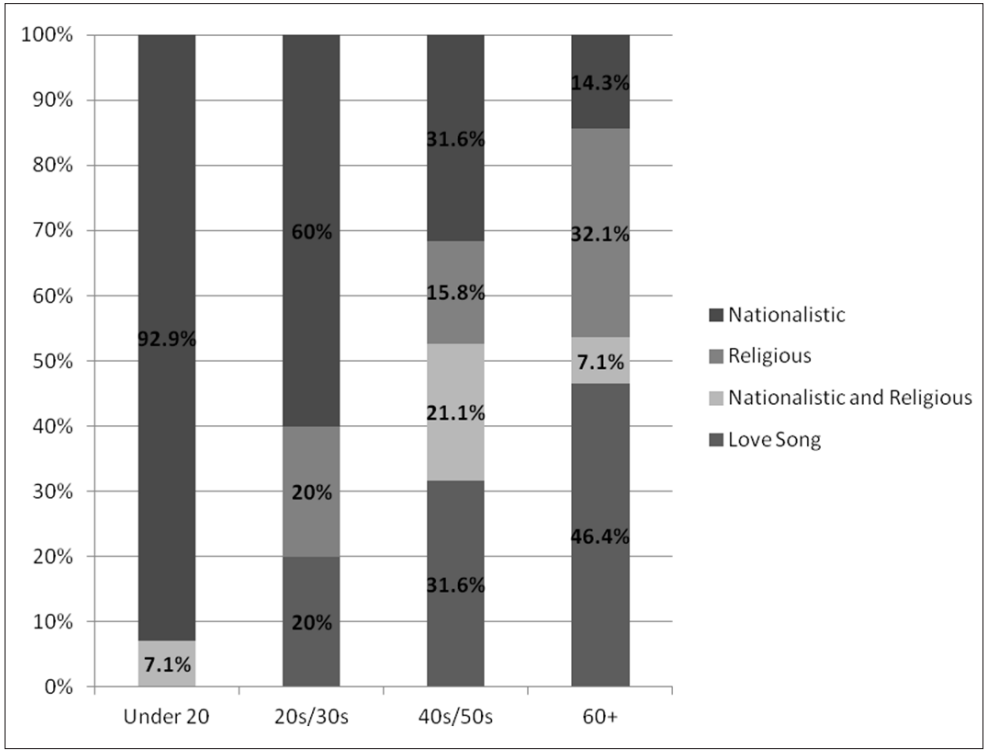

Fig. 3. All songs chosen as signs of Welshness, by song type and percentage for each age group. Nationalistic songs decreased as age increased.

important for religious or nationalistic songs, but not so much for love songs. More specifically, the importance of lyrical content and the importance of the language of the lyrics appear to selectively co-occur with preferences for nationalistic and religious songs, while preferences for love songs seem to be more associated with other factors.

For these data, another statistical test, Kendall's tau, was used. Kendall's tau tests for reliable associations between variables or factors; that is, it examines two variables to determine if they reliably co-occur and change in tandem with one another. The Kendall's tau showed no correlations between the choice of love songs and reasons "lyrical content" or "language of the lyrics" on the questionnaire. However, lyrical content and the language of the lyrics *did* correlate with the choice of nationalistic and religious songs. This suggests that when singers chose nationalistic and religious songs as signs of Welshness, they were most likely doing so because of the message in the lyrics, with the use of the Welsh language possibly imbuing these lyrics with additional Welshness.

It was the oldest group of participants who most often chose love songs; these were 19th-century traditional songs—e.g., Joseph Parry's "Myfanwy"—the lyrics of which have no overt references to anything about Welsh identity. Presumably, these particular songs have been associated with Welshness over a lifetime of repeated experiences. The teens, on the other hand, seemed to choose the "obvious" songs, most often the national anthem of Wales, "Hen Wlad fy Nhadau." Since they have less experience making associations and building Welsh identity (i.e., they may have rarely, if ever, thought about Welshness and any connections it might have to certain songs), it would follow that the teens would pick songs that have contextually determined or nationally agreed-upon meanings.

