

“MY VOICE SPEAKS FOR ITSELF”: THE EXPERIENCES OF THREE TRANSGENDER
STUDENTS IN SECONDARY SCHOOL CHORAL PROGRAMS

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ABSTRACT

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Is choral music education in America at a “trans(gender) tipping point”? With the purpose of furthering and enhancing the sociocultural dialogue surrounding LGBTQA issues in music education and to improve vocal/choral instruction for trans students, this multiple narrative case study explored the musical lives and lived experiences of trans students in high school choral music programs. The two grand tour problems of this study were:

- To describe how transgender students enrolled in secondary school choral music programs navigate their gender identity in the choral context.
- To describe if/how transgender students in secondary school choral programs were supported by groups including their choral teachers, choral peers, and school administrators.

The emergent research design employed narrative inquiry and ethnographic techniques in order to honor and highlight voices of the three participants: Sara, Jon, and Skyler (pseudonyms).

The stories of these three students revealed the importance of context and geography in shaping the experiences of trans youth at school. Additionally, the connection or lack thereof between voice and gender identity was different for each of the participants. The policies of the students’ school districts, high schools (administrators), choral programs, and outside music organizations (e.g., state music education organizations) shaped and influenced how Sara, Jon, and Skyler navigated their trans identity within the high school choral context. Mentors and important others helped these students as they traversed their individual gender journeys. Based

upon these data, I contend that secondary schools and choral programs can make policy changes, both large and small, in order to better serve trans youth. I also posit that more professional development and incorporation of (trans) gender issues is needed for choral music educators.

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*For three dear friends who departed this earth far too soon:
Germán Andrés Aguilar (1979-2014), who inspires me to be a better conductor-teacher
Adam Aaron Gray (1982-2015), who inspires me to write and urged me to pursue a Ph.D.
Rebecca “Becca” Reichert (1982-2006), who inspires me to be a hard working, caring educator
And also to my grandmother, Lois Ayotte, without whom I would not be a musician.*

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CHAPTER 1—INTRODUCTION

I remember how confusing it was when the meaning of “transgender” became clear to me, and the fact that this was a reality that people lived and grappled with every day stopped me in my tracks. I was taking a summer graduate education course in San José, and I was not thrilled about taking it. It was expensive and was to involve long days of being inside when I really wanted to be relaxing and decompressing after a stressful school year.

Our class met in the multi-purpose room of a school. Atop a small platform at the front of the room stood two six-foot folding tables used as the teacher’s desk and workstation. On the floor were eight tables surrounded by folding chairs. The tables overflowed with construction paper, scissors, glue, magazines, and other accouterments found in an average American elementary school classroom. Surrounding these tables sat a myriad of teachers—among them elementary, physical education, music, and special education—from various Bay Area districts. We were an excitable, eclectic, friendly, and somewhat rowdy bunch. On the first day of class one student came in late—Sam¹: tall(ish) and very slender with short, clean-cut brown hair, and sporting athletic wear. A toothy, glimmering smile bright enough to light up foggy San Francisco, where (I would soon find out) Sam taught middle school P.E., instantly piqued my interest. The walk was confident and calm. Sam found a seat at the table next to mine. I had a strange, instinctive inkling that we would make a strong connection.

Sizing Sam up and—admittedly—invoking stereotypes, I thought, “Oh, fun! Sam will be my lesbian friend in the class” (as a gay man in a room full of mostly heterosexual women, the idea of having another gay person in the room seemed comforting). This was a passing thought until the teacher and other students in the class instinctually (and without prompting) began to

¹ To maintain anonymity, pseudonyms are used for all people and places/locations in this document.

refer to Sam using male pronouns. I was severely confused. As time progressed and we felt more comfortable around one another (several days of eating lunch under a tree outside the school aided in this process), my new friend Sam explained his transition and what he was going through. He was at a precipice of sorts in his transition and was taking this class partially to distract himself from the weight set upon him regarding a potential double mastectomy. This was a new world to me. I had not considered before this point what it would be like to be perceived in a way that conflicts with one's own understanding of oneself. I had made so many incorrect assumptions about Sam, and I felt ignorant. He taught me to not make assumptions about the gender identity of others and to examine how gender can play a role in the K-12 classroom. Spending time with Sam made me realize how many repressed emotions and feelings surrounding gender identity existed deep within me.

The Transgender “Tipping Point”

Seven years after my first meeting with Sam, the sexuality and gender landscapes in the United States have changed drastically. In recent years, there has been rapid progress toward equal rights for many members of the LGBTQA² (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer/questioning, asexual) community in the United States. Within a year of this writing, a decision by the U.S. Supreme Court on marriage equality followed many state-level decisions (decided by both referenda and by federal judges) making marriage equitable in various states. In popular culture, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender issues have become increasingly present,

² L (lesbian), G (gay), B (bisexual), T (trans), Q (queer, questioning), and A (asexual). This is the way that I have chosen to represent sub-populations of gender-sexual diversity. When used in other forms (e.g., LGBT), I am quoting the acronym used by another author in an effort to accurately represent their writing. I have chosen these seven letters (representing eight terms) because at this juncture, I consider it a fairly comprehensive representation of the many facets of the non-cisgender and non-heteronormative population and I am aware of the fact that these letters are not all-inclusive.

and the “T” in LGBTQA is becoming more prominent. Several popular television programs such as *Orange is the New Black*, *Glee*, *The Fosters*, and *Transparent* (Solomon, 2016) feature or have featured trans³ characters.

At the time of this writing, American society seemed to be at a “tipping point” regarding trans issues, as evidenced by coverage in the news media (e.g., Bernstein, 2014; Burkett, 2015; Hesse, 2014; Padawer, 2014; Schoenberg, 2015; Steinmetz, 2014a). In addition, the visibility and activism of celebrities like Chaz Bono, Laverne Cox, Janet Mock, and Caitlyn Jenner ignited conversations about trans issues across the U.S. After nearly six decades of struggling with her gender identity, Caitlyn Jenner’s “coming out” caught the attention of many people who may have previously been unaware of the evolving discourse surrounding trans issues. Her speech at the ESPY awards in the summer of 2015 included a passionate statement against the bullying that many trans people face in their daily lives and a plea for an appreciation (rather than a fear) of diversity. In Boston, the Butterfly Music Transgender Chorus gave voice to people who may not have felt welcome in more “traditional” choral ensembles (Young, 2015, 2016). Perhaps this trans visibility will bring topics previously not discussed into public discourse—for example, issues surrounding trans health care (e.g., Lombardi, 2001), the recent movement to lift the ban on trans people serving in the U.S. military (e.g., Lubold & Schwartz, 2015), homelessness, unemployment/underemployment, and sexual violence (e.g., Beemyn & Rankin, 2011; Grant et al., 2011; Lombardi, Wilchins, Priesing, & Malouf, 2002; Testa et al., 2012).

A burgeoning line of scholarship indicated that there might be a generational gap around trans issues. Beemyn and Rankin’s (2011) large-scale study suggested that:

³ I prefer *trans* to *transgender*, as the former strikes me as slightly more inclusive; thus this is the version I use throughout this dissertation.

Many younger people indicate that they readily recognize and accept themselves as transgender. They can now see transgender images in popular culture, read about transgender issues in the mainstream media, and connect with other transgender youth through web pages, chat rooms, social networking sites, and other online venues. As a result, it seems that significantly fewer younger transgender people today lack information for an extended period of time or have a sense of prolonged confusion. (p. 114)

However, although more information is available, coming out processes remain context dependent. Increased dialogue and information about trans issues does not change the struggle that people who are trans may face in navigating their gender identity, especially for those who are non-binary.

Cultural and generational shifts may have inspired an emerging line of scholarship on trans issues in music education (Bartolome, 2016; Nichols, 2013; Silveira & Goff, 2016; Sullivan, 2014) and choral music (Berglin, 2014; Edidi & Palkki, 2015; Edwards, 2009; Steele, 2016; Sweet & Bergonzi, 2016). Trans people are even become more visible in hardcore and other “vernacular” music scenes (e.g., Stanley-Ayre, 2015). Unsurprisingly, this scholarship coincided with a burgeoning conversation about trans choral singers on social media (e.g., Facebook) and choral bulletin boards (e.g., ChoralNet). As an example, in December 2014, a concerned high school choir teacher posted the following in a choral director group on Facebook:

Recently, one of my sophomore sopranos came out to me as transgendered [*sic*] and would like to identify as male. Since then, I’ve switched out that student’s choir dress for a vest and black dress shirt (male concert choir outfit), and of course, I have switched to

using male pronouns when addressing this student in order to support him. However, I need guidance on what part I should have him sing. (social media, December 2, 2014)

The teacher went on to explain that the student desired to sing tenor and had been “practicing low.” He very much wanted to switch voice parts. This teacher’s reaction is encouraging—she immediately was understanding and supportive about pronouns and concert dress, and she was trying to do the best thing for her student. What is not encouraging—and quite frightening—were some of the responses to this post, including the very first reply:

Tell him there is such a thing as a boy-soprano. Then, tell him you didn’t wake up one morning and decided [*sic*] to be a choir director; you went to college to learn the difference between a soprano and a tenor and that *he has to sing soprano*. (social media, December 2, 2014, emphasis added)

Likewise, in response to a similar request in the same Facebook group, one teacher wrote: “Unpopular Opinion: *I know this person identifies as a male, but that does not make them one.* Their voice part is still the same. Shouldn’t be in male choir” (social media, June 9, 2015, emphasis added). In April 2016, a preservice music teacher posted the following: “I am a transgender music ed. student. What are the chances of securing a career with my gender transition in mind? Significantly less? Very concerned, to be honest” (social media, April 9, 2016).

This online rhetoric exemplifies the lack of compassion and knowledge music educators may have regarding trans issues, and features the cisgender⁴-centric lens through which many people (including choral music educators) see the world.

In September 2015, I received the following e-mail:

⁴ *Cisgender* refers to a person whose assigned birth sex matches their gender identity (non-transgender).

Hello. My name is Ronn. I am a senior at a [southern state] high school, and I am a transgender male. I quit choir last year because my director forced me to wear a dress. I begged him and begged him to let me wear the attire of my gender identity, but he repeatedly refused, even after talking with the counselor about it. I was furious and miserable, and I quit. And now, I can't audition for all-west and All State choir, because you have to be a member of your schools choral ensemble to join. I'm just sad...I think my situation is beyond helping. I've just been denied so many times, I even contacted the [state vocal music organization] president and she just basically told me I had to be in my schools choir. We only have one choir and one director. (personal communication, September 21, 2015)

As this quote exemplifies, educators who have never considered trans issues before may feel threatened or intimidated by their lack of ability to mentor students with whom they share little or no common ground. What these teachers fail to understand is that the voice can be an important part of gender identity and expression—it is one of the ways humans express gender. While these may be seen as isolated incidents, I can report anecdotally that more and more choral conductor-teachers are asking questions on choral bulletin boards and social media groups about how to best support trans students in their choirs. This is significant, because at the time of this writing, it seemed that there was much misunderstanding about gender diversity in the choral music education community.

What is Gender?

There are many lenses through which we view the world. Our experiences vary based upon a myriad of factors such as age, ethnicity, race, geographical location, sexuality, and gender. The discourse surrounding gender can be fraught with assumptions and

misunderstandings. Davis (2009) wrote that because “language constructs the socially available categories of identification, language directly affects the visibility to gender diversity... [the] range of linguistic options directly affects individuals’ ability to make the complexity of their gendered histories understandable” (p. 113). Beemyn and Rankin (2011); Järviuoma, Moisala, and Vilkkio (2003); and Valentine (2007) also noted that language has a powerful influence on gender. Thus, I begin by defining key terms that will be used throughout this dissertation.

Definitions for Common Ground

Sex versus gender. *Sex* and *gender* are not synonyms, although many people use them interchangeably in daily discourse: from daily speech to research reports. *Sex* historically has referred to the biological/genetic features that distinguish males and females, the product of three combined elements: genetics, anatomy, and hormones. The term *sex* is widely used to mean these things, but this is a contested claim (e.g., Fausto-Sterling, 2012). According to Lorber (2005), “Sex is more of a continuum than a dichotomy” (p. 9). Some scholars and philosophers, have argued that there is no biological basis for sex; as Butler (1993) wrote,

The category of “sex”⁵ is, from the start, normative; it is what Foucault has called a “regulatory ideal.” In that sense, then, “sex” not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce—demarcate, circulate, differentiate—the bodies it controls... In other words, “sex” is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time. (p. 1)

⁵ “We take one aspect of gender and give it a special meaning and its own name (sex). That privileges this aspect of gender over gender identity, which is playing out in the anti-bathroom bills” (Genny Beemyn, personal communication, April 3, 2016)

Gender, on the other hand, is a set of socially constructed and context/culture-dependent ideas regarding gender roles and what behaviors and physical attributes are considered “masculine” or “feminine” (Bornstein, 1994). Järviluoma, Moisala, and Vilkkö (2003) stated that “any given gender role acts in relation to other gender roles within the whole gender system of that particular society” (p. 11). According to Butler (1990), biology does not create gender, but rather gender becomes legible through attributes such as the clothes one wears, the mannerisms one uses, and the pitch of one’s voice—all attributes that play a role in one’s musical experiences. After some criticism of the ideas in *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler (1993) later revised her stance, claiming that gender is discursive—that gender is a gestural speech act in which the actor does not precede gender.⁶ As Butler (1993) put it, “discourse produces the effects that it names” (p. 2). Gendered acts are produced by the effect of the action. Gender also is produced and experienced socially; Hayes (2003) argued that: “although gender is often experienced as a deeply authentic aspect of the individual self, many theorists have persuasively argued that gender identities must be understood as *relationally* formed” (p. 1094, emphasis in original)

Similarly, *gender identity* and *gender expression* are distinct terms. *Gender identity* is one’s inner “gender compass”—how one experiences their gender in their own body and in their own context. *Gender expression* refers to how one exhibits their inner gender identity in the world. This may include clothing, gestures, manner of speaking, etc. *Gender roles* are culturally contextual attributes pursuant to masculinity and femininity understood as “normal” in a given context. For example, in modern American society, girls and women are expected to be feminine; many consider men who exhibit feminine characteristics abnormal. *Gender attribution*

⁶ In the 1999 tenth anniversary edition of *Gender Trouble*, Butler wrote: “If I were to rewrite this book under present circumstances, I would include a discussion of transgender and intersexuality, the way that ideal gender dimorphism works in both sorts of discourses, the different relations to surgical interventions that these related concerns sustain” (p. xxvi).

refers to the gender that one is assigned by others based on their appearance. For example, if one is walking down the street and sees a tall person with broad shoulders, they likely expect to see a cisgender male.

I use the term *gender* to refer to a spectrum of gender identities and expressions rather than to signify a man/male, woman/female binary. Thus, I consider the concept of gender to be related to the LGBTQA umbrella of discourse and research. Because I operate from the position that gender is a non-binary category, all of the literature discussed herein is viewed through that lens (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011; Bornstein, 1994, 1998; Nagoshi, Nagoshi, & Brzuzy, 2014). The sex versus gender dichotomy becomes critical when exploring the literature on sex and gender in general education and music education, because, as will be demonstrated in this dissertation, these terms have been used in vastly different ways.

Defining sexuality. *Sexuality, sexual orientation, or romantic orientation* refers to how one acts on⁷ their erotic and/or romantic desires. Sexuality is analytically distinct from gender but intimately bound with it, “like two lines on a graph that have to intersect” (Stryker, 2008, p. 16). As Valentine (2007) wrote, “I want to argue that ‘transgender,’ rather than being an index of marginality of ‘an out of the way category’ ...is in fact a central cultural site where meanings about gender and sexuality are being worked out” (p. 14). Gender and sexuality are related because we often make assumptions about one’s sexuality based on their performance of (e.g., adherence to or rejection of) hegemonic, societally created gender norms (Butler, 1999; Schilt & Westbrook, 2009). For example, feminine men and masculine women often are assumed to be gay, although conceptually, gender and sexuality are distinct. As Butler (1999) wrote,

⁷ Or do not act on, in the case of asexual individuals.

Gay people, for instance, may be discriminated against in positions of employment because they fail to “appear” in accordance with accepted gender norms. And the sexual harassment of gay people may well take place not in the service of shoring up gender hierarchy, but in promoting gender normativity. (p. xiii)

Similarly, de Jong (2014) noted that, “the discourse about gender remains extremely limited, in part due to a linking of gender identity with sexuality” (p. 869).

Defining transgender. Transgender as a term and a concept has been understood in varying and sometimes contradictory ways. At the turn of the twentieth century, there was little or no vocabulary or schema surrounding the concept of what we would now call *transgender*. Of the “sexologists” of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Beemyn (2014) wrote:

Many of these sexologists, as they became known, did not make clear distinctions between gender nonconformity and same-sex attraction. Rather than treating same-sex sexuality as a separate category, they considered it only a sign of “gender inversion”—that is, having a gender inverted or opposite of the gender assigned to the person at birth. (...) Not until the early 20th century did gender difference become considered a separate phenomenon from same-sex sexuality and start to be less pathologized by the medical profession. (p. 505)

In 1980, the American Psychiatric Association added “Gender Identity Disorder” to the their Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), a term later changed to “Gender Dysphoria” (American Psychiatric Association, 1994; Glickman, 2014; Lev, 2013), which was changed for DSM-V. In defining the history of this change, Lev (2013) wrote,

The diagnosis is intended to be used when there is a marked incongruence between the individual’s expressed or experienced gender and that which was assigned to the person

at birth. This condition, consistent with other diagnoses, must cause clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.

Gender dysphoria is characterized by a strong desire to be treated as the “other” gender or to want to change one’s sex characteristics, and a strong conviction that one has feelings that are typical of the “other” gender. (p. 292)

This change was complicated and controversial. As Lev (2013) noted, “The story of Gender Identity Disorder, and the new diagnosis of Gender Dysphoria, is a narrative of an oppressed people and their liberation struggle, amid the psychobabble of gender conformity, mental illness, and medicalization of human diversity” (p. 290). Lev (2013) argued that even new nomenclature of gender dysphoria could be harmful to the trans community, while others noted that a formal diagnosis of gender dysphoria can aid trans people in getting the medical and mental health services that they may require.

The fact that behaviors we now understand as transgender were diagnosed a psychological disorder is significant—and is perhaps one reason that trans people have had such a difficult time achieving equality, even within the LGBTQA community (e.g., Cvetkovich & Wahng, 2001; Stryker, 1994; Wilchins, 1997). There has been a similar “othering” of sexuality by medical and religious communities, which labeled non-heterosexual desire as deviant (Foucault, 1978). For example, while homosexuality was essentially removed from DSM-II in 1973, “Ego-dystonic Homosexuality” remained in the DSM-III (Spitzer, 1981, p. 210).

There is great diversity within the trans community about words and terms used to express gender; for example, in Beemyn and Rankin’s (2011) study, participants provided 603 unique descriptors for their gender identities. A commonly understood usage of *transgender*

(trans) is as a blanket term⁸ to denote any kind of variance from, or opposition to, binary gender, though opinions about the use of this term vary widely (Davis, 2009; Elliot, 2010; Stryker, 2008). The term *transgender* originally was meant to “distinguish people who cross sexes by changing their bodies (transsexual) from people who cross genders by changing their clothing, behavior, and grooming (transgender⁹)” (Wilchins, 2004, p. 26), but is now used more broadly and may now include a diverse group including people who identify as (among others): transexual, transgender, transvestite, gender fluid, genderqueer, agender, gender non-conforming, demi-girl, demi-boy, drag queen, and non-binary. Some people use the term *transgender* to denote a person who innately identifies as the gender opposite to the one assigned to them at birth (Stryker, 2008), though some people who fit this description claim the term *transsexual* (many trans individuals transition to living permanently within their inner gender identity—with or without surgery). Namaste (Namaste, 2005 as cited in Elliot, 2010) and others have questioned the legitimacy of transsexuals being placed under the “trans umbrella,” because not all transsexual people see their gender journey as a critique of the gender binary: “the majority of transsexuals do not make sense of their lives in lesbian/gay terms.” After transitioning from one gender to another (e.g., male-to-female), some trans people no longer consider themselves transgender (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). However, as Butler (1998) wrote:

To cross from one gender to another may suggest that those genders are in place, have their place, prior to the possibility of crossing. But there is no acquisition of gender without such a crossing, a dangerous crossing into cultural norms that brings both pleasure and fear. (p. 359)

⁸ It should be noted here that some theorists and scholars, as well as trans people, make a clear distinction between “transgender” (or “transgendered”) and “transsexual.” For a review of this distinction, see Elliot (2010) Chapter 1.

⁹ or “transgenderist”

Being *stealth* (considered by some a less pejorative term than *passing*) is when people who are trans live their lives full time in their new gender identity/expression in a way that does not call attention to the fact that they are trans. In other words, when one meets a stealth trans person, one cannot ascertain the fact that they are trans. *Cisgender* or *non-trans* denotes to a person who is not transgender—one whose assigned birth sex matches their gender identity.

Vital vocabulary. An increasing number of trans people claim monikers like *genderqueer*, *gender-variant*, *gender nonconforming* (or simply *queer*) that challenge the gender binary. These terms refer to a variety of circumstances, including: a disconnect between *assigned birth sex*, a medical determination made at birth based on a baby's genitalia, and their gender identity and/or gender expression; or a fluidity of gender (i.e., varying their gender expression between male and female, or living permanently “in the cracks”).

A *man* or *trans man* (or *trans guy*) is a person who has transitioned to living as a male (they also may use *female-to-male/FTM*) and a *woman* or *trans woman* expresses female gender identity (they may also use *male-to-female/MTF*). This is an important distinction that often causes confusion. When referring to a trans person who is transitioning, one should always refer to the gender *to which* they are transitioning, not their assigned birth sex. For example, a female-bodied FTM transsexual person should never be called a trans woman. In addition, *transgender* seems to be accepted more readily than *transgendered*, which is generally seen as offensive (Steinmetz, 2014b). An increasing number of gender liminal people are choosing to identify themselves using pronouns typically reserved for a group of people—namely, *they*, *them*, and *their* (Bennett, 2016; Wayne, 2005). For example, in referring to a gender non-conforming person, one could say, “they wrote me a letter” or “I’m meeting them for coffee.” As Järviluoma, Moisala, and Vilkkö (2003) noted:

In the English language the generic use of the pronoun ‘he’ has only been standard practice for less than 200 years. When reading Jane Austen one notices that the plural form of the pronoun, ‘they’, is used as generic far more often than the pronoun ‘he’. (p. 71)

Some people also use original pronouns such as ze (rather than s/he) and hir (rather than his/her) (Bornstein, 1998; O’Conner & Kellerman, 2009). I will use singular plural pronouns for some people who are trans throughout this dissertation. In 2015, the Oxford English Dictionary added “Mx.” as a gender-neutral title: an alternative to Mr., Mrs., and Ms. (McDonald, 2015).

Gender: Performativity and Stretching Definitions

Gender is learned, negotiated, and expressed in many ways and in many facets of life (e.g., Bornstein, 1994; Butler, 1990, 1993; Davis, 2009; Wilchins, 1997, 2004)—including in music (Green, 1997, 2002; Järviluoma, Moisala, & Vilkkio 2003; McClary, 2001; Solie, 1995). The sociological explanation of gender performativity was a break from psychological and medical/clinical explanations of sex/gender (Hird, 2002). Butler’s 1990 book *Gender Trouble* grew out of the burgeoning literature on feminist perspectives from the early 1990s. Butler (1990) contended: “gender proves to be performative—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed” (Butler, 1990, p. 33). In other words, gender is not inherent but continually fashioned by each individual. In describing gender as something that is enacted—something that is made real in the world through speech and action, Butler insinuated that each individual repeatedly performs actions that denote one’s gender, either complying with or disrupting normative discourses and actions for what is deemed culturally appropriate for their

gender (Butler, 1999). Living outside of these societal norms, then, can prove difficult and/or dangerous for people who transgress or defy them.

The notion of performativity confused and angered some in the trans community, whose gender identity and expression may be innately tied to their sense of self. Some scholars also criticized Butler for using trans people to make a point while ignoring their lived experience (e.g., Namaste, 2000). Some wondered, for example, if performativity implied that a trans person living their life as a different gender than the one they were assigned at birth was like putting on a “gender costume” each day. Butler’s 1993 book *Bodies that Matter* addressed these concerns:

If I were to argue that genders are performative, that could mean that I thought that one woke in the morning, perused the closet or some more open space for the gender of choice, donned that gender for the day, and then restored the garment to its place at night. Such a willful and instrumental subject, one who decides *on* its gender, is clearly not its gender from the start and fails to realize that its existence is already decided *by* gender. (Butler, 1993, p. x, emphasis in original)

Butler’s notions about gender performativity are related to the notion of gender as a social construct—something that is being negotiated and re-negotiated continually in society (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011; Bornstein, 1994; Lorber, 1994; Nagoshi, Nagoshi, & Brzyzy, 2014); West and Zimmerman (1987) referred to this as “doing gender.” In addition, the roles and behaviors defined as masculine or feminine are context and culture-dependent (Brody & Hall, 2008). In other words, behavior that may be perceived one way in the United States may be seen differently in another country or culture. Regional differences within countries also can influence gender norms—what is acceptable in San Francisco may not be tolerated in the context of a town in rural Michigan.

Autobiographical and historical writing on trans issues has aided in the spread of information on trans topics not previously discussed (e.g., Bornstein, 1994; Boylan, 2013; Green, 2004; Mock, 2014; Stryker, 2008; Wilchins, 1997). These writings have helped to stretch and mold the definition of (and perceptions about) gender. Beemyn (2014) and Feinberg (1996) traced “trans history” in an attempt to demonstrate that many of the many of the gender hang-ups present in modern America did not exist in earlier societies. Similarly, Stryker (2008) chronicled the history of the transgender movements and prominent trans people from yesteryear. Declaring herself the original “gender outlaw,” Bornstein (1994) imparted her thoughts on the social construction of gender through humor, memoir, and even a performance piece included as a chapter in her book. Similarly, Green’s (2004) autobiographical book, *Becoming a Visible Man*, mixes memoir with encouragement, education, and activism. Wilchins’s (1997) book *Read My Lips: Sexual Subversion and the End of Gender* is something of a battle cry for the trans community. She encouraged trans people to take up the narrative on gender issues and to fight for recognition:

The regime of gender is an intentional, systemic oppression. As such, it cannot be fought through personal action, but only through an organized, systemic response. It is high time we stopped writing our hard-luck stories, spreading open our legs and our yearbooks for those awful before-and-after pictures, and began thinking clearly about how to fight back. It is time we began producing our own theory, our own narrative. (p. 25)

The question of gender fluidity (as opposed to a gender binary) has been a topic of some disagreement in the trans community and may be explained by a generational divide. Drawing on doctoral research, Roen (2002) discussed the political dichotomy of “outness” using the terminology “both/neither” vs. “either/or.” While Roen noted that trans activists like Bornstein

(1994) considered passing to be a form of hiding—and therefore not an asset to the public image of being a “gender outlaw”—some of Roen’s (2002) participants sought to remain stealth (“pass”) and to avoid using their gender as a political statement. Similarly, combining theory and data, Davis (2009) explored the quandary of gender “fluidity” and the fact that increasing complexity in “gender experiences” troubled notions about the gender binary by interviewing 40 trans people about self-identification and about their experiences. Davis challenged the notion that gender fluidity signifies an amorphous category without boundaries. These studies exemplify the fight people who are trans may undertake for a place to belong, within queer communities, and in society at large—including schools.

A small number of publications have explored the experiences of trans teens, including the engaging and often heartbreaking stories compiled by a former teacher at an alternative “school” for a group of mostly transgender teens in Los Angeles (Beam, 2008). Beam is not a researcher. Her book contains no method section or theoretical framework; however, she taught at the school (called Eagles) for over two years. Her book is rife with thick description, describing how she supported these oft-fragile students. Beam (2008) wrote:

This is the middle ground that thugs and bullies don’t like: a genetically male teenager wearing an electric blue prom dress with off-the-shoulder straps, and slightly scuffed silver sandals, with one heel worn down (I heard a girl lost a few teeth for this). They don’t like boots and Fubu shirts, and they don’t like too-big sports jerseys either, with Ace bandages and three Beefy-T’s beneath to flatten and cover up the goods. They don’t like ambiguous-looking kids of either gender, but especially ones who wear platform go-go boots with tight jeans underneath a miniskirt and a gray boy’s hoodie because it’s cold outside, with short fingernails painted a gender-neutral black. “What the hell is *that*?”

they ask, before they rip apart the so-called threads looking for answers. Three-quarters of high school-aged transgender kids have been harassed or assaulted for being trans, and about 90 percent feel unsafe in school, when they go. (p. 98)

Kuklin's (2014) book depicts in photos and stories the experiences of six trans teenagers navigating their gender identity. Christina, one girl who is trans profiled in the book, described the difficulty that she had at school:

There were days when I would not go to school, knowing I damn well needed to get my butt to school 'cause I was on the verge of failing. My appearance stopped me. As I went outside I started to get panicky because I didn't feel right about the way I looked. (p. 34)

Christina's story exemplifies the difficulty trans women face in society; because the United States is a society in which hegemonic masculinity is an accepted norm, trans women are often reviled for rejecting their masculinity. Christina's story also demonstrates the construct that on a physical level, it is much easier for trans men to be stealth (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011; Kulkin, 2014). It also demonstrates how schools can be difficult places for non-cisgender students.

Gender in Education

In December 2014, a 17 year old transgender girl from Ohio named Leelah Alcorn, faced with the prospect of never being able to be the woman she was on the inside, died after stepping in front of a transfer truck. In her suicide note she wrote: "Please don't be sad, it's for the better. The life I would've lived isn't worth living in...because I'm transgender. I feel like a girl trapped in a boy's body, and I've felt that way ever since I was four. I never knew there was a word for that feeling...I just continued to do traditionally 'boyish' things to try to fit in" (Johnson, 2014). Leelah's tragic death falls into a long litany of teen suicides among queer youth that began to spike in 2010. Too many queer youth grow up in communities where they are rejected for openly

expressing their gender-sexual diversity. It is time for Americans—and educators in particular—to wake up and to take part in helping to end more needless suicides.

According to the National Transgender Discrimination Survey Report on health and health care, a staggering 41% of trans people attempted suicide, compared with less than 5% of the general population (Grant et al., 2010). In an August 2015 story in *USA Today* Unger (2015) stated that, “more than a dozen other surveys of transgender people worldwide since 2001 have found similarly high rates, and the problem has grown more visible since Caitlyn Jenner’s coming out raised awareness about transgender health issues overall” (para. 4).

Schooling and Gender Norms

Students learn many things in school in addition to the sanctioned curriculum. There is a hidden curriculum present in classrooms, hallways, playgrounds, and cafeterias through which students learn subtle, often unspoken lessons about societal norms and expectations about many things (Apple, 2004) including gender (Basow, 2004; Giroux, 1983; Pascoe, 2007; Thorne, 1993). Apple (2004) stated that students glean messages of this hidden curriculum by encountering “institutional expectations and routines” during their years of schooling (p. 13). Applying this concept to gender in schools, O’Toole (1998) wrote, “Teachers are not immune from society’s notions of gender... their pedagogy is laden with subtle messages about who is important in the classroom” (p. 13). Basow (2004) noted that children come to school after years of gleaning gender messages from their families, surroundings, and the mass media. School is a training ground for the dissemination of gender norms and gender roles, where students learn about—but may also disrupt—traditional models of masculinity and femininity (Pascoe, 2007; Roberts, Allan, & Wells, 2007). Teachers can help or hurt this process, as articulated by Koza (1993b): “Expert teacher knowledge based on sexist discourses leads to teaching practices that

tend to reproduce unequal power relations, while other expert knowledge may challenge those relations” (p. 214).

Scholars in general education (e.g., Jordan, 1995; Pascoe, 20007; Renold, 2000, 2004; Thorne, 1993) and music education (e.g., Green, 1997; Hall, 2005, Roulston & Misawa, 2011) posited that students learn social norms surrounding gender roles early in life. For example, children learn that singing is appropriate for girls and effeminate boys, the latter group who, as Rands (2009) noted, “are often attacked because of gender nonconformity” (p. 423). Butler (1999) and others noted that individuals might be punished (taunted, bullied, harassed, etc.) for not subscribing to socially accepted (and reinforced) gender norms.

