HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF MUSIC PERFORMANCE ANXIETY

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Abstract

Music Performance Anxiety (MPA) can be defined as “the experience of marked and persistent anxious apprehension related to musical performance that has arisen through specific anxiety conditioning experiences, and which is manifested through combinations of affective, cognitive, somatic and behavioural symptoms” (Kenny, 2011, p. 433). This is a disorder that many students and performers, no matter what level or ability, seem to experience in the music classroom. Though MPA can inhibit students from reaching their full potential, there is a plethora of information available to guide teachers to become more aware and helpful towards students who are experiencing MPA. The concept is to see how much teachers really know and how are they being efficient and proactive in their classrooms to help their students. This study will examine the perceptions of five high school music teacher’s views of Music Performance Anxiety as compared to existing literature. The qualitative data collected were grouped into four themes: (a) traits and symptoms, (b) coping techniques, (c) environments, and (d) impact of MPA. The teachers in this study appeared to feel that that there was a need for better education and knowledge on MPA in order to better assist their students.

Keywords: Music Performance Anxiety, MPA, adolescents, music education
High School Teacher Perceptions of Music Performance Anxiety

Many teachers have encountered students who have suffered or demonstrated signs of Music Performance Anxiety (MPA). Teachers engage students who are capable and talented musicians but do not feel they have the confidence when it comes to performances and auditions. So how do teachers help students through these troubles? As educators, we should know varied techniques or practices that can help transition our students from being nervous to being confident performers. According to Lehmann, Sloboda, and Woody (2007), “It is much easier to identify a case of performance anxiety—you know it when you have it—than to write a textbook definition. Usually it is defined by the physical and mental sensations experienced” (p. 146).

Many teachers know that their students are experiencing performance anxiety, but it is necessary to take a closer look to know if we are setting our teachers up for success when it comes to the guidance and help some students need. Few professionals have the qualifying skills necessary to manage and take control of MPA; therefore, it is important for music educators to increase their knowledge and understanding in order to aid their students (Patston, 2014). MPA can become apparent in childhood and in adolescence (Kashani & Orvaschel, 1990). In order to examine this situation in detail, it is ideal to study students in their adolescent years.

As educators, our degree trains us on a wide range of aspects in musical education that qualify us to teach any age group between kindergarten through 12th grade. However, this qualification does not include recognizing and addressing MPA. Since 90% of adult musicians began their musical learning before the age of 12 (Nagel, 1993), a portion of this qualification should incorporate components outside the realm of music, including managing performance anxiety. “Given that students in their early teens may have eight years or more of one-to-one instructional experience, music teachers need to have some understanding of their role in the
development and maintenance of MPA” (Patston, 2014, p. 91). MPA tends to be something the normal musician must and will deal with on a professional and amateur level. The idea is not to find ways to eradicate MPA for the lives of students, but to learn how to manage it. In fact, a certain amount of MPA may cause a sense of arousal that can optimize a performance (Petrovich, 2004). However, it is the emotional responses that can define this to be a benefit or a hindrance. Petrovich (2004) continued to point out that moderate physiological arousal, if interpreted by the student as alertness or preparation, can enhance their performance. Because there seems to be a fine line where this is true, teachers need to have the tools to guide their students to that sense of accomplishment. Patston (2014) stated that many teachers, whether in the classroom, studio, or conservatory, observe their students experiencing MPA related to performance, but many do not have the qualifying skills to help manage the condition. This shows us how essential it is for music educators to increase an understanding of MPA in order to support their students (Patston, 2014).

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to gather information about performance anxiety and interview teachers in order to compare their own experiences, either personally or with students, to the research.

Review of Literature

Definition

A clear definition of MPA can be found from Kenny (2011): “MPA is the experience of marked and persistent anxious apprehension related to musical performance that has arisen through specific anxiety conditioning experiences, and which is manifested through combinations of affective, cognitive, somatic and behavioural symptoms” (p. 433) Three systems are manifestations within MPA: (a) Physiological arousal, (b) behavioral responses, and (c)
fearful cognition (Osborn & Kenny, 2008). Since anxiety can be experienced when performing in music, it is crucial to help our students learn to identify and deal with the symptoms that come from being in a performance-based environment. Experiencing MPA that is disabling is not advantageous to the performance. According to Petrovich (2004), MPA is a debilitating experience that can be categorized as a type of social phobia, as listed in the “Anxiety Disorders” section in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) of the American Psychiatric Association. Teachers must look and study the impact anxiety has on student performance and how teachers can help students effectively control the anxiety for a more positive performance experience. If we as teachers have a well-established music program, our students are going to care more about their performances and the evaluations of the teacher, their families, and their peers. This atmosphere may elevate the chances of students developing MPA (Mitchell, 2011). Mitchell (2011) also states that “for some students, particularly those who are extensively involved in music study, it is not only their identity as musicians that is at stake when they perform, but also their overall sense of self worth” (p. 32). This is a strong statement to make, for it shows the pressure some students create in the classroom. It is still uncertain if teachers can recognize these behavioral patterns and be knowledgeable enough to create an environment where students feel safe enough to express themselves.

**Traits and Symptoms**

**Gender.**

Some research appears to find that there are genetic and behavioral traits to Music Performance Anxiety. Females are two-to-three times more likely to experience anxiety than males (Kenny, 2006). When focusing on adolescent development, gender differences between males and females may be understood when looking into the social context of music.
performance. Females tend to be more susceptible to fear when on display in front of others (Essau, Conrade, & Petermann, 1999). One study, in particular, investigated the impact of MPA in female musicians and how it correlated to their development of jazz performance, particularly in improvisation. Wehr-Flowers (2006) suggested that females were significantly less confident with lower levels of self-efficacy, thus showing more anxiety towards learning and performing jazz improvisation. Another interesting fact to note from this study is that these problems were not because of ability, skill, or talent, but one centered more on social psychology.

**Perfectionism.**

Perfectionism, as a personality trait, has been poorly evaluated in musicians, and some researchers appear to have found that performers with higher personal values of perfection and social standards of perfection experienced more anxiety than those performers who do not (Kenny, 2006). Perfectionism seemed to be an understated theme found in some of the research presented. Some students who tended to be overly sensitive to criticism and showed signs of perfectionism created a sequence of events where the student selectively attended to negative aspects of their performance (Petrovich, 2004). These higher personal standards of perfection and social standards of perfection showed students with more debilitating forms of MPA (Kenny, 2006). Personal standards can be looked at in two different ways: (a) Personal standards, which have students feeling that they must perform at their full potential at all time, and (b) social standards, which have students feeling that the people around them expect perfection and success at everything they do. These unrealistic expectations are the inhibitors that can prevent students from becoming confident performers. Simple phrases that students hear on a daily basis, such as “practice that piece and bring it back when it is perfect,” or encouraging students to
“perfect” their technique, may trigger feelings of perfectionism and MPA in adolescent students (Patston 2014).