Song meaning is still affected by personal experiences; even so-called "highly coded" songs (Griffiths, lecture, October 15, 2008) would be subject to individual interpretations. Nevertheless, the lyrics in "Hen Wlad fy Nhadau" concerning language vitality and the song's specific role as a national anthem are notable. Also notable is the fact that half of all teens added Dafydd Iwan's 1983 song "Yma O Hyd" ("Here Still") as a second or third choice after the national anthem. Like the national anthem, Iwan's lyrics celebrate Welsh distinctiveness and preservation of the language. It is unclear whether or not these choices are due to the overt references to Welsh distinctiveness, the fact that the lyrics directly refer to the language itself (the lyrics are not only *in* Welsh, they are *about* Welsh too), or some other factor. However, the teens who chose these songs also stressed that the ability to speak Welsh does not define Welshness: they stated that they consider non-Welsh speakers to be just as Welsh as themselves.

The teens' inclusiveness may at first seem to be at odds with their highly nationalistic—and thus, possibly exclusive—song choices. However, these data are consistent with experiments conducted by Scourfield and Davies (2005), who looked at issues of race among children aged 8-11 in Wales, a country that the 2001 census indicates is 97.9% white. Scourfield and Davies found that Welsh children's concepts of Welshness were inclusive, with children making statements like "We're all the same on the inside"; however, these kids framed their inclusiveness with "traditional and exclusive discourse" (2005: 103). In other words, the children used traditional, even stereotypical, signs of Welshness in their descriptions of identity. For example, when describing a black child in Wales, the children viewed him as being just as Welsh as any other child, *if* he played rugby, spoke Welsh, or had a Welsh-sounding name (2005: 103). Like the children in Scourfield and Davies, the teens in this research chose traditional and exclusive markers (in this case, songs) of Welshness, despite otherwise seeing Welshness as being inclusive. It is possible that having less developed concepts of Welshness explains these results.

Results and Discussion: Gender and the Glamorization of Welsh Choirs

In addition to differences based on age, there were also notable distinctions by gender. For example, all singers listed "friendship" as an impetus for joining their choir; however, women also named "musical opportunities" nearly as often. This answer was barely present in the men's responses. This may reflect the few opportunities Welsh women have—at least, compared to Welsh men—to sing in a choir in North Wales. I am reminded specifically of one of my visits with a group of adult female singers. One explained that MVCs have far more opportunities, including travel opportunities, "even if they aren't good choirs." These singers suggested to me that women's roles in Welsh musical traditions have been underestimated and underappreciated.

There are several potential factors that contributed to the historical dominance of MVCs.[12] In the 19th century, women lacked both the numbers and the free time to be a bigger part of the burgeoning competitive choir tradition (cf. Gareth Williams 2001: 153). Women were also more often the ones who left home to find work abroad (Mari A. Williams 2000: 174). For instance, it was estimated that by 1931, over 10,000 girls from South Wales were working as domestic servants in London. The Ministry of Labour confirms that twice the number of females as males, aged 14-18, left for England between 1930 and 1934 (Mari A. Williams 2000: 174). Beyond the

limitations of their gender roles, Welsh women were also up against great discrimination. In a now-infamous incident from 1847 called the "Treachery (or Treason) of the Blue Books" (government reports had blue covers), English commissioners berated the moral character of Welsh people, criticizing Welsh women in particular (Beddoe 1986: 230-1, 234; Kreider 2002: 25). But it was not just English men who berated Welsh women. In Wales, women were blamed for the demise of the Welsh language (see Mari A. Williams 2000: 145-149, 170-172) and notably for this research, the diminishing quality of Welsh singing (see David Jenkins 1899 in Gareth Williams 1998: 167-8). Deirdre Beddoe sums up women's invisibility in traditional views of Welsh identity, claiming that Welshness is based solely on male groups: rugby players, miners and all-male choirs (Beddoe 1986: 227).

In addition to a feeling of being overlooked among Welsh female singers, there appears to be a gender difference in how North Wales singers view the vitality of the choral institution. It was the men in this research who were negative about the future of Welsh choral singing, and the sentiment that the MVC in particular may soon be gone is one that is echoed in popular media as well. This might be because the form, and potentially the function, of the MVC has changed quite drastically from the choral institution's early days (cf. Gareth Williams 2001). MVC singers are no longer young workers from a common industry, singing in fierce competition.[13] Even more disconcerting to most people is the fact that today's MVCs have a much more elderly membership now than they did in the past (cf. Gareth Williams 2001), and aging is often cited as evidence of an impending doom for this choir type.[14] MVCs are now, more often than not, groups of retired men who gather weekly to sing because choir serves as a domain for socializing.