School Policies and Interventions

One of the ways schools, including K-12 choral programs, can deconstruct hegemonic gender archetypes is to recognize that gender is a social construct and that many people in the postmodern era do not fit into binary distinctions like male/female, masculine/feminine, and do not wish to. As Wells, Roberts, and Allen (2012) wrote,

Today’s schools and society are rapidly changing. As such, parents, children, and youth bring with them different social norms and diverse worldviews. Issues surrounding gender identity are complex and can be equated to how sexual orientation was understood some 30 years ago. Attitudes change, times change, but the hopes, dreams, and fears of parents and students often remarkably remain the same. (pp. 23-24)

There is little legal precedent for honoring issues of gender-sexual diversity in schools, as noted by Hirsman (2012):

With the emergence of digital technology and ubiquity of cyber-communication, the challenges and solutions for LGBT students have become more complex. The laws are

essentially playing a “catch-up” game, leaving local school districts with broad discretion in dealing with LGBT issues in their school communities. (p. 18)

This means that, essentially, most school districts and school administrators are “flying without a net” when it comes to considering LGBTQA issues. Scholars including McQueen (2006), Meyer (2010, 2014), and Pascoe (2007) advocated for addition of transgender and non-binary gender issues into the secondary school curriculum. McCarthy (2003b) encouraged teachers to ask themselves: “Do I stifle nonnormative gender expression in my classroom?”... As young people increasingly explore the diversity of gender expression, educators must be prepared to understand and support their students by providing resources and a safe school environment” (p. 47). Several authors suggested policy language and/or improvements for schools to honor transgender or “gender creative youth” (Meyer & Pullen Sansfaçon, 2014), including Callender (2008); Luecke (2011); Meyer (2010, 2014); Sausa (2005); and Wells, Roberts, and Allan (2012). As Pascoe (2007) wrote, “High school is hard. Negotiating gender identities is hard. Figuring out sexualities is hard. It is up to adults to configure spaces that support youths’ variety of gender and sexual expressions” (p. 173).

In the United States, transgender and gender creative youth are protected by the Equal Protection Clause in the Fourteenth Amendment, the First Amendment, Title IX, and state non-discrimination or human rights laws (Meyer, 2014).¹⁰ However, until 2016, individual districts and schools were responsible for deciding how those laws apply in their community. Writing from a legal perspective, Hirsman (2012) wrote,

¹⁰ Current bills and legislation also influence trans students. For example, at the time of this writing, several states in the U.S. have discussed and/or enacted “bathroom bills,” many of which mandate that all students use the bathroom for their assigned birth sex. Some of these bills are aimed at public school bathrooms specifically (e.g., Petrow, 2016; Rogers, 2016; Steinmetz, 2015).

Without clear statutory directives, local school boards respond in a variety of fashions, often mirroring the mores of the local community. In more socially progressive communities, the “prom problem” is easily dispensed with by treating the event as a gender-neutral social occasion, open to all, with or without a “date.” Conservative communities, on the other hand, are resistant to non-conforming “lifestyles,” and cling to traditions... Transgender issues are not banal or trivial. The fact that state interscholastic associations have addressed transgender student participation in interscholastic athletics is a step forward. While the treatment is not uniform (some states require sex reassignment), the table has been set for informed reasoned discussion, removed from the influence of a local community’s “moral values.” (p. 24)

For example, Callender (2008) chronicled the story of a high school student in Toronto who began high school presenting as male and transitioned to presenting as female. The article is written from the perspective of the school counselor that helped Jade with her transition and gleaned several recommendations for working with trans youth. In setting up Jade’s story, Callender (2008) posed important questions for education professionals:

Is your educational system/structure supportive of all gender diversities? Do you have a basic understanding of transgender issues?... Are you aware of current laws and rights of transitioning youth with respect to accommodations and prevention of harassment and discrimination? What would you do if a student approached you about transitioning in his or her school setting? (p. 38)

Callender’s (2008) recommendations for school counselors, most of which could be modified to address all educators, are outlined in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Guiding principles for school counselors in working with trans youth

Principle	Specific advice
Don't panic	A counselor has a very important role in reassuring parents, families, and other service providers that trans people are healthy, happy, and whole people. Preventing a youth from being transgender is not possible and should not be considered as an option—supporting the youth and his/her[/their] family is the best option.
Build trust	Listen; professionals who are not listening may be seen as the ones standing in the way of the transition ¹¹ . *Transitioning is necessary; for many trans people, living as their birth gender is not possible. *Trans youth may be in a hurry to make decisions because their bodies are changing in the opposite direction from how they feel. If not supported, many youth will find other means of transitioning that are less safe. Be aware of the extreme discrimination that trans youth may be facing and the frustration that this elicits. Be aware of your own feelings about this issue (seek outside support for your concerns); trans youth should not be expected to educate the adults around them. Advocate for all professionals involved to get the training they need to work effectively with this community.
Inform youth of options	Involve youth in the process every step of the way. Youth will need all the information they can get to make a good decision. Support youth to research safe resources themselves.
Connect trans youth and their families with community resources	Trans youth often exist in isolation from each other, which is a major factor in low self-esteem, self-harm, and suicide risks. This is a challenging process for any family, but resources for parents and families exist to help them learn to accept and appreciate a trans youth.

Note: This table is a verbatim transcription of the suggestions in Callender (2008), p. 51.

Meyer (2010) provided broad “key steps” to take while considering gender-sexual diversity in schools: (a) create coalitions—find administrators and other school professionals

¹¹Being trans does not automatically signify the need for a transition. If a student is agender or genderqueer, for example, they may not find the need to transition socially or in terms of their gender expression.

who are also supportive of LGBTQA youth, (b) build foundations for long-term, sustainable change—think about policy initiatives and strategies that could have long-term influence in this school, (c) identify priorities and strategies, which may involve:

(1) members of the school board and their political affiliations, (2) existing school and district policies, (3) current curricular guidelines and expectations, (4) available local resources for presentations, workshops and in-service activities on gender and sexual diversity, (5) recent efforts and outcomes of related reform efforts in your state or province, (p. 130)

and (d) sustain your spirit—as the author noted, all of the world’s injustices can not be solved overnight. Social justice goals should be pursued at a sustainable pace.

Similarly, based on a synthesis of previous literature, Meyer (2014) suggested the following policy initiatives:

(a) stop the bullying and harassment targeted at specific students, (b) offer extra protection before and after school (work with local police and school security), (c) provide in-school counseling and/or a safe space for the student, (d) make dress code exceptions for students based on their affirmed gender identity or revise dress codes so that they are gender neutral, (e) make accommodations for PE class and bathroom use in dialogue with the student and family, (f) use child’s preferred name and pronoun, (g) support social transition (from one gender to another) with an integrated action plan, (h) provide professional development for all school staff to be able to understand and respectfully work with this student and their peers, and (i) consult with experts to ensure your action plan is comprehensive and affirming of the child/adolescent’s own pace and choices. (pp. 83-84)

The U.S. Education and Justice Departments implemented many of these suggestions in 2016 (Lhamon & Gupta, 2016; U.S. Department of Justice, 2016a). Additionally, Wells, Roberts, and Allen (2012) posited that

specialized professionals can serve as the ‘go-to’ or resource persons and can help to coordinate the open communication that is critical to a successful school-based transition. Often principals and teachers do not have the time or specialized skills to play this important role. As a result, a supportive psychologist, social worker, school or community counsellor [*sic*] can serve in this role to ensure that accurate information is shared and a transition plan is in place. (p. 27)

Having one “point person” to spearhead a transition at school may help diffuse confusion and facilitate dialogue.

Wells, Roberts, and Allen (2012) provided many helpful resources in their document entitled *Supporting Transgender and Transsexual Students in K-12 Schools: A Guide for Educators*, published by the Canadian Teachers’ Federation. In addition to providing thorough and thoughtful suggestions for a successful transition plan (pp. 27-30), the authors suggested the following steps for teachers: (a) signal your support, (b) challenge transphobic comments and jokes, (c) identify transgender and transsexual people in society. For schools, the authors encouraged education professionals to: (a) provide leadership, (b) establish basic expectations in your school code of conduct, (c) be inclusive, (d) create inclusive and user-friendly libraries, (e) be prepared and proactive, (f) provide resources and training for school counselors, (g) maintain confidentiality, (h) update school policies and procedures, and (i) continue to learn. Pursuant to policies, the authors advised school officials to:

Revisit your school dress code and ensure that it is flexible enough to allow a student to dress appropriately and in accordance with their gender identity. Create a school policy to ensure that all transsexual students can use the washroom that corresponds to their consistently asserted gender identity. (p. 35)

Sausa's (2005) data analysis yielded two sets of recommendations: one for elementary and middle schools and one for high schools, many of which are consistent with themes from Luecke (2011). Some of these suggestions for K-8 schools are broad and sweeping (e.g., "change personal and peer gender norms") while others are eminently practical (e.g., "invite guest speakers, show educational films, and hang posters and other visual aids in the classroom that affirm trans people") (p. 25). For high schools, Sausa's participants recommended: (a) creating gender-neutral bathrooms, (b) allowing trans students to play on sports teams matching their gender identity, (c) requiring that school personnel use a trans students' chosen name and pronouns, and (d) exploring training so that school leaders explore training so that they are prepared for the presence of trans youth in their schools.

Wells, Roberts, and Allen (2010) suggested the following recommendations for K-12 schools as they work to honor trans/gender variant students:

- (a) develop explicit policies and student codes of conduct, which expressly prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression,
- (b) provide professional development opportunities to further knowledge on sexual orientation and gender identity issues and concerns, (c) infuse sexual and gender minority perspectives in the curriculum, school, and classroom discussions, (d) develop inclusive library collections and open access to age-appropriate online information and community supports and services, (e) support and sustain gay-straight alliance (GSA) clubs in

schools, which are inclusive of transgender and transsexual students, (f) require all teachers and adults to intervene, prevent, and report harassment, bullying, and violence in schools, (g) designate and make gender-neutral bathrooms and change room facilities publicly available, (h) identify in-school allies, advocates, and mentors for transgender and transsexual students, (i) require all school staff, parents, and students to respect and use a student's preferred name and chosen pronouns, (j) ensure that a student's preferred or chosen name is used in all school records, (k) respect the confidentiality of all transgender and transsexual students and their families, (l) educate parent councils about sexual orientation and gender identity issues. (p. 37)

Note that these authors suggested *requiring* all education professions to respect a student's name and pronouns, including on school records, a mandate that came about in 2016 (Lhamon & Gupta, 2016).

From her study of masculinity and sexuality discourses in a California high school, Pascoe (2007) suggested the following: (a) provide legal protections for LGBTQA students (including anti-harassment/bullying measures), (b) educators and "administrators can modify both the social organization of the school and the curriculum content so that they are less homophobic and gender normative" (p. 169), (c) allow the formation of GSA's or other LGBTQA organizations, (d) examine ways in which school curriculum, structure, and events foster a "hidden curriculum" that reinforce hegemonic messages about gender-sexual diversity.

Several authors (e.g., Beemyn, 2005, Bilodeau, 2009) provided policy suggestions for colleges and universities, some of which could be adapted to fit secondary K-12 settings. To address "genderism" on campus, Bilodeau (2009) suggested reforms including: (a) creation of gender-neutral facilities (bathrooms, locker rooms, etc.), (b) training about trans issues for

education professionals, (c) infusion of trans issues into the curriculum, (d) education about trans issues within the LGBTQA community (e.g., a high school GSA). Bilodeau (2009) also suggested that trans students be able to be addressed by their real name and pronouns, which may include changes in online (e.g., e-mail, cloud storage) accounts to eliminate the student's birth name from these electronic systems.

Beemyn (2005) suggested several improvements colleges and universities could make in honoring trans students. One of the practical suggestions they make is to allow students to easily change name and/or gender easily on school documents and identification cards:

Being able to alter their records and documents, though, is personally and legally important for many trans students. Not only does having the appropriate name and gender listed reflect and validate their identity, but it can also protect trans students from constantly having to explain why they use a name different from their birth name and why their appearance does not match a photo or gender designation on an identification card. Moreover, updated records and documents can ensure that trans students will not be outed and will help protect them from discrimination when they apply for jobs, seek admission to graduate and professional schools, and at any other time that they must show a college document. (p. 83)

Additionally, some universities have gone away from limiting students to either "M" or "F" on documents and forms, but rather provide a blank space for students to write in their gender. In addition to these important policies, Beemyn (2005) suggested that queer groups and initiatives in schools add more than the tacit addition of the "T" to LGBT by fostering programs and policies about trans issues.

As Meyer (2010) noted, “Addressing issues of gender and sexual diversity in schools is challenging but important work” (p. 131). I believe strongly that the choral community *must* adapt to honor trans students—and soon. As Herndon (2000) stated, “Change depends on the interaction of gender roles within a given social system” (p. 355). The notion of gender-complex education set forth by Rands (2009) might be a good place to begin.

Gender-Complex Education

Rands’ (2009) article introducing “Gender-Complex Education” is geared toward teacher educators, but many of the concepts espoused are transferrable easily to choral conductor-teachers. For example, by replacing a few words in the following sentence, a main tenet of the article applied to the choral context becomes clear: “If the field of [choral music] is committed to equity and social justice, then [choral music education] programs must prepare educators to teach gender in more complex ways that take into consideration the existence and needs of transgender people” (p. 419). Rands noted that the “T” in “LGBT” often is ignored in educational research, and the same goes for music education research (Nichols, 2013). Ze suggested that more work be done in this area:

The scarcity of research on transgender issues in education is problematic because transgender people participate in the educational system at all levels. The number of transgender people who participate in the education system is difficult to measure because the high level of societal transphobia ensures that many transgender individuals are not comfortable publicly acknowledging their identity. Furthermore, lack of access to information prevents many young people whose gender differs from the dominant model from having the language to name their experiences and feelings. (p. 421)

Rands defined four types of education through which gender is learned in school. The first, *gender-stereotyped education*, is when teachers identify students by, and therefore reify, the gender binary of boy/girl and masculinity/femininity. For example, when an educator ventures that hammers are for boys and dolls are for girls, they reinforce gender stereotypes. Second, *gender-free/gender-blind*¹² *education* rests on the assumption “that gender can and should be ignored in educational contexts and that gender is irrelevant to education” (p. 425). Third, *gender sensitive education* involves teachers asking themselves, “is gender involved here?”, then working to counteract any negative side effects due to “gender category oppression” (p. 426), for which Rands gave an example from a music methods class: “An instructor of a music methods course asks teacher candidates to analyze the ways in which gender is portrayed in children’s songs” (p. 426). Rands’s preferred model, *gender-complex education*,

challenges not only gender category oppression but also gender transgression oppression.

It takes into consideration the complex sets of privilege and oppression that students and teachers experience based on their gender categories, gender expressions, and the gender attributions others make of them. (p. 426)

Most important for choral conductor-teachers, perhaps, is the fact that: “the gender-complex teacher does not expect children to fit into a dichotomous classification of gender” (p. 426).

Choral conductor-teachers can enact *gender-complex education* by knowing terms and definitions surrounding gender and trans issues (as described above) and enacting anti-oppressive teaching in the choir room. For example, if a choir was studying “The Light Hearted Lovers” by Kirke Mechem, a “dialogue” between a man and a woman,

¹² Though I believe that this term accurately describes what Rands describes, I struggle with the question: what would a similar, appropriate, and non-ableist term be?

a student might point out that the man in the story is portrayed as able to take care of himself and others while the woman character is portrayed as needing a great deal of help. The teacher might point out that that is an example of gender category oppression and ask another student to explain why. (p. 427)

Choral-conductor teachers can begin to diminish the supremacy of the gender binary by learning about the spectrum of gender and understanding that perhaps not everyone in their classes fits into two gender boxes. By keeping an open mind and putting students' best interests first, the choral classroom could become a safe space for *all* students—regardless of gender identity/expression.

Gender in Music Education

As is true for many people, middle school was a trying time for me. I was doing a lot of singing and community theatre and was not interested in sports or guns or the outdoors. Thus, my classmates did not know what to make of me. Cliques began to form, and little by little people started to whisper words about me that I didn't understand. Then in seventh grade home economics someone confronted me. I was standing at the stove, and he said: "Everyone thinks you're gay"—right there over my cauldron of over-cooked, seventh grade excuse for spaghetti sauce. Thank goodness for music and theatre and artistic friends who showed me that it was OK to be myself, even in my non-hegemonic awkwardness.

In a heteronormative society, there often is a conflation of sexuality and gender identity (DePalma, 2013; Pascoe, 2007). While students may believe that they are being bullied because of their sexuality, they are more often harassed for not conforming to hegemonic gender roles (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009). Much of the time, boys are bullied for "being gay," but this is

usually because they are perceived as acting feminine, not because they are attracted to other boys. Girls, on the other hand, may be bullied for not being feminine enough.

Scholars in various music disciplines have pondered the intersection (overlap?) between gender and music. While a review of gender and music-related scholarship is beyond the scope of this literature review, it is advantageous to note that the mutualism between gender and music has been written about, debated, and theorized by music scholars including musicologists (e.g., McClary, 1991; Solie, 1995), ethnomusicologists (e.g., Diamond & Moisala, 2000), and choral conductors (e.g., Apfelstadt & Conlon, 2009). Similarly, scholars in music education have long been interested in gender issues (e.g., Abeles & Porter, 1978; Harrison, 2010a; Trollinger, 1993).

Like Apple and Giroux, Green (1997) argued that music classrooms aid in the reification of gender rules/practices. The goal of Green's 1997 book *Music, Gender, Education* was "to reveal the participation of music education in the continued production and reproduction of gendered musical meanings and practice, through the everyday musical interactions and experiences of girls and boys in contemporary schools" (p. 3). Gould (2004) agreed: "Gender is inherent in all aspects of the music education profession" (p. 67). Feminist scholars Elizabeth Gould and Roberta Lamb critiqued the incessant patriarchy and misogyny in music education. The work of feminist scholars in music education, including Lamb, Gould, Green, Koza, and O'Toole has laid the foundation for subsequent writing on issues of gender and sexuality. Indeed, as Nichols (2013) noted, "Elizabeth Gould first lifted the veil masking the presence of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) persons in music education when she came out as a 'middle aged lesbian' in an article for *Philosophy of Music Education Review* in 1994" (p. 262)—a seismic event at the time that paved the way for current inquiry and discourse surrounding LGBTQA issues in music education.

Situated upon the strong critique of hegemonic masculinity provided by feminist music education scholars including Lamb, Gould, Koza, Green, and O'Toole, the discussion of trans issues is an evolving discourse. Lamb (1994) pointed to the notion of non-binary gender in describing *socialist feminism* as seeing “sex/gender systems as social (not biological) constructions [that aim] to eliminate masculinity and femininity... [as a result of their] dissatisfaction with the essential gender-blind character of Marxist thought,” and *postmodern feminism* as being interested in the “subjectivities, representation and performative qualities of gender” (p. 61). In building upon conceptualizations of gender as a social construction (Lorber, 1994, 2005), my work seeks to move trans identities from the margins of music education to the center.

Gender in Vocal/Choral Music Education

Starting in eighth grade I was fortunate to take lessons with a voice professor at a local university. He helped me through my voice change and gave me foundational knowledge about technique and repertoire. For solo and ensemble festival my senior year of high school, he assigned me “Deh, vieni alla finestra” from Mozart’s Don Giovanni. I knew that I could sing the aria technically—but I never felt comfortable with the “masculine” notion of serenading and wooing a woman on a balcony. After I performed, the adjudicator said something like, “You may not be shaving every day yet, but you really need to act and embody the drama of this scene—you’re trying to get this woman to fall in love with you!” I had no schema for any of this and I felt foolish... like my way of being male wasn’t acceptable.

The application of feminist theory became, for some, a contested subject (e.g., Elliot, 2010; Hayes, 2003; Nagoshi, Nagoshi, & Brzyzy, 2014; Namaste, 2005; Serano, 2007). Several scholars in music (education) viewed their research through a feminist lens. These writings

include: explorations of music education journals and pedagogical materials viewed through a gendered and/or feminist lens (Hawkins, 2007; Koza, 1992, 1993a, 1993b), explorations of misogyny in the lyrics of choral pieces (Conlon, 2009), examinations of the patriarchy inherent in the structure of many choral American programs (Gauthier, 2005; O'Toole, 1998; Wilson, 2012, 2013), and studies about the relative absence of females in collegiate faculty choral positions (VanWeelden, 2003). In light of these explorations, I once again refer to the question posed above in response to feminist philosophy in music education: how do trans people fit into the research and writing cited here? Can they? Will they ever?

Trans Issues in Vocal/Choral Music Education

The human voice and various aspects of one's identity may be inextricably linked (Faulkner & Davidson, 2004; Monks, 2003; Oakland, MacDonald, & Flowers, 2013) because the voice is tied to one's gender identity and gender expression and is a vital part of the way one performs gender (Bond, 2015; Burge, 2015; Edwards, 2009; Green, 1997; Jackson, 2015). Because the voice comes from within one's body, there seems to be something intensely personal about singing as an outward expression of inner feelings surrounding gender.

A small number of studies have explored trans issues in the vocal/choral context (Berglin, 2014; Edidi & Palkki, 2015; Edwards, 2009; Nichols, 2013; Steele, 2016). Nichols' (2013) participant, Rie/Ryan participated in both school band and choir, but their experience in school choral music is mentioned briefly in the context of a broader exploration of their musical experiences both in and out of school. Rie/Ryan was not served well in public school, including their music education; their story highlights the "pivotal role that music can play in the lives of transgender students seeking community and self-expression" (p. 262). Edwards (2009) explored the phenomenon of the trans voice in a choral setting, reviewing the vocal pedagogy

literature on trans voice change issues and interviewing members of TransVoices, a trans choral ensemble in Minneapolis/St. Paul—finding that the chorus helped the singers find their voices, both literally and figuratively. Edwards noted that the singers she interviewed had “very personal relationships with the ensemble” (para. 6).

Edidi and Palkki (2015) co-wrote a narrative study on the rich and varied musical life of Lady Dane Figueroa Edidi, a trans woman of color who made her living as an artist and activist. Edidi’s story referenced issues of intersectionality (e.g., Carter, 2014; de Vries, 2012; Warner, 2008) not usually discussed in the predominantly Eurocentric literature on trans people (Nagoshi, Nagoshi, & Brzuzy, 2014; Namaste, 2000, 2009). This co-constructed narrative uncovered similar themes to Rie/Ryan’s story in Nichols (2013), but was told from a very different perspective. Dane’s journey as a trans woman of color and her work as an activist uncovered many lessons music educators can employ to make music education—and society— more inclusive of *all* kinds of trans people. Berglin’s (2014) action research study chronicled the experiences of a former high school student who had transitioned from female to male during his tenure in a high choral program where Berglin was the teacher. Berglin (2014) explored issues of vocal range as well as this student’s experiences navigating his musical identity and finding his place in the context of high school choir.

Need for the Study

Gender is linked with most experiences in life, including music (Green, 1997, 2002; Harrison, 2010b; McClary, 1991), and in particular with vocal and choral music (Bond, 2015; Elorriaga, 2011; Moore, 2008; O’Toole, 1998). In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault (1978) wrote of the repression of sexuality. Though this is not a perfect correlation to speaking about transgender issues, I believe the same idea can help justify the need for this study. By speaking

and writing about transgender issues in (choral) music education, researchers create discourse that is sorely needed in the current cultural and educational climates. According to Foucault:

If sex is repressed, that is, condemned to prohibition, nonexistence, and silence, then the mere fact that one is speaking about it has the appearance of a deliberate transgression... For decades now we have found it difficult to speak on the subject without striking a different pose: we are conscious of defying established power, our tone of voice shows that we know we are being subversive, and we ardently conjecture away the present and appeal to the future, whose days will be hastened by the contribution we believe we are making. (Foucault, 1978, pp. 6-7).

Most gender research in the music and music education literature has focused on the differences between men and women—research that has reified gender roles and gender stereotypes in the music education discourse. Also, the burgeoning LGBTQA literature in music education focuses almost exclusively on lesbian, gay, and bisexual perspectives (DePalma, 2013; Elze, 2005; McCarthy, 2003b), with little or no mention of transgender viewpoints. As Elze (2005) wrote, “An urgent need exists for knowledge about the psychosocial challenges and resiliencies of transgender youths; the influence of environmental contexts on their trajectories; and interventions, at all levels, to promote their health and well-being” (p. 84). Sexuality and gender identity are related, but distinct concepts (Bornstein, 1994; Lorber, 2005; Wilchins, 1997). As Lorber (2005) wrote, “Peoples’ gender conformity supports gendered practices; peoples’ gender diversity and deviance challenge it” (p. 12). The stories of trans students and teachers are often left out of the discourse in choral music education. No known research besides Berglin’s (2014) study has explored the experiences of transgender students participating in secondary school choral music programs. The stories and experiences of the participants are the focus of the

study. It is my hope that this study and other similar explorations will add to the growing body of literature on trans issues in music education and that these studies will improve the experience of trans students in secondary school choral programs.

CHAPTER 2—REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Breaking down stereotypes and releasing students from their gender straightjackets is one critical way in which educators can open up space for all students who define themselves as outside of the mainstream to find support and to be valued for who they are and not for what society tells them they should be. (Wells, Roberts, & Allen, 2012, p. 8)

What sets gender apart from the other aspects of musical engagement is its close relationship to a students' sense of self: their biological sex, their balance of masculine/feminine attributes and their sexuality. (Harrison, 2010b, p. 91)

Sex/Gender Research in Music Education

The sex/gender dichotomy becomes critical when exploring literature on gender-sexual diversity in general education and music education, because these terms have been used in vastly different ways. As stated in Chapter One, I operate from the position that gender is a non-binary category, therefore all of the literature discussed herein is viewed through that lens (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011; Bornstein, 1994, 1998; Lorber, 1994, 2005; Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010; Wilchins, 2004).

Literature Reviews

Much has been written about sex/gender in music education since the 1970s. Trollinger (1993) did not differentiate “sex” and “gender” in her literature review in which she organized literature into two broad categories: (a) musical abilities (e.g., singing, intonation, instrumental performance, pitch conservation, composition), and (b) factors mediating gender differences (e.g., personality; listening preferences; gender associations with music activities and instruments). In seeking to re-ignite a dialogue on male issues in music, Harrison (2010b) and

Adler and Harrison (2004) strongly reinforced the concept of binary gender (male and female as the only two options). Harrison (2010b) wrote: “The word ‘gender’ therefore needs to be reclaimed to represent a study of the involvement and roles of women and men in music” (p. 79). Adler and Harrison (2004) endorsed a “critical *genderist* approach” (p. 80), their argument against critical feminism in music education being that this perspective can discount and devalue males. What Adler and Harrison failed to acknowledge is the male privilege that allowed them to make such statements about feminism, and they failed to recognize the fact that part of the feminist movement was to ‘even the playing field’ in some way after centuries of patriarchy (e.g., Lorber, 2005; Walters, 2005). Furthermore, from a non-binary gender lens, their argument serves to make the male/female dichotomy more prominent. Adler and Harrison (2004) claimed that the maintenance of “male gender role rigidity” has a profound influence on “boys’ disengagement from vocal music” (p. 270).

Music education scholars have long had an interest in the interplay between music and gender.¹³ Green (1993) and Hanley (1998) investigated the link between music and gender using an open-ended survey. Hanley adapted Green’s survey for use with secondary music teachers in British Columbia and found that these teachers held many hegemonic beliefs about gender roles, including that girls were meant to sing and that boys were superior at composition; thus furthering stereotypes and maintenance of the gender binary. Hanley (1998) wrote, “respondents

¹³ Green (1997) posited that: “The music classroom is a place in which the present-day operation of gendered musical practices and meanings surfaces, both in the raw common-sense and in the considered perspectives of girls, boys, and their teachers. Together, pupils and teachers in schools reveal the workings of our contemporary construction of the discourse on music and gender in which, without necessarily being aware of it, we reiterate the gendered practices and meanings that are bequeathed by our musical, historical legacy. More importantly, the school music classroom can illuminate some of the processes involved in the construction of individual gendered identity through musical experience itself” (p. 17).

tended to perpetuate certain negative gender stereotypes in spite of their stated attempts to be fair” (p. 67). Sex/gender role stereotyping has been a topic often discussed in music education discourse.

Sex/Gender Stereotyping

In the 1970s there seemed to be a great interest in studying sex roles (e.g., Bem, 1974) and the implications thereof. To that end, Abeles and Porter (1978) explored the sex stereotyping of instruments using four quantitative studies with different populations, concluding that, “musical instrument gender associations are widespread throughout all age groups” (p. 74). This article sparked immense interest in sex roles in music education, inspiring similar studies in intervening years (e.g., Abeles, 2009; Griswold & Chrobak, 1981; Wrape, Dittloff, & Callahan, 2014), all of which uncovered similar results to Abeles and Porter’s (1978) study. For example, Griswold and Chrobak’s (1981) participants labeled instrumental conducting as masculine and choral conducting as feminine. Similarly, singing has been coded as feminine in many studies (Ashley, 2010; Elorriaga, 2011; Gates, 1989; Green, 1997; Hall, 2005; Harrison, 2007, 2010a; Heywood & Beynon, 2007; Koza, 1993b; Legg, 2013; Manovski, 2013), including a study by Harrison (2007), in which the singing voice was rated as the third most feminine instrument after the flute and clarinet.

Status and experiences of female conductors/teachers. There has been a sustained interest in feminist topics in music education that inspired research and philosophical writing about gender inequity and the devaluing of women in music education (e.g., Gould, 2001). As Gould (2011) wrote: “Feminist philosophy in music education... reveals and critiques effects of music education practices, what results from choices represented in pedagogical techniques, curricular documents, instrument selection/assignment and hiring practices, and then, to provide

alternatives” (p. 135). This line of thinking and writing influenced much of the scholarship cited in this dissertation. For example, researchers have explored equality between males and females in various types of music positions. Delzell (1994) explored sex stereotypes among high school band teachers, and found that in the mid 1990s, the band was world growing less male-dominated, albeit slowly. Similarly, Feather (1980) and Gould (2001, 2003, 2005b) explored representations and experiences of women college band directors. Of the world of collegiate band directors, Gould (2003) wrote, “Women have reported that they feel excluded within the profession” (para. 25).

Moore (2008) purported to discuss the link between her gender and musician identities via an autoethnographic narrative study about teaching in a band setting. While Moore cited Butler’s notion of gender performativity being a “stylized repetition of acts,” the study read more like a collection of stories than a cohesive narrative study. Moore (2008) included some perplexing and troubling statements such as: “I therefore had to become male to direct this ensemble” (p. 11)—a statement that was neither supported nor explained. What did Moore mean by this? Because her study clearly relied on the male/female gender binary, statements like, “I...had to become male” become problematic when considering trans people and a spectrum of gender identities. Similarly, Sears (2015) profiled the experiences of a band teacher named Cathy to explore the experiences of a female in a male-dominated position. Cathy faced the need to counteract the “traditionally masculine character traits that administrators deem necessary to be successful in such a position” (para. 12) through constructs including dress, classroom management style, and interactions with administrators.

Other studies explored the disproportion of males versus females in collegiate choral positions. In her study on the demographics of choral conductors in four-year postsecondary

institutions in the U.S., VanWeelden (2003) discovered that: “Eighty-three percent of the Director of Choral Activities were males ($n = 744$) and seventeen percent were females ($n = 148$)” (p. 23). Similarly, Hansen (2009) utilized data from the College Music Society in her exploration of the tenure process among female choral conductors. In 2006 in higher education choral positions in the U.S., 1,689 male faculty were listed as opposed to 850 females. Hansen (2009) also wrote that there was a “more than 5.5 to 1 ratio of male choral conductors leading [institutions training graduate students] than females” (p. 216).

Qualitative studies have considered gender issues in music teaching and conducting. McCord and Carrier (2012) explored the experiences of a first year music teacher [Carrier] with a “butch” appearance and the reflections of her mentor [McCord]. The authors explored the complicated relationship between gender identity and sexuality, and the fact that gender expression can cause speculation or fear among adolescents. Carrier’s unapologetically “butch” appearance sparked anxiety among some factions of her school’s population; the authors wrote, “Any deviation from the cultural gender normality might cause discomfort, as it threatens the status quo” (para. 3). Brenneman (2007) utilized a feminist point of view to present the voices of three successful women choral conductors in her narrative study. The data were viewed through a gendered lens, exploring issues such as motherhood versus professional life, early exposure to music, performing and teaching experiences, and “gendered perspectives” on performing and conducting. All of the participants in this study identified important mentors and discussed an implied glass ceiling female conductors sometimes face (e.g., several of the participants discussed the fact that males normally conducted choral-orchestral works). As one participant asked: “Could I continue in my work as a conductor knowing... I was always going to be at a disadvantage, that I was going to be a *disadvantaged* conductor?” (p. 122).

Representations of sex/gender in music education print materials. Another area of study concerning sex/gender roles is the representation of males and females (and masculinity and femininity) in music education materials, including journals, methods books, and student texts. An exploration of illustrations in music textbooks by Koza (1992) identified a quandary regarding gender and music education that has existed since the nineteenth century: “On one hand, music was considered a feminine pursuit, and the masculinity of males participating in music was sometimes called into question. On the other hand, during much of the century, specific musical styles, activities, performance settings, and instruments were off-limits to women” (p. 30). Through her exploration of nearly 3,500 figures, Koza discovered that sex role stereotyping and underrepresentation were common: “68.9 percent of the music-related figures were male” (p. 30). Building upon Koza’s work, Kruse, Giebelhausen, Shouldice, and Ramsey (2015) examined 7,288 photos from *Music Educators Journal* over half of a century, discovering that “while representation of males and females in MEJ has changed in 50 years, inequity persists” (p. 485).