**Fight or flight.**

Educators can sometimes be quick to see the more physical symptoms of MPA. These include increased heart rate, shallow breathing, and the avoidance of practice (Patston, 2014). These symptoms are related to the physiological arousal symptoms mentioned before. They have a tendency to make the human body react with a more fight-or-flight response. Patston’s (2014) study suggested the following:

The concept of the fight or flight response was introduced by Cannon (1927) to refer to the body’s general reaction to situations in which threat is perceived. Cannon identified accelerated hear rate; contracted arteries, which leads to cold extremities; inhibited gastrointestinal activity; sweating; dilated pupils, and a rush of adrenalin, as being typical manifestations of sympathetic arousal. Blood vessels constrict, which raises blood pressure, thus causing the body to heat up. Perspiration is then released, but because of the restricted blood supply to the extremities such as hands and feed, this perspiration feels cold. (p. 87)

This fight or flight response to performing can greatly impair the overall experience of that performance. Too much arousal can be caused by a genuine fear, whether that of a real or imagined threat, and can be characterized by physiological responses (Kirchner, Bloom, & Skutnick-Henley, 2008). Having an understanding of this response is not enough to prevent it. Some say that the brain will naturally dissipate the fear as the performance progresses because the brain acknowledges that a fight-or-flight response is not necessary in the performance (Kirchner, Bloom, & Skutnick-Henley, 2008).
Behavioral responses.

Behavioral responses can include difficulty maintaining posture and failures of technique (Osborn & Kenny, 2008). Some students may find that they are overcompensating when dealing with a symptom that affects them physically. For instance, if they suffer from lack of air, a brass player may put more pressure on their mouthpieces in order to attain the high notes. However, that will contribute to fatigue quicker than would in practice time (Lehmann, Sloboda, & Woody, 2007). Others may be so focused on the fear, they forget to focus on elements such as expression, or even the notes themselves (Lehmann, Sloboda, & Woody, 2007). We cannot practice for all these events. It would be very hard to recreate an environment where students would lose air support or concentration unless they were performing in front of people.

Fearful cognitions.

Fearful cognitions, which consist of negative thoughts of a performance catastrophe and the probability and effects of negative evaluation, become very hard to maintain and cope with. This negative self-talk is a main characteristic of MPA and is especially concerning when one has to deal with it during an ongoing performance (Krichner, Bloom, & Skutnick-Henley, 2008). Petrovich (2004) clearly outlines the following symptoms that can be categorized under these fearful conditions:

- Anticipation of failure and fear of humiliation or exposure
- Intense anxiety and, sometimes, panic attacks
- Awareness that the fear is excessive
- Avoidance of performing situations or enduring performances with intense distress
- Impaired performance
• Shyness, sensitivity to criticism, increased anxiety in situations other than performing and lowered self-esteem (p. 25)

**Age, culture, or ensemble-type.**

Age, culture, or ensemble-type may contribute to the symptoms of MPA. One interesting argument is that choral singers tend to have less MPA in ensembles, and that could be credited to the fact that students get choral performance exposure at a much younger age (Andrews & Ryan, 2009). There is also data that suggests that “young children are not fully developed emotionally or physically, thus guidance and nurturance is critical for growth” (Nagel, 2012, p. 3). Teachers of younger grade levels need to be aware of the sings of MPA and start to help students from the beginning. Looking into genre, Perdomo-Guevara (2014) investigated the relationships between performer’s musical genre, the way they think about performance, and their performance-related emotions. Classical and non-classical performers were found to have very different emotional profiles and, thus, proved that MPA may not be exclusively an individual problem, but rather a problem partly determined by the concerns that are emphasized by a performer’s cultural group (Perdomo-Guevara, 2014).

**Coping Techniques**

**Alexander technique and meditation.**

There has been some research into techniques and treatments for MPA. One specific technique that is often mentioned is the Alexander Technique, which is “an educational process in which the student learns a set of skills that result in lessening of the areas of tension in the body, so that movements become easier and less effortful” (Kenny, 2006, p. 61). The aim is to eliminate certain muscle habits that would interfere with a performance with the use of kinesthetic cues, the sensation of tension, effort, weight, and position in space (Kenny, 2006).
This appears to be very similar to the ideas of meditation and yoga. In fact, yoga that was introduced into the classroom as a way of managing and dealing with MPA was successful with conservatory students (Hofmann, Khalsa, & Stern, 2012). Participants in this study showed a large decrease in MPA. Improvements were sustained at 7- to 14-month follow-up interviews, as well (Hofmann, Khalsa, & Stern, 2012). Another study showed the success of using Relaxation-Breathing Training (RBT) as a resource to reduce MPA. This study showed that students still had an increase of MPA the closer they are to performance time, but those who used RBT had reduced levels (Chen, Liao, Min, Luh, & Su, 2010). Some researchers found that performers need to accept and understand their fear in order to silence negative inner voices (Arneson, 2010). Other studies showed that many performers used meditation, exercise prayer, deep breathing, and yoga to help cope with MPA. Meditation has also shown to help with the heightening of focus and attention (Dunn, Hartigan, & Mikulas, 1999). In the moments before a performance, when anxiety seems to be at its worst, people that used meditation reported having more moments of relaxed pleasure (Chang, Midlarky, & Lin, 2003).

**Beta-blockers.**

Beta-blockers have been a treatment used by many in the professional world, and can sometimes be seen as an immediate fix towards MPA. “Exposure-based treatments, coupled with ‘brain-based’ techniques, including time-limited use of beta-blockers, offer the quickest path to symptom reduction” (Gannon, 2015, p. 16). This may be an idea that can help musicians learn how to self-regulate their anxiety on demand. It is likely that due to the immediate relief a performer can find in beta-blockers that we find standard techniques less effective (Gannon, 2015). In fact, beta-blockers have become more popular and found more frequently used with performers recent years. In a study by Lockwood (1989), a survey of 2122 orchestral musicians...
found 27% used propranolol to manage either anxiety prior to a performance. Of that group, 19% used the drug on a daily basis. We have to be careful, however, to not give too much credit to beta-blockers for a successful performance. These drugs are not all-powerful. Giving too much credit to pharmaceutical aids can reduce a performer’s sense of self-efficacy for managing anxiety (Petrovich, 2004). The reliance on beta-blockers can cause students to credit a positive performance to the use of beta-blockers instead of developing their own self-confidence and self-efficacy.