Early in the history of choirs, singers socialized at church events. By contrast, choir was strongly competitive (Trystan Lewis, interview, May 15, 2009). In fact, many choirs formed just for eisteddfodau, and then disbanded immediately afterward (interview, May 15, 2009; Gareth Williams 1998: 148; Owen 2009). I would argue that these choirs demonstrate that camaraderie was not their primary goal, or would they not have rehearsed all year anyway to enjoy each other's company? Although it is unclear just how important socializing was to these earlier choirs, it is extremely important to MVCs today.

While nearly all the men expressed concerns about MVCs disappearing, only two women saw any decline in interest, and both were also convinced that a choral resurgence was in the works. These views might be more affected by age than gender (e.g., the men's negativity might be related to their age, rather than the fact that they are male). The only teen who was concerned

about the future of Welsh singing was a male; however, that is far too small a sample to make any certain claims that gender, and not also age, affects how singers see the vitality of the institution. Beyond the choir members themselves, there are many expressing concern over the future of MVCs; I have seen several examples in the media while in Wales and since I returned home (Rogers 2011; "What future for Welsh male voice choirs?" 2008; and Herbert 2000 represent just a small sample).

However, one of the things that emerged from this research is that fears about the demise of the Welsh MVC in North Wales may be unfounded. Many new MVCs have been established in North Wales over the past 40-45 years. In fact, 67% of the MVCs who were part of the concert series at which I conducted my fieldwork have only been in existence since 1970. And of all North Wales MVCs in existence today (45 total choirs), nearly half have only been around since the 1970s or later, with another 38% in existence since the 1950s and/or 1960s; only a mere 13% existed before 1950 (see Owen 2009).

Because records of choirs in North Wales are sparse, I cannot include an accurate comparison of whether or not there are more or fewer choirs now than at any specific time in the past. However, new choirs forming over the past 40-45 years might demonstrate a recent positive, rather than negative, change. As such, the MVC tradition in North Wales might be expanding rather than shrinking. Specifically, ten MVCs formed in North Wales the 1970s, seven in the 1980s, four in the 1990s, and only one in 2000 (see Owen 2009). While it is true that MVCs are not currently forming at their previous pace, it may simply be that there are not enough "MVC-aged" men to populate any additional choirs, and there are too many choirs to allow for any one choir to have a large number of participants (Trystan Lewis, interview, May 15, 2009). Lewis noted that in 2006, people were hoping Fron Male Voice Choir would inspire young men to join MVCs because of their successful EMI recording, but this just did not materialize (cf. Herbert 2000). He also explained how 30 years ago, conductors lamented that MVCs would not exist in 30 years' time; yet in North Wales today, there are a multitude of choirs in quite a small geographic area (interview, May 15, 2009).

Lewis, who was in his early thirties at the time of this research, said: "When I started conducting the MVC, I had something like six or seven young men, the same age as me. And they dwindled just because of course they had more work responsibility, engaged, got married, had children, etc., and they just couldn't give the commitment. And that's basically it" (interview, May 15, 2009). Other members of Lewis' MVC also supported this view, telling me that young men "always" leave choral singing in their twenties and thirties; they themselves did the same, returning to choir upon their retirement. Now

that MVCs are no longer the result of co-workers joining together, and since other social outlets are available to working-age men, MVCs will most likely remain the domain of retired men, occasionally accompanied by a few older teens/young adults. However, this does not necessarily mean that MVCs will disappear. As new generations reach retirement age, it is likely that they will continue to populate MVCs in North Wales. As such, it is more accurate to say that MVCs are aging but not dying out.

Related to this concern over MVCs fading away is a distinction some of the men made between professional and amateur choirs in Wales. Such distinctions were not found among the women's responses. In talking about one choir in particular, several men used terms like "contrived," "professional" and "elite," while the women emphasized the fact that the choir's members are Welsh, which in their opinion helps to show the strength and variety of Welsh vocal prowess. To some of the men, a growing professionalism is contributing to the demise of community MVCs.[15]

The amateur-professional distinction was not articulated by any of the teens. However, the history of their choir includes contention over this distinction. Co-founder Cefin Roberts explained common reactions he encountered when he first established the choir: "We don't need this professionalism in Wales—it's always been an amateur thing. Why should children pay to learn to sing and dance?" (interview, June 21, 2009). Interestingly, although the teens pay tuition, they are not required to audition. Thus, unlike the MVC I interviewed, this group does not exclude singers on the basis of ability.