Hawkins (2007) analyzed the gendered aspects of choral textbooks meant for adolescent singers and discovered that the pieces and teaching materials over-represented white men and contained many iterations of hegemonic masculinity.¹⁴ Similarly, Koza’s (1993a) exploration of choral methods textbooks and articles between 1982 and 1991 uncovered that “references to gender reflected and reinforced discourses that are both misogynistic and homophobic” (p. 48). Koza (1993a) examined several texts in which athleticism and masculinity were assumed characteristics for all boys and that if these “masculine” attributes were utilized in the choral classroom, boys would want to sing.

¹⁴ I use *hegemonic masculinity* to denote the fact that masculinity is defined in opposition to femininity and that society generally values masculine attributes more than feminine ones.

Similarly, in exploring articles in the *Music Supervisors Journal* between 1914 and 1924, Koza (1993b) discovered a larger amount of discussion about males in music than about females in music; Koza also uncovered early evidence of the problem of the “missing males” in choral music programs. Here, one quandary of the structure of many American choral programs was revealed. If there is an over-abundance of females who like to sing, why are treble choirs not the most highly valued (O’Toole, 1998)? Koza (1993b) noted that, “an absence of males is a problem only if mixed ensemble music is considered the most legitimate” (p. 227).

Singing and Gender Roles

Gender and vocal identity. Focusing on the vocal/choral music experience, researchers have explored the intersection of voice and identity (e.g., Faulkner & Davidson, 2004; Monks, 2003; Oakland, MacDonald, & Flowers, 2013).

Monks’ (2003) study found that one’s voice is intimately tied to their sense of self. Elorriaga’s (2011) findings supported Monks’ claim. Through his interviews with 90 people, including 25 students, employing Monks’ work to explore the thoughts and experiences of his adolescent choral students, Elorriaga (2011) stated that: “most of the participating boys had a vocal identity which positively influenced the construction of their gender identity” (p. 328). Unfortunately, Elorriaga’s data do not sufficiently support this conclusion, and the study reinforces hegemonic masculinity and gender role rigidity. The author included sweeping statements such as: “as they all were men, they just associated their collective vocal qualities with their masculinity, with the strong feeling of belonging to the same male singing group and, finally, with the fact of just being a man” (p. 328). This statement is problematic on several levels: (a) Elorriaga uses “men” and “males” as a synonym, which is semantically false, and (b) this statement (and others like it) are built upon a assumption about what “just being a man” is—

or should be. The author did not problematize gender roles; rather, these roles were reinforced. As Wilchins (2004) wrote:

And what can it mean to feel like a natural woman or a real man? Since these are binary opposites, one can only distinguish feeling like a real man to the exact degree that one does not feel like a real woman, and vice versa. (p. 130)

Bond (2015) chronicled the experiences of Tyler, a “voice-variant” undergraduate music education student who identified as a “countertenor and I sing alto in choir.” Throughout his middle, high school, and undergraduate vocal and choral experiences, private voice teachers and choral conductor-teachers had been consistently unprepared for Tyler’s presence. The following exchange recounting an experience in middle school choir exemplifies his frustration:

I would often not sing. I would sit there in choir (gestures sulking). “Why aren’t you singing” (pretending to be the teacher)? I can’t sing this (gesturing toward fake music). (pause) You have to sing this” (again, being the teacher). “I CAN’T sing this. It’s too low.” (para. 10)

Tyler’s story illustrates the construct that gender roles are intimately tied to vocal classifications like “soprano” and “bass”, and that, for those who fall outside of the boundaries of socially-accepted aural representations of those voice classifications, vocal and choral music can be challenging experiences.

Children begin to absorb information about gender roles early in life. Hall’s (2005) study indicated that boys acquire ideas about male gender roles and masculinity during early childhood; 25 out of the 34 participants identified singing as feminine at age five. Hall also found peer modeling to be a possible “strategy to improve singing” (p. 16). Manovski’s (2013) reflective study recounted an experience in which he sang a “girls song” in a middle school vocal

concert. The bullying and harassment Manovski (2013) experienced due to his non-hegemonic gender expression made his public school experience excruciating. In the end, finding his “evolving, real voice” was therapeutic (p. 31). Studies such as the ones cited here indicate that social factors among adolescents can play a large role in boys’ attitudes towards singing and the kind of masculinity they feel they must perform (Ashley, 2010). One recommendation Ashley (2010) made based on his data was that single-gender choirs are not a good idea.

Single gender choirs. The purpose of Wicks-Rudolph’s (2012) study was to “assess choral directors’ knowledge of biological and sociological sex differences in secondary choral classrooms” (p. ii). The author believed that music teacher attrition could be curbed if secondary choral music educators were educated about sex differences. This study is fundamentally flawed because “sociological sex” does not exist. The author wrote:

The media uses the terms “gender” and “sex” interchangeably. Since this can be confusing for the reader, the researcher has made the following distinction within this literature review. “Sex” will refer to the biological differences of males and females, and “gender” will relate to the behavioral and social tendencies. (p. 12)

Though this distinction is helpful, the difference between “biological sex” and “gender” is not made clear. Wicks-Rudolph’s (2012) statistical analyses suggest that the choral music educators surveyed had little or no knowledge about “biological and sociological sex differences” and how they might apply in the choral setting.

All-female choirs and the female voice change. Within the structure of many choral organizations, females often are disrespected (O’Toole, 1998). In the traditional hierarchy of choral programs in the U.S., women’s choirs are rarely considered an “elite” ensemble (Gauthier, 2005; Wilson, 2013), and O’Toole (1994, 1998) contended that choral music in the United States

disrespects girls. To explore such hypotheses, Gauthier (2005) conducted action research with Western Michigan University women's choir students to gauge their feelings about the prominence of all-female choirs. She found that: (a) 90% of females surveyed said that their first choice would be to sing in a mixed (co-ed) choir, (b) 89% of females considered mixed choirs more prestigious, and (c) the overwhelming feeling among females who sang in treble clef choirs was that they were "not good enough to get into the mixed choir" (Gauthier, 2005, p. 46). Wilson (2013) uncovered similar results in her qualitative study that explored the preferences regarding, and opinions about, treble choral ensembles.

Gackle (1991, 2006, 2011) and Sweet (2015) studied the phenomenon of the female voice change. In Gackle's (1991) groundbreaking work on this topic in the 1980s and early 1990s, she laid out four stages of vocal maturation for females: "the overall color is that of a treble sound—it does not change. However, in terms of *richness*, *depth*, and *warmth*, the quality changes noticeably, and those stages of change can readily be identified by a trained listener" (Gackle, 1991, as cited in Sweet, 2015, pp. 73-74). Gackle's more recent work also considered the social and emotional aspects of the female voice change (Gackle, 2011). In a phenomenological exploration of the female voice change with middle and high school choral students, Sweet (2015) explored both physiological and emotional aspects of the female voice change. Part of her study explored the contexts in which females sang and the implications thereof. Participants enjoyed singing with a "no holds barred attitude" (p. 82) when outside the choral setting (e.g., while home alone, in the car). Sweet's study revealed a gap in the research literature: little attention has been given to the female voice change after years of research recommending that the focus remain on the boys changing voice (Freer, 2006).

All-male choirs and the male voice change. Kennedy (2002), Sweet (2010), and Ramsey (2013) explored the experiences of tenor/bass choir students in middle school, high school, and college, respectively. In Sweet's (2010) intrinsic case study of eighth grade boys from her auditioned, after-school choir, she discovered that a supportive learning environment was more important to participants than being in an all-male choir, which echoed findings from a study by Kennedy (2002) profiling the experiences of junior high boys in a mixed choir. Sweet's (2010) participants experienced homophobic bullying at school as a result of their participation in choir but reported that they enjoyed singing with their male choir, not because of the single-gender nature of the class, but because of "the importance of teamwork and dedication" (p. 10).

Ramsey (2013) explored the culture of a successful high school male choir and their highly respected teacher. She found that high school males sought a balance of vulnerability and strength in the choral context. Ramsey (2013) also reported that the participants expressed progressive views of masculinity and attitudes toward gender-sexual diversity. One participant who identified as gay said that the male choir accepted him unabashedly and affirmed his non-heterosexual identity. Another participant spoke eloquently about the life lessons gleaned from his choral experience including the ability to "talk about deep poetry and be vulnerable" (Ramsey, 2013, p. 172), noting the fact that it was his high school choir teacher who modeled such behavior.

An oft-discussed topic concerning males and singing is the quandary of the changing voice. Research on the male changing voice was initiated by McKenzie (1956) and furthered by scholars including Cooksey (1977, 1984), Killian (1997, 1999), and Fisher (2014). Through his research, Cooksey (1977, 1984) developed a series of stages of the male voice change that has become foundational in this line of research.

Noting the purely physiological nature of Cooksey and McKenzie's work, Killian (1997) interviewed 141 males about their voice change in order to ascertain what psychological factors emerge during the change. Killian (1997) interviewed adults and children, singers and "nonsingers," and musicians and "nonmusicians," and then analyzed her qualitative data using word/phrase frequency counts.

Subjects ($N = 164$) consisted of boy singers (junior high boys presently participating in a choir), boy nonsingers (junior high boys currently not participating in any musical organization), men singers (men over the age of 23 who reported they were singing in an organization at the time of their voice change), and men nonsingers (men over the age of 23 who reported they were not singing at the time of their voice change). (p. 523)

Killian's (1997) study revealed that: (a) boys had more vivid memories of their voice change when compared with the adult males, (b) singers were more aware of physiological changes than nonsingers, and (c) negative terms (e.g., hard, difficult, insecure, embarrassing) were used more frequently than positive ones (e.g., proud, fun). In a subsequent study, Killian (1999) discovered that the male voice change was occurring earlier than had been previously posited.

In her ethnographic exploration of the voice change at the elite American Boychoir School, Kennedy (2004) interviewed 27 students, two music directors, and ten staff members. Kennedy (2004) recommended: (a) imparting knowledge of healthy vocal technique, (b) encouraging boys to use both their high and low ranges during the change, and (c) frequent monitoring of the change process for the maintenance of physiological and psychological well-being among adolescent male singers. In a quantitative study, Fisher (2014) explored the impacts of voice change, grade level, and experience on singing self-efficacy as measured by the Singing

Self-Efficacy Scale for Emerging Adolescent Males, concluding that “years of participation in choir had an impact on emerging adolescent males’ singing self-efficacy” (p. 286).

Male engagement with singing/choral music. The concept of male interest with singing and choral music has received great attention in the music education research literature (Harrison, Welch, & Adler, 2012). The question “Why do boys keep singing?” prompted Heywood and Beynon (2007) to interview 18 Canadian males, ranging from adolescents to adults, including people who currently sang and those who did not. Their data revealed seven reasons that their participants kept singing: “(a) social interaction, (b) activity and life balance, (c) musicianship, (d) feeling valued, (e) leadership, (f) emergent perceptions of masculinity—personal, social, and institutional, and (g) paths of resistance (e.g., subverting societal norms)” (p. 117). As in Kennedy’s (2004) ethnography, many of the participants in Heywood and Beynon’s (2007) study were members of an elite men and boy’s choir, and some attended performing arts schools.

Much of the research on male engagement with singing has profiled the thoughts and experiences of adolescent boys. Bennetts (2013) explored boys’ perceptions about music and singing participation at school by studying the choral programs of four different schools in Australia: two co-educational schools and two all-male schools. Bennetts’ data indicated that one of these four schools helped to facilitate a connection between boys and the school music program, so this school was profiled and held up as a model. Said school advocated for and promoted the music program as vital to the school’s culture. Bennetts (2013) argued that these factors, in combination with a teacher-centered pedagogical approach and the influence of being an all-male school, were helpful in this context. Unfortunately not all schools have a music program in which boys feel so comfortable (Harrison, 2010a; Manovski, 2013). In discussing the

recruitment of male singers, Harrison (2010a) cited a *genderist* approach, contending that “counter-stereotyping presents both a problem and a solution,” and stating that “achieving greater numbers of male involvement with boys who are popular, well liked and enjoy high status can assist in overcoming the negative aspect of stereotyping” (p. 50), a notion that is troubling from a gender/feminist point of view. On this topic, I wrote: “But what about the boys who do not enjoy popularity or high status? Why would choral conductor-teachers not affirm those students who are likely already struggling socially in school? It does not need to be this way” (Palkki, 2015, p. 29).

Freer (e.g., 2006, 2009a, 2009b) has maintained a consistent research agenda regarding males and singing, focusing primarily on adolescent singers. His narrative self-study (2006) illustrated how his own negative experiences in elementary school choir shaped his public school teaching, teaching philosophy, and scholarly interests. He contended that more qualitative research could help the voices of middle school boys be heard so that choral educators could adjust instruction according to student needs. To that end, Freer (2009a) interviewed boys from three groups: students who have sung continuously in school choral ensembles, students who sang in school choir but later left, and boys who had never sung at school. Examining the data through the lens of the flow experience, Freer’s (2009a) participants discussed the importance of, (a) individual vocal/musical development within the choral ensemble, (b) positive and immediate feedback, and (c) appropriate and carefully chosen repertoire and rehearsal techniques. A similar study by Freer (2009b) profiled the experiences of three high school males about their singing experiences, exploring the role of singing as it interacts with the possible selves construct. Freer (2009b) found that role models, appropriate repertoire, and camaraderie were vital in helping to establish “possible selves that [involved] choral music” (p. 352). The results of

this study mirror findings by Harrison (2010a), who interviewed 21 students about school music, stereotyping, bullying, and factors influencing music participation. Harrison's participants reported being bullied because of their association with "gender-incongruent musical activities," and that: (a) a strong urge existed to stop singing during the voice change, (b) teachers were important in "[providing] broad opportunities" (p. 46), and that (c) repertoire choices were critical in shaping their choral experience.

Legg's (2013) quasi-fictional narrative study is an amalgam of stories from three adolescent males about their experiences with singing in school. This heartbreaking story recounts a student being cast as the lead in the school musical and then being publicly taunted by an English teacher as a result. Legg's (2013) fictional character brought to life the homophobia, bullying, and humiliation that plays out in schools daily, a topic explored by Abrahams (2012), whose two participants, "like to sing but confess that they sing in choirs at some risk to their socialization as members of their peer group" (p. 91). The middle school boys in Kennedy's (2002) study found that friends, parents, and a supportive choir teacher were influential in helping them overcome potentially difficult social situations at school, such as the ones outlined by Abrahams (2012), Legg (2013), and Manovski (2013) because of their choir membership.

The "missing males" conundrum. Koza (1993b) stated that the quandary of the "missing males" had plagued choral music educators since the early twentieth century. Gates (1989) explored historical data and statistics and concluded that: (a) in the early 1700s in Boston, most singers were male, (b) in the 1930s U.S. high school choir enrollment was fairly equally balanced between males and females, and (c) that by the 1980s, a "gradual but profound shift [had] occurred" in that "males who are now young adults in our society were far less willing to be identified publicly with singing as secondary students than were females" (p. 41). In a recent

study, Elpus (2015) explored enrollment in American high school band, choral, and orchestral ensembles between 1982 and 2009. He discovered that enrollment in high school choir has remained constant at approximately 70% female and 30% male. Elpus' data counteracts the assertion by Gates (1989) that female engagement would wane in the years following his study.

Based on all of this gender (in the binary sense) research, how does inquiry about trans students fit into discussions of gender in music education? Diamond and Moisala (2000) wrote about the distressing nature of this trend:

Approaches that essentialize dichotomies of male and female distress me a lot although I recognize that we still need descriptions and critiques of how these dichotomies have been enacted in various societies. But there have always been strong women (and men) who define themselves outside of the conventions and I really like to see their agency celebrated. (p. 1)

Among the authors cited that did acknowledge a spectrum of genders in music education is Manovski (2013), who posed some difficult questions with which choral music educators should begin to grapple, or at the very least, that they should discuss:

What if you had a gay male student in your classroom wanting to sing songs sung by other girls and could actually *sing them*? What if he wanted to sing alto or soprano? What if you had a girl who wanted to sing tenor or bass and could? What if they auditioned for the school musical, desiring to perform roles contrary to your expectations? Would you disallow these learners the opportunity for a positive experience? Would you want to shield them from any oppression that could soon take place? (p. 29, emphasis in original)

Manovski's (2013) study explored concepts of both gender and sexuality. While a full exploration of sexuality in music education is beyond the scope of this dissertation, it is hopeful

that the music education research community is exploring LGBTQA issues with increased frequency, due in part to three LGBTQ studies in music education research symposia held at the University of Illinois (e.g., DeNardo et al., 2011), most recently in May 2016. However, like so much writing and research about LGBTQA issues, nearly all of it deals with only the “L” and “G”¹⁵ (DePalma, 2013; McCarthy, 2003b, Nichols, 2013). The small number of music education studies discussing transgender issues (Bartolome, 2016; Berglin, 2014; Edidi & Palkki, 2015; Nichols, 2013; Silveira & Goff, 2016; Sullivan, 2014) may be understood better in the context of the next section of this dissertation, which focuses on research about: transgender people writ large, trans youth, trans college students, trans teachers, and trans students in K-12 settings.

Experiences of Trans People

Few studies have been able to speak to the experiences of trans people in general. Some research, however, indicates that lack of understanding about gender diversity and a fear of non-hegemonic gender expression may lead to a lack of opportunity for trans people. The trans people in Clements-Nolle, Marx, Guzman, and Katz’s (2001) study had difficulty finding adequate (or any) employment opportunities. Similarly, Beagan et al. (2012) explored the occupational status of three trans adults. While they faced some “occupational lapses and adaptations” (p. 226), the participants eventually found fulfilling occupations. Unfortunately, societal fears about gender identity also may inspire fear and self-hatred in some trans people. Clements-Nolle, Marx, & Katz (2006) interviewed 515 trans people, 32% of whom had attempted suicide. Certainly, suicides of trans teens, including Leelah Alcorn (Johnson, 2014), should prompt concern and action in changing societal norms regarding the policing of gender

¹⁵ This trend seems to be changing. When exploring the list of presentations at LGBTQ Studies & Music Education III conference in May 2016, six of the 29 sessions focused on transgender issues exclusively.

roles. The process of identity development among trans people may be a helpful place to start in making these societal shifts.

Through interpretation of the data from their mixed method study ($N = 3,474$), Beemyn and Rankin (2011) sought to create a model of trans identity formation. Data were collected via three methods: a large national survey followed by in-person and phone interviews as well as email interviews. Of the people in their sample, 2,648 participants were assigned male at birth, 807 were assigned female, and 19 did not answer. In terms of their current gender expression, 40% identified as female, 26% as male, 25% as transgender, and 9% as other. The majority of respondents in Beemyn and Rankin's survey reported feeling "different" by the age of 12. The data suggest that, although society has made great strides, trans youth are still a vulnerable population:

A common perception is that young transgender people today have it easier than transgender people in past decades because of the greater availability of resources and support services. However, our findings demonstrate that many transgender youth continue to struggle with accepting their gender identity and gaining the acceptance of families and peers. (p. 44)

MTF (male-to-female) youth had a more difficult time than did FTM respondents expressing their gender identity as young people, likely due to a general societal contempt for femininity (Beam, 2008; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Grossman, D'Augelli, & Salter, 2006).

One of the goals of Beemyn and Rankin's (2011) study was to explore issues of campus climate for trans college students (for further discussion see Beemyn, 2005, 2012; Beemyn, Curtis, Davis, & Tubbs, 2005). Beemyn and Rankin's (2011) data suggest that campus climates for college students often are hostile for LGBT students, and especially for transgender students:

“anti-transgender bias is, in part, a logical outgrowth of the genderism prevalent in educational, religious, and governmental institutions. As demonstrated by the research on college campuses, this negative climate fosters hate crimes against transgender people and contributes to their ‘invisibility’” (p. 89). Rather than suggesting a stage theory of trans identity development, Beemyn and Rankin (2011) listed “milestones” for the various sub-populations studied: (a) FTM/T: female-to-male transgender, (b) MTF/T: male-to-female transgender: (c) MTDG: male to different gender, and (d) FTDG: female to different gender. For example, milestones for the FTM population include (a) “thinking of oneself as a lesbian, but realizing over time it was not a good fit,” (b) “realizing that there are FTM individuals and that transitioning is possible,” and (c) “learning about and meeting other transsexual men” (p. 116). Beemyn and Rankin’s (2011) work is a departure from previous stage theories (e.g., Lev, 2004; Lewins, 1995) in that it described the experiences of all people who consider themselves trans without exception (e.g., some in the trans community do not consider cross-dressers to be trans because they do not live full-time in their non-binary gender identity).

Trans Teachers

Two known studies chronicled the experiences of trans teachers. Roberts, Allan, and Wells (2007) profiled two teachers who disclosed their gender identity at school. Gayle Roberts and Carol Allan, both of whom identify as transsexual women, shared their stories in an effort to inform school officials about discourses that can “render trans-identified students and teachers invisible” (p. 120). Roberts connected the struggles that she faced in attempting to conform to hegemonic gender norms to her hopes for trans youth: “As I strived to internalize these overpowering male sex-role expectations, I increasingly felt a sense of shame and worthlessness... I now see that no child or adult should ever have to experience the [same]

shame and pain.” (p. 121). Roberts, Allan, and Wells (2007) concluded with a series of recommendations for trans teachers regarding gender identity disclosure at school. For example, they encouraged transitioning teachers to remain optimistic yet cautious: “Be aware that some students, parents, and/or staff members may object to your transition and continued presence within the school or district. Have a plan to deal with this possible outcome” (p. 125). This cautionary note exemplifies a lack of societal acceptance of trans people in modern America. For trans people who may subvert traditional gender roles, there must be a careful and context-specific negotiation of openness and caution.

McCarthy (2003a) allowed her participant Kelly, a female-assigned trans man, to tell her own story about experiences at school (Kelly chose female pronouns to describe herself in the article). Kelly’s evolving sense of comfort with herself and her gender identity led her to come out as gay at school—first to her colleagues (intentionally) and later to her students (unintentionally—a student brought it up in class). Echoing findings by McCord and Carrier (2012), Kelly noted that, by showing up to school in men’s clothes, with short hair, and displaying non-feminine appearance, she was “wearing [her] identity” (p. 174). In terms of creating schools that are safer for trans individuals, Kelly said:

To create a safe environment for teachers and kids who break gender norms—nobody’s comfortable with it, so you’re not going to create it in a school, which is just a reflection of the rest of our conservative culture around gender. I guess you have to begin by educating teachers about gender, and about their own assumptions and comfort levels and discomfort levels with people breaking the typical limits of gender. (p. 178)

As McCarthy (2003a) and her participant demonstrated, teachers and students operate within school cultures that can perpetuate societal norms about gender and sexuality. Trans teachers can

teach their cisgender colleagues about non-binary gender: what it means and how teachers can respectfully interact with trans students and/or colleagues in K-12 settings.

Studies on Trans Youth¹⁶

Several studies explored the experiences of trans youth. Grossman and D’Augelli (2006) discussed themes of vulnerability in health and mental health issues based on their interviews with 24 trans youth, over half of whom identified as MTF. Seventy five percent of the respondents reported disclosing their gender identity to their teachers—a larger percentage than disclosed to their parents (66%) or grandparents (50%). A majority of the participants in Grossman and D’Augelli’s (2006) study reported being bullied in school and discussed a lack of access to health and mental health resources. Building upon insights from Grossman and D’Augelli (2006), Grossman, D’Augelli, and Salter (2006) interviewed 31 MTF youth about their experiences of self-discovery, victimization, and parental reactions. Their data suggest that, “gender expression milestones can occur early in life” (p. 85). These participants reported being called sissies as young children, including by their parents. The great majority of participants experienced extreme victimization; “therefore, they never really [felt] safe and secure” (p. 87).

Studies have focused on the resilience and resolve of trans youth who face difficult situations. Grossman, D’Augelli, & Frank (2011) surveyed 55 trans youth about factors that predict psychological resilience. The youth surveyed reported feeling different at an average age of seven-and-a-half and began to consider themselves FTM and MTF trans at an average of age 15 and 13, respectively. Based on this research, the authors suggested that, “interventions to enhance future realities of transgender youth and interventions to enhance psychological

¹⁶ There is a substantial body of literature exploring LGBT youth as a whole (e.g., Wright & Smith, 2013). For the purposes of this literature review, I have, in general, chosen not to discuss these studies but rather have focused on studies about trans youth specifically.

resilience should begin when the youth are older children or young adolescents” (p. 112). This conclusion indicates that K-12 teachers need to be sensitive to the needs of trans youth, and know how to advocate for the well-being of trans youth with whom they have contact. Focusing specifically on trans students of color, Singh (2013) explored the resilience of 13 trans youth in the southeastern U.S. All of the participants in this study were aware of *adultism*, defined by Singh (2013) as “the system where adults hold privilege and power in youths’ lives” (p. 697), describing challenging situations with parents, teachers, and school administrators. The trans youth Singh (2013) interviewed also discussed the need for, and difficulty of, self-advocacy within the education system—to “stand up” for themselves and their gender identity in K-12 and university settings. Also, consistent with findings in Beemyn and Rankin (2011), trans youth sought a place in the LGBTQ youth community, including use of social media to connect with youth with similar experiences.

Several studies have documented the thoughts and experiences of the parents of gender-variant youth. Hill and Menvielle (2009) interviewed 42 parents of 31 children ranging in age from four to 17.5 years old. Parents reported various paths toward acceptance of their children’s gender nonconformity and generally worried about their children being bullied in school and having a more difficult life in general. Hill and Menvielle’s (2009) data counteract the literature on reparative therapy (therapy that purports to “cure” issues of gender-sexual diversity) for LGBTQ youth.

In an effort to inform the practice of social service professionals, Grossman, D’Augelli, Howell, and Hubbard (2006) interviewed 55 trans youth about their parents’ reactions to their gender nonconforming expression and identity. These youth reported that 43% of mothers and 26% of fathers knew of their child’s gender nonconformity, and 54% (mothers) to 63% (fathers)

reacted negatively or very negatively after disclosure. Based on their data, the authors noted that, “transgender youth are misunderstood not only by their parents, but also by most social service professionals, teachers, and administrators of agencies and schools, who are uncomfortable with them” (p. 13). Thus, they urged social service professionals to “become transgender knowledgeable” (p. 14).

Hampton (2014) chronicled the activities and impact of a community-based support group for transgender or gender creative youth in a rural Canadian community. The author predicated this study on the notion that trans youth may feel isolated and that their sense of gender identity and sense of self may be buoyed by connecting with other trans people. This can be particularly impactful in rural communities, where interventions like a school GSA (gay-straight alliance or gender-sexuality alliance) may not exist. “On the whole, transgender youth perceive there to be few safe environments in which to express their authentic gender identity... [and] this is even more likely in rural communities founded on conservative values” (Hampton, 2014, p. 178). Such findings make the potential role of the music teacher even more critical.

Gender Socialization in Schools

As previously discussed in this dissertation, gender socialization is just one of the myriad of concepts students learn in school (Apple, 2004; Basow, 2004; Giroux, 1984; Pascoe, 2007). To explore this phenomenon, researchers explored how sex/gender norms are learned in schools. In an effort to increase awareness and sensitivity about LGBTQ issues in British schools, DePalma (2013) undertook a “deep interrogation of sex and gender with the aim to help teachers and children understand how sex/gender categories are policed and recognize and question our complicity in maintaining commonsense understandings of sex and gender” (p. 1). DePalma (2013), who asserted that both gender *and* sex are socially constructed, purported that teaching

children the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity is vital, “because children who present gender-variant preferences and behaviours [*sic*] can be automatically read as gay, or proto-gay, an assumption that is simply inaccurate” (p. 2). DePalma’s (2013) action research study involved 26 teacher-researchers in 16 primary schools who chronicled the content of, and reaction to, lessons taught to students as part of the No Outsiders Project by Jay, a trans man. Originally, some of the teachers cautioned Jay not to reveal his trans identity to students, but when the opportunity to do so presented itself at one of the schools, Jay seized it. A sixth grade teacher described the reaction of the students to Jay’s disclosure: “The discussion they then had with him, I’ve never felt so proud to be a teacher in my life . . . They were asking him things like, ‘So do you feel happier now you are a boy?’” (DePalma, 2013, p. 12). Upon reflection, the teachers in this study felt that they easily could support cross-gender play among their students, but that their schools may not be prepared for a trans student to change names, pronouns, and dress at school: “It seems that uncertainty has its limits, particularly in school” (DePalma, 2013, p. 12).

Utilizing Foucault’s notions about discourse (Foucault, 1972, 1978) as a lens, Dietert and Dentice (2013) explored gender socialization among MTF trans issues via interviews with 32 participants about negotiating their gender identity with their families and at school. The researchers inquired about difficulties with peers at school surrounding gender identity. One participant discussed the types of taunts with which he dealt: “People would have to ask me, you know, are you a boy or a girl? And I’d get crap thrown at me because they’re like ‘Girls shouldn’t look like boys!’ and crap like that” (Dietert & Dentice, 2013, p. 38). The authors wrote, “Based upon Foucault’s (1972) term ‘surface of emergence,’ the discourse of gender originates in early socialization” (p. 39). All educators, including choral conductor-teachers, play

a role in gender discourse. Students who defy gender norms in school may face harassment, both physical and verbal, which can be detrimental to their success.

Asserting that school climate (or *gender climate* as coined by the author) is an important aspect of making LGBTQ students feel comfortable at school, Ullman (2014) utilized stage-environment fit theory to examine interview data from five LGBTQ adolescents in Australia. The participants included one FTM trans student named Joe who attended an all-female religious school where he was required to wear a female school uniform (compulsory in all Australian schools) and received repeated advice from teachers about how to be more feminine. Joe said that he felt an air of contempt from teachers about discussing LGBTQ issues. “You can’t just turn a blind eye and that’s all they [teachers] seem to do. It’s incredibly frustrating... I feel as if I won’t have any support... I just sit there and fume” (Ullman, 2014, p. 437). Ullman concluded by challenging those who work in K-12 schools to acknowledge, support, and provide curriculum about LGBTQ issues.

Several studies focused on the experiences of young trans students and their families. As several studies have indicated, “Gender-variant students are becoming more known and visible in public schools but...they do not make up a homogeneous group” (de Jong, 2014, p. 869). Graham (2012) explored the experiences of gender nonconforming students in an Early Childhood Education classroom—specifically focusing on how autonomous these students were in expressing their gender identity and what the influence of the teacher might be to that end. Data were gathered by surveying parents ($N = 35$) of gender nonconforming youth ranging in age from three to 11 years old. Graham found that, “Parents were of the opinion that their child autonomously expresses their gender identity in the early childhood education setting” (p. 33), and that parents appreciated being able to offer the child’s teacher suggestions about how to best

support their child. In a study on such a sensitive topic, it would have been more illuminating to read transcript excerpts from in-depth interviews rather than presenting statistical data with such a small sample size.

Payne and Smith (2014) interviewed elementary school professionals ($N = 12$) about their experiences working with young trans children. Data from their study indicated that school professionals received little or no training about how to work with LGBT students, schools lacked policies and procedures to deal with the “novelty and unexpectedness of the enrollment of a transgender student” (p. 408), and many school officials did not wish to address LGBT issues directly (even if there was a trans student in the school). Payne and Smith (2014) wrote that, “Students who fall outside the heteronormative alignment of biological sex, normative gender, and heterosexual orientation are hyper-visible and often perceived as dangerous and hypersexual [especially] in elementary school contexts, where childhood innocence is strictly defined and strictly protected” (p. 408). Payne and Smith (2014) argued that keeping the well-being of a trans child at the heart of all decision-making decisions at school is key to making them feel comfortable and honored in the elementary school environment.

To explore the process and effects of teaching about gender diversity in elementary school, Ryan, Patraw, and Bednar (2013) observed the teaching of one teacher at an urban K-8 school in the American Midwest. Over the course of four lessons, this teacher able imparted vocabulary regarding new way to think and talk about gender via discussion; careful selection of resources, reading, and video materials; and connecting new concepts to the students’ prior knowledge. Based upon these data, Ryan, Patraw, and Bednar (2013) encouraged teacher educators to “[Share] voices from a range of inclusive classrooms so preservice teachers know

this work is possible and so they can see how their students may react to lessons they try” (p. 102).

What would the factors be for parents of a trans child in choosing the right elementary school? This research question drove Slesaransky-Poe, Ruzzi, Dimedio, and Stanley’s (2013) description of how one elementary school prepared for the arrival of a new trans student, Martin. Through collaboration between Martin’s mother (who was a teacher educator), the school guidance counselor, the principal, and a consultant, planning occurred to “create a preliminary plan of action to ensure a smooth transition” (p. 33). The authors agreed that, “Effective professional development was a critical component in this process” (p. 33). The guidance counselor (Ruzzi) encouraged school professionals to: “Recognize how the work you are doing now will help other children in the future... You must be willing to spend the time and effort, and know you are making a difference” (p. 40).