**Performance practice.**

Some researchers (Whitcomb, 2008) find that one major cause of MPA is insufficient preparation and a way to decrease stress is to perform more often. This idea of more useful practice time and more chances for performance opportunities seem to be the main focus teachers have to managing MPA in the classroom. Providing additional performance practice opportunities should seem sufficient to help battle the effects of MPA, but some may never seem to improve because they become used to performing under pressure. Petrovich (2004) stated that students that had the most opportunity and frequency to perform, paired with the positive feelings of success, had the lowest levels of MPA. Petrovich (2004) was quick to note that it was not solely on the frequency of an actual performance, but the correlation with a more positive experience. The positive experience was more important that regularity.

**Cognitive, behavioral, and cognitive-behavioral interventions.**

Kenny (2006) discussed certain cognitive, behavioral, and cognitive-behavioral interventions. The behavioral therapies focused on changing behaviors that arise when performers feel anxious and they become a hindrance. Kenny (2006) states that:
One of the main targets of behavioural therapies for anxiety disorders is excessive music tension, which is treated with deep muscle relaxation training and systematic desensitization, a procedure in which the person is encouraged to imagine the feared or anxiety-provoking situation in graded steps, called the fear of hierarchy, until they can visualize the situation without experiencing the muscle tension that used to accompany the visualizations. (p. 61)

It is only after a performer masters this technique that they are encouraged to apply these skills to real life situations and performance opportunities that cause the anxiety. Cognitive therapy focuses on changing the faulty thinking patterns that create inhibiting behaviors. Cognitive-behavioral therapy is a combination of the two previously mentioned therapies. In this therapy, performers use action-oriented therapies that include record-keeping, active participation, application, and evaluation.

**Negative thoughts.**

Teachers also need to be aware and sympathetic to the thoughts that accompany MPA. If teachers are aware of students using negative thoughts, they can be a source of support. They can encourage students to counter negative thoughts and feelings with statements that are more positive and supportive (Kirchner, Bloom, & Skutnick-Henley, 2008). The use of repetitive internal verbalizations, or mantras, is another form of positive thought that can easily be used in a meditative way (Petrovich, 2004). Open dialogue with students can be successful as a way to help guide students to more positive thought. “Opening a dialogue with students which not only acknowledges that nerves may be a part of musical development, but also encourages them to talk about their experiences when discussing such issues, is also a way to identify if students are becoming perfectionistic or overly anxious” (Patston, 2014, p. 92-93). Teachers, with open
dialogue, have an opportunity to explain to students the feelings they may experience in a performance.

Many teachers focus on the pre-performing planning but do not include this as a form of preparation (Patston, 2014). A teacher must also be aware of the comments made to students when presented with an opportunity to discuss issues. Simply stating, “You know this. You are fine,” is not as effective as saying, “I’ve witnessed you using breathing techniques to calm yourself so many times. I know that they will help you today” (Petrovich, 2004). It can also be effective for teachers to discuss their own personal struggles with MPA. This can encourage students to not be ashamed to discuss their own problems and have a more applicable open dialogue. It is important for the student and performer to trust the teacher and depend on their knowledge of MPA and the fact that they can offer an educated approach for coping (Petrovich, 2004).

**Environments of Music Performance Anxiety**

This paper focuses on adolescent MPA. Though there are many studies on MPA, few look towards its direct effects on adolescents and the environments that are commonly found to provoke feelings of MPA. According to Kenny (2006), anxiety was first identified in children nine- to 14-years of age in a study performed by Simon and Martens (1979). Though this study’s main focus was on sports performance anxiety, there was a portion that had a comparison between sports-induced anxiety and anxiety from musical activities. Performing in a band was listed as the highest anxiety among the group of activities, which included team sports (Simon & Martens, 1979).
Audience.

The most obvious environment that a student would experience MPA is in front of an audience. The presence of an audience is directly tied to elevated physiological arousal and self-reported anxiety in music performers (LeBlanc, Jin, Obert, & Sivola, 1997). It should be noted that the type of audience could have a positive or negative effect on coping with MPA. According to LeBlanc and colleagues (1997), having an audience of peers tended to be the most stressful for students, especially in adolescents. LeBlanc, Jin, Obert, & Sivola (1997) asked students to perform in three different scenarios, all while being monitored for different levels of MPA. Students were also asked to self-report on their experiences in an open interview. “The anxiety self-report shows a steady climb towards higher levels of anxiety in each succeeding performance condition, with self-reported anxiety highest in the third condition, in which participants played for all the researchers and a peer-group audience” (LeBlanc, Jin, Obert, & Sivola, 1997, p. 486). Seventeen students (68% of the sample) reported this as the most stressful performance condition, and five (18%) made a special note to say that they were most anxious when playing for a group of classmates and friends. This type of social phobia can elevate the degree of threat a student feels when under pressure to perform (Kenny, 2006). “Those perceiving threat are likely to experience the greatest anxiety, and those who are most anxious are most likely to perceive performance conditions as more threatening” (Kenny, 2006, p. 53).

Evaluations.

Environments of evaluation also gave students and performers an amplified sense of MPA. Students are hyper-aware of their performance and the fact that they are being closely assessed gives them added pressure. Exposure to early and frequent evaluations, and self-evaluations, may trigger the psychological, behavioral, and cognitive responses of MPA in
students who come from expectations of excellence but support of achieving that excellence is low (Kenny, 2006). Even if the setting for a performance is not directly a formal evaluation, a student or performer with MPA may find fear with the possibility of a critical audience (Chang, Midlarky, & Lin, 2003).

**Negative performance experience.**

Further studies show how negative performance experiences can create longstanding issues with MPA. These negative performance experiences can become encoded in the brain and leave a lasting impression on students as they aim to develop their own personal music goals (Gannon, 2015). Music students who report a negative music experience will self-report higher and more debilitating levels of MPA over others who experience more positive experiences (Osborn & Kenny, 2008). Though this may seem obvious, teachers need to be aware of adolescent development and how important it is for them to have positive musical exposure in a performance setting. Osborn and Kenny (2008) shared a study where a correlation between music students who reported a negative performance experience and those who showed significantly higher MPA. Osborn and Kenny (2006) continue to show the possibility that a specific psychological vulnerability may develop elevated MPA through exposure to evaluated performances in a competitive environment. This is not to say that teachers should only provide experiences with guaranteed positive outcomes, but we must try to provide our students with the right tools to succeed. Students should be able to feel confident enough to receive constructive criticism and not encode it as a negative experience. If our students are experiencing problems with anxiety, they can interpret almost any kind of feedback as negative, whether that is the intent or not (Osborn & Kenny, 2008).
Impact of Music Performance Anxiety

It is important to understand the impact that comes from not being able to cope with MPA. MPA is something that many musicians appear to struggle with on a daily basis, whether they are at a professional level or not. “Acceptance that an anxiety condition is perceived as almost ‘normal’ in training institutions requires further exploration, not only of MPA, but of its place within the conservatorium culture” (Patston, 2014, p. 89). The idea that MPA is normal finds some to believe that must deal with it. However, there are ways to help students succeed in music without the debilitating side effect MPA brings. Though there are no detailed studies done on specific performers who have left the profession due to issues with MPA, there is qualitative research on those who leave the profession and become educators rather than continue as performers (Patston, 2014). We should also take care in how MPA is managed and coped with at the adolescent stage. As children progress into their adolescent period, they start to develop a set of personal values, and some have found a link between that and self-worth (Patston, 2014). We are close to understanding that performance anxiety can be perceived as having a positive or negative effect on performing, but it is the negative impact MPA has on performing that how delicate this can be (Schneider & Chesky, 2011).