Notably, the teens' reasons for joining choir were the most varied of all groups, and suggested an interest in the more glamorous aspects of choral membership. While friendship was the most common response (as it was with the adults), the teens' responses also often included "travel opportunities" and "performing opportunities." Specific explanations such as: "My brother was in [the choir] too, and he got to go to London and everywhere to perform and I wanted to do that too," and "… performing is such a buzz—an adrenaline rush!" show that the teenagers see choir as providing more than just a domain for socializing.

For the teens, choir is offering a more glamorous style of choral singing, part of which includes the addition of choreography to performances. The teen choir's choreography is to be expected given that their director has an extensive music theatre background. However, I also observed choreography during 2009's *Côr Cymru*, as well as at the St. John's Concert Series (October 2008) and the North Wales Choral Festival (Novemeber 2008) in Llandudno, even among MVCs with the oldest members (cf. Owen 2009: 94). Like other

conductors I spoke with, Only Men Aloud's Tim Rhys-Evans emphasizes the quality of the singing above all else, but he does see choreography increasingly becoming an important part of the Welsh choral institution. After talking about all the aspects of choral singing that he is passionate about—the text, the arrangements, color, the voices—he added: "… but having said that, I know we could sing the most wonderful Mendelssohn motet, with stunning variety of color and attention to German and we'll get polite applause from an audience, but we kick our legs and they go crazy!" (interview, May 6, 2009). Conductor Trystan Lewis corroborated the increased use of choreography in Welsh singing, although he has no interest in it for his own MVC (interview, May 15, 2009). Buddug Roberts, director of North Wales MVC Côr Meibion Dwyfor says of his choir's choreography: "It can be a bit of a disaster, with some members going one way, some the other and bumping into each other!" (qtd. in Owen 2009: 94).

One could argue that as more and more choirs adopt the use of choreography, the Welsh choir institution is being reinterpreted (cf. Herskovits 1948, 1951; Kazadi wa Mukuna 1990) by musicians who incorporate a "show choir" image. Undoubtedly, this process is fueled by the need for entertainers in the Welsh-language industry, created and sustained in part by S4C. The result is a relatively new form for Welsh choirs, and for some men, it seems to be perceived as a threat to traditional community choral singing.

In my fieldwork, there were five male teenagers who discussed with me their interest in future choral membership. Two were interested in MVCs, and a third was undecided between joining a Mixed or MVC in the future. Of the other two, one said he would join a Mixed, and the other a Gospel choir. All eight girls who specified what type of choir they would join in the future chose Mixed and not Ladies. These responses suggest that Mixed choirs may someday be the most common and most popular of the Welsh choirs. Formal training and the desire to sing classical and/or more varied repertoire might also affect this.

Conclusions and Areas for Future Research

Continuing to keep track of the number and types of choirs in Wales, and also the absence or presence of choreography in performances, will show how the changes discussed here might affect this treasured Welsh institution into the coming decades. Although difficult, it would be advantageous to talk to the teens again in their adulthood to determine whether their perceptions of Welshness change in a predictable way over time; i.e., will they begin to see

some people as "more Welsh" than others, and will they talk about the things that make someone so, as this generation of adults does? This work could also be replicated in South Wales to determine regional distinctions in associations between Welshness and choral singing.

For now, my research has shifted to North America, focusing on those who see Welshness as a part of their cultural identity. This is part of my work on what I call "Blank-American" identity, in which individuals fill in the "Blank-" with the culture of their immigrant ancestors (e.g., Welsh-American). Notably for this discussion, North American adults, like the adults in Wales, chose non-nationalistic songs as signs of Welshness. They also see some people as being "more Welsh" than others, and seem to have prototypes for Welsh signs too. However, it is unclear if these data are related to age or other factors. For example, it is possible that factors such as having mixed ancestry, and the volitional and often fervent nature of Blank-American identity might cause people to see identity as a graded concept (thus allowing some people to be "more" Blank-American than others). Indeed, the most often cited reason North Americans gave for someone being more Welsh than someone else was not ancestry, language fluency, or the like; it was enthusiasm for the culture (cf. Wray et al., 2003). My ongoing research investigates these issues.