In another study about the school experiences of a gender variant child in elementary school, Luecke (2011) explored one school district’s “coordinated response” to Jaden, a young male-bodied student who transitioned to female gender expression in fifth grade. The school took measured, intentional steps to make this transition smooth, including: (a) identifying “safe people” with whom Jaden could speak should issues arise, (b) inviting a trans youth expert to help administrators with professional development for school staff, (c) communicating with parents of students in the school, and (d) providing anti-bullying (pro-ally) training for students. While Jaden’s transition was not without moments of discomfort for students, staff, and parents, overall it was successful and her school was supportive: “The positive experiences [of Jaden and her classmates] are now woven into the fabric of their lives, providing them with ‘gender angels’ that they can carry with them as they find new ways to be supportive in their future interactions

in middle school and beyond” (pp. 153-154). Luecke’s (2011) study provided a blueprint that schools could use to “question the ways in which gender is operating and what the consequences are” (Rands, 2009, as cited in Luecke, 2011, p. 145).

Few education studies exploring trans issues have focused on student experiences, and many that have done so paint a distressing picture about the daily lives of trans students in K-12 schools. Several scholars have commented on the consistent portrayal of trans students as victims buried under a heap of quantitative data (e.g., Greytak, Kosciw, & Diaz, 2009). As Nichols (2013) commented: “As I considered the ways in which I might retell Rie’s story to an audience of music educators, I wished to avoid *perpetuating the meta-narrative of violence and victimization* that routinely accompanies accounts of gender-variant students in American schooling” (p. 272, emphasis added). This is not to say that all narratives about trans people are about violence, but many are (e.g., Grant et al., 2010). It is important that studies about trans teens address issues of harassment and violence while also showing how they can be resilient and have positive experiences.

Trans College Students

Several studies have explored the experiences of trans college students. In fact, the body of scholarship on the collegiate population is much larger than the work in K-12 schools. This is perhaps not surprising considering university Institutional Review Board procedures and the sometimes-difficult research permission processes of public school districts. A full review of this line of scholarship is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but a sample of findings is presented here. Beemyn and Rankin (2011) and Rankin and Beemyn (2012) used data from their large-scale mixed-methods study of trans people to disaggregate information related to collegiate students, finding that college campus climates often were hostile for LGBT students, and

especially for transgender students. Beemyn and Pettitt (2006) surveyed a wide array of higher education institutions about the inclusivity of campus language and policies pursuant to trans students. They found that few colleges had trans-related services and policies such as gender-neutral bathrooms, access to hormone therapy, and trans-inclusive policies regarding records and forms.

Several qualitative studies explored the experiences of trans college students. Bilodeau (2005) presented a case study of two students who use “transgender” but “expressed gender in ways that fall outside traditional constructions of female-to-male and male-to-female transgender categories” (2005, p. 31). Data from the two participants supported the use of D’Augelli’s (1994) lifespan model of sexual orientation identity development and called for further research on students who are gender non-conforming. Bilodeau (2005) noted the need for college campuses to examine how they reinforce gender oppression. In a similar study, McKinney’s (2005) participants reported a campus climate that was hostile towards trans people and a lack of trans-related resources on campus. Pusch (2005) found that trans students who transitioned to living full-time in their true gender identity began to feel more “normal.” Effrig Bieschke, and Locke (2011) discovered that trans college students were likely to have higher stress levels, even after seeking counseling. Catalano (2015) presented data from interviews with 25 trans men in college, focusing on the concept of being “trans enough,” exploring how these students navigated their gender identity while in college. Catalano (2015) noted that policy changes in post-secondary education are context-dependent: “Higher education as an institution is enmeshed in systemic processes that exist beyond the boundaries of any specific campus” and that policies related to gender identity and expression “Can affirm or disavow students’ identities” (p. 425).

Several quantitative studies explored the experience of trans college students. Dugan, Kusel, and Simounet (2012) examined transgender college students' perceptions and experiences pursuant to 17 aspects of the college experience. Drawing on data from a large national data set, the authors analyzed statistics from 91 trans college students. One finding was that MTF and intersex students, "Reported significantly less mentoring by faculty members than their FTM peers" (p. 731). Of all of the trans sub-groups, MTF students seemed to be the most marginalized in the collegiate setting. Overall, trans students faced significantly more discrimination and harassment, causing them to feel less comfortable on campus. According to Dugan, Kusel, and Simounet (2012), "Enhancing perceptions of campus climate should begin with increasing the awareness of transgender students' needs as well as formal training processes that educate faculty, staff, and peers" (p. 733). Seelman (2014) analyzed a sub-set of the data from the National Transgender Discrimination Survey to explore the experiences of trans college students ($N = 2,772$) in accessing housing options and bathroom facilities that matched their gender identity. She discovered that

transgender people of color, those who are younger, those with a disability (physical, learning, or mental), and those more frequently perceived as transgender are more likely to be denied access to appropriate bathrooms or other facilities due to being transgender or gender nonconforming. (p. 199)

Seelman (2014) argued for an intersectional approach to research and policy in order to "change higher education institutions for the better" (p. 198). Consistent with other research, this study revealed that trans women were at a higher risk for discrimination than were other subsets of the trans community, perhaps due to "The overlap of transphobia and misogyny" (p. 193)—another form of intersectionality.

Experiences of Trans Students in K-12 Schools

Harassment of trans youth in schools. Several studies explored the oppression that trans students face in school (Greytak, Kosciw, & Diaz, 2009; Kosciw et al., 2012; McGuire, Anderson, Toomey, & Russell, 2010; Toomey, McGuire, & Russell, 2012; Wyss, 2004), while others have explored responses to bullying of surrounding trans or gender non-conforming students by peers (Wernick, Kulick, & Inglehart, 2014) and school counselors (De Jong, 2014). All of these studies on the harassment of trans students evoke hooks' (2000) definition of oppression: "Being oppressed means the *absence of choices*. It is the primary point of contact between the oppressed and the oppressor" (p. 5, emphasis in original). Many trans students are forced to attend schools where they were continually tormented. Using data from self-identified trans students ($N = 295$) from the GLSEN school climate survey, Greytak, Kosciw, and Diaz (2009) found that: 82% of these students felt unsafe at school, 37% reported missing school "frequently" due to harassment due to their gender expression, 62% experienced cyber bullying, and 67% had their property damaged at school. These findings echo data from a similar study by McGuire, Anderson, Toomey, and Russell (2010).

Wyss (2004) conducted a qualitative study chronicling the experiences of nine adults who were "out" as trans in high school. Nearly all reported horrific stories of taunting, shoving, inappropriate touching, and even rape—both in and out of school. It is thus unsurprising that five of the nine participants dropped out of high school. Wyss's (2004) study was one of the first to explore the experiences of trans youth in schools. Similarly, Sausa (2005) interviewed 24 trans youth in the hope of formulating recommendations for schools on how to support gender variant students better. Echoing themes of Greytak, Kosciw, and Diaz (2009) and McGuire, Anderson, Toomey, & Russell (2010), 96% of the participants in Sausa's study reported verbal harassment

at school and 83% reported physical attacks as well. In most cases their concerns were “ignored by administrators, teachers, and staff” (p. 20).

Non-harassment experiences of trans students in K-12 schools. A small number of studies not focused on harassment have explored the educational experiences of trans students in K-12 schools. Gutierrez (2004) interviewed four MTF transgender students of color attending a GLBT alternative school in the Northeastern U.S. “The interviews expose the need to advocate for education that acknowledges and addresses the ways that race, sexuality, class, ethnicity, and gender together inform life experiences and identity, especially within the context of educational institutions” (p. 70). All four participants rejected the term “transgender” in describing themselves, and all faced multiple, intersecting layers of oppression (what many call intersectionality). Sadly, even within a GLBT alternative school environment, the needs of trans students were largely ignored. Though Gutierrez (2004) situated her study in little extant literature (citing only two sources), it provides some honest and profound thoughts about transgender inclusion in education. The students in Gutierrez’s (2004) study longed for an acknowledgment of their identity: “their *whole* identities, not just fragments” (p. 76, emphasis in original). The students also recommended that schools do more to educate students about gender. More studies chronicling the experiences of trans students in K-12 environments are vital, especially in an era in which more trans youth are coming out in secondary schools (e.g., Beemyn & Rankin, 2011; Grossman & D’Augelli, 2006; Stufft & Graff, 2011; Turnbull, 2011).

Transgender Research in Music (Education)

Few studies explored trans issues within the context of music education. One study from general education has implications for music education and was published in the journal *Gender, Education, Music, and Society*. Sullivan (2014) explored the concept of safe spaces for young

(grades K-3) students by having trans adults reflect on their early childhood experiences. She discovered that the music room was a particularly powerful and safe space for several participants. Sullivan (2014) noted that the findings of her study are not generalizable, and her work inspired more questions than answers. For example, “What can you do in your own classroom to make transgender children feel safe and supported?...What can you do in your family, school, and community to educate others about what transgender children need and have to offer?” (p. 23). To answer some of these questions, Silveira and Goff (2016) surveyed inservice music educators ($N = 612$) about their perceived readiness to teach trans students. Data analysis revealed that: “The overall mean scores of attitudes toward transgender individuals and attitudes toward supportive school practices were 2.11 ($SD = 0.77$) and 2.29 ($SD = 0.63$), respectively suggesting fairly positive attitudes on average” (p. 12). Silveira and Goff’s (2016) data are encouraging—but the abstract concept of supporting trans students and the reality of doing so in the classroom may be disparate.

There are several concerns with the Silveira and Goff (2016) study. What Silveira and Goff (2016) describe with “transgender” is close to a common definition of transsexual—which is only one subset of the larger trans community. In addition, some of the data presented is not as positive as the authors lead readers to believe. For example, 37.3% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “Legal names no longer preferred by transgender students should be public information at school” (p. 10). Likewise, 33.8% agreed or strongly agreed with the following: “It is unrealistic for teachers to practice using gender-neutral language in the classroom” (p. 10). More concerning, however was that 40.1% of teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, “Transgender students in choir should be permitted to sing with a

vocal part that aligns with their gender identity” (p. 11). Based on these data, the authors made the following claim:

While there is some research examining procedures such as androgen therapy (e.g., Damrose, 2009) and Melodic Intonation Therapy (e.g., Hershberger, 2005) to aid in voice transition for male-to-female and female-to-male individuals, the case could certainly be made that students should sing the voice part appropriate for their vocal development. (p. 16)

The sample of respondents included all types of music teachers—band, choir, orchestra, and “other.” Based on a very small survey sample made up mostly of music educators who do not teach choir, it is irresponsible to make claims about which voice part trans students should or not sing. Silveira and Goff (2016) did not consider the literature on the connection between voice and gender identity and the extremely personal nature of the voice for some trans people, and their claim is not supported with sufficient data.

One way to explore how teachers can support trans youth in schools is to *talk to them*—to *ask* what their experiences have been and how they might help improve schools based on these narratives. Nichols’s (2013) narrative case study presented the story of a genderqueer student named Ryan/Rie in the Midwest. Using critical and emancipatory storysharing, the author chronicled the musical life of a student who, in the manuscript, preferred to be referred to using alternating pronouns (“he/him” in one paragraph and “she/her” in the next). Nichols identified the need for further scholarship on transgender issues in music education:

This story is critical to the burgeoning conversation regarding LGBT issues in music education because it traces the role of in-school and out-of-school music learning in the fraught process of one person’s struggle to align his physical self, his social presentation

of gender, and his sexual orientation while negotiating a school environment unprepared for his presence. (p. 264)

It is possible that soon, K-12 and college/university music students will have a nuanced vocabulary and schema regarding gender variance while many teachers, counselors, and administrators will remain “unprepared for [the] presence” of trans students, a concept reflected in Nichols’s (2013) data: “Rie rejects the notion that her sense of safety stemmed from any conscious effort on the part of her music teachers. According to Rie, the band and choir teachers ‘never brought [my gender expression] up’” (p. 268). By not actively discussing trans issues or helping Rie, the music educators in their¹⁷ school acted just as poorly as the students that rejected them. Though Nichols’s (2013) study is a good first step, there is still a large gap in the literature on trans issues in vocal and choral music specifically. If vocal and gender identities are linked (e.g., Elorriaga, 2011; Moore, 2008), it seems prudent to explore the experiences of trans students in school choral music programs.

Trans Research in Vocal/Choral Music (Education)

Trans voices. Trans people express their gender in many ways: their clothing, their mannerism, their gait, and, of course, their voice (Lipson, 2013). Opinions within the trans community about voice issues vary. Zimman (2014) wrote:

Some trans people may wish to change their speaking styles as part of a shift in gender expression, and the fact that many gender differences are learned rather than innate suggests that kind of change is possible, if challenging. Others may prefer a nonnormative voice, in order to signal a queer or distinctly trans identity. (p. 127)

¹⁷The use of the singular pronouns “they/them/theirs” has become standard practice in the trans community (Wayne, 2005). More and more publications, including *The Washington Post*, are allowing the use of the singular they (Bennett, 2016; Walsh, 2015).

Some trans people elect hormone therapy and/or surgery as part of their transition. Trans men may take testosterone and trans women may take estrogen. Vocally speaking, the changes produced by these hormones are not equal between MTFs and FTMs. A transsexual man who takes hormones following female puberty can, in many ways, mimic adolescent puberty, but transsexual women born into biologically male bodies generally have a more difficult time counteracting the influences of male puberty. These changes can be critical when considering singing voice issues for trans people (Edwards, 2009). If FTM singers begin a testosterone regimen, their vocal anatomy will develop in much the same fashion of an adolescent cisgender male (Constansis, 2008; Sweet & Bergonzi, 2016). For MTFs on the other hand, the influence of male puberty on the vocal anatomy is more difficult to counteract: “Once the vocal cords lengthen and thicken, which occurs when a bio-male goes through puberty, recapturing the higher voice is difficult because the vocal cords do not return to their pre-puberty characteristics through estrogen therapy or sex reassignment surgery” (Edwards, 2009, para. 16).

While a full review of literature on trans voice therapy is beyond the scope of this dissertation, it should be noted that there is a growing compendium of writing on this topic, mostly geared toward speech therapists and pathologists (e.g., Byrne, Dacakis, & Douglas, 2003; Carew, Dacakis, & Oates, 2007; Chaloner, 2000; Davies, Papp, & Antoni, 2015; Gelfer, 1999; Hershberger, 2005; Lipson, 2013; Neumann, Welzel, Gonnermann, & Wolfradt, 2002; Neuman & Welzel, 2004; Steele, 2016; T’Sjoen et al., 2006; Wicklund, 2013). Several of these manuscripts are not “studies” in the traditional sense, but rather are based on the professional/practitioner experiences of the authors. Nearly all of the literature from the vocal pedagogy and speech pathology literature discussed and/or studied trans women, some of whom dislike the sound of their voice (Byrne, Dacakis, & Douglas, 2003).

Several studies explored techniques and therapies to raise the fundamental frequency of an MTF client's voice to sound more feminine. The fundamental frequency is an acoustical property related to formants that can help distinguish a voice as male or female. According to Titze (1994), the fundamental frequency of a typical male voice is 85 to 180 Hz, and that of a typical adult female from 165 to 255 Hz. In addition to fundamental frequency, vocal resonance is also a factor in the "gendering" of voices (Coleman, 1976). Studies have explored various techniques to help raise the fundamental frequency of MTF clients' voices, including forward tongue carriage and lip spreading to change the shape of the vocal tract (Carew, Dacakis, & Oates, 2007); various surgeries, including modified cricothyroidopexy (Neumann & Welzel, 2004); and Melodic Intonation Therapy (Hershberger, 2005). It seems that for MTF singers, good technique and proper use of resonance is crucial. There is vocal cord surgery available for MTFs, which "reduces the vibrating length of the vocal cords and thereby hopefully raises the pitch to a believable level with no long-term attendant hoarseness" (Chaloner, 2000, p. 266). However, the literature seemed to indicate that an MTF singer might be better served by vocal re-training than by surgery.

The scholarship about FTM vocal pedagogy is quite limited when compared with the literature cited above (Azul, 2015). Though hormone therapy for FTM trans people can lower the fundamental pitch of one's voice, it is not a "magic bullet" as explained by Wickund (2013): "There is huge variability in each person's response to testosterone and the pitch change may not be especially dramatic, and may sometimes be minimal" (para. 5). One study on the FTM changing voice appeared in the online journal *Radical Musicology*. In a self-study on the trans changing voice, Constansis (2008) documented his own voice change as he underwent initial hormone replacement therapy treatment. A professional female singer prior to transition,

Constansis elected a lower dose of testosterone than is typically prescribed (many trans men choose a high dose initially to accelerate the rate of bodily changes—voice change, body hair and muscle growth, etc.). Constansis (2008) found that the lower testosterone dose facilitated a change that was quite similar to that of an adolescent cisgender male:

Though changing voices bear common characteristics, FTM transvocality behaves less conventionally than the rest. Anyone dealing with FTM voices should understand that the vocal reactions to artificial testosterone are rarely stable or smooth, especially during the first year. The vocal practitioner needs to be able to anticipate these effects as well as any added obstacles. (para. 28)

In the end, Constansis found the quality of his new voice to be quite pleasing, perhaps due to the combination of the lower testosterone dose with a rigorous practice routine: “The combination of the right gradual testosterone intake together with soft exercising of the voice can help the voice not only to retain its singing quality, but also to acquire a new and aesthetically pleasing quality” (Constansis, 2008, para. 32).

Edwards (2009) interviewed two people singing in a transgender chorus in Minneapolis/St. Paul, and situated her data in research about trans changing voice issues. Echoing themes of Green (1997), Edwards (2009) gave a poignant rationale for why research and dialogue on trans issues in vocal and choral music is vital:

Voice is one of the major cues that we use in ascribing gender—often in a nanosecond—and is a significant component of our identity. For people who are transgender, transsexual, genderqueer, crossdresser, or differently gendered, issues surrounding voice are complex, often laced with hazards, fear, and shame as well as disjunction and self-alienation. Silence often occurs as a way to avoid this discomfort or, tragically, as a

safety precaution since identifiably transgender people face a high risk of violence and hate crimes. Thus, claiming a singing voice takes on particular significance for transgender people, despite the added psychological and physiological complexities.

(para. 1)

A commonly heard adage in education is that no significant learning occurs without significant relationships. So, in addition to voice change or any other physical issues with which trans singers deal, perhaps the most important thing choral music educators can do is to *create an environment in which singers feel honored and safe*. Although a growing body of literature has explored the physiological aspects of voice changes among trans people, especially those who undergo hormone therapy, a broader exploration of trans identity in the vocal/choral context has yet to occur in music education research.

Trans research in choral music education. Though their study was not focused on trans singers specifically, Palkki and Caldwell (in press) explored the notion of the secondary choral classroom as a safe space for LGBTQ singers. Their survey included Likert-type questions and open-ended free response questions geared toward LGBTQ collegiate choral singers ($N = 1,123$) reflecting on their secondary choral experience; 11.84% (133 respondents) expressed their gender in ways outside of the traditional gender binary (male/female), and 9.61% identified as gender non-conforming, intersex, questioning, or transgender. Analysis of survey data indicated that gender non-conforming, trans, and gender-questioning respondents felt less safe than did their lesbian, gay, and bisexual peers. When asked how their choral programs contributed to a sense of safety, one trans respondent wrote about the gender-neutral use of language by their choral teacher: “My director spoke to voice parts rather than to genders. He referred to basses as basses, not as men. He referred to sopranos and altos rather than women” (Palkki & Caldwell, in

press). When asked what their choral programs could have done to make them feel safer, one respondent wrote: “The topic of gender expression could have been openly discussed rather than avoided” (Palkki & Caldwell, in press).

Edidi and Palkki (2015) depicted the musical life of a vibrant trans woman of color, Lady Dane Figueroa Edidi, an activist and author who discussed racism, oppression, and intersectionality. The co-authors sought to bring these important concepts into the music education dialogue. By utilizing narrative inquiry, Dane told her own story. Edidi spoke of singing being deeply influential. This quote demonstrates the power of choral music and the role it can play in the life of a young trans person:

But where I really got my start really was church: singing in church in the little youth choir, and that was great because the thing about music is that—music—really as a child, it was my salvation. It was my refuge. It was my love. It was the time in which I felt that I was really, really, really in my element. I really was loved. I was really accepted. (para. 20)

In her concluding narrative, Edidi encouraged schools to do their part in educating students about gender: “We must also begin to move towards distinguishing the difference between gender and gender performance especially as they will both manifest differently within the classroom” (para. 38).

In an action research study with a trans student in his high school choir assigned female at birth, Berglin (2014) collected data during three interviews and two voice lessons to explore the challenges and concerns about being a transgender student in a choral music program. Over

the four-month span of the study, the student's comfort level within the choral ensemble increased. Berglin included suggestions regarding voicing¹⁸ and repertoire, and concluded that:

through better understanding and a willingness to work with the student instead of trying to “fit” him into a traditional choral “box,” the student thrived and found his place in the ensemble, as well as a better understanding of and agency for his vocal development.

(abstract)

Berglin's (2014) work is indicative of the type of study the choral music education community desperately needs. Trans youth are coming out at younger and younger ages (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Grossman, D'Augelli, & Salter, 2006) and some are even seeking hormone therapy to halt puberty in their birth-assigned sex (Roen, 2011). Therefore, more and more public school choral teachers will be working with trans youth—and soon. Choral music is tied intimately with the concept of gender—consider “women's choirs” and “men's choirs,” not to mention choir dresses and tuxedos (e.g., Edwards, 2009; Palkki, 2015; Palkki & Caldwell, in press). Therefore, it is imperative that choral music educators expand their notions about gender—away from a simplistic binary category toward a “gender-complex” (Rands, 2009) approach in which *all* students—cisgender, trans, genderqueer, questioning, and every other variation—can thrive. As Wilchins (2002) wrote: “The time for changing the mainstream is now. Gender *is* the civil rights movement for our time, because gender rights are human rights. And I look forward to a day when they are universally recognized and respected as such” (p. 17, emphasis in original).

¹⁸ Anecdotally, it seems that this is a topic of great concern. I have been involved with several threads in the “I’m a choir director” Facebook group regarding which voice part trans students should sing. Observing these threads and others on ChoralNet lead me to believe that there is a large amount of misunderstanding, misrecognition, and confusion regarding trans issues.

CHAPTER 3—METHOD

The need for further engagement with trans issues by those who care about social justice is clearly warranted, if politically fraught and much contested (Elliot, 2010, pp. 7-8).

Statement of Purpose and Problems

With the purpose of furthering and enhancing the sociocultural dialogue surrounding LGBTQA issues in music education and to improve vocal/choral instruction for trans students, this multiple narrative case study explored the musical lives and lived experiences of trans students in secondary school choral music programs. This dissertation presents the viewpoints of three students who were currently or recently enrolled in a high school choral class at the time of data collection. Insights from adults including choral teachers, school counselors, and administrators added context and helped to provide a broader view of the students' experiences. The emergent research design employed narrative inquiry and ethnographic techniques in order to honor and highlight the participants' voices. Because choral programs generally are understood to be a safe space for LGBTQA youth (Palkki & Caldwell, in press; Silveira & Goff, 2016) it is hoped that K-12 choral music educators can glean valuable and necessary information about how to best serve transgender (including gender variant, genderqueer, gender non-conforming, etc.) students in secondary school choral programs. The specific problems of this study were:

- To describe how transgender students enrolled in secondary school choral music programs navigate their gender identity in the choral context.
 - To describe the role that factors such as voice (change), choir uniforms, and choral program structure play in their choral experiences.

- To describe the positive and negative aspects of participation in school choir when considering their gender identity.
- To describe if/how transgender students in secondary school choral programs were supported by groups including their choral teachers, choral peers, and school administrators.

During data collection it became clear that school and district-level policies played a major role in these students' experiences. Therefore, I also examined policy approaches taken by each school and school district.

Researcher's Lens

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) and Lyle (2009) stated that qualitative and narrative researchers should be forthright in explaining elements of their background that could influence their approach to the study. Similarly, as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) wrote, "For narrative inquirers, it is crucial to be able to articulate a relationship between one's personal interests and sense of significance and larger social concerns expressed in the works and lives of others" (p. 122). Thomas (1993) ventured that, "The penetration of values is unavoidable, and the solution is not to try to expunge them from research, but rather to identify them and assess their impact" (p. 21).

I approached this work as a cisgender man who has been "out" as gay for approximately 20 years. As intimated in the vignettes above, I have several trans friends and knew one trans male student at the high school at which I taught in California. In the spring of 2014, I met my boyfriend, who is a trans guy.¹⁹ Asher has taught me an incredible amount about many things, including gender. Though his expertise and knowledge of the literature has been extremely

¹⁹ "Trans guy" is Asher's preferred gender delineation (as opposed to "trans man" or "trans male").

helpful (after graduating from college, he was working towards an M.A. degree in religious studies with a focus on gender issues), I want to make it clear that I did not undertake this study because of him. I was considering study of trans issues in choir before I met him. Knowing Asher's journey and story certainly has made me think about trans issues in a deeper way. Learning about the difficult moments of his gender journey has helped me see how challenging daily life can be at times for persons questioning their gender identity or who live outside of the gender binary. Certainly being in a long-term relationship with a trans guy has influenced my approach to the study. While it may have put me at a risk of remaining too close to the data (or led me to paint an overly optimistic view of the data), it also gave me the advantage that I have thought through and discussed many trans issues with someone who has *lived* them.

Is It OK For A White, Cisgender Male To Do Research On Trans Issues?

For me, and for many other writers, work on LGBTQA issues is delicate, personal, and sometimes challenging. Writing about and researching trans experiences can be especially sensitive. Because facing a gender identity that is incongruous with one's assigned birth sex can be personal and difficult for outsiders to understand, some have questioned whether study of trans people's experiences by cisgender researchers is appropriate. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) wrote, "Narrative inquirers need to reconstruct their own narrative of inquiry histories and to be alert for possible tensions between those narrative histories and the narrative research they undertake" (p. 46). Thus, I begin by discussing elements of my own gender journey and how it may have influenced this research.

Some authors who are trans have questioned the motives of cisgender research on trans issues. For example, Wilchins (1997) wrote:

Is there not something deeply immoral in the way these writers fail to help those whose lives they blithely mine for new insights and incantations? Do they never feel a twinge of guilt as their ‘studies’ merely escalate the politicization of our bodies, choices, and desires, so that, with each new book, while their audience enjoys the illusion of knowing more about us, we find ourselves more disempowered, dislocated, and exploited than before? (...) Our performance of gender is invariably a site of contest, a problem which—if we could but bring enough hi-octane academic brainpower to bear—might be ‘solved.’ The academician’s own gender performance is never at issue nor that of the ‘real’ men and women who form the standard to which ours is compared. Through the neat device of ‘othering’ us, *their* identities are quietly, invisibly naturalized. How nice to be normal, to know that the gender-trash is safely locked in the Binary Zoo when they turn off the word processor at night... No one bothers to investigate the actual conditions of our lives or the lives of those we hold dear. (p. 22, emphasis in original)

I do not agree that all studies on trans people disempower and/or exploit trans people. Many recent studies have brought trans issues to the fore in delicate and professional ways: both those done by trans researchers (e.g., Beemyn, 2005; McCarthy, 2003a) and those undertaken by non-trans scholars (e.g., Bilodeau, 2005; DePalma, 2013). Wilchins’ (1997) comments also inspire the question: If only trans researchers are “allowed” to explore trans issues, then will that not limit the extent to which these stories will enter research and popular discourses? Julia Serano (2007) expressed similar concern in her book *Whipping Girl*:

When academics appropriate transsexual and intersex experiences for their essays and theories, and when they clip out specific aspects of our lives and paste them together out of context to make their own creations, they are simply contributing to our erasure. If

cissexual academics truly believe that transsexual and intersex people can add new perspectives to existing dialogues about gender, then they should stop reinterpreting our experiences and instead support transsexual and intersex intellectual endeavors and works of art...Non-intersex, cissexual...academics should put down their pens, open up their minds, and simply listen to what we have to say about our own lives. (pp. 211-212)

I believe that it is possible for cisgender researchers—remaining ever aware of their cisgender privilege—to use their position in a positive way to bring attention and respect to trans experiences and trans issues. While this power differential cannot be erased, the use of an ethnographic lens helped participants to speak for themselves and reveal their reality in their own way—shining a light on things that may have remained uncovered.

Also, the transgender experience is not a monolith—it is multifaceted and is constantly evolving. This study was an attempt to give voice to trans teens—a group of people without a strong voice in academic discourse. Is sharing the experiences of trans teens ethical? Is it inappropriate? Or on the other hand, is it empowering and educational? I have no answers to these questions, and I am completely unsure about who gets to decide. What I do know, however, is that I had many questions and a desire to learn from these students what choral music educators can do to honor the gender identities and journeys of trans students.

Elliot (2010) grappled with suggestions from trans writers that as a cisgender woman, she had no business theorizing and writing about trans issues. I realize that the parallel between theorizing and doing narrative research is not exact, but I believe that Elliot's words and experience are apropos. Thus, I quote at length here:

Trans and non-trans persons have enormously different stakes in the debates that traverse the newly designated field of trans studies. Although I do not believe this fact warrants

the silencing of non-trans perspectives it sometimes produces, acknowledging those different stakes is a crucial matter. Grappling with these debates remains primarily a theoretical concern for non-trans persons like me—which is to say, for those whose personal integrity and material well-being are not affected by their outcome. Obviously, those who cross or change sex have much more at stake in how issues that carry personal and political consequences for them are addressed or not addressed. Many have been subjected to transphobic attacks by both trans and non-transpersons who could have been allies instead. Lacking insider expertise is a disadvantage here, and I am grateful for the formal and informal feedback on my research from a number of transpersons. I have learned that one advantage of being an outsider to both transsexual and transgender communities is the obligation it brings to consider how and where their respective needs and goals converge and how and where they differ. (p. 5)

Similarly, Namaste (2000) wrote:

To date, very few of the monographs, articles, and books written about us deal with the nitty-gritty realities of our lives, our bodies, and our experience of the everyday world... Our lives and our bodies are made up of more than gender and identity, more than a theory that justifies our very existence, more than mere performance, more than the interesting remark that we expose how gender works. Our lives and our bodies are much more complicated, and much less glamorous, than all that. They are forged in details of everyday life, marked by matters not discussed by academics or clinical researchers. (p. 1)

I agree with Wilchins (1997) that it is unfair for a cisgender researcher to inquire about participants' gender identities and bodies without calling their own gender into question. Gender

is an inescapable construct—in society and in research. Järviluoma, Moisala, and Vilkkö (2003) asserted that, “Gender, the cultural construction of masculinity and femininity, cannot be avoided in any research activity” (p. 1). Especially in a study about non-binary gender, it was important to consider the ramifications that gender could have on the process of conducting qualitative research. Because a qualitative researcher acts as the primary data collection instrument, it is standard practice for them to disclose experiences and biases that may influence their study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Inherent in Wilchins’ critique is the fact that in her 1997 book, she *assumed* that every cisgender person felt “normal” where gender was concerned. I never have. It should be noted that Wilchins evolved in her thinking on this issue and in later books (e.g., *Queer Theory, Gender Theory* in 2004), adopted a “softer” (read: somewhat less activist) stance. The following commentary is meant to disclose aspects of my own gender journey that have influenced my research, reading, and writing (not to mention my daily life). Furthermore, this dissertation is not an attempt to create a theory about trans people. Rather, I utilize other theories in an effort to honor the lived experiences of the three students that are the focus of the study.

I always had some level of apprehension about growing up to be a “man.” When I was young, I knew I was different (strange, I thought—quirky), but I didn’t know why. I do not remember ever exclusively playing with “girl toys,” and I have no memory of ever feeling female on the inside. Still, I never foresaw growing up to be “manly.” This contradiction stayed with me through the perilous and awkward adolescent years and into college. Growing up, I was constantly surrounded (affronted?) by a society subtly teaching me what a “real man” was supposed to be like—and somewhere deep down, I knew that I would never grow up to be that way. I liked to sing. I had terrible posture. I was socially awkward. I preferred Broadway musicals to the NFL. I sang in choir, participated in school plays, and excelled in speech and

debate. I did not care about sports. And in my hometown, those qualities made me less of a man—or at least that is what I learned in my hometown and at school.

I have become a vocal supporter of trans rights. Since I began reading and writing about gender in 2014, I have been posting images and news stories about trans issues on social media, prompting two friends to ask me outright if I am transgender. Also, I consider myself quite androgynous. On many occasions, I have been openly mistaken for a female (and just once, on the street in San Francisco, a drag queen!). For many years I struggled to accept my appearance because all of the cisgender male models that I saw—gay and straight—represented stereotypically masculine attributes that I felt I would never possess.