Teachers have the responsibility to set our students up for success. Giving students a sense of control can help students lessen anxiety (Mitchell, 2011). If students have the confidence in their skill that is required for the performance ahead of them, they will most likely approach it with a better sense of control (Mitchell, 2011). Maybe more teachers need to focus on the psychological aspects of MPA in helping students gain confidence and self-worth. Teachers must then value their students for reasons other than performance, and the students need to be aware of it (Mitchell, 2011).
As previously stated, this study was utilized to gather information about MPA from a review of literature and interviewed teachers in order to compare experiences to the research. By gaining a better understanding on how to identify, help, and possibly manage MPA in our students, we may become better teachers. With this study, we may be able to begin to find if there is a need to further education and practices within our classroom to set up our students for success.

**Method**

The interviewed participants were a convenience sample of five collegiate acquaintances of the researcher. These teachers are currently high school music teachers in Connecticut. Each participant took part in a semi-structured interview built upon 14 researcher-developed open-ended questions created from a review of the existing literature (see Appendix). Each interview was completed individually on a videoconference and ranged in length between 15-25 minutes. Questions were based around the following topics: (a) coping strategies, (b) instruction, (c) preparedness, and (d) knowledge. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and provided to the interviewee following the interview to be reviewed for increased reliability. This also provided an opportunity for the interviewee to give additional thoughts on the subject.

Names have been changed to maintain confidentiality and recorded materials are protected and will be destroyed after the completion of the project. The University of Florida’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the study. Each participant signed an informed consent form prior to the interview. Data from the interview, in the form of transcribed notes, were examined and reviewed to find similar themes, such as causes, symptom identification, and treatments, that relate to the understanding of the topic based on the research and existing
literature. Each interview was transcribed and the data were organized to align with existing research.

Participants

The interviewees will be referred to as Teacher A, Teacher B, Teacher C, Teacher D, and Teacher E, to maintain anonymity. Teacher A is a teacher of Concert Band, Jazz Band, Marching Band, as well as theory courses and a music history class. This teacher has been in the profession for six years at the high school level of grades 9-12. He is also proficient on saxophone and regularly performs around the area. Teacher B has been teaching high school, grades 9-12 for 20 years, focusing on choirs, guitar, and string orchestra. Previously, Teacher B worked in a general music setting in elementary school. Teacher B is a locally well-known percussionist who performs regularly outside of teaching. Teacher C currently teaches high school chorus for grades 9-12 and has done so for the past seven years. This teacher also has experience teaching chorus, guitar, and general music at the middle school level of 6-8th grades. Teacher C is a vocalist that performs with a community group in her area on a regular basis. This teacher also has experience with wind instruments and is skillful on the French horn. Teacher D has been in the high school setting for 27 years, primarily teaching String Orchestras, Symphony Orchestra, Concert Band and Wind Ensemble, as well as chamber groups and Marching Band. Teacher D has also taught AP Theory, Music Theory, Music Appreciation, keyboard classes, and guitar, and was appointed department chair of his district in 2001. This teacher’s main instrument is the tuba. Teacher E has the longest experience in a high school setting with 29 years teaching multiple jazz ensembles, History of American Popular Music, History of Jazz, and Music Technology. This teacher has, over the years, worked in the middle schools in congruence with
his time at the high school, but has since become full-time at the high school level. Teacher E is a trumpet player, primarily performing jazz.

Results

The coding of this data was done by thematic analysis. The data were grouped into major categories that directly evolved from the research and emerged from the patterns of coded data. These major categories emerged during the interviews and when the data were compared and contrasted, and associated concepts were grouped together. The data were reviewed in the following thematic categories: (a) traits and symptoms, (b) coping techniques, (c) environments, and (d) impact of MPA. Table 1 shows the coding process and how the associated concepts from the interviews were grouped into major categories:
Table 1

*Interview Data Coding Process*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Category</th>
<th>Associated Concepts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traits and Symptoms</td>
<td>- Behavioral Traits (finger twitching, shaking, turning red, and sweating)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Symptoms that cut down on the “Fuel” of musicians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Cognitive-Behavioral traits (nervousness due to internal thoughts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Adrenaline rushes and excitement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Withdrawn and avoidance-like behaviors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coping Techniques</td>
<td>- Breathing techniques</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Increased practice time</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Mock performances</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Alexander Technique</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Beta-Blockers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Consistency with warm ups and exercises</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Yoga and meditation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Exercises in focusing and centering thought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Just deal with it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environments</td>
<td>- Rehearsal setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Performances in front of peers</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Playing assessments</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>- Adjudicating settings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Auditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- OTHER: If students are prepared, they should not experience MPA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact</td>
<td>- One of the biggest problems with students in a rehearsal setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Surveying students after a performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Teaching holistically to better students musically, but also to be aware of social and emotional needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Affects student’s expression and emotion when performing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Should have a positive effect on performances</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Traits and Symptoms**

Traits and symptoms, as mentioned in the literature review, can be seen in many different ways and can sometimes be hard to identify. Many of the teachers reported more behavioral traits of anxiety to be more easily identified than cognitive traits (see Table 2).
Table 2

*Associated Concepts of Traits and Symptoms*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Traits and Symptoms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher A</td>
<td>Behavioral Traits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher B</td>
<td>Cutting down on the “Fuel”, loss of musical enjoyment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher C</td>
<td>Cognitive-Behavioral Traits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher D</td>
<td>Behavioral Traits and Symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher E</td>
<td>Physical and Behavioral Symptoms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teacher A commented on behavioral traits such as finger twitching and shaking to the point that it interfered with the technical aspects of performing. This aligned with Teacher A’s own personal experience with performance anxiety. Teacher A noted that because of a rush of adrenaline, they would experience caused their hands to shake considerably.