The present paper reveals continued associations between Welshness and choral singing in North Wales. It also suggests ways in which Welshness might be explained by broader theories of cognition, particularly with regard to aging. Older people show evidence of having more extensive, explicit cognitive models of Welshness, as the age groups in this research reliably differed in both the quantity and variety of recognized markers of identity. Older individuals also seem to have prototypes for Welshness: they see Welshness as a graded concept, and view some people as better examples than others. Songs as signs appear to be based on the experience of making associations over time; the most obvious choices (e.g., nationalistic songs) diminish in importance/as markers consistently as the age of the participant increases.

This research also shows how sociohistorical factors potentially affect Welshness. Men tend to distinguish between amateur and professional choirs; they also see the institution declining, presumably as a result of its changing form. On the other hand, women and teens (the latter being primarily female), see a resurgence in the popularity of Welsh choral singing. This might be explained in part by the abundance of Mixed choirs appearing in the media. Particularly notable for this discussion is the fact that the women in this research chose choral singing as a sign of Welshness more than any other

marker. And yet, by their own accounts, their place in the choral institution has been largely overlooked. As such, they feel marginalized by the very thing that for them best represents their own culture.

Finally, the teens' lack of definition and defensiveness of their cultural identity may also be explained in part by the fact that they are surrounded by others who share their cultural signs (e.g., language), and because they have not had to defend their distinctiveness, thanks to victories won by earlier generations. Likewise, the oldest participants may have such rich and varied concepts of Welshness because of the unique circumstance of being in a Male Voice Choir. I suspect these sociohistorical factors work in tandem with the cognitive ones to produce the results in this research.

Despite the limitations outlined earlier, the data presented here provide insights into perceptions of Welshness and choral singing across age and gender groups in North Wales.[16] This study addresses gaps in the literature concerning Welsh music and identity (cf. Williams 1998; Hill 2007), and importantly, helps to fulfill the need for theoretical discussion and interdisciplinary work on music and identity (cf. Rice 2010). The theories outlined here provide possible explanations for why patterns in the data exist. And although this research focuses on just a small community of singers in North Wales, the aim of this paper, ultimately, is—as Suzel Ana Reily suggests—"to contribute one small piece of the massive global puzzle" (2010: 332) concerning music, meaningfulness and cultural identity.

Notes

I would like to thank all of the Welsh singers and conductors who made this research possible, especially Trystan Lewis, Cefin and Rhian Roberts, Tim Rhys-Evans and the following choirs: Côr Meibion Maelgwn, Côr Meibion Llanrwst Ar Cylch, Côr Meibion y Penrhyn, Côr Meibion y Foel, Côr Meibion Dinbych A'r Cylch , Côr Cymysg Dyffryn Conwy, Côr Glanaethwy, Côr Merched Bro Nest, Côr Ieuenctid Môn and Only Men Aloud. A special thanks to those who became our family in Wales: Hugh, Betty, Colin, Julie, Paul, Cathy, John and the Bangor Rotary. And for their input on the project, thank you also to Kazadi wa Mukuna, Tom Janson, Denise Seachrist, Richard Feinberg, Heather Sparling, two anonymous reviewers, Caroline Lucas, Jenny Daniels, Kent State's ethnomusicology department, members of the Image, Music, Identity conference in Nottingham (2009) and members of SEM in Indianapolis (2013). Finally, a special thanks to Phillip Hamrick, whose inspiration, knowledge, and editing made this a better paper.

1. While I recognize that "sex" would be the more accurate term, I chose "gender" for its conventionalized meaning, i.e., male and female; however, sexual

orientations/identities were not discussed in this project. I also wanted to emphasize social constructs, in particular those that have caused females in Wales to feel relatively overlooked in the choral institution compared to men.

2. There may be some evidence that the two were being linked as far back as the 12th century: Gerald of Wales implied that Welsh distinctiveness could be defined in part by a predilection for singing (see Burstyn 1986: 162). However, his descriptions are the subject of debate. Shai Burstyn provides an overview of Gerald of Wales and an argument in support of his credibility (1986: 155-169); cf. Gareth Williams (1998: 24-25) for an opposing view. *Eisteddfodau* (Welsh music and poetry competitions) were also first recorded in the twelfth century (Blyn-Ladrew 1998: 226).