The point is that, while I am not trans, I bring some level of gender variance to the table when conducting this research. This work often has been intimidating, frightening, and delicate, but I do not believe that these feelings should stop me from doing this type of work. Because as Wilchins (1997) and Namaste (2000) intimated, more stories (especially positive stories) about trans individuals and trans students are necessary in a society where conceptions about gender are expanding rapidly. The purpose of the present study was to help trans students in choral programs to portray “[their] own narrative” (Wilchins, 1997). In this study, the students constructed their own narrative.

Design

This study took the form of an intrinsic narrative case study because my interest was in presenting the stories of three students who represented rich cases, not in generalizing about the experiences of all trans students (Stake, 1995). This study fit the description of what Yin (1993) termed a descriptive case study, defined as “a complete description of a phenomenon within its context” (p. 5). Though it is true that the findings of the study are not generalizable, I do intend

for the outcomes of the study to have practical implications for practicing choral music educators, which Patton (1990) termed “applied research,” defined as “evaluation...to inform action, enhance decision making, and [application of] knowledge to solve human and societal problems” (p. 12). Similarly, Bassey (1999) contended that case studies in education should lead to “knowledge which could be of consequence to other teachers” (p. 7). Studies such as this may be aided by what Bassey (1999) called *fuzzy generalization*:

A fuzzy generalization carries an element of uncertainty. It reports that something has happened in one place and that it may also happen elsewhere. There is a possibility but no surety. There is an invitation to ‘try it and see if the same happens for you.’ (p. 52)

Because many trans students are now disclosing their gender identities in middle and high school (or even earlier), it is my hope that choral music education practitioners glean useful information from this study.

Within the context of this multiple narrative study, I employed ethnographic techniques, to assist in the storying and restorying of participants’ experiences. Because part of data collection involved observation, thick description and other ethnographic techniques helped to place the participants in their unique contexts—namely within their schools, their school choral programs, and the communities/states/regions in which they lived.

Multiple definitions and types of narrative inquiry exist, and the chosen approach when using this form of inquiry as a research method must fit the research topic and setting (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2013). Pinnegar and Daynes (2006) defined narrative inquiry as a method and a phenomenon, writing, “As a method, it begins with the experiences as expressed in lived and told stories of individuals” (p. 54). Moen (2008) described narrative inquiry as “a frame of reference, a way of reflecting during the entire inquiry process, a research method, and a mode

for representing the research study” (p. 57). Moen (2008) made three broad claims about narrative inquiry, that: (a) human beings organize their experiences of the world into narratives; (b) stories are based on an individual’s past and present experiences, values, the addressees of the story, and when and where they are being told; and (c) multivoicedness is inherent in narrative.

Connelly and Clandinin (1990), Clandinin and Connelly (2000), Clandinin (2006), Moen (2008), and Webster and Mertova (2007) asserted that narrative inquiry is especially appropriate for studies about education because social science and education researchers are interested in the study of people and their experiences. Moen (2008) wrote, “In narratives, the complexity of the classroom is not broken down and divided into elements. On the contrary, narratives from classrooms capture both the complexity and, as we have seen, the multivoicedness of teaching” (p. 65). Webster and Mertova (2007) claimed that:

Narrative delves beneath the outward show of behaviour [*sic*] to explore thoughts, feelings, and intentions. If narrative is fundamental to communication, then the use of narrative as a research method may, for instance, give us a better understanding of teaching, learning, and performance in a wide range of environments and may assist in generating more appropriate teaching tools and techniques. (p. 12)

Simply put, rich narratives can inform teaching practice.

Music education settings abound with rich stories, thus narrative inquiry seemed an ideal method for the present study. As Stauffer and Barrett (2009) wrote, “narrative troubles certainty” (p. 20). Stauffer and Barrett (2009), Bowman (2006), Hartz (2012), and McCarthy (2007) discussed narrative inquiry in music education specifically. “Narrative inquiry projects are deeply relational and committed to the pursuit of questions of educational significance—

questions that challenge taken-for-granted notions of the nature of life and learning in and through music” (Stauffer & Barrett, 2009, p. 16). Stauffer and Barrett (2009) suggested that narrative inquiry can uncover stories not normally heard in music education research, encouraging scholars toward “resonant work,” which they stated can be achieved when a researcher is: (a) respectful, (b) responsible, (c) rigorous, and (d) resilient. This notion of resilience is important when considering narratives about social justice:

Narrative that is resilient—and resonant—aims at troubling certainty. It speaks to multiple audiences and is open to multiple interpretations. It rests on the principles of respect and responsibility. It is rigorous inquiry, conducted with methodological and theoretical integrity. *It retains its appeal and persuasiveness across time and contexts through honest and critical storytelling directed at matters of social justice, educational equality, and human dignity.* At its best, resilient narrative builds autonomy, independence, and resolve so that readers and those who participate in the inquiry are moved to take on resonant work themselves. (p. 26, emphasis added)

Considering the delicate nature of gender identity and expression among teens (Grossman & D’Augelli, 2006; Hydén, 2013b), narrative inquiry seemed an ideal tool to honor the lived experiences of the three participants. These students had stories to tell—important, rich stories—that may not have been shared otherwise. Considering the seeming ignorance of choral music educators considering issues of gender (e.g., Bond, 2015; Palkki & Caldwell, in press; Nichols, 2013; Wicks-Rudolph, 2012), it was vital that the participants speak for themselves and share their own stories in their own way.

Ethnographic inquiry involves the use of rich narratives as well as strong connections with participants. Ethnographers should not act as cold, detached observers (Emerson, Fretz, &

Shaw, 2011). As Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) asserted, “It is hard to expect ‘honesty’ and ‘frankness’ on the part of participants and informants, while never being frank and honest about oneself” (p. 91). Part of fieldwork involved thick description (Geertz, 1973)—a tool ethnographers use to portray the culture being studied with rich, vivid language. Like narrative research, ethnography has the potential to illuminate stories rarely heard in the research discourse.

Music education researchers began employing ethnographic inquiry beginning in the 1980s (Krueger, 1987, 2014). Bannister (1992) described how early music education research (before the late 1960s) was opinion-based and written on the basis of personal experience rather than on data collection. Since then, music education researchers (as well as scholars in the sociology of music and ethnomusicology) have explored music in social contexts, noting the “value that all musics have in the context of people’s lives” (Bannister, 1992, p. 133). Bannister (1992) urged music education ethnographers to ask questions regarding how music changes the lives of musicians and how musicians can shape social settings.

Emergent Design: Narrative Inquiry Employing Ethnographic Techniques

This study employed a narrative design incorporating ethnographic techniques (e.g., observing participants in choir, taking down jottings that were converted into fieldnotes using thick description). Bruner (1997) espoused “ethnography as narrative” when he wrote, “My thesis is that ethnographies are guided by an implicit narrative structure, by a story we tell about the peoples we study” (Bruner, 1997, p. 264). Nearly every narrative resource I consulted included discussions of foundational ethnographic principles such as thick description, fieldwork, and reflexivity (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2013; Clandinin, 2006; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Cleaver, 2009; Moen, 2008; Webster & Mertova, 2007). Likewise, sources

discussing or employing ethnography contained an affinity for narrative and storytelling (Bannister, 1992; Campbell, 1999; Luttrell, 2000; Stauffer & Robbins, 2009; Van Maanen, 2006). As Van Maanen (2006) wrote, “[Ethnography] exists...somewhere in academic limbo-land (or purgatory) as a *storytelling institution* possessing a good deal of scholarly legitimacy...” (p. 13, emphasis added).

Bruner (1997) contended that ethnography and narrative should include discussion of beginning (past), middle (present), and end (future): “In my view, we begin with a narrative that already contains a beginning and an ending, which frame and hence enable us to interpret the present” (p. 267). Drawing on his own anthropological research with American Indians, Bruner (1997) noted that as stories are retold, they are seen in a new light and in new contexts: “There is infinite reflexivity... Eventually, all experience is filtered out and we end where we began—with the story” (p. 272). Similarly, Gubrium and Holstein (1999) wrote about the “border” of narrative and ethnography, contending that this border exists in a delicate balance that researchers must navigate:

Our own view is that we need to keep the border problematized, not concretized; we should not resolve it by privileging narrative or ethnography to the virtual exclusion of the other. Nor should we aim for some form of synthesis. We prefer to view the border as a working feature of field research by approaching narrative analysis and ethnography as in representational *interplay*, as analytic urgencies that constantly keep one another in check. (Gubrium & Holstein 1999, p. 565, emphasis in original)

Gubrium and Holstein (1999) contended that ethnography can help give context to narratives, but that researchers should proceed with caution: “We must avoid completely identifying social life with its accounts or risk dissolving it in the immediate particulars of storytelling” (p. 569).

How might this cooperation between ethnographic and narrative inquiry play out in music education research? Several of the studies referenced above provide models for a mixture of narrative and ethnographic work. For example, Carlow (2006) provided a template in her case study of Irina Choi, a Korean-Russian immigrant in a high school choral program. Irina fell in love with choral singing in her native Russia and Kazakhstan, but felt dismissed and devalued in the beginning choir at her large suburban high school in the U.S. In describing the methodology for her case study, Carlow (2006) wrote:

My role in the study was that of a participant observer... I set out to explore each participant's socially constructed reality in the context of the choral classroom to learn about the ways in which she made sense of her individual world... The aim of narrative inquiry is to understand, through people's stories, how people think and act in the situated contexts in which they live. (p. 67)

Cooperation between narrative and ethnographic research can be especially effective in exploring issues of gender and sexuality in music education (e.g., Brenneeman, 2007; Legg, 2013; Nichols, 2013; Saldaña, 2008; Talbot & Hendricks, 2012). Because of the co-constructed nature of these two forms of inquiry and the possibility of participants having a direct role in portraying their stories, issues of gender-sexual diversity can be explored deeply and meaningfully by both the researcher and the participant(s).

Participant Selection and Procedure/Timeline

Participants for this study were recruited through choral music educators, professional colleagues, and friends. The first participant is a relative of a colleague in state. The second participant's choral teacher approached me after a national conference presentation, and the third is the child of a singer in a community chorus directed by my friend and colleague. Inevitably,

because of the small number of participants, an element of convenience sampling arose in this study (Patton, 1990). As Squire (2013) wrote,

Pragmatic and ethical considerations are important, again, for sampling... With sensitive research topics, it can be hard to recruit a sample for qualitative interviewing. The resultant small number of participants may, out of the researcher's concern to learn as much as possible from this group, be asked to participate in more intensive research, perhaps using a life history or biographical approach. (p. 55)

With the addition of more research participants, elements of intensity and homogenous sampling also came into play (Patton, 1990, p. 182).

I received permission from my dissertation committee to pursue early data collection because one participant, Sara (pseudonym), graduated from high school in May 2015. Because the focus of the study is on trans students currently in secondary choral music programs, I completed two observations, three participant interviews, and one interview with Sara's choral teacher while she was still a senior in high school. During the data collection and writing phase of this study (2015-16) Sara was attending an in-state university, and I met up with her throughout the 2015-16 school year to check in on her journey as a freshman in college and to follow up on data collected in the spring and summer of 2015. Confidentiality has been maintained through the use of pseudonyms for all people, places, and locations mentioned in fieldnotes and interviews. Pseudonyms were implemented in the first draft of all transcripts and fieldnotes so that real names never appeared in print.

Participant Descriptions

Sara [pronouns: she/her/hers]

At the beginning of data collection, Sara was an 18-year old high school senior. She and I

met while she was a senior in high school in River Glen, a small town (population 5,000) near a mid-sized Midwestern capital city. Later in the data collection phase, she was a freshman at Regional State University (RSU). Sara has an older sister who now lives in another state with whom she is close; her parents divorced “a couple years ago.” Before going away to college, Sara lived with her mother. She explained, “I was always closer to my mom but my dad is a very... book smart guy. As a person he’s not my favorite” (Interview #1, 4/23/15). As of the time of this writing, Sara saw her father on a regular basis. Sara was deciding between studying music and engineering. Though her major was undeclared during her freshman year, she was participating in the choral program at the university. While a student at River Glen High School, Sara participated in band, color guard, choir, and the school musical. She served as a section leader in the school’s chamber choir and was chosen to sing in Regional, State, and All State honor choirs.

Jon [pronouns: he/him/his]

Short, confident, and (admittedly) loud, Jon was a 17 year old high school senior at the time of data collection. Jon always lived in suburban areas in a state on the Eastern seaboard. Of his hometown (population 3,400) where he lived since age “six or seven” he said, “I’ve always loved Landerstown. I think it’s a great place” (Interview #1, 10/12/15). Jon had been actively involved in the arts at Landerstown High School: he was in select choir and drama as well as the GSA (gay-straight alliance). Jon is the son of a real estate developer (father) and an accountant (mother), and his sister taught first grade in a nearby community. Jon recounted being interested in sports and other outdoor activities as a young child. He played softball for several years and even “went to the Little League world series” (Interview #1, 10/12/15). At the time of our first

interview, Jon was working on his college applications to in-state universities, and his current girlfriend was a student at a large state university in the Midwest.

Skyler [pronouns: they/them/their]

Skyler is one of the most articulate 16 year olds I have had the pleasure to know. At the time of data collection, they were a junior at Parkton High School in a suburb outside of a medium sized Midwestern city. The younger child of two university math professors and the younger sibling of an undergraduate math major, Skyler came from a family in which both mathematics and music were highly valued. Both of their parents were active in local music and theatre organizations. Skyler changed their name the summer before data collection began, though they had been using their real name both in and out of school before this legal change occurred. Skyler is a passionate musician who, at the time of data collection, sang with both the Parkton High School Concert Choir (beginning mixed choir) and Chamber Singers (advanced mixed choir).

Data Collection/Sources

The Michigan State University institutional review board approved this study (exempt status) on January 20, 2015. I obtained consent forms from adult participants (teachers, parents, etc.) and parental consent and assent forms from the three student participants. Data forms from interactions with the students included fieldnotes from classroom observations (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011), transcripts from semi-structured interviews, and e-mail and text correspondence with participants. I also conducted semi-structured interviews with important adults in these students' lives (e.g., choral teachers, school counselors). I observed participants in their high school choral classes. Some interviews occurred via e-mail or Facebook messenger. I transcribed

and coded interviews as soon as possible after they occurred and devised follow-up questions based upon questions or interesting topics from these interviews.

Data Analysis

Analysis in Narrative Inquiry

After recorded interviews were transcribed, I coded them using methods of analysis as described by Fraser (2004), Saldaña (2013), and Webster and Mertova (2007). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggested that narrative analysis begin with archiving, rereading, and beginning to construct a summarized account, and *narratively coding* field texts—a non-linear process:

It would be tempting to view this overall process of analysis and interpretation in the move from field texts to research texts as a series of steps. However, this is not how narrative inquiries are lived out. Negotiation occurs from beginning to end. (p. 132)

After selecting events and stories to report, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) contended that researchers have three possibilities: (a) to broaden (generalize), (b) to burrow (concentrate on the event at hand), or (c) to restory (asking, “what meaning does the event have in their life?”). Stories must always be considered in context, and narrative researchers must recognize that social expectations and norms may alter the stories shared by participants (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998). Clandinin and Connelly encouraged the writing of *interim texts*, which may appear in the final research text or serve as stepping-stones in moving from field text to research text; this is similar to the description of fieldnotes as described by Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011). I wrote analytical notes after each experience I had in the field. Creswell (2007) wrote that narrative analysis “may be a description of both the story and the themes that emerge from it” (p. 56). Riessman (1993, 2002) suggested that clues for analysis of narrative transcripts might be found in the grammar usage of the participants—that *how* something is said can be just as telling as

what is said. For example, verbs and “exit points” from stories can unlock some semblance of deeper motivation. Also, “turning points” in stories can indicate “a radical shift in the expected course of a life” (Riessman, 2002, p. 705). Riessman (1993, 2002) wrote that narrative analysis is guided by theory but also by the subjective meanings that the researcher brings to the project and that the goal of narrative analysis is not to achieve trustworthiness: “The ‘trustworthiness’ of narrative accounts cannot be evaluated using traditional correspondence criteria. There is no canonical approach to validation in interpretive work, no recipes or formulas” (p. 706), concluding that the process of narrative analysis is “slow and painstaking” (p. 706)—something that requires a strong relationship between researcher and participant and a willingness to attend to the subtlety of the participants’ restorying. Riessman (1993, 2002) and others noted that narrative analysis is influenced by the life, contexts, and experiences of the researcher as well as by existing theories and the extant literature on the topic.

A Narrative Analysis Framework

I utilized a narrative analysis framework from the field of social work developed by Fraser (2004), who suggested that narrative inquirers follow seven phases of analysis: (a) hearing the stories, experiencing each other’s emotions; (b) transcribing the material; (c) interpreting individual transcripts; (d) scanning across different domains of experience; (e) linking ‘The Personal with the Political;’ (f) looking for commonalities and differences among participants; and (g) writing academic narratives about personal stories. For each of these phases, Fraser provided a list of guiding questions. Next I explore each of these phases in reference to their use in this study.

Phase one: Hearing the stories, experiencing each other’s emotions. Fraser (2004) contended that a researcher should approach interactions with participants in an emotional sense,

so as to not “[over-intellectualize] personal stories” (p. 186). She pointed out that the emotions of the researcher, the primary data collection instrument, could be recorded in journals and fieldnotes. Guiding questions for phase one include: “What ‘sense’ do you get from each interview?” (p. 187).

During my time in the field, I took many notes (jottings) that I later transformed into written fieldnotes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). These fieldnotes comprise many types of thoughts, including the emotions I felt during my observations and interviews. For example, on my first visit to meet and interview Jon, I composed the following fieldnote based on my jottings:

It was really early (school begins before 7:30 am!) and I was behind in my morning coffee consumption. As usual, I was quite apprehensive about this entire experience. I was worried that I would seem out of place and/or that this (quite expensive) trip would turn out to not be worth my time, money, and energy. (Fieldnote, 10/12/15)

This type of struggle was ongoing.

Phase two: Transcribing the material. Soon after interviews were complete, I personally transcribed each recording. Fraser (2004) noted that:

Researchers may (or may not) attempt to ‘clean up the speech’; that is, remove comments made by interviewers, erase repetition and sentences that are not finished, and so on.

Silences and pauses may be indicated at the points at which they occur because they too, are likely to have meaning. (p. 187)

I chose to use a smooth verbatim style of transcribing, which does indeed attempt to “clean up the speech.” Transcribing is inherently reductionist and can signify a researcher’s values and beliefs (Mishler, 2003). I felt that the smooth verbatim style was most appropriate for this study

because it provided coherence to the content, which allowed the stories of the participants to truly “speak,” and to become the foundation of the study. Even within this transcription style, I have noted pauses²⁰, noises (e.g., “ascending rocket sound”), and perceived emotions associated with speech (e.g., “exasperated”). I also have noted examples of one speaker interrupting another speaker with an equal sign (=). An example of a guiding question for phase two is “Have you omitted or misheard any of the material?” (Fraser, 2004, p. 188).

Phase three: Interpreting individual transcripts. One of the guiding questions related to this phase is, “Are there ‘main points’ that you can decipher from particular stories?” (p. 190). After transcribing interviews and typing fieldnotes, I read through each transcript several times. As I read, I was searching for themes, inconsistencies, and points that required clarification. Fraser (2004) wrote, “One of the main challenges of this phase...is trying to disaggregate long chunks of talk into specific stories, or segments of narratives” (p. 189). I found this to be true: sometimes stories were clearly delineated, and at other times they needed to be pieced together from smaller sections of text. In listening to recordings from interviews and reading (and re-reading) transcripts, I also listened for hesitations and pauses—noting where the participants may have felt uneasy or uncomfortable, wished to change course, etc.

Phase four: Scanning across different domains of experience. Fraser (2004) suggested that narrative researchers examine their data from multiple perspectives, namely *intrapersonal* (self-talk, what the narrator says to oneself), *interpersonal* (dialogue between people, such as when participants include imitated quotes from people in their stories), *cultural*, and *structural*, which “[makes claims] about the influence of public policies and/or social systems” (p. 192). All four of these perspectives surfaced during data collection and analysis. For

²⁰ The exception is in Chapter 4 about Sara, who requested that I remove most of the pauses in the chapter telling her story.

example, several participants included quotes from other people while telling their story. Also, in a study of issues of gender identity, the structural domain was omnipresent in that much of the discussion with these students was about their experiences in institutions (e.g., high schools, honor choirs run by state music education organizations, universities). Pursuant to this phase, Fraser posed the question: “If different domains of experience are to be made explicit in the analyses, how might they be linked?” (p. 192)

Phase five: Linking ‘The personal with the political’. This phase overlaps with the previous one and draws on ideals from feminist literature. “During this ‘phase’, attention is deliberately given to references made to popular discourses... [such as] ‘coming out.’” (p. 193). In a study exploring gender identity, this linking of the personal and political was a vital aspect of data analysis. As Fraser (2004) noted, “Humour [*sic*], metaphors, language choice and narrative style are usually mediated by time, place, gender, culture, and class” (p. 194).

Conducting interviews in spaces in which students and other adults could not hear participants helped the students feel safe and comfortable. I also tried to make both my personal and professional knowledge of trans issues explicitly known to the students. My goal (and constant fear) during data collection was to honor these students and their journeys, asking myself questions such as, “What responses might/do the participants make about your analyses? If there is disagreement, will it be signaled? If so, how?” (p. 193).

Phase six: Looking for commonalities and differences among participants. As is common in qualitative studies with multiple participants, the sixth phase involves “comparing and contrasting the content, style and tone of respective speakers” (Fraser, 2004, p. 194). The author suggested providing explanatory notes that may explore the process taken as codes and themes were developed and stories are “short-listed” (p. 194), pointing out the importance of

highlighting “surprising and/or anomalous” findings and “ideas that are confronting and/or unpopular” (p. 195). The purpose of this study was to document the musical lives and experiences of the student participants, not to compare them; however, it was impossible not to notice similarities and differences. These students each attended high school in vastly different types of communities. Comparisons between participants’ experiences may help some of the findings become somewhat more generalizable and applicable to a broader range of settings/communities.

Phase seven: Writing academic narratives about personal stories. The process of moving from transcribed interviews and fieldnotes to a finished product is not an exact process. Fraser (2004) noted that several drafts might be necessary to sort through the non-linear process of narrative analysis. “Rather than hoping to produce ‘the right’ knowledge, or indeed, ‘the truth’, narrative researchers realize that there are multiple possibilities for representing stories” (pp. 195-196). Fraser suggested comparing narrative data with the research questions, checking the tone toward the participants in the stories (e.g., “is it respectful?”), and having peers or colleagues read and critique the work. I am certainly cognizant that this dissertation presents *one version* of *one facet* of the rich, multi-faceted lives of the participants. My goal in the data analysis phase was to remain respectful and to constantly return to the participants’ experiences and stories as the basis of this project.

Observations

I took notes during field observations that I converted into fieldnotes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011) soon after observation (it was important that this work happen soon after the observations to stave off the inevitable pitfalls of memory loss). The process of creating fieldnotes was a chance to transform jottings that would be meaningless to an outsider into thick

descriptions (Geertz, 1973) that helped elucidate insights about participants and/or the field site, and also illuminated aspects of reflexivity. Creating and coding fieldnotes about “othered” populations can be perilous:

Such “outsider” research—university researchers studying poor or working-class people, white researchers studying people of color, or male ethnographers trying to find out about women’s lives—has also been criticized on political grounds for advancing the careers of researchers while distorting, and some would say exploiting, the lives of those under study, and sometimes for exposing illicit activities key to the survival of such groups.

(Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011, p. 163)

While such a notion was overwhelming, I tried to remember that I am only one person and that I can only ask one research question at a time. I have tried my best to understand context and portray participants as “whole persons, socially constituted... bundles of situationally relevant traits” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011, p. 165).

Theoretical Lenses

This study employed several theoretical perspectives. As Järviluoma, Moisala, and Vilkkö (2003) posited: “Theory, research, and the politics of gender are intimately related. The theoretical stance taken in relation to gender in research has practical consequences.

Acknowledgement of the theoretical position as a political position is part of the research process” (p. 22). Considering the role of theory in narrative research, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) wrote,

How will narrative inquiry fit with, enlarge, or shift the social and theoretical conversations around our phenomenon of interest? We need to be prepared to give an

account of what we learn about our phenomenon that is special, something that could not be known through other theories or methods. (p. 123)

At the core of this study are the narratives—the lived experiences—of the three participants. While elements of transgender theory justify such an approach (e.g., an acknowledgement of the importance of embodiment and of the lived experiences of trans people), it (or any other theory) is not the core of this study. I do not purport to be a philosopher or theorist, but rather a learner whose work and study have been influenced by several theoretical positions.

Feminist and queer theories were crucial forbearers to transgender theory. In zooming out to consider the trajectory of these theories, one notes that just as second wave feminism was a vital movement in the 1960s and 1970s, so, too, is transgender theory crucial now, not from a place of critique, but from the perspective of theory evolution—building upon and expanding the work of feminist and queer theorists. Especially in music education, without the work of Lamb, Gould, Koza, O’Toole, and other influential feminist writers, there likely would be no discourse about LGBTQA issues in music education. Their work became the ground on which other explorations of gender-sexual diversity in music education was built.

While feminist ideals initially seemed to illuminate aspects of the trans experience, others posited that a new theory, what came to be known as queer theory, could better explain the non-binary and performative/discursive aspects of gender (Butler, 1993, 1999). As Bullington and Swarr (2007) remarked, “Trans people have been seen by many as threatening to feminism” (p. 307). Thus, some transgender theorists (e.g., Elliot, 2010; Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010; Nagoshi, Nagoshi, & Brzuzy, 2014) contended that neither feminist nor queer theories are appropriate for explorations of trans issues.

Feminist Theory

While the goal of early feminists was to gain the same rights and privileges (e.g., suffrage) as men, “second-wave feminism’s major theoretical accomplishment has been to make visible the structure, practices, and inequalities of the gendered social order”²¹ (Lorber, 2005, p. 11). Of the progression of the feminist movement, Walter (2005) wrote, “In the 20th century, ‘first-wave’ feminists had demanded civil and political equality. In the 1970s, ‘second wave’ feminism concentrated on, and gave great prominence to, sexual and family rights for women” (p. 137).

Some feminist theorists have remained skeptical about the notion of a spectrum of gender (Heyes, 2003)²². Bullington and Swarr (2007) noted that both feminist and trans scholars have polarized one another—highlighting the anomaly of two marginalized groups (cisgender women and trans people) clashing rather than banding together to disrupt hegemonic cultural norms:

It disheartens us that feminist communities that have been so formative and important to our own survival have been so dispassionate and shortsighted when it comes to transgender issues. And it disheartens us that trans communities that we belong to or are allied with have been so disrespectful and shortsighted in labeling feminism and feminist spaces as special enemies of trans people. (p. 307)

As Elliot (2010) noted, this rift can stunt conversation and progress: “The disparaging response of non-trans feminists to trans persons unfortunately tends to be associated with feminism as a

²¹ “Gender is a system of power in that it privileges some groups of people and disadvantages others in conjunction with other systems of power (racial categories, ethnicity, social class, and sexual orientation)” (Lorber, 2005, p. 11).

²² “...influential non-trans feminists have orientalized the trans subject and concomitantly failed to investigate their authorial locations as stably gendered subjects. This reductive characterization of the transsexual as the dupe of gender then permits the conclusion that transgender politics writ large have no feminist potential” (Heyes, 2003, p. 1095).

whole, despite the existence of more promising feminist responses that have grown in popularity especially since the early 1990s” (p. 18). Lorber (2005) addressed possible areas of compromise among third wave feminists²³:

Further from the mainstream are feminists that challenge “what everyone knows” about sex, sexuality, and gender—the duality and oppositeness of female and male, homosexual and heterosexual, women and men. They argue that there are many sexes, sexualities, and genders, and many ways to express masculinity and femininity. Some of these feminist theories are now being called the feminist *third wave*. (p. 5, emphasis in original)

Some feminist theorists question the legitimacy of transgenderism and transsexualism as noted by Hird (2002) and Stryker (1994), and some feminists and feminist theorists have been narrow-minded and bigoted in their thinking about trans women (e.g., Burkett, 2015; Jeffreys, 2014a, 2014b; Raymond, 2006; Wente, 2000). An overarching feature of this discussion is that defining ‘woman’ as a category has proven to be a difficult task; indeed, the questioning of who gets to be considered a woman has made dialogue and discourse difficult and in some cases, impossible (Bullington & Swarr, 2007; Elliot, 2010; Halberstam, 1998; Hird, 2002; Stryker, 1994). For example, Halberstam (1998) explored the borderland between women who identify as butch lesbians and trans people who identify as female-to-male transsexuals. I conjecture that these borderlands—this disputed territory—need not divide scholars and theorists who work on issues

²³ “Poststructuralist feminists do not deny the value of much feminist theory and practice based on identity categories. But in questioning the way that sex, gender, bodies, and sexualities have been conceptualized, they challenge and critique mainstream constructions of those concepts as given (either by nature or by culture) and unalterable” (Elliot, 2010, p. 27).

of gender-sexual diversity. I also argue that these discussions about theory should not inhibit political and social action.²⁴

Another argument against feminist theory is that it is Anglo-centric—failing to consider intersectionality, or multiple levels of subject positions (Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 2000; Namaste, 2000, 2009; Warner, 2008). As Nagoshi, Nagoshi, and Brzuzy (2014) wrote, “By saying that all women experience the same type of oppression, one devalues the experience of women who are subjected to multiple levels of oppression due to their race, ethnicity, class, or sexual orientation” (p. 18). The larger message is that trans people may deal with many levels of oppression. Still, feminist and queer theorists have grappled with, and sometimes rejected, trans people in their theorizing, as discussed by scholars including Elliot (2010); Hird (2002); Nagoshi and Brzyzy, 2010; Nagoshi, Nagoshi, and Brzuzy (2014); and Stryker (1994).

As mentioned previously, Gould and Lamb are part of a group of writers and philosophers who have argued for a feminist re-casting of music education (e.g., Gould, 1992, 2004, 2007, 2011; Koza, 1992, 1993a, 1993b; Lamb, 1994, 1996; O'Toole, 1994, 1998). This work foregrounded LGBTQA studies in music education, much of which deals with gender. As Gould (2004) wrote,

Segregation and exclusionary practices constrain musical and educational growth for music education students and teachers, as well as the profession itself. Feminist critique challenges the profession to address the ways in which gender is inherent so that we may identify and implement approaches for change that are grounded in the material conditions of everyday life. (p. 16)

²⁴ “Social construction, postmodern, and third-wave feminists have just begun to translate their destabilization of the gender order into politics or praxis. Degendering needs to be translated into everyday interaction, which could be revolutionary enough” (Lorber, 2005, p. 17).

Gould's quote demonstrates the concept that gender is omnipresent. How gender variance fits under the feminist theory umbrella has not always been clear. Some scholars inside (e.g., Gould, who utilizes Butler's work) and outside of music education could no longer reconcile trans issues with feminist ideals. The rift between feminist and queer perspectives is indicative of the conflict between the lesbian feminist movement and heterosexual feminism (Elliot, 2009; Heyes, 2003; Lorber, 2005). Some of the scholars who questioned feminist theory turned to a different theoretical concept: queer theory.

Queer Theory

"Queer theory" first appeared in print in 1991. With this term, de Lauretis (1991) attempted to destabilize commonly used terms like *gay* and *lesbian*.²⁵ Rooted in post-structural, deconstructionist, and contrarian ideals, queer theory was an outgrowth of feminist and queer studies (though not synonymous with these areas):

Queer theory coalesced out of the growing sense among some feminists and sexual minorities that their access to equal rights and treatment would depend not on working out the glitches in an otherwise workable system but on rethinking from the ground up categories of persons and the distributions of power among them. (Turner, 2000, p. 15)

Queer theory is not a "theory" in the traditional sense: it is in essence several "theories" utilizing "queer" as a concept and a rhetorical tool (Halperin, 2003; Stein & Plummer, 1994). Queer theory involves an interrogation of desire and its relationship to identity, utilizing "queering" as a

²⁵ "Within three years, however, de Lauretis would argue against its use as she felt it had become distorted in the academy. She noted that the "marketing trend [of] 'queer theory' . . . has quickly become a conceptually vacuous creature of the publishing industry" (de Lauretis, 1991, as cited in Gould, 2013, p. 66).

verb²⁶: “‘Queer’ is an identity, a theory about non-heteronormative sexuality, and a theoretical orientation for how identity is to be understood” (Nagoshi, Nagoshi, & Brzyzy, 2014, p. 22). A common criticism of queer theory is that, while it has defined what it is against, it has given little or no explanation of what it is for:

Queer theory begins with a suspicion: that the predominant modes of intellectual and political activity in western culture during the late twentieth century do not serve the needs of queers and that perhaps they cannot be made to do so. Queer theory is oppositional. But queer theorists have not arrived at a scheme for what should replace existing modes. (Turner, 2000, pp. 9-10)

Though queer theory has been applied to experiences of gay men and lesbians, a larger attempt has been made to dismantle rigid definitions and labels regarding gender and sexuality. As Watson (2005) noted, “Most prominent queer theorists work to challenge and undercut any attempt to render identity singular, fixed, or normal” (p. 74). Queer theory calls into question the notion of binary gender: Jagose (1996) ventured that queer theory “[demonstrates] the impossibility of any ‘natural’ sexuality, it calls into question even such apparently unproblematic terms as ‘man’ and ‘woman’” (para. 2). The choice of the word “queer” is intentionally not “gay” or “homosexual,” reflecting the larger deconstructionist view that all word choices imply political meaning.