Teacher B noted more symptoms and traits found within his students and less about their own personal experience. Being that this educator teaches both choral and instrumental, he was able to distinguish different symptoms depending on the requirements of the performer. Teacher B made a specific analysis to symptoms cutting down on the fuel of the musician, whether it is the air support of a singer or the physical control of the bow hand of a string player. This teacher also made the connection to how that can affect the students’ ability to show expressiveness.

“Once you get the jitters and you’re afraid that something bad is going to happen, you can’t focus on being a musician, and that’s too bad” (Teacher B, personal communication, March 15, 2016). This shows understanding that having a debilitating problem with MPA can cause the student to lose the enjoyment of what music should be. This teacher also noted possible cognitive symptoms, such as how self-confidence and negative thoughts have an effect. He seemed to have experiences with cognitive symptoms as an inhibitor towards a positive performance.

Teacher C made certain symptomatic references that could be categorized as cognitive-behavioral traits. The students in their examples showed signs of nervousness on a cognitive
level that made them feel as if they were experiencing issues they needed to fix before they would be able to perform at a competent level. “They start going through a myriad of issues they need to fix and it gets really in their head” (Teacher C, personal communication, March 20, 2016).

Behavioral traits and symptoms were the focus of Teacher D. Teacher D discussed his own issues with MPA and how his symptoms were very physical and easy to see. These symptoms were a heightened body temperature, sweating, and turning red in the face. This teacher, whose educational focus was on band and wind instruments, noted the stress that the body could develop when playing a wind instrument. A similar reaction as Teacher A resulted in crediting adrenaline as a main source for these symptoms. Teacher D also saw an opposite effect with students when they looked as if they were completely withdrawn and would try to avoid the situation that created the MPA. This teacher made the comment that students were making averting reactions to avoid getting “picked on”. These can be categorized as more cognitive inhibiting traits.

Teacher E did not discuss symptoms as detailed as the other teachers, for he did not seem very aware of students experiencing MPA. This teacher mainly talked about the excitement students had before a performance, relating it to energy. Being that this teacher was mainly looking for physical and behavioral symptoms, he only noticed if something was extreme. Teacher E made a specific reference to a student who suffered from debilitating anxiety in other classes and had accommodations to not participate in rehearsals if not capable. He made note to say that he himself has never seen this student demonstrate anxiety in his classroom, despite the fact that this student needed modifications to their daily routine to help with coping.
Coping Techniques

As important as it is to be able to identify traits and symptoms of MPA, it is not helpful unless there is a plan in place to help students manage those symptoms. There were many coping techniques discussed in the review of literature demonstrating that ideas and coping techniques are available and research has been done. The responses from the teachers about coping techniques were varied and coded as shown in Table 3.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Coping Techniques</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher A</td>
<td>Breathing techniques, increased practice time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher B</td>
<td>Alexander Technique, beta-blockers, and mock performances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher C</td>
<td>Centered breathing, Yoga and meditation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher D</td>
<td>Focusing and performance practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher E</td>
<td>Just “deal with it”</td>
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</table>

Teacher A discussed the use of breathing techniques to help calm the nerves he himself felt when dealing with MPA. His techniques seemed to be about calming the heart rate and gaining centered breathing, mainly because he is proficient on a wind instrument. Another coping technique brought up with Teacher A was the amount of performing. He wanted a multitude of opportunities to practice performing and thus allowing him to learn to cope with MPA. Learning about coping techniques came from a private lesson teacher that Teacher A had in college. It was noted to be a very informal lesson based on holding his breath and counting backwards to calm himself. Some coping techniques Teacher A used in the classroom was to provide opportunity for his students to perform in smaller ensembles, such as chamber or duets, in order to gain confidence as players in a more exposed setting. When Teacher A was asked about students ever approaching him for help on this subject, the teacher replied that he has not
had that experience. He specifically noted that students just deal with it, whether successful or not.

Teacher B had a different experience with coping techniques of MPA on a personal level. The lack of coping techniques made this teacher choose a different path that he originally pursued:

When I first went to school I wanted to be a music teacher and then I got the performance bug and so I wanted to play in an orchestra. I found that to be very stressful and I don’t think I would be happy doing that because you have to have a certain makeup for it. I had some really stressful performances where I would get to the end and go, “I don’t know if I played anything right.” And yeah, I did play something right but I was just a mess.

(Teacher B, personal communication, March 15, 2016)

Teacher B mentioned certain coping techniques, such as the Alexander Technique and the use of beta-blockers, but did not refer to any of them as successful. He made it known that nothing was done with any regularity, thus he was never really able to perfect anything. Teacher B, however, had a great sense of how to help students cope in the classroom. The use of mock performances allowed students to practice music for an audition in an environment that had them perform the music from beginning to end and receive feedback from other teachers and peers. This setting was known as practice so the students were not getting grades, and others were able to provide the students with a more positive experience. Teacher B also uses the same warm-up routine in rehearsals and then prior to a concert so that the consistency will give the students a sense of familiarity and will, in turn, get them centered and focused for the performance of the group.
Like the previous teachers mentioned, Teacher C had not had any formal training in methods to cope with MPA but received some help from her private teacher. These tips were small and mainly centered around breathing. Another concept that Teacher C uses and expressed interest in learning more was the use of yoga and meditation. Teacher C’s mother is a yoga instructor and, on her own accord, thought that the use of yoga and other relaxation methods would be appropriate when dealing with debilitating effects of MPA. This teacher did not do any specific research on this but has used her own experience in calming breathing techniques to know that there is a correlation between meditation and coping with MPA. The idea of breathing exercises to help calm and focus became a developed idea in her classroom when using this technique as a warm up. In an idea very similar to Teacher B, Teacher C uses this as a warm up in all classes and before concerts. She also encourages students to do these exercises as warm ups before going into an audition or any performance that is evaluative.

After having a more physical problem with MPA, Teacher D seemed to be more attuned to students with MPA, thus found success with using different coping techniques. He himself found help by specifically asking certain people for advice when needed and took some of their own experiences to guide students. Being that this teacher has seen students who really struggled with MPA in an evaluative session as an adjudicator, he reflected on how important it is for the performer to become focused before even entering the room. “Even before you go in the room, to have yourself prepared and relaxed, and then you go in the room very calmly, and you approach it and you take the time that you need to settle yourself down before you start the performance” (Teacher D, personal communication, March 22, 2016). Teacher D has also seen students struggle when asked to play in front of peers and in rehearsals, so he likes to provide students with the knowledge of upcoming rehearsals and lessons that may require them to perform solo or
in a small group. He noted that even when tuning the ensemble, it is more efficient to tune sections or small groups instead of tuning one student at a time. Teacher D also tried to provide students who will be undergoing an evaluative performance, such as an audition for college or region festivals, opportunity to perform in front of the main rehearsal ensemble. He noted that playing in front of peers is very difficult, so if students were to gain better control of their MPA in this setting, the idea of playing in an audition would not be as daunting as a task. Teacher D also noted that he would provide any and all opportunities these students wanted, including an unlimited amount of practice to help the students in the end.