3. Developed by John Curwen and known as "sol-fa" or "tonic sol-fa" in North Wales, this notation uses no staves or classical European notes, but instead solfege syllables to indicate pitches, and lines and dots to indicate rhythms. Eleazer Roberts is often credited with introducing it to Wales in the mid-to late-19th century (Gareth Williams 1998: 25-6). The various spellings of gymanfa ganu are due to mutations found in the Welsh language; see Hughes 2000. There is some debate as to when and where the first gymanfa ganu took place, either in Aberystwyth in 1830 or in Aberdare in 1859. However, what is certain is that they were regularly held in the second half of the nineteenth century and they were popular social events (Gareth Williams 1998: 24).

4. Welsh all-male choirs are called *Côr Meibion (côr* is Welsh "choir," *meibion* "male") followed by their town name or some other geographic marker. In Wales, when any of these are translated into English, the phrase "Male Voice Choir" is used. For example, "Côr Meibion Maelgwn" is rendered "Maelgwn Male Voice Choir." Côr Meibion was used for 20 years before the English translation "Male Voice Choir" first appeared in *The Musical Times* in 1882 (Gareth Williams 1998: 185). Other choir types in Wales are known in English as Mixed (male and female adults), Youth or Children's (also mixed-sex), and Ladies (all female).

5. When Welsh transmitters were switched from analog to digital in March 2010, S4C became an all-Welsh language channel; as such it no longer carries several of its former programs. It remains to be seen how this will affect its future ratings and influence. S4C is consistently watched and considered an important means of protecting the Welsh language (cf. Evans 2010; S4C Welsh Affairs Committee 2011). The station also remains a rallying point for Welsh Nationalists; see Griffiths 2011; "Pressure Group …" 2010; Shipton 2011; "Future of S4C under threat …" 2011. Nevertheless, it is true that singing shows are popular in Britain outside of Wales, too (see ITV's *Britain's Got Talent* or BBC's *The Choir*), and it seems that a "singing craze" has also hit the American media: e.g., NBC's *America's Got Talent*, *The Voice*, *The Sing-Off* and Fox's *American Idol* and *Glee*. Obviously, choral singing—all-male and mixed-sex—is a widespread phenomenon and not exclusive to Wales (e.g., see German Männerchor or South African Mbube). However, as this paper shows, it is often chosen by Welsh identity-creators as a marker of distinctiveness.

6. The per capita numbers are as follows: Scotland: 0.0000247 choir/person, England: 0.0000494, and Wales: 0.0000623. The proportions of choirs in Wales, England, and Scotland are significantly different from one another ($\chi 2(2) = 16.058$, $p < .001$). This indicates that the proportion of choirs is significantly higher in Wales than in England or Scotland when total population size is considered. I am grateful to David Johnstone and Phillip Hamrick (personal communication) for running these statistics.

7. See M.O. Jones (NLW MSS 4381B, pp. 12-13 in Gareth Williams 1998: 122). Meurig Owen's oral histories (2009) reveal many stories of former choirs in North Wales with little or no written documentation. According to Tŷ Cerdd (http://www.tycerdd.org/societies-directory/societies-directory), there appear to be more choirs in the South than in the North today. However, without controlling for population differences, it is impossible to say if there is a higher concentration of choirs in either place.

8. North Wales has historically had the highest percentage of Welsh speakers. According to data from 1921-1981, in the Bangor area, where much of the current research was conducted, the percentage was as high as 80-90% (Colin H. Williams 1990: 39-43). This is in sharp contrast to counties elsewhere in Wales: compare the total of 63% of the population being Welsh speakers in Gwynedd County in 1981 to just 2.5% in Gwent County in South Wales (Balsom 1985: 3). Not surprisingly, language was mentioned often as a sign of Welshness. Nevertheless, I suspect that affinity with North Wales is not exclusively a recognition of that place as a space for the language. Instead, I assume it also includes emotional attachment to the landscape itself, and to the singers' own personal experiences in that space. There is a popular term in Wales, *hiraeth*, which refers to a longing or nostalgia for something and is often bound specifically to place. Garrett, Coupland and Bishop write about another important concept, "gwlad": "The Welsh word *gwlad* resonates through Welsh cultural history, not least in the Welsh national anthem *Hen Wlad fy Nhadau* ('Land of my Fathers'), where *gwlad* refers to nation, nationality and territory, but also potentially to country(side) and landscape" (2005: 532). North Wales has been associated with distinctive, traditional Welsh culture since the Middle Ages (cf. Bremner 2011). Obviously I cannot speak for the Welsh concerning North-South rivalry. However, the distinction is commonly made when people talk about where they are from, based on my own experiences and also from surveying popular media (e.g., see BBC 1's *Gavin and Stacey*).