While Halperin (2003) pointed out the fact that queer theory has “effectively re-opened the question of relations between sexuality and gender [and has] created greater opportunities for transgender studies” (p. 341), some who research trans people/issues find queer theory limiting

²⁶ As Stein & Plummer (1994) noted, queer theory may involve “a willingness to interrogate areas which normally would not be seen as the terrain of sexuality, and to conduct queer ‘readings’ of ostensibly heterosexual or nonsexualized texts” (p. 182).

(Stryker, 2004). As Nagoshi, Nagoshi, and Brzuzy (2014) wrote, “Many transgender individuals express dissatisfaction with the purely social constructivist assumptions about gender identity that is inherent in queer theory” (p. 74). For example, if queer theory means to deconstruct hegemonic notions of gender and sexuality, can it not be seen as deconstructing trans identity as well? And if identities are being deconstructed, where is the basis of support for helping queers overcome the constraints of heteronormativity and cisgender privilege?

If multiple oppressed social identities are merely the product of multiple social forces, all of which can be queered, there is no explanation of how individuals navigate these multiple identities, nor is there a basis for using these identities as a source of empowerment for opposing oppression. (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010, p. 434)

The question becomes: who gets to decide where the queering ends?

Several music education scholars employed queer theory in their philosophizing and research. For example, Abramo (2011) utilized queer theory as a theoretical and analytical tool in exploring the gender discourse in high school rock band classes. Gould (e.g., 2005a, 2009, 2011, 2013) often has turned to queer theory:

Queer in lesbian/feminist imagination skews the view, upsets the balance, alters relations of power and desire. It takes us beyond the borders of what we know and can do, of what we can hear. Never one thing or all things, queer disrupts what is most comfortable about our selves. It challenges us to understand and experience our subjectivities in terms of multiplicities. And in doing so, it creates (unlimited) possibilities. (Gould, 2005a, p. 12)

Like Stein and Plummer (1994), Gould (2010) noted that “queer” can also be used as a lens for reading and interpreting texts and performances: “Reading queer calls attention to the queerness

always already existing with/in cultural texts” (para. 8). Applied to the process of music teaching, Gould (2009) proposed that:

Queer moments in music education, moments when processes of musical culture are sustained and celebrated, become not moments of cultural relativism or canonical loss, but rather musical engagements of potentiality opening different ways of musician-ness that do not depend on teacher/student dyads or our musical culture/your musical culture distinctions. (p. 67)

As with the progress inspired by the use of feminist perspectives in the music education discourse, the use of queer theory expanded and furthered the dialogue surrounding LGBTQA issues in music education. More recently, transgender theory has come to the fore, which theorists posit can more appropriately be applied to the lived experiences of trans people. As trans issues become a part of the music education discourse, transgender theory may provide a helpful lens/tool.

Transgender Theory

Transgender theory is emerging as a tool for inquiry and analysis from scholars who found feminist and queer theories insufficient or inappropriate when exploring the lives of trans people²⁷ (Greaney, 1999; Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010; Nagoshi, Nagoshi, & Brzuzy, 2014; Roen, 2001). Nagoshi and Brzuzy (2010) described how, “Transgender theory as a critique of queer theory developed from Roen’s (2001) ideas that transgenderism included more than just an ‘either/or’ conceptualization that accepted the fluidity of gender identity but still retained the

²⁷ “Understanding the essential components of gender, while embodying the essentialist and socially constructed aspects, gives us the opportunity to move beyond solely feminist and queer theories and opens up the possibility of understanding the complex human being as multifaceted, complex, grounded, and yet changeable” (Nagoshi, Nagoshi, & Brzuzy, 2014, p. 89).

gender binary” (p. 435). In defining the main tenets of transgender theory, Nagoshi and Brzuzy (2010) noted that:

Transgender theory encompasses and transcends feminist and queer theory by explicitly incorporating ideas of the fluidly embodied, socially constructed, and self-constructed aspects of social identity, along with the dynamic interaction and integration of these aspects of identity within the *narratives of lived experiences*. (p. 433, emphasis added)

Nagoshi and Brzuzy (2010) and Nagoshi, Nagoshi, and Brzuzy (2014) argued that transgender theory might be helpful in exploring issues of intersectionality as they relate to trans identities.

A major departure from queer theory is that transgender theory takes into account both embodiment and lived experience: “In [transgender theory], embodiment is seen as an essential component of the self” (Nagoshi, Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2014, p. 86). Trans-identity theory proposes an “explicitly self-constructed aspect of identity, one that derives meaning from the narrative of lived experiences” (Nagoshi, Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2014, p. 87). Also (notably for this study), “Trans studies also have the opportunity to move away from purely theoretical discourse and move toward issues of the agency of real transgender individuals” (Nagoshi, Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2014, p. 88).

Hydén (2013a) discussed the quandary of embodiment in narrative inquiry, stating that the body is often ignored in narrative research: “Bodies not only realize the relation between the individual person and the world. The relations between persons are also recognized through bodily encounters: other persons are seen and experienced by and through their bodies and what these bodies ‘do’” (p. 128). Transgender theory’s consideration of embodiment is a significant defining feature. However, that embodiment is not necessarily significant to all trans people.

Unlike feminist and queer theories, transgender theory has had some difficulty making in-roads in the academy (Greaney, 1999). With transgender theory (not unlike feminist debates about “who is considered a woman”), the issue of who “gets to” work with theory is contested:

Who gets to do theory in the academy? Not me. As a white, male-to-female transgendered dyke, I have not been allowed to participate in the professional production of critical theory for reasons that have nothing to do with my intellectual ability and everything to do with the discomfort people like me evoke in graduate school admissions committees. (Greaney, 1999, p. 159).

Transgender theory departs from being entirely theoretical; rather, this stance seeks to honor day-to-day needs and experiences of trans people.²⁸ Ultimately, Nagoshi, Nagoshi, and Brzuzy (2014) stated that the narratives of trans people can be empowering: “Through ‘transcendent stories,’ the dynamic relationships in transgenders’ lived experiences of their embodied and self-constructed aspects of identity can act to empower transgenders to resist oppression” (p. 438). It is hoped that the narratives conveyed in this dissertation will be “transcendent stories” that ultimately will help the participants to feel empowered as they navigate their transgender identity in a cisgender-centric society.

While transgender theory provided helpful guideposts for the present study, it is not monolithic—and employing it does not imply that *all* elements of feminist and queer theories have no place in studies involving people who are trans. As previously stated, this is not a philosophical or theoretical dissertation: the “bedrock” of this study was the stories and lived

²⁸ As Elliot (2010) noted, “widespread ignorance of trans lives both inside and outside feminist and queer communities enables a host of oppressive practices to persist, from differential access to hormones, surgery and other forms of health care to the criminalization of transpersons” (pp. 6-7).

experiences of Sara, Jon, and Skyler.²⁹ Feminist, queer, and transgender theories provided ways forward in the data analysis and writing phases.

Trustworthiness

Maintaining trustworthiness is a crucial concern for qualitative researchers. In this study, I maintained the anonymity of all participants by using pseudonyms for all persons, places, and events in the study, including use of pseudonyms in all transcripts and fieldnotes. Because transgender identity is a sensitive and highly personal topic, I strived to maintain strong, meaningful relationships with the participants. As Hydén (2013b) wrote, “I will make the claim that what is a sensitive topic and what is not is due mainly to *relational* circumstances, that is, the relationships between the teller and the listener” (p. 224, emphasis in original). All participants had the opportunity to review and edit their interview transcripts to ensure that I had not taken their words out of context (Patton, 1990). I met face-to-face with all three students to confirm these edits. All three participants chose to make grammatical changes and all requested that I remove several quotes. In addition, colleagues with extensive qualitative research experience assisted with analysis triangulation by peer checking codes and transcripts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Van Maanen (1988) suggested that the terms *reliability/validity* be replaced with *apparency/verisimilitude* and that qualitative researchers speak of *transferability* rather than *generalizability*. Thus, because this is an intrinsic case study, the findings are not generalizable, but may be transferable to trans singers in other secondary school choral programs (Bassey,

²⁹ Here I agree with Gould (2005a) who wrote: “Experiences of the world are more politically and corporeally relevant than any theoretical discussion, and what those experiences mean depends on our situatedness both discursively and materially, making subjectivity an ongoing process that never results in stable or fixed identities, but is rather continuously contested” (p. 5).

1999; Webster & Mertova, 2007). These data also may inform the evolving dialogue regarding acceptance of trans students in choral music education.

Limitations

As is typical in qualitative studies, the small number of participants ($N = 3$) yielded stories and experiences specific to these individuals in their own contexts. Therefore, broad generalizations about trans choral students are not possible, but there may be themes and stories in the study that may transfer (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Tracy (2010) suggested that when rigorous research and vivid writing are employed, qualitative researchers might inspire some element of transferability. Similarly, Ellis (1995) posited that “evocative storytelling” in qualitative studies can evoke feelings that can be experienced and processed by a wider audience. In addition, teachers may glean suggestions for teaching practice from the experiences of these students (Bassey, 1999). Lyle (2009) wrote, “Narrative subsumes both the process and the results. It is my belief that the coupling of narrative and reflexive inquiry well positions practitioners to explicate the nuances of schooling experiences as they inform praxis” (p. 295).

Another limitation is that the analysis of narratives is inevitably subjective. As Riessman (1993) wrote, “Meaning is fluid and contextual, not fixed and universal. All we have is talk and texts that represent reality partially, selectively, and imperfectly” (p. 15). It is inevitable that my own lived experiences, contexts, and relationships have influenced the hearing and telling of these three stories. There existed an infinite number of ways to bound parameters in this narrative study, so what is presented in the following chapters is *one* version of these students’ stories—not *the* version.

All three participants are white, upper middle class students, thus limiting the breadth of this study. Because trans people face multiple layers of oppression or intersectionality (Carter

2014; Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 2000), their stories can illuminate journeys and experiences of those living outside the white, middle class, heteronormative, cisgender, colonizing, suburban perspectives too often highlighted in the research discourse (Smith, 1999).

CHAPTER 4—“I’M A GIRL AND I’M A BASS AND I OWN THAT”: SARA’S STORY

Table 2

People Interviewed and/or Mentioned in Chapter 4

Person	Description
Sara	Freshman at Regional State University and graduate of River Glen High School (RGHS); the main focus of this chapter
Mr. Thompson	Former RGHS choir teacher (Sara’s freshman and sophomore years)
Mr. Ames	RGHS choir teacher (Sara’s junior and senior years)
Ms. Dengler	RGHS guidance counselor; a mentor to Sara
Mr. Calloway	Former RGHS principal

Sara, In Her Own Words

As someone who had always been the out-of-touch, nerdy type, I expected the worst out of my classmates and contended with anxiety often. In response to this, and in coordination with counselors, school administrators and teachers, I pieced together a life-changing four year plan. In the aquatic metaphor of anxiety, I stuck my toes in the water in middle school, telling one close friend at a time that I wanted to be a girl and dress how I wanted. I was wary of classmates, family members and teachers that had been prone to teasing and/or conservative views, opting to be myself in front of some teachers, popular kids and my father much later than my close friends, my sister and my mother. Anxiety, and its drive away from regrets, pushed me to make important steps, demanding to wear a dress in band and choir, to wear the same costume and makeup as the other girls in color guard, and—bringing out the best and worst in the high school’s administration—demanding to use the gendered facilities in which I felt the most safe and human.

Anxiety forces us to evaluate what we find most important in progressing in our lives, even if it contradicts what seems most comfortable in our fore-thinking mind. Anxiety, the drive to put myself in front of people, helped me develop from an awkward kid with a few friends, to a

known music student that people came to see. Anxiety, the drive to demand the respect of others, helped me develop from a middle school student that entered adolescence feeling that something wasn't quite right, to a young woman with the confidence to make friends and let them hear my song. (Sara, university writing assignment, 1/18/16)

Setting the Scene

Early in the morning, I grabbed my coffee mug and headed out to the country to meet Sara and to observe her choir class (which met at 7:34 am!). Several churches dot the rolling hills and farmland outside of the town. One Baptist church's sign reads "The Ten Commandments Are Not Multiple Choice." Many well-preserved Victorian-era homes are intermingled on the street with more modern structures. On the bank of the river stands an old warehouse converted into apartments. River Glen has a historic American downtown lined with small businesses like a hardware store, a coffee shop, and the post office.

Once at school, I meet the choral teacher Mr. Ames, who is extremely welcoming. We sit in his spacious office across the hall from the choir room and discuss details of the study and Sara's history in the choral program. While I observe his teaching, Mr. Ames strikes me as jovial, light-hearted, and kind. He approaches teaching with a mix of humor and sarcasm that keeps the mood in the room light and positive. This is Mr. Ames' second year at the school, and he is working hard to build a program.

The students are in their seats with their music by the time Mr. Ames and I enter the classroom. The room is bright and lively. A red accent wall covered with felt behind the piano and a wall of mirrors add to the depth of the space. Old seated risers hold Wenger posture chairs. For being so early in the morning, the River Glen High School Chamber Choir students are surprisingly chipper, as I sit on the side of the built-in risers wishing I had brought a

Thermos® of coffee. The students are seated in some sort of mixed formation—students are seated in four blocks: one with (what I assumed to be) male students and Sara, two with female students, and one with male students on the far end.

Sara came to introduce herself before class started. She's tall and sturdy with long, dark hair. She was wearing a black Back to the Future t-shirt and black pants. I wrote in my jottings, "Chamber choir seems like a supportive environment." Students seem to feel empowered in this classroom. Throughout the rehearsal, students (Sara included) point out areas of concern or things that could be improved, and neither Mr. Ames nor any of the students seem off-put by this behavior: it seems like a natural part of this group's culture. I write, that it "seems easy to 'just be' in this classroom." (Fieldnote, 4/19/15)

Background, Gender Identity, and Family

Gender Identity

I met Sara during her senior year at River Glen High School in River Glen, a rural community not far from an industrial capital city in the American Midwest. During interviews with Sara in Mr. Ames' spacious yet cluttered office across the hall from the choir room at the high school, I continually was struck by her poise, wit, and intelligence. As she spoke, I found myself thinking about how her gender and musical journeys had been intimately intertwined.

Sara grew up in River Glen and had inklings from a young age about her gender identity:

When I was very young, for a very long time, I would draw all the time and have this imaginary futuristic world concocted in my head. And just spend time there and play pretend with that and just do all these stories with [them]: make my matchbox cars talk or pretend things were there and stuff. But, one of the elements that was there since I was very young—maybe three or four—was [to] imagine being transformed into a girl. And

then between the ages of maybe six and eight—I don’t know how I got it started but with multiple of my grandmas, I would have them buy me girl clothes, which I would wear at their houses. (Interview #1, 4/23/15)

Sara’s grandparents never questioned this behavior; she thought that they “probably dismissed it as playing around.” In intervening years, she took “sort of a hiatus” from wearing traditionally female gendered clothes, which, upon reflection, seemed “odd” to her. She said that around age “eleven or twelve I re-approached it” (Interview #1, 4/23/15).

[I] thought of it as cross-dressing. So that went [on] for a year, year and a half, and I talked to folks in an online chat room on a site called Laura’s Playground, which is a very gaudy but very informative resource for all things gender and cross-dressing related. So, I learned more about all of the terms and the alphabet soup that goes into this stuff, and sometime during the beginning of eighth grade or before, I realized that there was more to it than clothes. (Interview #1, 4/23/15)

Sara’s experiences connecting with other trans people via Laura’s Playground were influential—a way for her to feel a part of the trans community.

It was a very positive thing when I was in eighth grade and I was still in the ‘doing homework’ stage of learning terms and processes and just how it all works and that was when I realized “oh, I’m not a cross dresser. I’m a transsexual,” it’s not just about the clothes [*catching herself*] or, “transgender” rather. And since then it’s [the website Laura’s Playground] something I haven’t really needed. It’s just been a personal thing with me, getting people on the same page. (Interview #2, 5/4/15)

When I asked when her transition began, Sara said “to various degrees, between eighth grade and ninth grade” (Interview #2, 5/4/15). Starting in eighth grade Sara began to disclose her trans identity to more and more people, and used the image of a tree to describe this process:

I don’t remember the exact timeline for significant people like my folks, but in eighth grade I talked to certain teachers, I talked to certain friends that I trusted, I talked to my sister. Sometime thereabouts I talked to my folks, and my grandparents took a long time to get it, because [they are] baby boomers. And then I just started: a few people at a time, and then certain things spread to certain people and then more family members and then it was just like a tree just branching out. (Interview #1, 4/23/15)

This process continued through her sophomore year, at which point Sara was more or less “totally out” at school.

Sara described her transition as successful and identified the notion, as indicated by scholars including Beemyn and Rankin (2011), Wyss (2004) and others, that many trans teens face challenges while negotiating their gender identities. Here Sara explained how she compared her experiences to those of other trans people. She said that she had not encountered another trans person with a similar story.

Because whenever someone’s talked to me they’re either like—either more casual like a cross-dresser or just *way* in the closet. (...) I’m in the ninetieth percentile in terms of success out of all of the people that I’ve talked to. Ninety percent of the people I’ve talked to are in the closet or their parents dismissed them, or have even kicked them out.

(Interview #2, 5/4/15)

Here Sara defined success in terms of her ability to “come out of the closet” and to maintain strong relationships with her parents.

Family

Until she moved away to college, Sara lived with her mother in River Glen. Sara's sister lived in a nearby Midwestern state and her father lived in a town not far away. She said, "I lived with both my parents until they divorced a couple years ago. I was always closer to my mom but my dad is a very book-smart guy. As a person, he's not my favorite" (Interview #1, 4/23/15). At the time of data collection, Sara's mother was enrolled at a local community college, "because she was a stay at home mom all the time that my folks were married, so now she's trying to get herself going" (Interview #1, 4/23/15). Sara said that in terms of her gender identity:

She [my mother] has been on board from the beginning. Even though when I thought it was just cross-dressing and I wore girl's Halloween costume for the first time, she laughed, but [*chuckles, pause*] that was pretty much the only thing. She's always taken me at my word. It was an essential pillar to have—just someone that I could talk to.

Someone who could buy me clothes when I was in that phase of it. Just, at the very beginning, just someone that I could be seen by in my true form. (Interview #2, 5/4/15)

At age 15, Sara made declarative statements about the future of her transition and a desire for surgery. Her father did not support this idea but did aid in Sara's legal name change process:

At that time he was saying that I should wait until I got settled in college to change my name, so—and *everyone* can see now that that would have been a terrible idea. But it took awhile for him to realize that, yes, I should do that before I took the ACT. And that was one of the biggest things that he *did* do for me, was get the legal stuff going to change my name. So, that happened before my junior year, so that was neat chronologically. (Interview #2, 5/4/15)

For trans students in secondary schools, a legal name change can alter the trajectory of their experiences. Before recent changes at the federal level (Lhamon & Gupta, 2016), without a legal name change, trans students continually may have been faced with their birth name on school documents, such as course rosters and honor roll lists. As Sara mentioned, having her real (legal) name on ACT transcripts meant that she could apply to and enroll in university under her new name. It should be noted that under Title IX, schools are required to use a trans students name and pronouns.

Sara openly shared her experiences and struggles as a person with mental health issues (in her case, depression and Asperger's). I (wrongly) assumed that these struggles were related to her gender identity disclosure process. Sara clarified, "I don't think depression and coming out...touched each other at all" (Interview #3, 7/17/15):

The emotional stuff didn't have to do with coming out, it was in the vicinity of my folks splitting up, but not expressly about that—more about my dad taking me out of the musical my sophomore year because of a grade that wound up being an A anyway. The grade was a D at midterm, but that [punishment] was disproportionate and the musical was the biggest thing that I did with my friends and that was the catalyst for depression. (Interview #3, 7/17/15)

Being part of the school musical was something that Sara spoke about with great enthusiasm. It was one of the few things she and I discussed that made her face perk up. For example, speaking of the number "Step in Time" from *Mary Poppins*, she said:

Sara: That song is my favorite thing that I performed on that stage [at RGHS] over my eight years on that stage

Joshua: Really?

Sara: Yeah. It's a song that gives you goose bumps and our choreographer was amazing and the audience applauded for a long time. (Interview #4, 11/22/15)

After being taken out of the musical is when Sara first “met depression,” she described these dark periods as “consistent numbness” (Interview #4, 11/22/15).

In our fourth interview, Sara disclosed that she identified with many indicators of Asperger's Syndrome. The connection between gender variance and Autism has been studied as a phenomenon in the medical and psychological communities (Ceglie, Skagerberg, Baron-Cohen, & Auyeung, 2014; de Vries et al., 2010; Robinow, 2009; VanderLaan et al., 2015).

I wasn't really good with people until high school. There's a disconnect between my emotions—my *[searching for words]* understated emotions and what I show in my face. I kind of have a poker face most of the time unless I'm with someone I'm close to and getting genuinely excited about something. That's a thing. And just my precociousness in school crossed with all those things just sort of points to this. (Interview #4, 11/22/15)

Sara had not been formally diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome, but as she pointed out to me, “I was never formally diagnosed with gender dysphoria... it's self-evident” (Interview #4, 11/22/15). Gender dysphoria occurs when trans people feel a disconnect between their gender identity and their body. Sara attributed her dysphoria in the summer after graduation to a breakup with her ex-girlfriend that happened in the spring of 2015. Much of our third interview was spent discussing the breakup and its ramifications. “That [breakup] sort of brought my dysphoria to the front of my mind. So, I guess you could say that being transgender has a part in why I've been depressed again, even if I can't define exactly how” (Interview #4, 11/22/15).

Transitioning at School

River Glen

Sara's disclosure process at school took place in the larger context of River Glen, a small blue-collar community supported by a mill and industrial manufacturing. Speaking in generalities, and admittedly invoking stereotypes, during my first visit I thought that River Glen was not the kind of place one would think of as being overtly welcoming to members of the LGBTQA community. Yet, in many ways, Sara's experiences were positive. However, some individuals, at school particularly, were less understanding.

This community—I mean, there are plenty of stupid people. There are plenty of bigots. For one thing I'm the only "T" [trans] person here and most of the rest [of the LGBTQA people] are just bi[sexual], so that's not regarded as a big deal or is something that is necessarily known about, so... since I've had the most trail to blaze and I've done it myself, everything goes so slowly in the administration of this school that they probably just don't see it [accommodations for trans students] as needed. (Interview #2, 5/4/15)

Ms. Dengler, the RGHS guidance counselor, expressed her gratitude tinged with surprise about the phenomenon of River Glen being such a welcoming place for Sara:

Sometimes I am amazed that this little rural town: Sara exited, from what I see, fairly unscathed, physically. You hear horror stories of female kids being beaten up in bathrooms. And, I do not know what happened outside of school: I don't know if she was harassed in her neighborhood (...) I would have never expected River Glen to—A student like Sara I would have heard a story that she had to transfer somewhere else because people weren't welcoming. And, I don't want to put rose-colored glasses on it because she would come to me and be like—it was usually at the beginning of a year—I

remember two years ago she came in really ticked off because somebody (it was a freshman—you know it was within the first month of school, and he's just an idiot and not used to Sara and not aware that not everybody is like him) and made some comment about how a guy should be a guy. I think he use the word "fag" and Sara was pissed, rightfully so. But anytime Sara brought something to myself, I know I can speak for me, that I dealt with it right away and then and if it kept happening Sara came back. But, I would rarely hear the same kid's name. Maybe three times a year, maybe four, she would come to me "there's some kid harassing me in the lunch line" and I felt like at least on my end and I think our current administrations end, it was handled expediently. (Dengler, Interview, 11/4/15)

Sara agreed with Ms. Dengler's assessment of RGHS's prompt action when bullying occurred:

Joshua: Has there been any—have you experienced any weird comments or anything during your experience with [State Choral Organization] or in school choir or band about gender stuff?

Sara: Not in choir, not in honors choir, not in band. That's more like hallway stuff.

Joshua: What's that like?

Sara: Minor and annoying.

Joshua: Is it pretty persistent? Does it still happen?

Sara: No, it's very sporadic and very rare.

Joshua: Is it people that you know? People that you don't know?

Sara: People that I don't know.

Joshua: Has the school been supportive in any way with that?

Sara: Well, when it's people that I don't know I can't report them. The last time it was someone that I did know, I did report them and, well, my sophomore year somebody who was just kind of a class clown said some stuff and then I reported him and then he stopped and he was nice. This year, there's someone who's a class clown, but more of just an annoying idiot and I reported him and he stopped. (Interview #1, 4/23/15)

The school's responses to bullying issues were a significant part of Sara's ability to feel comfortable disclosing her gender identity at school.

“I Had Stockpiled The Confidence To Do It”

Overall, Sara described her transition at school as “a *very* good one. I had very low expectations of a town this small and conservative and I was soundly surprised” (Interview #1, 4/23/15). Sara thought about her transition at school long before it happened: “Coming out was—I had stockpiled the confidence to do it, it was just impatience with people.” Elaborating on this point, she clarified:

Impatience with people adjusting and using pronouns and using name and using appropriate pronouns and name referring to me in the past, because that's a habit people have where they'll use the wrong name or pronoun when they're referring to you when you were younger because they're trying to hold on to that even though the proper protocol is to say “when *she* was three.” (Interview #3, 7/17/15)

Sara described the disclosure process at school as very “cushioned,” in other words, planned and thought out:

[I was] talking to school counselors, talking to my therapists, just planning for different scenarios about telling different people—keeping them posted about who I was telling,

who I was planning to tell next and how they went. And the whole thing was just very... cushioned. (Interview #3, 7/17/15)

Part of this “cushion” may have been due to the fact that Sara had a prominent voice in her disclosure process at school:

In the third trimester of my sophomore year I had teachers use—well certain teachers use—my name and pronouns. And then July after my sophomore year I got my name changed. Some teachers are a little bit older and it took them longer to get it. Some people still mess up pronouns. Pretty much nobody messes up my name now that it’s on everything. Yeah, it’s just people that either their only impression of me is my voice or they’re just older and don’t really get it will use the wrong pronouns, but, that’s about it at this point. (Interview #1, 4/23/15)

Here Sara used her voice as an example of how people make decisions about gender attribution. In American society, it is a generally accepted principle that people with low voices should be male and people with higher voices should be female. In this way, through her speaking and her singing, Sara demonstrated the fact that one’s voice and gender identity are not necessarily linked: “[The transition wouldn’t have been so smooth] without me being so immersed in the band and choir and drama community here” (Interview #1, 4/23/15). Unlike many of the students profiled in many of the studies discussed above, Sara found support in the choral, band, and drama programs at RGHS.

Uniform

As will be discussed in more detail below, Sara chose to continue singing bass after her transition in high school. She did, however, advocate for herself in terms of choir uniforms, as recounted here by Mr. Ames:

She had one conversation with me about her uniform. She said—and she was a little tentative about it but also kind of direct—she said, “Are you OK with my wearing the choir dress?” I said, “Absolutely. If that’s what you’ve done in the past and that is what you’re the most comfortable with, then absolutely. That was two days into my first teaching job. I can’t imagine how difficult that must have been for her. (Ames, Interview, 5/4/15)

Sara also spoke with Mr. Calloway, the former principal, about the prospect of wearing a dress for RGHS events:

My freshman year after I became certain of my own identity I talked to Mr. Calloway. My freshman year for the musical—I was in the chorus and I wore a dress and that was the first public “thing,” so some people—less than ten people in the audience thought it was a joke. But, nevertheless, that was when my support was the highest from my friends in the cast and from Mr. Thompson. So, that was a big step, and then the summer and fall after that is when I did color guard so that was the second step and then Mr. Calloway made me do both those things before I could wear a dress for [concerts]. He wanted to introduce it gradually so that the various performances would still be about the ensembles and not drawing attention to *me*. Which makes sense, and it was agonizingly slow, but it worked perfectly. (Interview #2, 5/4/15)

As this comment shows, Sara’s perception was that the school’s response to her request to wear a dress was thought through and intentional. However, when I asked Ms. Dengler, school counselor at RGHS, if the response was coordinated at the administrative level, she said:

No. No. I would like to say that we're organized and proactive, but I mean, no, no....

[pause] but yes, I would say there were stages: there were events that happened that kind of opened the door a little bit more and a little bit more. (Dengler, Interview, 11/4/15)

In the same interview, Ms. Dengler recalled the opinions of the previous school administration—the one in place when Sara began disclosing her gender identity at school:

Our administration's response was "you put the spotlight on yourself instead of the group of concert-goers because people will be looking at 'who is the guy in the dress?' not 'look at our Chamber Choir with all of our outstanding performers.'" But after that it's never been an issue. The last two years we had a different administrator, and I believe Sara has been participating in drama and in the plays so she was able to take either non-gender-specific roles or she wanted a female role, she got it, or she was cast in it, so she was able to express herself as she is. And then I believe at concerts, too, she wanted to wear a dress. I know the last two proms she went to, she's [also] been to homecoming. She was fortunate, as we all are if we have good friends, but she had some supportive people that I think helped it be easier because they protected her. (Dengler, Interview, 11/4/15)

Sara reported that her experiences at school were, for the most part, positive, as exemplified in the following fieldnote from early in the data collection process:

Mr. Ames is running a bit late and Clint, a male student wearing white pants, a peach shirt, and a black and white striped jacket (I think he's the president of the choir council) was making announcements about upcoming events. In the front of the room sits a large white board with a projector attached to it (is this some kind of smart board?). Mr. A comes from a bond committee meeting at which they discussed the purchase of new risers for the choral program.

Aside: Being back in a high school classroom is really fun for me. This is a funny bunch of kids and being with them makes me think back to my days teaching high school out west. I wish that I could go back and teach high school now knowing what I know. I'd be a far, far better teacher.

The class begins with a back rub and I am especially interested in how the students near Sara will deal with this situation. As I glance over, I see one of the basses next to Sara gently sweep her long black hair to the side to facilitate a shoulder rub. I find this a very sweet gesture and I find myself surprised and grateful that this interaction was seemingly easy and without judgment. (Fieldnote, 5/8/15)

Family and “Band/Musical”

When asked what music means to her, Sara spoke of the power of the connection of mind, body, and soul while performing:

Music in general is just a *[pause, searching for words]* It's the only thing—or, not the only thing, but one of few things that I do that I can put not just my mind and body but my soul into. And it's something I can do every day and get results from while doing that, so there's nothing else like it in that respect. (Interview #2, 5/4/15)

Musically, Sara followed in her family's footsteps: her father played the bagpipes and also played trombone in the Mascot Marching Band (MMB) at a local large university. Sara's sister also played in the school band. Growing up in this family that Sara described as “band/musical,” she chose to play the trombone in middle school: “Up until sophomore year I played the same [instrument] that my dad played in the MMB. And I would have been embarrassed to be in choir when I was younger—just singing in front of people” (Interview #1, 4/23/15). This comment was

surprising, considering that Sara had recently been selected as one of 114 high school students for the All State Choir. She elaborated, “Well, in elementary school there was music class where we would do rhythm things and singing things and I was *very* embarrassed to sing in elementary school—the thought of being judged by my classmates or whatever” (Interview #1, 4/23/15).

Well I’m so far from that that I don’t really know why. My freshman year I was in band for marching band and then I started thinking about doing color guard which I did sophomore through senior year, but in the winter of freshman year they do winter guard for the basketball games, so that was my first experience with a flag. (Interview #1, 4/23/15)

Sara clearly had strong ties to both band and choir but credited her beginning band experience with enabling her music reading skills. Membership in color guard was a significant part of Sara’s gender transition at school; all of the members of the color guard were female and there was no “male” uniform option.

Sara: Well, as we talked about, gender is less relevant in [band] past the uniform. I mean except in marching band where color guard was a big step.

Joshua: So, that is a fairly gendered thing.

Sara: Yes, but that worked to my advantage.

Joshua: In what way?

Sara: ‘Cause we don’t have the money to get a *guy* color guard uniform that I wouldn’t have wanted to begin with. (Interview #2, 5/4/15)

Mr. Ames spoke to the importance of the color guard experience in Sara’s gender journey at school:

It's always fun for me because in the fall she participates in color guard. On Friday nights before football games, all the color guard girls do their hair and makeup in the choir room because I have a giant mirror. What I love is that they're always doing Sara's hair and makeup. In those moments, I can just see the joy for her, because she just feels like one of the girls, and I think that's so amazing. (Ames, Interview, 5/4/15)

Sara described a complicated relationship with her trombone section leader (whom she called a "cocky person") and how the prospect of him seeing her in color guard led to an influential "pep talk" from Mr. Thompson, the River Glen High School choir teacher for Sara's ninth and tenth grade years.