Teacher E had a very different approach to coping with MPA. This teacher felt that having MPA is a main part of being a musician, and that dealing with anxiety is part of the game. He himself felt that preparation and feeling confident in the work that was prepared was enough to help him overcome any anxiety that he felt, so this is how his students should react as well. Many examples of “Just go out and have fun!” were given by Teacher E. The mentality of “it is what it is,” and “if you didn’t fix it by now, it won’t be fixed for the performance, so don’t worry about it” seemed to be effective for this teacher, but this teacher was not very attuned to students dealing with problems of MPA. He had a very strict belief that talking to students about coping with MPA could be more of a hindrance than just letting them figure out how to deal with it. The idea is that if you bring up anxiety, students will start to feel it because you said it would be there. Though this concept is worth looking further into, it does seem to contradict some of the literature presented about MPA. This teacher also showed strong ideals that MPA is something that can improve performance, so it should be developed and maintained individually.

One interesting fact to note is that all five teachers said that they have never had a student come to them for help coping with MPA. Though it seems they all have had some exposure to
students who have shown signs of struggling to cope, none of them had any direct experience helping a student on a one-to-one level.

**Environments of Music Performance Anxiety**

Many teachers specifically think of concerts and public performances when it comes to the environments of MPA, but as the research has shown us, there are more opportunities for students to struggle with MPA outside the stage. The associated concepts found from the interviews of the five teachers are coded in Table 4.

### Table 4

**Associated Concepts of Environments of Music Performance Anxiety**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Environments of Music Performance Anxiety</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher A</td>
<td>Rehearsal settings, enhanced in front of peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher B</td>
<td>Dress rehearsal and playing assessments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher C</td>
<td>Performing in front of peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher D</td>
<td>Adjudication settings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher E</td>
<td>Playing tests</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teacher A discusses how the environment of the rehearsal classroom can have an impact on students with MPA. “Very few kids would volunteer to get up here and play in front of their peers, which I think is a problem because that is part of music. We make music and we perform for people” (Teacher A, personal communication, March 15, 2016). It is the concept that they would rather perform for people they do not know in a performance than stand up in front of their peers. The idea of being judged by musicians on their level and whom they may be in competition with scares some student so much that they will avoid every occasion requiring them to perform in front of their peers. Teacher A specifically recalls how students put their heads down and completely avoid eye contact when asked for a volunteer from a section. This teacher has tried different ways to make the students more comfortable in the classroom by making it a non-threatening environment, but it hasn’t given him much success.
Dress rehearsals can be a way to help students cope with MPA in a performance, but Teacher B pointed out that it will never compare to how it feels when the stage lights are on and the audience is full. Teacher B always tries to get his ensembles onto the stage before a concert so they are more mentally prepared by the difference in sound production, but he notices that it is not enough sometimes. There are still students who get nervous being on a stage and with the environment of the stage feeling so formal, it is hard to replicate in rehearsals. Teacher B also discussed his guitar class and how playing assessments always seemed to bring out anxiety in students. This was something that is necessary in the class, and even though Teacher B would observe students practicing with success, they would still struggle when in a one-on-one assessment. Teacher B noted that he tried to make this environment one of instant feedback with open communication in hopes that students would not feel as if they were on the spot. However, the nature of one person playing for another makes the performance much more personal, and students have a hard time overcoming that.

Teacher C noted right at the beginning that MPA was very prevalent with her in recitals or juries during college. These are more examples of playing in front of peers or in an adjudicative setting that increase MPA. This made her aware of these issues before ever getting into a classroom. Teacher C also stated that she has avoided music that requires students to perform solos because the students show great concern over auditioning. Students would ask Teacher C to audition in a group setting because they seemed afraid to do anything on their own. The teacher took to performing pieces as an ensemble because there is a level of comfort when performing with a large group. Teacher C also noted that students always mentioned after the audition if they had a hard time with MPA. “I’m not really with them in the moments that they
are stressed out, so it’s sort of hard to help them. That sort of takes it out of my hands” (Teacher C, personal communication, March 20, 2016).

The beginning of high school and the development into the adolescent stage can be known as a time when students become more self aware, and thus more anxious when asked to perform. Teacher D has a great understanding of this because he made reference to high school as being the environment where their MPA really developed in his students. He also made similar claims to how MPA felt greater when in an audition format than in a performance. This teacher, who has spent many years as a high school instrumental teacher, festival adjudicator, and festival conductor, has seen many students get anxious and very hesitant to play.

Because Teacher E only really reflected about MPA in a performance setting, he never reflected on it in any other way. Teacher E gave his own experience in regards to conducting the musical for the school:

I always get anxious the day of the show. Thursday, Friday and Saturday all day, when I should be relaxing and taking it easy. The tension is rising when I am getting ready to go out and do it, and I always found it interesting that all the time and energy and man hours that go into a production like that, and all of the adults are preparing these kids for this production (the producer, the director, the choreographer, the lighting person), they put all this time into this production. And then, when the production opens, and the curtain goes up, I’m the only adult, and with the swipe of the baton, I can kill the entire show. So everyone else is in the back of the room going, “This is great. This sounds great,” but I’m working! (Teacher E, personal communication, March 23, 2016)

Teacher E noted that once he gets into the pit, about five minutes before, all his nerves seems to dissipate and he goes into work mode. This teacher seemed to have the preemptive
signs of anxiety but has the ability to turn them off when the time comes. This is a great skill to have, especially when dealing with a high stress performance situation such as directing a musical. Teacher E did not have similar themes like the other teachers about playing in front of peers. He was convinced that students should be completely comfortable playing in front of their peers. To him, these were the students who support each other the most. This may be because being in a jazz band is more intimate and requires students to perform in a more independent way, thus not giving this teacher the exposure of students in large ensembles. Teacher E also noted that students seemed very nervous when performing for a test, whether it is basic scales or specific exercises, but this teacher did not show an understanding of this anxiety. He made comments saying that, “if you know it, there is nothing to be nervous about. Just play it. If you don’t know it, go practice it and come back later” (Teacher E, personal communication, March 23, 2016). This teacher did make notes about letting students perform just for him instead of in front of their peers, but was quick to say that the goal is to have them play in front of everyone because that is what musicians do when they perform.