9. There are many anecdotal examples concerning the associative and autobiographical nature of musical meaning; consider Thomas Turino's discussion of "The Star Spangled Banner" (1999: 227). He suggests that an individual may access conceptual information about American patriotism upon hearing this song, which may be described as part of the song's perceived meaning(s) for that person. However, as Turino points out, the same song can elicit an infinite variety of meanings: to someone else hearing the tune, what is accessed might be the beginning of a sporting event, to another, shameful American imperialism. There is also empirical

evidence to support the role of autobiographical memories in musical meaning, showing that music can act as a cue for memory retrieval (see Krumhansl and Zupnick 2013). Nevertheless, as one of this article's reviewers noted, two people can have similar emotional responses to a musical example despite having quite different personal experiences. I would make the point that the opposite is also possible: two people can have different emotional responses to a musical example despite having similar personal experiences with that piece of music. This suggests that emotion and episodic memory might make dissociable contributions to musical meaning (cf. Eichenbaum 2002: 269). Musical meaning is a messy topic, a full picture of which is well beyond the scope of this paper.

10. While there is not space for a comprehensive history of language legislation in Wales, a summary of major events follows. The Welsh Nationalist Party was founded in 1925, focusing on language preservation, and the Education Act of 1944 assured parents' rights to Welsh-medium education for their children (Löffler 2000: 192-4; Osmond 1985: 252; How Has Welsh Medium Education Developed? 2011). The National Eisteddfod also enforced an "All-Welsh Rule," requiring Welsh language activities exclusively, beginning in 1950. Saunders Lewis gave his famous radio lecture "*Tynged yr Iaith*" ("The Fate of the Language") in 1962, encouraging Welsh people to insist that the government include Welsh on official documents (Phillips 2000: 466-7). Following his lecture, *Cymdeithas ir Iaith Gymraeg* (The Welsh Language Society) was created, seeking official status for the Welsh language ("What is Cymdeithas yr Iaith?;" Phillips 2000). The Welsh Language Act was passed in 1967, but the language still held an inferior status (Welsh Language Act 1967 (repealed 21.12.1993) 2011). A campaign against English-only road signs was launched, in which signs were destroyed or torn down. This was inspired by musician and chairman of The Welsh Language Society Dafydd Iwan, who composed protest songs that brought the campaign into pop culture and attracted many young people (Phillips 2000: 473-4). These efforts ultimately also led to the creation of the Welsh-language radio station *Radio Cymru* in 1977 and Welsh-language television station *Sianel Pedwar Cymru* or S4C in 1982 (Welsh Devolution: A Timeline 2008). In 1988, the Welsh National Party (*Plaid Cymru*) argued for planning controls to improve economic conditions for the rural Welsh-speaking population. This included measures to restrict availability of holiday homes and housing for non-locals. There were also measures to encourage new residents to learn and use the Welsh language (Day 2002: 227). That same year (1988), the Education Reform Act was passed, making the study of Welsh compulsory—either as a first or second language—in primary and secondary schools in Wales (Jenkins and Williams 2000: 17). In 1993, the Welsh Language Act was passed, and *BwrddYr Iaith Gymraeg* (The Welsh Language Board) established to promote the language and ensure equality of Welsh and English (Day 2002: 216). In 1997, Wales achieved a devolved government, meaning some powers were transferred from the UK Parliament to the National Assembly for Wales (Devolved Government in the UK). The Government of Wales Act in 2006

emphasized support for the Welsh language (History and Achievements 2011). Most recently, Welsh was finally made an official language of Wales through the Welsh Language Measure of 2011 (Legislation). However, campaigns continued as late as 2011, when S4C's independence was threatened by the BBC ("Future of S4C under threat …" 2011). It may be that the teens will have to continue the struggle to save distinctively Welsh signs. Nevertheless, they were born after many major milestones.