I had a *[short pause, search for words]* friendly but overbearing section leader as a trombone who was like nice but judgmental of other sections like a "we're the best" kind of way. I was afraid that he would judge me for doing winter guard so by sheer coincidence I wound up talking to Mr. Thompson [the previous choir teacher] about it and he gave me some kind of pep talk—I wish I remembered how it went—so I could do the first rehearsal for that, but the friends that I had made in the fall play (every year at the school there's a fall play and spring musical). The friends I had made in the fall play included several choir folks, including two that became some of my closest friends until they graduated: Brenda Keillor and Fran Smythe. They were a year above me so I saw them first when I was in seventh grade and they were in eighth grade, so I had a crush on Brenda and that kind of persisted so I went to the fall choir concert my freshman year and I saw it and then I decided that I wanted to join so I talked to Mr. Thompson about it and then at the beginning of second trimester there was an audition and it's been *[rocket sound]* from there. (Interview #1, 4/23/15)

For Sara, personal connections and powerful mentors aided her processes, both musically and in terms of her gender journey.

Mentors and Role Models

Sara identified her sister, friends from school (Brenda, Fran, and Mia Hawkinson), and Mr. Thompson (her former choral teacher) as influential role models.

My sister has always been musical and encouraging and, like I said, we've been close. And, so, my coming out process started in the end of my freshman year and really got going through my sophomore year. So, sophomore year there's homecoming in the fall and snow fest in the winter—those are the two big dances, so those were the first two dances to which I wore dresses. And at snow fest, somebody made some comment that I didn't even hear and Mia Hawkinson punched them in the nose. And she's small, but doesn't take crap from anyone, and she's *[short pause, changing course]* just as far as music and personality, she's almost as inspiring as the sister I grew up with. And then Fran who was Brenda's best friend in high school and was in choir and in all the shows is one of the nicest people you would ever meet and she was just supportive from day one and was always someone that I could, and can, talk to. (Interview #1, 4/23/15)

Sara continually spoke about the support shown by Mr. Thompson, the previous choir teacher at RGHS. Whereas Mr. Thompson openly discussed his support to Sara, she was more apprehensive about disclosing her gender identity to Mr. Bone, the band teacher:

The very, very beginning of my coming out thing was talking to one person at a time in eighth grade: certain friends, my sister, certain teachers, and Mr. Bone was one of the teachers I was reluctant to talk to just because of his strong personality, but it turned out (two years later) that I had nothing to worry about. (Interview #1, 4/23/15)

Sara referenced this in a later interview as well:

[I was] nervous about talking to Mr. Bone, middle school band director, because he was one of those teachers that makes fun of people anyway, so I was afraid that worst case scenario he would make the same sort of jokes in poor taste that my dad did at the beginning. And he understood just fine and he directed the fall plays in high school and, he was just—because he knew me since fifth grade he was one of the last people to accidentally use the wrong name back in the fall of my senior year. (Interview #4, 11/22/15)

Sara had not been a student of Mr. Thompson before this pep talk in the choir teacher's office at RGHS; she described his support and mentorship as “essential”:

It was first day of winter [color] guard practice, I was super anxious about my trombone section leader seeing me spinning a flag and so he took me into his office to give me a pep talk and I had never *met* him before. And, I wound up going into being transgender and “this isn't just about spinning a flag” and how I had the two things linked together in my mind. And he was responsible for letting me dress as a woman in my first musical, which was sort of the first big thing, and just giving me support and being someone I could talk to all the while, the two years that he was there. He just sort of came out of nowhere and became a mentor figure, and then left. (Interview #3, 7/17/15)

Sara identified Mr. Thompson as an influential mentor figure who left River Glen High School after her sophomore year. She also identified Ms. Dengler, a high school guidance counselor, as a mentor figure who was present throughout her four years of high school, referring to her as an “Excalibur”: “Well, in the case of both the middle school and the high school counselors it was

something they were trained to be familiar with and they were just very open about it and more responsive than administration” (Interview #3, 7/17/15).

Realizations

Sexuality. In eighth grade, Sara also had realizations about being bisexual and took steps to disclose this as well, though she reported that to her, the connection between gender identity and sexuality are not strong:

Sara: Well, beginning of eighth grade is when I had my first crush on a guy, so that was when I figured out that I was bi, so I told a few people about that.

Joshua: So technically=

Sara: =It was both, but because I had been doing all this homework on the website called Laura’s Playground and learning about all the gender identity stuff, sexuality was the smaller deal from the beginning. It was both, but that [sexuality] was still secondary.

Joshua: So, you’d say that the realizations about gender and sexuality came about around the same time? At the same time?

Sara: Around the same time—at different paces. Sexuality is a bit more self-explanatory.

Joshua: So would you say that that realization came to you first?

Sara: Well, no because gender identity is self-evident from a young age. It’s just harder to recognize, whereas sexuality took until eighth grade because, puberty and whatnot. (Interview #4, 11/22/15)

Sara’s openness about her bisexuality was not initially well received:

It was the first time I had a crush on a guy and I told him. He was *diplomatic* about it but he said “you should pray to god to get Satan out of your soul.” I didn’t really tell a lot of

people because I think trans was already in the works so being bi was kind of overshadowed and was the easy part. (Interview #3, 7/17/15).

Gender. In terms of her disclosure process at school, Sara was initially selective about with whom she shared her gender identity. She said, “I wouldn’t really call it ‘coming out’ because it was talking to one person or one faculty member at a time that I was absolutely confident in” (Interview #4, 11/22/15). Sara began to disclose her gender identity toward the end of middle school, beginning in:

Sara: Eighth grade. It would have been 13-14. Yeah. Talked to, well, I talked to a couple people, a couple friends that I made in my homeroom class who were assumed to be bi or lesbian anyway who were my friends. And I talked to that counselor, Mr. Frances, and then by the end of the year I talked to a couple of my other teachers. My social studies teacher: Mrs. Marietti was kind of radiated liberalness and people kind of assumed she was a lesbian. And I put my thoughts down on paper to explain it to my English teacher—just sort of for the sake of exercise, made a writing assignment out of it to explain myself.

Joshua: What did you write?

Sara: I don’t still have it. I just wrote how I felt: “I’m transgender. I’ve pretty much just found out what this word means,” and all this stuff. And I think I wrote about my childhood, the girl clothes and stuff. So, yeah, there was one thing: I don’t remember exactly but she shared it with a different English teacher in the middle school who was trying to do something LGBT-related but I don’t think that ever went anywhere.

(Interview #4, 11/22/15)

Unbeknownst to Sara, her name appeared on a list of students passed from the middle school guidance counselors to the high school guidance counselors as the new freshman class entered RGHS. Ms. Dengler described their first interaction:

To be honest Sara is my first trans student, openly. She taught [me] a lot about how to work with students in the future. She was a freshman and to be honest we got a heads up from the middle school that said, I think they called it an “interesting one” because that was new for them. Her parents were very supportive of her. You don’t like to label students or target them but sometimes we get that list from the middle school, it can be anything from “this kid’s been in ISS [in school suspension] a million times,” it can be “this one, their father died at Easter” and so sometimes I wonder, because we did get that heads up, that we were more aware? (...) But I do remember Sara coming in and telling me that she is transgender and, it had to be tenth grade, and probably telling me of the name change and then offering me websites that I could go and educate myself if I had any questions and she did: she didn’t let me down on that end. She taught me a lot.

(Dengler, Interview, 11/4/15)

This exchange highlights the agency and resilience Sara displayed throughout her disclosure process. She rarely was afraid to be direct and to ask for what she needed. Sara’s openness with Ms. Dengler and others, including her choral teachers and honor choir conductors, facilitated a dialogue in her state about equity and inclusion of transgender students in high school choral activities.

“I’m a Girl and I’m a Bass and I Own That”

Voice

I notice that Sara is sitting on the edge of the bass section, meaning that she is always

between a male student (a bass) and a soprano (a female student). I assume this is an intentional move, and something I wonder if she appreciates (did she request this?). I sense that Sara grows frustrated with the level of musicianship in this class. She is musically talented and she felt like she and Clint needed to keep things musically “in check” once Mr. Thompson left RGHS.

(Fieldnote, 5/8/15)

At the time of our first interview, Sara had just been selected to participate in the All State Choir as a low bass. Her seat in the chamber choir at RGHS was on the edge of the soprano and bass sections so that she could sing bass while sitting next to a female student who sang soprano. In the RGHS Chamber Choir, the seating was as follows (from left to right):

Sara: Basses, Sopranos, Altos, Tenors.

Joshua: So it's in blocks?

Sara: Yeah, and I'm just always on the edge between basses and sopranos, and that was the same in honors choir.

Joshua: And that works fairly well?

Sara: Yeah. (Interview #1, 4/23/15)

This seating arrangement was a conscious choice on the part of Mr. Ames, and this idea was also implemented in the All State Choir rehearsals. Sara took the fact in stride that her voice did not match the traditional male-low voice, female-high voice binary:

I'm a girl and I'm a bass and I own that. It makes me unique in the scope as far—as wide as [State Choral Organization] as a whole. Much earlier on in my transition, two, three years ago I thought, “well, I'm not supposed to like this,” but since the whole honors choir thing has happened it's become my signature. (Interview #2, 5/4/15)

Sara had support and mentorship from her choral teachers about which vocal part she should sing. Although she once thought about singing soprano or alto (because she thought, “I’m not supposed to like this [singing bass],”), Mr. Thompson encouraged her to sing bass:

Sara: My sophomore year with Mr. Thompson I talked about how my voice lessons were focused on falsetto so I thought, “well, maybe I should just float and sing alto or something.”=

Joshua: =Did you ever have a serious conversation with anyone about that? Is that something you made known?

Sara: No, no. Mr. Thompson said, “No, you should sing in the bass section.” (Interview #2, 5/4/15)

When asked if she was comfortable with Mr. Thompson’s recommendation, Sara said, “Yeah. Because he was somebody that I respected and I figured he knew what he was doing. And he did” (Interview #2, 5/4/15). Sara identified Mr. Thompson as a role model in several capacities, including for his outward support of her gender identity, her vocal development, and her voice part assignment. Here Sara demonstrated the importance of community and support systems for trans students who choose to disclose their gender identity in school.

When asked about the voice change process, Sara said:

When I first talked to my folks I talked about—“I need surgery” and all these things, ‘cause I’d just done the homework—“I’m just starting puberty we need to start this now,” and that got put off indefinitely, and then my voice changed and now, in the grand scheme of [State Choral Organization], I am “that girl who sings bass” and I own it. (Interview #1, 4/23/15)

As discussed in Chapter Two, the voice change for people who identify as MTF is different than the process for people who identify as FTM. At the time of data collection, Sara had not begun hormone replacement therapy. When and if she does begin taking estrogen, it will not influence her vocal folds, which have already lengthened due to puberty (Chaloner, 2000; Constansis, 2008; Edwards, 2009).

After Mr. Thompson left River Glen High School, Mr. Ames was hired for the middle and high school choral position. Sara took private voice lessons with Mr. Ames during her junior and senior years of high school but was less satisfied with these lessons than she was with her experiences with Mr. Thompson, explaining that:

Most of my lessons with [Mr. Ames] are about learning the music I need to perform in a couple weeks and just getting feedback. It was better my sophomore year when I had Mr. Thompson because he was a bass. I wasn't as much of a bass then as I am now. Much of the lesson time my sophomore year I worked on falsetto which has come in handy—well, in all kinds of places, because I'm a low bass. A lot of stuff is up there, so as a result I'm more solid than some of the baritones in my bass section now in those ranges. (Interview #1, 4/23/15)

While reading and analyzing Sara's statements, I realized that I had brought my own assumptions about gendered voice part assignments to the fore. I assumed that trans choral students would want to sing a voice part that matches their gender identity. When asked about people assuming that she would want to sing soprano or alto, Sara said matter-of-factly: "Yeah. Huh. I have the voice that I have. Nobody really assumes that [*chuckles*]" (Interview #3, 7/17/2015).

Broadening the conversation, Sara and I discussed how “gendered” choir can be, and how this construct interacts with voice part placement and choir uniforms:

Well I mean everyone has a voice part. There is more overlap than just me. We have Ben Finney in concert choir who is a small guy who sings alto and we have some alto ladies who can reach very low into the tenor range and—but as far as the “ceremoniousness” (if that’s a word) of the uniforms and everything, people should be able to just—I mean, even in terms of people that—like, I subscribe to the binary but even in terms of people who don’t... well, I haven’t met people that couldn’t choose between a suit and a dress, so... I don’t know if I have enough perspective on that. But, I think as long as everyone’s comfortable, it still works. (Interview #2, 5/4/15)

Here Sara demonstrated that it is not only trans students who can be marginalized by a non-normative voice part (Bond, 2015). She also highlighted the importance of uniforms as a visual gender identifier. Also, Sara discussed the notion that some trans people still do “subscribe to the binary.” In other words, not all trans people consider themselves gender fluid or somewhere between male and female. Sara identifies as a female who was assigned male at birth, and she did not express any concern about being labeled a woman or wearing traditionally feminine attire, including in choir.

Honor Choir Experiences

Sara’s musical prowess propelled her to success in auditions, and she was selected for several honor choir experiences that took her outside of the walls of River Glen High School. As mentioned above, Sara participated in several honor choirs through the State Choral Organization in the Midwestern state where she grew up and attended high school. This state offered three “levels” of honor choir experiences: regional, state honors choir, and All State.

Last year in the fall—the fall of my junior year I—well actually I first tried to audition for regionals the fall of my sophomore year but I didn’t make it and then my junior year I auditioned and made it to regionals and that was amazing and then we auditioned there for states and I made it to that last year. But I didn’t make it to All State last year. And then fall of this year, I auditioned for regionals and made it, auditioned for states and made it, when I got to states the memorization test didn’t go as well as it did at states last year, but I nevertheless—I get to follow in Brenda’s footsteps and go to All State.

(Interview #1, 4/23/15)

River Glen is close enough to the city in which the state honors choir event was held that Sara stayed at home and commuted. For All State, however, she stayed on campus at Regional State University (RSU), where she would later be a student:

Ms. Williams filled in Mr. Phelps about me so I will get a room to myself. There was no issue about that. Mr. Phelps e-mailed me and asked me if I wanted a specific roommate but I don’t know this year’s people that well. (Interview #2, 4/3/15)

I asked Mr. Ames, Sara’s choir teacher for junior and senior year, to speak to the steps that he took before her honor choir experiences:

I was trying to be really sensitive for her, and trying to look out for her without her knowing about it. I didn’t want her having to be worried about “where am I going to go to the bathroom or get changed?” So I contacted Molly. What I didn’t know at the time was that Molly—who was friends with my predecessor [Mr. Thompson] and I, had previously had a conversation about Sara. Her response to me was, “Absolutely, no problem.” She even arranged her standing position in the choir so that she was the bass

closest to the girls so she wouldn't feel out of place as opposed to sticking her in the middle of a bunch of tuxedos. (Ames, Interview, 5/4/15)

During these honor choir experiences, Sara sometimes faced challenges with conductors and coordinators who did not use pronouns correctly. In these situations, Sara was forthright, informing the adults in charge about the pronouns and language that would make her feel most comfortable. Sara recounted experiences in All State Choir (Dr. Weatherson, conductor) and State Honors Choir (Mrs. Apple, conductor):

Sara: Mr. Phelps [coordinator] seemed kind of scattered and he and Dr. Weatherson [conductor] messed up pronouns a lot, but the music was great. The concert was great.

Joshua: Did you approach one or both of them about pronouns at the beginning of the rehearsal process?

Sara: Ms. Williams filled in Mr. Phelps. I talked to Dr. Weatherson and he said he would forget and he forgot.

Joshua: Ok. Forgot in terms of referring to you personally or doing the "let's have all the men sing here"?

Sara: Both. Mrs. Apple at states was better about it, but she kind of lost it as the weekend went on.

Joshua: Yeah

Sara: Just as it gets closer to concert time. (Interview #3, 7/17/15)

Sara's experience illuminates the seemingly benign language so often used in the choral setting that can have gendered connotations:

Sara: In honors choir there have not been issues other than the default script the coordinators read for instruction—Ms. T read "the men will go here to change and da da

da.” And so, those were all pretty default last year and then this year at states, they got the memo and Mrs. Apple would say “sopranos and altos” and “tenors and basses.”

Joshua: Does that make a big difference to you?

Sara: Yes: it does. It made me feel that I had arrived in terms of being recognized in [State Choral Organization] as a whole. (Interview #1, 4/23/15)

(...)

Joshua: So, what does it feel like when they slip and they say “men and women”?

Sara: It’s annoying in a... it’s like, if annoyance is anger, it’s like the sad version of annoyance.

Joshua: Sure. You wouldn’t say it’s hurtful?

Sara: No, because I know that they don’t mean it. (Interview #2, 5/4/15)

Here Sara conflated the idea of pronoun usage with recognition—highlighting the point that her voice, both literally and metaphorically, was unique and important.

In the following story about All State Choir, Sara discussed “gendered” connotations of choreography for one of the pieces.

In All State back in May we did an arrangement of “Skip to my Lou” and they had us do some choreography things with the women doing one thing and the men doing another thing—for that they actually said “tenors and basses do this and sopranos and altos do that” but you could tell that they were supposed to be “men and women” things to do, so I talked to the people on either side of me and did the women things to do. And that was annoying. (Interview #5, 1/23/16)

This story highlights the many layers of *genderism* (Bilodeau, 2009) that can exist in the choral rehearsal/performance environment and how trans students might feel in these situations.

Accommodating Trans Singers

In terms of the types of adjustments choral teachers need to make to accommodate trans students, Mr. Ames said:

I remember in those first couple of weeks, I made the mistake of saying, “ok *guys*, let’s go,” when I wanted my male voices—my low voices. At first it was just her correcting me, and then it was everyone: “Mr. Ames, we want ‘low voices’ not gender,” and I’m was like—[*grumbles*] It took a long time to beat it in to my head, because my whole choral life it had been “alright boys, let’s go,” “alright girls, let’s go,” so a *challenge* for me has been to try to remove the gender terminology from my vocabulary. Now, it’s not just Sara who calls me out on it—it’s a lot of the girls and my other low voices—they’re like “Ames, don’t say that.” [*snaps*] So they’ve been really, really supportive of that language. I think where it gets dicey is those more intimate situations.³⁰ My impression is that people have been very supportive of [Sara] making the transition here in our program. (...) I try to keep any analogy I’m using sort of gender-neutral as well—when we’re talking about a piece dealing with love, I try and say, “a *person* you might have feelings for” as opposed to the stereotypical boy loves girl or vice versa. I do this also because we have a gay student in our chorus, and probably more that I’m not aware of. I

³⁰ One such “intimate situation” occurred during performances for one of the school musicals. Mr. Ames said: “I think most of the people have been pretty accepting of her making the transition. I think where we ran into some problems—and it wasn’t with me specifically—it was with Jack Bone who was our fall play director (he’s our middle school band director). She brought up the dressing room situation again with him and he took a softer stance and was going to allow her to use the girl’s dressing room and instead move girls, who didn’t feel comfortable with her being there, somewhere else, and I think there were a couple of girls in the chamber choir who were really upset about it—got some parents involved—there were some phone calls. He ultimately, I think, decided to move her out. And so, I think there are probably a few girls who aren’t necessarily comfortable with her in those more intimate settings.” (Ames, Interview, 5/4/15)

try really hard to be as neutral as I can when using examples or analogies. (Ames, Interview, 5/4/15)

Mr. Ames' re-thinking of gender in the choral classroom has made him think more globally about safe space for queer choral students (Palkki & Caldwell, in press):

I think transgender students are going to force choir directors to re-think some things that they do. (...) I think it's important for us to continue to grow as educators to create a safe and comfortable space for our students. The arts tend to be a place where people feel the most comfortable—feel at home. I preach that with my kids, I really do. I want them to know it's ok to be who they are. They don't believe me necessarily and it'll take some years because I'm still new here, but, you know, choral musicians are the most accepting people that I have ever met. I think that the choral environment really helps to create a sense of openness and acceptance, and the choral director helps to foster this environment. Singing is such a vulnerable art form and you have to be comfortable with who you are as [an] individual before you can truly open up. There is no hiding. Once you have done that, choir becomes like family and family accepts you no matter what. (Ames, Interview, 5/4/15)

Overall, even though Sara interacted with conductors who stumbled over pronouns, she described her experiences with [State Choral Organization] as “very positive” (Interview #2, 4/3/15). As a strong musician, Sara enjoyed being part of “a choir that knows all of the different vowel shapes, and a choir where everyone wants to be there, everyone wants every moment of it and puts in their best” (Interview #1, 4/23/15).

Graduation, a Challenging Summer, and Transition to College

Sara graduated from River Glen High School in May of 2015. The summer between

graduation and her start at RSU was difficult. In addition to dealing with a break-up, she was preparing to go away to college and live on her own for the first time. During our interview from July 2015, Sara described to me that one of the symptoms of her depression was to withdraw socially, which she found herself doing before she moved away to college:

I sort of wonder if this breakup is pointing me in a similar direction, ‘cause the reason why I called to set up an appointment [for therapy] is because some days it’s felt like “it’s fine, I can get past this by myself” or “it’ll be OK I can get past this with her help or with other friends’ help” or “I can’t get past this” and that lack of stability was the reason why I called to set up an appointment again. And I’ve been playing a lot of video games—which is fine, but I can’t tell if that’s just because it’s summer and I’m bored or if I’m just occupying myself. (Interview #3, 7/17/15)

Later that summer, Sara moved into a residence hall at RSU. When asked how things were going in late November 2015, Sara said: “Ummmm [*slightly nervous chuckle*] Up and down” (Interview #4, 11/22/15). Sara explained that her struggles with self-doubt could be amplified by mistakes such as “wrong pronouns and things”:

On the days when depression is in the forefront it’s easier for wrong pronouns and things to get under one’s skin. And, body image issues: as far as whether I’m feminine enough and stuff. Whereas there are other days that I’m thankful for some of the aspects of my body that I *do* have and I’ve found a hair removal solution that actually works, so that helps a lot—including with self-esteem regarding those things. And so, yeah: ups and downs. (Interview #4, 11/22/15)

During her first semester at RSU, Sara sang with two choirs at RSU, Novum Voces (an early music ensemble) and Campus Choir: “As far as choir stuff, I’m in Novum Voces, which is

about really old music... I like Campus Choir better. I like Campus Choir's sound better. I like Campus Choir's members better" (Interview #4, 11/22/15).

Originally I auditioned for College Singers, which is the top choir at Regional, and Dr. Price [the head of the RSU choral program] clarified that first-years don't really do that. So, Cadet Choir didn't really fit into the schedule that I set up for this semester, so "you can do Novum and Campus Choir and I'd be happy to have you in Cadet Choir next semester." So for next semester, that's what I built my schedule around. (Interview #4, 11/22/15)

When I followed up with Sara at the beginning of the spring 2016 semester, she was singing with the Cadet Choir under Dr. Price, the director of choral activities at RSU. Sara had immense respect for Dr. Price and considered her to be an inspiration and a mentor figure. Here she recounted an experience from her first week in Cadet Choir:

Monday of the other week, [I] went to the first rehearsal and then I went up to her after and I employed one of the strategies that we learned in leadership in marching band from Mr. T which was if you're going to criticize someone you precede it and follow it if you can with praise. So, I basically told her exactly what I told you about how I like—or how when I have a conductor who seems like a mentor even when I can't confer with them directly, there's just this energy and everything else falls into place, and then I said, "sopranos and altos, tenors and basses"... something along those lines. I said it more professionally than just jumping into it like that she fully understood, she was already trying to become aware of it and it was something she intended to ask me exactly what was correct. And then, a few days ago, she said "men or women" a couple times and then corrected herself and she asked to see me after and I was going to come up to her after

anyway and say “Thank you for being aware. Thank you for correcting yourself. I can see that you’re making progress, it’s great and I really appreciate it.” And she said, “I give myself a C.” *[both laugh]* So she was beating herself up about it and I came up there to say “thank you for being aware of this, you’re doing amazing, not just with this but with everything.” And so that’s how aware she tries to be. (Interview #5, 1/23/16)

As of January 2016, Sara had not declared a major and was considering choosing a major other than music. When Sara and I first met in spring of 2015, she had auditioned for the School of Music at RSU and had not gained admission. As her freshman year progressed, she thought about changing her path, but has more recently “resolved to find the right path, rather than the easy one” (Follow-up, 3/26/16).

After our fourth interview, Sara did some vocalizing. I was bowled over at the rich, resonant tone that she produced. She was not in good health that day and felt a bit self-conscious. But when she sang “Deep River,” and was able to easily float the octave leap, I was immediately impressed.

Sara always struck me as strong and brave. Early in my data collection, however, I wondered what it must be like to walk in her shoes: One day in the RGHS choir room, I wrote, *“This kind of safe environment is so important for small town kids.” I remember being a small town kid—the choir room was such a safe haven for me—and I’m guessing it’s the same for many of these students, including Sara. I wonder how she feels when she leaves this room and faces the hallway and the classes and the world where students, teachers, and strangers may be less than welcoming and understanding.* (Fieldnote, 5/4/15)

After our follow-up interview last week, Sara asked if I could drive her to her car, which was parked about a mile from the hotel. She seems disappointed that I cannot stay to have dinner

with her. As we drive, it became clear that Sara does not know the exact location of her car or even the name of the street on which it is parked. We drive around and Sara uses deductive reasoning to eventually locate her vehicle.

As we drive, I discuss with her an upcoming choral conference at which two of the choirs from RSU would be performing. I mention that it was the College Singers and the Women's Chorus to be featured. She quickly snaps at me [and I paraphrase]: "Don't say 'Women's Chorus.' Isn't that exactly what we're trying to change?" Of course. How insensitive. Sara had just explained to me that taking "men and women" out of the choral vernacular was her number one piece of advice for choral music teachers. I'm trying so hard to adjust my vocabulary (I'm doing a much better job in church choir rehearsal now), but it's so difficult. Especially when "Women's" is in the title of the choir! Would people know what I was talking about if I said "Treble Chorus" or something similar? I suppose it doesn't matter, because if someone didn't know I could turn that into a "teaching moment." Onward. I'll try to be better in the future.

(Fieldnote, 1/31/16)

As a goal of this study is to lend credence to the voices of the participants, I wanted Sara to have the last word in this, her chapter. I asked her the following question: *You have an opportunity to tell choral teachers what they need to know and how they should be behaving. What could you tell them about working with you or with another trans student?* To this question, Sara reiterated the importance of "gendered language" in choral rehearsals:

Sara: The short answer is, when you're talking about voices, don't say "men and women" and when you're talking about "men and women," don't say voices. Men and women applies when people are choosing tuxes or dresses, voices apply for just about everything

else in that context, although since moving to Regional I've met and become friends with non-binary folks, so—

Joshua: Say more about that.

Sara: One of my friends, they present feminine and they're fine with that. They just are not fine with being called a girl. They use they/them pronouns. They're open to "it" pronouns but nobody really goes for that because that just seems dehumanizing. But, I would imagine that when they call for women to be fitted for dresses, they probably feel the same way I do when they refer to basses and tenors as "men." (Interview #5, 1/23/16)

Here Sara demonstrated the diversity that can exist under the "trans umbrella." Also, it shows that, for her, words in rehearsal carry great weight in how she feels within the group. More telling, however, was her response to this question: If there was, say a freshman in high school and there was a trans girl that was really interested in staying in choir. What would your advice be for her?

Everybody has a different experience with this because everybody has different backgrounds that they have to contend with. I was very lucky with my parents and my sister, all the friends that I had, and all the teachers that I had that prevented the "small town thing" from happening. So I don't know if this will be all applicable as well, but I would say: Figure out who you are, become confident in that; even if you're not confident in that, stick to that idea. Put on the face of being confident about that idea and it will manifest itself and build a diplomatic relationship with your teachers and your administration and they'll be willing to help you get where you need to be. (Interview #5, 1/23/16)

CHAPTER 5—“IT’S THE MOVING ON PART”: JON’S STORY

Table 3

People Interviewed and/or Mentioned in Chapter 5

Person	Description
Jon Kade	Senior at Landerstown High School (LHS); the main focus of this chapter
Jane	Jon’s birth name
Mr. Peter Mullins	Jon’s former choir teacher at LHS; mentor
Ms. Frances Perkins	Jon’s drama teacher at LHS; mentor
Ms. Paula Martinez	School counselor at LHS; mentor
Dr. Zachary Endroth	Jon’s speech therapist at a local university
Tim	Jon’s friend and fellow tenor in the LHS select choir

Setting the Scene

Place: Landerstown

It was really early (school begins before 7:30 am!) and, I was quite apprehensive about meeting Jon for the first time. As Mr. Mullins, the Landerstown High School (LHS) choral teacher, drives me through town, I realize that this is not the setting that I was expecting. Landerstown is a perfectly manicured suburb. As we drive down the lane of pristinely landscaped lawns and what seem to be upper middle class homes, he explains to me that just 12 years ago this was all farmland. Landerstown has now become a bedroom community for a large Northeastern city—you can get into the city in just over an hour if you get the limited stop commuter train. The developers who built this community estimated that each home would bring 0.5 children to the school district. Each home actually brought 2.5—thus the need for a new high school became evident.

After driving through a small residential area of several single-family homes with large front lawns, we come upon Landerstown High School, a pseudo-Modernist structure that (as Mr. Mullins joked) looks like a prison. (It really did.) Inside is a nicer-than-average suburban high school serving between 800 and 900 students. Mr. Mullins and I walk through a large, central

cafeteria on the way to the arts wing. Outside the choir room in the hall, Wenger risers and other miscellaneous stage equipment stand against the wall.

As in many high schools, the music wing is somewhat separate from the rest of the school. The choir room at LHS is spacious with dark-ish carpeting, acoustical panels on the ceiling, and painted white brick walls. Near the door there is a bulletin board that says “Music Is” in the center. Students have added slips of paper completing the prompt. Above the board are posters of the solfège hand signs and a quote that reads “HARD WORK beats TALENT when talent HARDLY WORKS.” Mr. Mullins was leaving LHS the first week in November for a job at another high school 15 miles away. The principal, students and staff were all very sad to see Mr. M go. He was one of only three teachers who have been at LHS since it opened 13 years ago. Mr. Mullins was one of the faculty sponsors for the Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA). There are rainbow stickers on his door and white board, and a picture of he and his husband on his desk.

Jon Kade

Before school, Jon Kade made a point to come into the choir room to meet me. I am immediately struck by his charisma and confidence. I write that he is “short but incredibly confident.” He and Mr. Mullins discuss some kind of “testing” over the weekend—something about a German piece. (I came to find out later that this was a memory/note “test” at a rehearsal of the All State Choir over the weekend.) (Fieldnote, 10/12/15)

Childhood

Family and Friends

At the time of data collection, Jon lived in Landerstown, a suburban community in the Northeastern U.S. that has a median family income of nearly \$125,000 per year. Ms. Perkins, the LHS drama teacher and an influential figure in Jon’s life, said that Landerstown “historically had

been an incredibly conservative town” (Perkins, Interview, 10/13/15); choral teacher Mr. Mullins described the community as a “big sports town” (Mullins, Interview, 10/12/15).

Jon was born in a bordering state because his family happened to be at his grandmother’s house when his mother went into labor. He was assigned female at birth and given the name Jane. He has lived his entire life in suburban communities in the Northeastern state in which he lives; he had lived in Landerstown since he was “six or seven” (Interview #1, 10/12/15). At the time of data collection, Jon was a senior in high school and living with his parents: “My dad’s a developer. He built most of the houses in our town” (Interview #1, 10/12/15). His mother was an accountant who sold real estate on the side, and his sister was a first grade teacher. Jon was quite athletic as a child:

I was really into being outside. I’d climb trees and run around and I always wanted to play with the other kids, and play manhunt. I was never into dolls or anything like that. My mom used to get angry. My sister had Barbie’s and I used to hit them—tear her Barbie’s apart. *[both chuckle]* [I liked] Legos, you know stuff like that. I played softball for five or six years. (Interview #1, 10/12/15)

Jon preferred to play with the boys in his neighborhood as a young child. He moved from a Catholic school to a public school in Landerstown during middle school: “We decided just to wait and keep me in Catholic school until fourth grade and then I switched over” (Interview #2, 10/13/15). When I asked Jon about Catholic school, he said with a strong dose of sarcasm, “Oh, it was fannnnnnntastic. So, I didn’t have a lot of friends at first. I got to know the kids in my class and I guess that’s how I got into the quote unquote cool kids” (Interview #2, 10/13/15). Jon moved to Landerstown at age seven, after his parents divorced:

I lived [in a neighboring community] and then my parents got divorced and then we moved to Landerstown and then I lived over in that house from age seven to 12 and then I moved to a new house, and now I'm here. (Interview #2, 10/13/15)

At the time of this writing, Jon lived with his mother and stepfather, whom he considered (and called) his father³¹.