**Impact of Music Performance Anxiety**

Understanding the impact of MPA is just as important as the topics previously discussed. The views and ideas from these teachers are important to recognize where our attentions need to be in order to receive better education (see table 5). If teachers do not understand the impact of MPA, the importance of the subject will not be urgent enough to want to make a difference.
Table 5

*Associated Concepts of Impact of Music Performance Anxiety*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Impact of Music Performance Anxiety</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher A</td>
<td>One of the biggest problems students face in the rehearsal classroom; loss of control in the performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher B</td>
<td>Gave a survey to his students to find their point of view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher C</td>
<td>Need to teach more holistically, not just musically; less in large choirs than instrumental groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher D</td>
<td>Found that MPA really affects expression and emotion in performing; loss of focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher E</td>
<td>Felt MPA should have a positive effect on performances</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teacher A discussed how MPA is one of the biggest problems that students go through when it comes to performing. This impact can be seen when Teacher A gave an example of a student who played a solo perfectly in rehearsal every time but missed his cue at the performance. Teacher A reported the student shaking and not being able to control his sound, which barely allowed him to make it through. It is very disappointing to students when a situation like that happens. Students can work very hard to prepare, but if something happens in a performance that throws them off, all that preparation means nothing. When asked approximately what percentage of their students demonstrate some degree of MPA, Teacher A reported that generally 50-60% would, but that percentage is raised to 80-90% when students are asked to perform in front of their peers. He gives this a high percentage because he feels that teachers are not supporting risk and the idea that it can be beneficial for students to learn from their failures. Instead, it is a negative to fail and not have things perfect right away.

Teacher B had an interesting example to add to the interview. This teacher gave a survey to his students after the previous choir concert, and a specific question was asked about nerves and anxiety right before the performance. This teacher reported that about half the students said they did not experience anxiety, and the other half reported that they were only a little nervous.
Teacher B was surprised, for he thought more students would have reported higher levels of anxiety. The nature of the concert should be taken into consideration, for we do not know the level of music performed and the size of the choral group. When asked about the percentage of students who demonstrated some degree of performance anxiety, this teacher did not feel confident to give an answer.

Teacher C gave a response to impact based on the educational setting presented to teachers. This teacher reported:

We are supposed to be teaching our kids holistically and we are supposed to be teaching the entire student, not just how to play an instrument, but bettering them and their social and emotional needs. We don’t really learn how to deal with those social and emotional needs. [MPA] is one of the biggest stress factors that I think they face. (Teacher C, personal communication, March 20, 2016)

This is interesting to note, for they were one of the few teachers who brought in educational practices and tied it into the importance of coping with MPA. Teacher C also noted how schools give students who need accommodations for extra time due to stress and anxiety in testing situations, but we do not apply these same accommodations in a music setting. They specifically say that all auditions and playing tests are done the same, regardless of what students need to succeed. Teacher C also noted that they see less MPA in large choirs than they do in instrumental ensembles because the average size of choirs are typically bigger with large sections. This comfort in numbers is what allows students to feel safe and confident enough to not have debilitating problems with MPA. Teacher C noted about 75-80% of her students showed some degree of MPA, with very few students who would be willing to volunteer for anything. She related the mentality to being so afraid of giving a wrong answer and being afraid
of failing that students do not allow themselves the opportunity of that kind of exposure. Students feel like they are expected to get things done correctly, and even if they were to receive feedback meant to provide them with a learning experience, they can be so fragile to think of it as negative.

Teacher D reflected on the impact of MPA by discussing the effect it has on the students’ ability to use expression and emotion when performing. Since Teacher D spent many years being an adjudicator for festivals, he noted that many students became nervous and their performance was very limited. This teacher reported that many students were focusing so hard on playing the correct notes that other parts of the audition did not reach potential. The fact that students can be prepared by working hard and giving themselves ample practice time was negated when stepping into the audition room. The failure that these students felt was hard for Teacher D to witness and not be able to alleviate it. One example Teacher D mentioned was a student that had to leave the audition room to collect themselves before trying the whole audition again. This teacher noted that the student was a capable and talented player but had a very hard time getting through the musical selection required in the audition. When asked for a percentage of students who demonstrated some degree of MPA, Teacher D reported about 80-90%.

Teacher E provided very different answers compared to the other four teachers. This teacher believed that the impact of MPA is typically a positive one that can be used as an enabling force to encourage students to perform at a higher level. In fact, this teacher made a point to say that sometimes it is others, such as parents and other teachers, who are overly concerned about students’ and anxiety that it becomes more of a problem that it would has to be. This teacher also used verbiage such as “worrywart,” which suggests that Teacher E finds struggling with MPA as a weakness. Teacher E seemed mainly concerned that if educators
approach students with help or techniques, or even open communication, we are telling them that they should be experiencing anxiety. “It’s like the more awareness there is of a situation, the more concern there is about the situations, and the more we spend time focusing on the situation instead of on to things that would, in and of themselves, alleviate that situation” (Teacher E, personal communication, March 23, 2016). They also reported only seeing about 10-15% of students demonstrating some degree of MPA.

Discussion

This study intended to show how a sample of five high school music teachers viewed MPA in their teaching environment, and if teachers felt prepared to address MPA with their students. Though each of the interviewed teachers were able to bring different topics, ideas, and opinions to their interviews, many underlying themes became apparent. This discussion will provide additional connections and suggestions for minimizing MPA in the high school music classroom and give suggestions for further studies.

Potential Significance

Most teachers agreed that there is a lack of information provided to teachers about MPA. Many based their own coping techniques on their personal experience, not based on literature or research done on the topic. Though no student has asked any of the teachers for help, this does not mean that there is not a problem. This could be that students and teachers believe that the impact of MPA is part of being a performer and that there is not much that can be done. Teacher E seemed to be more in that mentality, being that he was not interested in learning more about the topic and the extent of a study like this is taking the exposure of MPA too far. The other four, however, felt there was much to gain from a further study.
Many of the teachers seemed to be aware of the student’s symptoms that were similar to the ones they personally experience. For example, Teacher D’s experience with behavioral symptoms such as shaking and turning red made him more aware of students experiencing those symptoms, but made him less aware of students who could be experiencing more cognitive symptoms. This can be that he has a more heightened awareness of these symptoms. Teacher E was the only one to report a low percentage of students he believes demonstrate symptoms of MPA. There is reason to believe that this teacher, who did not express concern with MPA, either projects an environment of ease to his students, or, since he does not feel that it is an issue, is not aware when students are struggling. This could suggest that teachers may not realize there is a problem, or if there is a real problem to begin with. Another argument could be that because Teacher E’s performing group is jazz, these students may have a closer bond due to more experienced performers or smaller ensembles than those in an environment of band or orchestra. Thus the anxiety to perform in front of each other is less. This study was not able to allow for such conclusions, but does open the topic up for discussion.