11. Quantitative analyses were conducted in order to provide empirical support for patterns in the data; I am indebted to Phillip Hamrick for running the statistics. The ANOVA indicated that the differences between age group in song type selection has less than a 5% probability of being due to chance ($F(3, 76) = 3.89$, $p < .05$). I acknowledge that it is both impossible and ineffective to try to generalize the singers' responses. I also stress that this analysis determined relationships in the data; it did not suggest any causalities. Thus, while the quantitative analyses tested the reliability of patterns in the data, the explanations of why these patterns exist are my own interpretations.

12. Several interviewees suggested that MVCs are considered the "most traditional" type of choir. This is notable considering the fact that all choir types—including Mixed—have been around for as many years. The distinction is not based on repertoire: MVCs sing quite a lot of popular music (mostly music theatre tunes), with a major increase over the past ten years (Lewis, interview, May 15, 2009; cf. Gareth Williams 2001: 162). On the contrary, many Mixed choirs sing few, if any, popular songs. However, it should be noted that popular repertoire is not without precedent in Welsh choirs. Turn-of-the-century choirs were accused of adopting "vulgar" popular songs; see David Jenkins' 1899 criticisms in Gareth Williams (1998: 167-8). D. Emlyn Evans, another well known composer/critic/adjudicator of this era, also felt that community singing and popular song were hindrances to the institution (Williams 1998: 160). He opposed competitions where "soloists are allowed to wander at their own sweet will from 'Pop Goes the Weasel' to a Handel aria" (1998: 163). As for present-day MVCs, Gareth Williams writes: "The modern aesthetic frowns on the eclectic male-choir repertoire as one supremely lacking in authenticity, an indiscriminate *mélange* of arrangements, spirituals, medleys, hymn-tunes and operatic choruses wrenched from context. Yet in Wales it draws upon the accumulated capital of an industrially based process of cultural production that contributed to the shaping of the social order between 1880 and 1914. The Welsh male choir survives as a social and musical phenomenon and a remarkable institution of popular culture" (1998: 192). Tŷ Cerdd (http://www.tycerdd.org/societies-directory/societies-directory) shows that, at present, there are more MVCs than Mixed choirs in North Wales. However, it shows comparable numbers throughout the country as a whole, while *British Choirs on the Net* (http://www.choirs.org.uk) shows more MVCs than Mixed choirs country-wide. Both show that MVCs and Mixed choirs far outnumber all-female choirs; the number of Ladies choirs is particularly sparse in North Wales.

However, British Choirs on the Net is limited to only those choirs who have an online presence, while Tŷ Cerdd is presumably limited to its member ensembles: for example, the Youth choir featured in this research is not listed.

13. Some of today's MVCs still compete in eisteddfodau and other competitions; others only give concerts. The choirs still often represent a particular community but they no longer represent one particular workplace exclusively. Inquiries about interviewees' occupations were not a major part of this research. However, in conversations with participants, I learned that most are retirees who never worked together, but instead joined their choir because it was the local choir. These changes in North Wales MVCs are consistent with data from South Wales (Gareth Williams 2001: 157, 164-5).

14. This trend is happening in South Wales as well: in 1947, the average age of Treorci's choir members was between 20 and 30 years old; in 2001, it was 58 (Gareth Williams 2001: 157, 164-5). In North Wales, MVC audiences' ages seem to parallel those of the choir members, too. This statement is based on my own observations and supported by interviewees, as well as Devine 2008. I must stress that Llandudno, the site of many of the performances used in this research, is known for being a popular retirement community. It also attracts many elderly visitors on holiday. However, even the performances I saw outside of Llandudno were mostly populated by elderly audience members.

15. The fact that only men made these distinctions is significant for several reasons. First, while members of the so-called "professional" choir we discussed did win their positions through auditions, many MVC members—including all of those in this interview group—are required to do the same. Secondly, some men did clarify that "professional" choirs use microphones and sing an abundance of popular songs (hence, making them something different). However, choirs considered more traditional often do the same. Finally, many members of the choir we discussed did still have "day jobs" at the time of this research. The lines are obviously fuzzy, and the issue is not a new one in Wales. In the late 19th- and early 20th-centuries, there were concerns about complacency and technical deficiencies among Welsh choirs; blame for this was often placed on amateur participation in choral events (see Gareth Williams 1998: 144-145).

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