The awareness of how students get elevated levels of MPA when performing in front of their peers is another theme that becomes important, especially when discussing adolescent development. As Kenny (2006) reflected, this social phobia can become more heightened during the adolescent stage, thus becoming more of an issue when performing in front of peers. The participants in this study reflected that there were levels of heightened MPA during performances, but there appears to be a noticeable increase in front of peers. Though this concept could be continued into college, it would be interesting to find correlations between confidence, self-efficacy, and social awareness and how that inhibits MPA. Getting a better understanding of this may help with learning more efficient coping techniques for this stage of development. It
appeared that some of the participants tried to help with this problem. It seemed to be beneficial for Teacher B to provide opportunities for students to continually perform in front of peers, and by making it as positive as possible. This association with positive experiences was something discussed in the literature and could be developed more in the classroom. One could do this by group performances and in the use of peer and self-assessments. Providing critique that gives students reinforced positive feedback and creative criticisms to help with improvement will guide students to understand that this development is needed to become a better musician.

The idea that MPA is something that should not be eliminated, but managed in a way where it can become a positive, was a theme brought up with multiple interviewees. This idea was not originally in the discussion for this paper, but has emerged as something that should be stated and discussed. The teachers felt that with the right frame of mind, a heightened level of awareness and nervousness has the potential to enhance a performance. This theme gives us further reason to develop more efficient coping mechanisms in our classrooms. If students, specifically at an age where social awareness becomes more prevalent, have more positive experiences from either their teachers or their peers, they may start to see MPA as a way to better their performances and auditions.

Teacher E brought up an interesting point that is worth noting, for it can change how teachers and students become aware of MPA and the effects it can have. The idea is that if we make students aware of the issues they could have, the students will potentially start to feel the anxiety, whether they were before or not. It would almost be as if the students feel they are supposed to be getting anxiety with performances, and if they are not, then something is not right. This is a good point to make, and could have potential implications if this topic is overdone. A great way to alleviate this concern is to include exercises that help control breath,
posture, or anything that MPA can exacerbate. If these exercises are done on a routine schedule and not directly linked to coping with MPA, students may use the technique to prepare for a performance or audition without realizing their calming effects. These mutually beneficial exercises can easily be incorporated into the lesson of any performing ensemble.

It is important for teachers to be as prepared as they can to set their students up for success. In order to do this, we need to be educated and ready to handle situations that can hold students back. Though there is plenty of literature and research on MPA, it may not easily be available to teachers. This is a topic that can better teachers and should be brought into development opportunities like conferences and professional development. There is still much that can be learned. Coping techniques and educational opportunities for teachers can benefit students well beyond the stage. Schools and educational programs are always in search of quality professional development, so incorporating useful knowledge on MPA in this way would benefit programs and teachers alike. Due to the amount of information available, it would only require teachers the opportunity for further learning to become useful. Even providing time for teachers to openly discuss the issues and techniques they use amongst themselves can be helpful and a great resource. All of the teachers interviewed for this study showed thoughts of reflection and most showed interest to learn more about MPA. If the need and desire is there, the educational opportunity should be provided.

There were a few limitations to this study. Notably, the sample size of teachers interviewed was small, thus limiting feedback. These teachers also portrayed an imbalance of gender, for only one female was interviewed. In addition, all of the teachers were from a specific region teaching in similar educational settings. A number of teachers continue to perform regularly on their instruments demonstrating that they had overcome their own personal MPA.
Finally, this study did not give a voice to the student’s engagement with MPA and the issues they experience as adolescents.

**Impact on Teaching**

The impact of MPA can be a well-known concept for teachers in the classroom. The information in this paper can be used to show a need for further development and discussion with teachers. Not only advocating for professional development can be beneficial, but also to create a manual or resource guide for teachers to use as needed. With all the information available, teachers have the potential to become better prepared to handle MPA.

As a teacher, I would like to use some of these ideas in both the research literature and from the teachers I interviewed. I would incorporate breathing exercises that simulate the Alexander Technique, yoga, and meditation. Doing this in the beginning of each rehearsal, as referenced by teacher B and C, could potentially give my students the tools to have a more focused and productive rehearsal, all while giving them tools to help with MPA. The way I would speak to my students would be more centered on building their confidence and staying away from sayings such as, “You are fine. You will be fine.”

Lastly, I found that the teachers interviewed and research literature discussed how giving multiple performance opportunities, such as mock auditions, to be very valuable. I would give students this opportunity on a regular basis, whether they are preparing for auditions, or want to expand their performance prospects and their skills as musicians.

**Recommendations for Further Study**

Technology is an ever-growing topic in the educational world, and it has its place in the treatments of MPA. The use of technology that allows people to practice with an accompaniment in real-time surroundings and use of virtual reality is something that will soon be implemented,
and a study on such a development will benefit teachers everywhere. Virtual environments can produce a sense of presence for performing musicians, but the degree of that presence and the thinkable benefits of this virtual environment is still unknown (Orman, 2003).

Though this study did not have a gender balance of participants, it would be beneficial to see if there is a correlation between male and female teachers and how they identify and manage MPA in the classroom. A more in-depth study can be completed with a larger participation number and equal male and female teachers. Data could be coded to see if there are any connections between how MPA is identified and managed in the classroom and the gender of the teacher.

Further study can also include understanding the role of educators who may unintentionally facilitate the development of MPA (Patston, 2013). “Future research of the vital role that teachers play is clearly warranted. Well-informed, supportive pedagogy of both the individual and their instrument would be a tangible benefit of such research, and reduce the impact of this insidious condition (Patston, 2013, p. 95). Though there may not be a clear answer to the solution of managing MPA, educators cannot ignore this as a problem in future musicians. If students are given the correct tools to succeed, they will gain self-confidence, self-efficacy, and the skills to handle anxiety and enjoy performing music.
References


Appendix

Interview Questions

1. What grade level and subject do you teach? For how many years?

2. Have you had any personal experiences or issues with Music Performance Anxiety?

3. At any point did your training address issues of Music Performance Anxiety, either personally or with students? How so?

4. If not, what was missing for you or what do you wish you had learned?

5. What techniques have you used or tried to use to help with Music Performance Anxiety? How did you learn about these techniques?

6. Do you have any current or past students who suffered from Music Performance Anxiety? If so, how did you help those students?

7. How do you feel Music Performance Anxiety affects students?

8. When do your students typically demonstrate symptoms of Music Performance Anxiety?

9. What environments do you typically see students experience Music Performance Anxiety?

10. Have students ever asked you to help them with Music Performance Anxiety? In what context?

11. What symptoms do you typically see or associate with Music Performance Anxiety in your students?

12. What was the worst case of Music Performance Anxiety that you have seen in your career from a student? Please describe it without using any identifying information about that student.

13. Approximately what percentage of your current students would you say demonstrates some degree of Music Performance Anxiety?

14. Do you feel that there is a need for teachers to receive better education on Music Performance Anxiety?