Music

During fourth grade, Jon joined choir for the first time and described the circumstances surrounding this as quite random: "It wasn't really a big thing. I remember getting a form in fourth grade to be like, 'if you want to sign up for chorus.' And... I was like, 'yeah, I'd love to sign up.' And, I just started going" (Interview #1, 10/12/15). This seemed to begin a seismic shift for Jon, as he became less interested in sports and more interested in the arts: "I stopped [playing softball] freshman year, because I got really heavy into theatre, and then I started doing the musicals, so that interferes. Plus it was just too much. I just wasn't feeling it anymore" (Interview #1, 10/12/15).

Middle School

"It was a weird time": Coming out, phase one. Jon first came out as a lesbian at school at age 12, and this was not received well by everyone at school:

I got bullied because I came out pretty early. I came out when I was 12 years old, so in middle school I got bullied—not bullied for it—but definitely there was *gossip* about it and people would ask me about it like I was a science experiment. (Interview #2, 10/13/15)

This disclosure made the parents of some of Jon's classmates uncomfortable:

³¹ For the remainder of this document, when I refer to Jon's "dad," "father," or "parents," I am referring to (or including) his stepfather.

When it happened a lot of my friends' parents were like "I don't know if I'm comfortable with him sleeping over anymore." And it became this big thing and my parents started to get angry at me when I came out to them and they found out that people knew. [*imitating parents*] "No one's going to want to be friends with you anymore" and [*exasperated sigh*] "everyone's going to think that you're trying to *rape* them" and all these horrible things. (Interview #3, 11/16/15)

Though Jon's parents initially had concerns, he found support from several adult mentors, including a counselor at a YMCA day camp that he attended and a history teacher at his middle school:

Jon: I came out at school fall of sixth grade; I told my parents spring of sixth grade. And they were *not* having it. They were like "you have no idea what you're talking about. You're wrong. You're not right, you're wrong. Talk to us in like ten years when you're out of college."

Joshua: Did they literally say that?

Jon: Yeah. It was a lot... I remember I was at camp one time, and some girl... asked me about it in front of everyone at camp and I freaked out. "No... kidding!" I cried. I walked out and the counselor brought me outside and was like, "don't worry about it." And was like "If you are, it's OK," and all of this stuff. It was a cool experience. (...) And the same thing happened in eighth grade with my history teacher... kids were talking about it in the hallways and she saw me get heated. And she said, "Look, don't stoop to that level. You're above that. Tell me what's going on." And of course I lied and told her they were rumors, but she said "Yeah, but if they aren't, just know that's OK." So I really think that shaped my perspective on loving myself. (Interview #3, 11/16/15)

The fact that Jon was able to publically disclose his lesbian identity in middle school was quite surprising to me. Though, as he admitted, this “coming out” process was rife with fits and starts:

Other kids, they would just ask me about it and that kind of—it took a year or two—by the time I got to the end of junior high, I was still back and forth about it. People would be like, “Oh, I heard that you’re gay or you’re bisexual” and I’d be like, “No! Not at all.” And I denied it for the longest time even though I openly had girlfriends. There was no rhyme or reason to what I was doing. It was a weird time. (Interview #2, 10/13/15)

Though other students spoke openly about Jon’s sexuality, to administrators and most teachers, it remained “unspoken” (Interview #2, 10/13/15).

“You put kids where they fit”: Middle school choir. In middle school choir, Jon’s choir teacher did not openly discuss his sexuality, but he did make vocal accommodations that helped Jon feel at ease as he navigated his gender identity in the middle school choir classroom:

I had a really great choir director in middle school, and so he gave me parts that went with my voice. I was an alto, I guess, all through middle school. And I did the [pause] middle school musicals (...) [My middle school choir teacher would] give me male roles. Not “male roles,” but roles that had lower vocal parts because he knew that I could sing—I just couldn’t sing high. I mean, now I could probably sing alto because now I’m a trained musician and I know how to work with my voice. (...) I always felt comfortable in my voice, you know? I was never scared of the fact or embarrassed about the fact that my voice was lower. (Interview #1, 10/12/15)

Jon’s middle school choir teacher made a big impression on him as a young vocalist:

Joshua: So was that a conversation that you... had with him [about singing lower vocal parts] or was it just he=

Jon: =Yeah, so he just figured it out, you know. You put kids where they fit, and I was lucky that he did that. (Interview #1, 10/12/15)

Though Jon received support from choral teachers throughout middle and high school, his vocal habits later would cause damage to his vocal folds, which will be discussed later in this chapter. For this, he does not blame his choral teachers, but rather remains grateful for the area in which he grew up. Jon returned to words like “fortunate” and “lucky” many times during our conversations. He remained grateful for the many people in the Landerstown school district that supported his gender journey, both in and out of the music classroom. He said,

The fact that I live in [Eastern state] really, you know, I don’t live in the South. I’m sure this would NOT be the case if I lived somewhere else. So that’s why I’m staying north for college. Yeah, I’ve really lucked out, you know? (Interview #1, 10/12/15)

Jon eventually realized that his ‘otherness’ was not due to homosexuality, but gender, and took steps to transition at Landerstown High School.

Transitioning at School

Transition Plan

Jon said that he began to transition at the “end of sophomore year... or, I didn’t start transitioning until sophomore year. I’d probably say I was there probably junior year and then this year [2015-16] was the first year that I finally had my teachers calling me ‘Jon’” (Interview #1, 10/12/15). Mr. Mullins noted:

Junior year I found out over the summer he wanted everyone to call him Jon, so OK, Jon was it... but not teachers. We still didn’t know. So when [our choreographer] and I got ready for the musical, we called him in and were like “ok, so we need to know if you’re comfortable having this conversation because all the kids are calling you Jon. What

would you like us to do? And, let's think about casting for the show. What are you going to do?" Then he had the conversation with us that Jon [was the] preferred name, male pronouns, and "I'll be auditioning for a male role." "Ok, great... as long as we know!" (Mullins, interview, 10/13/15)

Jon had strong support from the administration and counselors at LHS.

One of our counselors at the school [Ms. Martinez], I talked to her a lot... So when my parents got angry and stuff happened she would call me down and be like, "Look, here's what we're going to do. We have an action in place. Don't worry about your parents. We're taking care of it." And anytime there was anything with the school, the school was on my side and not my parents' side, because [*nervous chuckle*] my parents—my mom called our principal last year and was like, "you can't let teachers call my child by blah blah [Jon]." And the principal was basically like, "Look, my teachers are going to call your child whatever your child wants to be called." And the way my principal explained it to my mom was, "It's the same thing as a kid going in on the first day of school the teacher calling them Matthew and the kid saying 'I like to be called Matt.' You can't tell me that my teachers can't do that with your child." And so my parents did *not* like that answer. [*chuckles*] So that's why they had the meeting this August because there was so much butting heads and so much anger last year that they just needed to make sure everything was smooth. (Interview #1, 10/12/15)

A meeting of the minds. The influential meeting to which Jon referred was held in August 2015 and involved Jon, his parents, the principal, and Ms. Martinez (the LHS student assistance coordinator/anti-bullying specialist). After this meeting, which occurred just before Jon's senior year, everyone at LHS, including faculty, was encouraged to use male pronouns and

the name “Jon” at school. This was a pivotal event in Jon’s transition at school as in this meeting his parents and adults at school decided to move forward with his transition—together. As suggested above, one of the remarkable parts about Jon’s transition was the immediate and unwavering support of the LHS administration. Even at times when his parents were struggling with his transition, school staff acted as a liaison between Jon and his family members.

Jon: Ms. Martinez, the guidance counselor, she found a way in which we could mediate and make things happy with my parents and also with me. Because teachers started to ask Ms. Martinez and administration because they would hear in class my classmates call me Jon or say “he” or someone would be referring to me and they called me “he,” and teachers were just confused, because they weren’t told anything, but they didn’t want to ask me about it and make me uncomfortable, so they’d go to Ms. Martinez and be like, “Hey, I just wanted to ask because I didn’t want to make him feel uncomfortable.”

Joshua: That’s great. It sounds like things have gone pretty smoothly.

Jon: Yeah [*somewhat tentatively*] they have. I mean, everyone has always been on board.

(Interview #1, 10/12/15)

Ms. Martinez was an extremely influential figure in Jon’s coming out process at Landerstown High School. She spoke about Jon’s transition at school and referenced how charming and well liked he was at LHS, which provided important context:

Jon being who he is, everybody knows him. So then I had to have conversations with administration to say, “What policies do we have? How do we support him through this?”

It was kind of interesting because he started to use the male name in the theatre department hoping that it was just going to stay contained to the theatre department and it didn’t, [it] sort of started to leak. So we needed to help him gain control (...) We met

over the summer because Jon made it clear to me that in September of 2015 he wanted to come back to school and he just wanted everybody to know: he was going to be addressed as Jon, every teacher, every student from top to bottom to know. So with administration, we said “Ok, you have parents.” I had some inside information from Jon regarding their progress in this. So we wanted to meet. So we had a meeting with mom and dad and Jon and said, “Ok, we have to—you let us know. Is it that face-to-face we may use Jon but then if it’s an e-mail...? How are we going to do this? If he wins student of the month, is it on the website? All these pieces of things.” Dad said, “Listen, if it’s Jon it’s Jon *everywhere*. We’re not going to do that. We’re not going to have it be Jon [in] this area and not in that area.” (...) We just want[ed] to do this well for everybody involved. They’ve been great about that. So then I crafted an e-mail that went to the entire staff letting them know that, yes, this is how we’re going to go forward then of course Jon understands that this is a process for us as well and there may be days that a teacher may forget or—all of those pieces. And then I opened it if there was anybody who felt that they needed to speak to me in private about this, please know that they could because you have an entire building of staff. (Martinez, Interview, 11/16/15)

The school’s response. This meeting and similar events as well as everything that I heard from Jon, Ms. Perkins, Mr. Mullins, and Ms. Martinez led me to believe that LHS’s response to Jon’s transition was well thought out, considerate, respectful, and deliberate:

The school community? Oh, the choir kids are great—everyone’s always been great about it. The school, too. There’s been two or three incidences [of bullying or harassment], but I have to say, this has to be the best school community out there. And that’s why I’m not really a good example of trans kids going through bullying... I don’t

know if it's just people are afraid to bully me. [*chuckles*] I don't know what it is but I've really just been blessed with the fact that the teachers here and principals and the kids are just all *so cool*. (Interview #1, 10/12/15)

Ms. Perkins, Jon's drama teacher and mentor, suggested that things had not always been so easy for Jon at LHS, and that other trans students were following in his footsteps—one of whom “came out” to Ms. Perkins:

I think that Jon gets to be Jon here and that people are not going to give him shit over that. And that there are far fewer kids throwing around the word “faggot” or using “gay” as an insult [than there used to be in this school]. But they do still do it. I think they're smarter; those of them who do still do it, are just more careful about when and whom they do it in front of. But it's not like we made it go away completely. And there are other types of bullying that still go on. And there are other things that are still going on and are becoming more complicated; like I have a kid who came out to me on the last day of school last year as gender fluid. And he's *really struggling* with that. But because that's brand new in the zeitgeist, *nobody* knows how to talk about that or deal with that, and if he were to come to school going back and forth between genders everyday, I *know* that people here would talk about that and take issue with it and whatnot in the beginning. And we'd have to go through a period of adjustment as people become more aware. They're ignorant, they don't understand, and we fear what we don't understand. (Perkins, Interview, 10/13/15)

In addition to Jon's high school principal, an “out” lesbian, Ms. Perkins and Mr. Mullins had always been supportive of Jon:

I really lucked out with the fact that all my teachers this year are teachers I've had in the past except for one new guy who's from Turkey; he's a problem. But besides that it's all teachers that I've had before so my English teacher that I have this year for AP English, he was my honors English teacher sophomore year, so I thought it was going to be the easiest person to navigate through it, but actually he had the hardest time with getting used to calling me Jon. (...) But people like my biology teacher who is two years out of college and my calculus teacher who is two years out of college, they're all like, "oh yeah!" Because this generation is *very* different from the old generation. I find that my older teachers have more trouble with it than my younger teachers. (Interview #2, 10/13/15)

When I followed up several months later about interactions with his English teacher, Jon said:

He was kind of weird at first but now he's fine. Now it's February. Everyone's in the swing of things. I don't really have any issues with any of my teachers. They're all just so supportive. I mean the jocks are the only people I have issues with and even some of them—because I'm friends with some of them—and this one kid Cain who was talking to one of my best friends Sallie, he was like, "I don't understand why people make it their issue. They act like they lose sleep over it at night of what Jon wants to be called. Just call him Jon. What does it have to do with your life what he wants to be called?" So, that was pretty nice to hear that he said that. But there's going to be assholes everywhere. That's something that if I don't get used to now, I don't know *what* I'm going to expect in college. (Interview #5, 2/5/16)

Safe Space

Jon was able to express his gender identity in the context of the choir and drama

programs at LHS. A supportive, inclusive environment had been created in the performing arts wing of the school: the E-wing. Mr. Mullins used the image of the “island of broken toys”³² to describe this area of the school:

Mr. Mullins: ...that’s what I can say about all the kids in the E-wing down here. Across the board, they really are one big dysfunctional family. It’s lovely. But, they will look out for each other outside of the E-hall as well. And really keep an eye on each other, especially the underclassmen or kids that they’re worried about—so they’re really good about taking care of each other.

Joshua: And the E hall includes?

Mr. Mullins: The band, theatre, and chorus. I call it the island of broken toys a lot of the time, and it’s a fun place to be. I wouldn’t have it any other way. *[laughs]* (Mullins, Interview, 10/13/15)

To Jon, the E-wing signified a place where he felt recognized and seen as his true self:

I think when I’m back here [in the E-wing] in the department and I’m doing rehearsal or I’m in choir, people are calling me Jon and saying “he” because that’s what they view me as. That’s who I am to them. But when it’s out in the rest of the school, people are calling me Jon because it’s what they know I want to be called. So it’s the difference between someone actually seeing me as male and someone just doing what is making me happy. And that definitely has an effect on how I carry myself, because I’m a lot more

³² To clarify this sentiment and this terminology, Mr. Mullins clarified: “Working with these kids is tough. They come to us literally broken, and sometimes teaching music is the last thing we need to do. They’re looking for an escape, or structure, or a safe space, or somewhere to truly be themselves. We become their counselor, parent, confidante, therapist, punching bag, role model, etc. Lovely—when I’m just supposed to teach these kids to sing without taking all that other stuff into account, or worse yet, pretending that all that brokenness doesn’t exist or affect these kids on a daily basis.” (Mullins, personal communication, 2/13/16)

comfortable and I'm a lot more confident when I'm back here because you're not judged.
(Interview #2, 10/13/15)

Role models. Of LHS teachers who were particularly influential, Jon said:

Jon: Mr. Mullins absolutely—and my drama director Ms. Perkins. I mean, my journey with coming out and being who I am, they were always there when my parents weren't supportive or when there was a bad day. I always knew that I could come here [E-wing]. It was a safe place to be.

Joshua: Yeah... and how did you know that?

Jon: They were just always there. Both of them have always been open books with me. They've always been influential in letting me be who I want to be and supporting me and showing me that I can still be like a normal kid in the department and not letting who I am affect that, I think it's really changed how I think of myself. (Interview #1, 10/12/15)

At the time of data collection, Jon was heavily involved with both the choral and drama programs at LHS.

Mr. Mullins. From the first time I observed an interaction between Mr. Mullins and his students, several things became clear: that he thrived interacting with this age group, that the students felt very comfortable with him, and that he was an outspoken advocate for LGBT students, as exemplified in the following fieldnote.

Thirteen desks are in a semicircle around the piano, in front of the Wenger risers. In these desks sit the thirteen young people in the LHS select choir. As they begin their listening lesson, the student teacher uses the term “influence” to prepare the class for the guided listening of “El Hambo” by Jaakko Mäntyjärvi. The student teacher asks, “Who is a good influence?”

Jon immediately pipes up, “Peter Mullins!” The entire class bursts into laughter. Jon is funny and confident—not afraid to speak up. (Fieldnote, 10/14/15) Mr. Mullins wrote:

I’ve always been extremely outspoken with issues and causes near and dear to my heart.

The theater teacher at LHS started the GSA. A year or two into it, she asked if I’d be interested in serving as the co-advisor. The more I interacted with our LGBTQ students, the more vocal I got. I was also fully tenured and established in the district with a very good teaching reputation, so it became easier to advocate for these students. I remember all too well what high school was like for me, a closeted gay kid in a small-town Catholic school. It was important for me to help these kids have a better experience than I did.

(Mullins, personal communication, 2/13/16)

Jon mentioned that Mr. Mullins seemed to be a step ahead of him in terms of gender discoveries and disclosures:

He [Mr. Mullins] would say, when he would make comments I’d be like [*makes anxious noise*] because I wouldn’t be comfortable with it. But since I know him, he’s not just a teacher calling me out in a class. He’s a mentor and a friend... It was similar to a friend making a comment in a group of people: it made me uncomfortable only because I wasn’t there yet, but I almost liked the uncomfortableness because it got me used to... it was going to be uncomfortable at first regardless, so it was nice to have it be uncomfortable in this environment [choir] rather than in the entire school. (Interview #1, 10/12/15)

Part of this “uncomfortableness” involved an encouragement for Jon to wear traditionally “male” concert attire, even before he “came out” to Mr. Mullins as trans:

I’ve worn a suit for choir performances since sophomore year. So my freshman year I dressed in black dress pants and a [*with quote fingers*] “blouse.” Oh, I didn’t wear a suit

the fall of my sophomore year. He put the option on the table for me even though he didn't really "know" yet. It's weird—he made me a tenor before I knew and he put the suit option on the table before I knew. It's always been weird, he's got this little intuition... and has always given me a little push. *[chuckling]* He's never cared. He's like, "yeah, wear a suit, what do I care?" (Interview #1, 10/12/15)

Although this happened, Mr. Mullins initially was skeptical. As he said:

Two years ago, it was—well forever it had always been boys and girls. Boys dress code, girls dress code and two years ago a student asked me, a female student who identifies as female, is female said, "Can I wear a suit?" And without thinking, I said, "No, you can't." And I just dropped and went on to something else and I sat down after the period... "Why the hell did I say no?!" That doesn't make sense. So the next day I had another section of Chorus. Before it could even be asked, I corrected myself and said, choose either or. Doesn't matter to me. And then the day after that, with that same student, I said, "I misspoke after I thought about this and realized my decision made no sense, yes if you want to wear the boys attire, that's fine." (Mullins, Interview, 10/13/15)

As I listened to Mr. Mullins describe his actions to make Jon feel comfortable even before his formal gender disclosure, I wondered if there was more to the story:

Joshua: Maybe somewhere in the back of your mind you were kind of "laying down the crumbs"?

Peter: Yeah, I think in my head I probably was—since sophomore year, but I was like, "Ok, I'm going to make this easier, maybe?" *[laughs]* I didn't want to have him come up and ask me, "Can I wear the boys stuff?" *[imitating himself]* "It's open: whatever you're going to wear [is OK]."

Joshua: What would you say is the mentality of your colleagues in this area, in this state, in this part of the country about this issue? Are people on board or are they more clueless?

Peter: I think at first they are clueless because talking to my colleagues when I first—going back to All State last year: [I said] “Is this even an issue? Why do we have to discuss it? If it’s not an issue for you yet, it will be. It’s not a matter of *if*, it’s a matter of *when*. So yes, we should be having these discussions and laying the groundwork *now* so that when you do have a trans student, you’re not wondering what the hell you’re supposed to do.” As a state [music education] organization, we need to be leading the way here. And as choir directors for Christ’s sake we need to be leading the way—of any other department of any other subject area it’d be the performing arts people who are first in line to make these changes and to be proactive and be an open and inclusive classroom. (Mullins, Interview, 10/12/15)

In terms of adjustments in his teaching, Mr. Mullins tried to be sensitive to “gendered” language in class before Jon officially disclosed his trans gender identity. Jon said:

Last year [*pause*] I got in the choir as a tenor, so in the beginning of the year when [Mr. Mullins would] want the basses and the tenors to sing, he’d be like “ok, men” and then he’d correct himself and say, “I meant bass and tenor.” But then once my name changed, then he could go back to doing that, so there wasn’t really any adjustment. If anything the adjustment was in the beginning of the year of him getting used to there being a “girl” in the tenor section, so that didn’t even last long. And all of the select choir kids are some of my best friends, so they all called me Jon. And that’s why he [Mr. Mullins] said, “I need

to know what's going on," because he didn't know what to say in class. (Interview #1, 10/12/15)

As mentioned previously, Mr. Mullins left Landerstown High School for another job between my third and fourth interviews with Jon. The transition plan in terms of informing the new teacher (who knew Jon) was already in place.

The new guy that took over [at the middle school] is actually coming up to the high school. I like the new guy that took over. I worked with him on a show over the summer. So, he was our music director for the summer show that we did, so—you know, I'm excited about him coming up, because he knows me, so I don't have to worry about having to explain anything or worrying about there being confusion. (Interview #1, 10/12/15)

At the time of data collection, Jon was singing in the select choir and playing a leading role in the fall drama. Within the context of the LHS choral and drama programs, Jon was able to explore his singing voice and how his voice played a role in his gender identity.

“This Doesn't Happen to Someone From Landerstown”

Coming Out: Phase Two

As previously discussed in this dissertation, the border between (and conflation of) sexuality and gender often is fuzzy and unclear (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009). Discussing the relationship between these two constructs illuminated an aspect of Jon's worldview:

Jon: I mean, I guess technically I've been trans the whole time, and that [being a lesbian] was something easier to come out with. And that gave me an answer of why I was feeling the way I was feeling. And then when that didn't satisfy what I was feeling and I had to look a little deeper. It's a journey. It's not something that you can figure out over night, in

the same sense that no one can accept it over night and in the same sense that you can't just make it happen over night, you have to... within yourself—

Joshua: So here's a really esoteric question: What do you see as the overlaps (or not) between your gender identity and your sexuality? Are they related?

Jon: I mean, I guess I want to say they are, because, of course being with a woman makes you feel like a man, of course that's the stereotype. So in that sense, they do overlap, but I still play the same role in a relationship that I did before. I'm so sensitive. It's horrible.

I'm still—*[long pause]* I'm a hopeless romantic. None of that has changed, and I guess that's why I seem wimpy sometimes and my friends joke that I'm going to make the full circle and become a gay man. *[both laugh]* And I'm like, “uh, thanks guys” *[chuckling]*

But, they obviously intertwine. One connects to the other; even though gender and sexuality are two different things, it's naïve to think that my sexuality didn't have an effect on what I was going through with my gender and vice versa. (Interview #2,

10/13/15)

Jon and I spoke about his gender realizations: when he realized that he was not a lesbian, but a trans guy:

I came out to my parents as being gay when I was *[pause]* 12 or 13. *[pause]* And they weren't about it. They thought, “you don't know what you're talking about, you're too young, you don't know, blah blah blah.” *[pause]* So that was kind of in waves: it worked its way through. Then I guess probably eighth grade/freshman year they kind of came around and then the end of my freshman year, I started dressing more masculine and I started just thinking about, “Crap: this could be something that I'm feeling.” But I didn't know. And at first I *didn't* think I was transgender, I was like, “I'm not comfortable being

a girl, but I don't know if I could be a guy... I don't know if I feel that way." So, I guess the summer going into my sophomore year, I was really trying to pave my way through that, and I cut my hair [in] October of my sophomore year (I donated it, so my mom liked that. It was longer, though. It was shaggy. And then I slowly moved it up). *[both laugh]* I was never into girly things for the most part, I was a tomboy when I was little, but I wasn't a tomboy when I was 12 or 13. I was very girly. I hung out with the *[using air quotes]* "popular kids." I had "boyfriends." And I think that's why it was such a shock, because it happened and it happened all at once. When I figured it out my sophomore year I was like, *[speaking very quickly and resolutely]* "This is what I want and I want to do it now... do it *right now*." And that wasn't possible. So I started to dress more masculine my sophomore year, and summer going into my junior year I went to Scotland for the Fringe Festival: we did a show in Edinburgh. And at the time no one called me Jon yet. I was with a group of 13 kids that all knew me, and we were there for two weeks and I was like, "You know what? Let's test it out. It's a safe environment." So for those two weeks I had them all call me "Jon" and "he and him" just to see how it made me feel. And I liked it and [I] guess, again, I'm very fortunate that I had the opportunity to be able to test it out in that way. [Most people] can't just fly away and go somewhere and do something like that. So, I liked it and it worked for me. So then my junior year, all my friends started calling me Jon. My parents weren't really having it. *[nervous chuckle]* They would kick my friends out if they'd accidentally slip and call me Jon in my house. Now they're really coming around. I don't really *[pause]* know if there was a definite moment. I remember my parents were out one day and I put on my dad's clothes and I remember feeling different. And I remember, I was like "Oh, wow! This is *nice*." And it

wasn't that I felt more and more like a boy, it was that I felt more and more less like a girl. *[long pause]* It felt *so weird* and it felt so horrible to put on female clothing or look at myself in the mirror. It didn't make sense to me, and I think that's why it took me awhile to really accept it, because... I don't know if I was in denial, but it was more so just the fact of like, "this can't be happening to me. This doesn't happen to someone from Landerstown." (Interview #1, 10/12/15)

As described above, Jon's realization about his gender and sexuality sparked disharmony in his family. His parents have become much more supportive and understanding over time, but there were times when things were quite difficult in the Kade family:

My parents are the only thing that really was an issue, which, you know, sucked because literally *everyone* was on board. My friends, my parents' friends, my teachers, my coaches, my friends' parents: *everyone* was on board except for the two most important people in my life. And they've become more comfortable with it because... With my dad being the main developer in the town, everyone knows my last name. Everyone knows who we are, so anything that happens with me is reflected. I can't go anywhere without someone saying my name or knowing who I am. So, when they saw that the town was kind of in support of me and everyone in our life was supportive of it, they were kind of like, "Well, alright, we really have no option." *[laughing]* Not that that was the only reason, but it kind of made it seem OK for them. (Interview #1, 10/12/15)

Family Matters

After the meeting at LHS discussed above, Jon and his peers began using his name and pronouns at school, and his mentors at LHS were ready to move ahead with this transition on a

larger scale at school. Unfortunately, Jon's parents were not as comfortable with this decision, especially when it involved the name "Jon" appearing in public venues:

We had some issues with my parents last year being upset that when the fall drama cast list was posted, it said Jon Kade, and my mom saw that it said Jon Kade. And it was online, so it was publicly out there—well, it was on a private Facebook group, but you know. It wasn't like our drama club page. *[pause]* So, she got really upset. She freaked out. It was tough with them for awhile, but they finally came around, but it was tough. So the point of having the meeting was... the administration didn't want that to happen again, so they wanted to sit down and make sure everything we were putting into play and all the guidelines we were setting were also OK with my parents. (...) For a while when I started dressing like that my parents would throw out terms like "Oh, she's butch" or "She's a dyke." And for awhile that was kind of what my parents thought, so when I came out to them [as trans], I guess about a year ago now, they were just shocked, but that didn't make sense to me because to me, it was *obvious* that this was the next... this was what was happening. But to them they didn't see it at all. (Interview #1, 10/12/15)

In terms of using his name and pronouns, Jon reported that his family was coming around:

My parents are *trying* to call me Jon. My sister does it, so whenever we're around my sister it's more so that they'll throw in a "he" here and there or they'll throw in "Jon" here and there. I think at this point it's just a matter of repetition or remembering to say it, which, you know, I went through that with all of my friends, too. It took awhile. It's not something that happens overnight, and I know that, so they're really getting there. I really can't complain about that aspect. (Interview #1, 10/12/15)

Ms. Perkins, the LHS drama teacher and a mentor to Jon, described how things between Jon and his parents had improved significantly:

Because of where [Jon] is in his journey, they are OK with his teachers calling him Jon and writing his name as Jon. Which was a *huge* shift from where we were last November. A *huge* shift, and that's only ten months. So to me, that's amazing—and really positive. Those ten months were often times really difficult... [but] to me that's super amazing, that *that* much changed has happened over the course of ten months, and I think that's a great testament to his parents' love for him. (Perkins, Interview, 10/13/15)

“Of Course it Defines Your Gender”: Voice Matters

Head Voice

Jon described his vocal development:

I was never a strong singer in middle school. I was always kind of in the back, because I couldn't get my voice—I didn't understand what my head voice was. That was a struggle for a while! (Interview #1, 10/12/15)

Jon described how he worked independently on his head voice when he was having vocal troubles earlier in high school:

When I started I couldn't sing anything on an “ah” in my head voice or on an “oh.” Everything was “oo's” and “ee's” ... it was the only thing I could get out and then I'd take our [choir] music from the year before and I'd actually learn it and I'd start to sing it on “ee's” and “oo's” and then I got my voice to be able to push it farther back, because it's easier to sing more nasal. I figured out how to do more vowels and I started to do words and then sophomore year I lost it because I didn't use it. (Interview #4, 11/17/15)

I was interested to learn more about this process of Jon working on his vocal technique the summer before his sophomore year. To clarify the statement above, Jon said: “[I] realized that it wasn’t as simple as just finding it [head voice] and then being able to sing with it. So, everything was just so far pushed back, which is why I started singing things on an “oo” and on an “ee” vowel, because they’re so forward” (Interview #5, 2/5/16). A friend helped Jon find his head voice.

I was with one of my friends and I was like, “How do I do this? How do you go about this?” She’s like, “just yawn.” I was like, “what do you mean just yawn?” So I sat there and she’s like “that feeling—she was trying to explain your soft palette rising. But I didn’t understand any of that. So I just sat there and I tried to sing through a yawn for hours. And finally I did it, she was like, “That was it! You did it!” I don’t know, *[laughs]* I can’t really explain it. (...) And then from there, [I] trained it, and now I’m obviously re-training it because I use it in a different part of my voice and having to learn to how to use my falsetto in my lower range not only because it’s for having to sing lighter, but when I’m singing with other tenors who can’t belt certain notes, which means I can’t belt those notes or else we can’t blend. Because notes that I’d usually not be able to have in my falsetto, needed to be there. [I was trying to] find that balance—a sound that is OK to sing in a choir almost *[chuckling]*—a sound that I’m not embarrassed to bring out. So I just played around with it, you know. *[pause]* (...) I didn’t have a game plan for it. I loved to sing, so when I finally found my head voice and being able to sing, then I went crazy about it and was like “yeah!” And it’s all I did all summer. (Interview #5, 2/5/16)

Jon and Mr. Mullins both discussed the fact that Jon has always had a naturally low voice.

I've always sung alto. [*exasperated sound*] The chips just really fell in place and worked out for me. Me becoming a tenor sophomore year *by chance* really just—[*pause, inhale*] I don't know, it was just because I've always had a low voice and I don't know if it has anything to do with me being trans or—I don't know if it's because you mimic how your parents speak. But my sister has a very high-pitched voice, [*under his breath*] so that doesn't make sense. Really just, again, I lucked out. (Interview #1, 10/12/15)

Voice Part Assignments

In speaking about voice part assignments, Jon once again voiced his positive feelings about the Landerstown school district and about the choral teachers specifically. He repeatedly said things like, “I lucked out” when describing his experiences at school. Two major events in Jon's vocal development at Landerstown High School involved Mr. Mullins, who foresaw Jon's gender journey and helped him navigate his voice and gender in the choral environment. This change occurred gradually and involved Jon advocating for himself. During Jon's freshman year in choir, he was assigned to sing alto but sang tenor on certain pieces or on sections of pieces.

Jon: I didn't sing at *all* my freshman year until spring. When I was in middle school, I didn't really sing a lot—I sang parts that I could sing and then the rest [*mischievously*] I just didn't sing. I didn't know what my head voice was. So I came to the high school and I tried: I gave it the good college try. When we would come back in sectionals I just wouldn't sing. But if we had individual assessments, I would sing, but I would just belt it all. And [Mr. Mullins was] like, “You need to find your head voice, you need to find your head voice.” And then finally I figured out what my head voice was, I guess, in March of

my freshman year. And then we did all of our spring pop music, and I got to actually belt and sing. And everyone was like, “You can sing? That’s weird.” So then that summer I spent my entire summer before going into sophomore year developing my head voice. I told myself, “I’m going to go in sophomore year and I’m going to be great. I’m excited.” Because I really wanted to be in select. I would watch them: we would have dress rehearsals and after the regular choir was done, select would go. But we would sit in the audience and watch select. And we would say, *[whispering]* “Oh my God, we’re going to be up there one day!” So all summer going into sophomore year I developed my head voice and then I got into first day of choir sophomore year Mullins says, “I want to try you out on tenor.” And I was like, “what?”

Joshua: No prompting?

Jon: Well, the only thing that I think might have prompted it was that I *could* sing tenor. And, when I was in the fall drama my freshman year, [Mr. Mullins’] (for lack of a better word) minions were like, “Oh you can sing tenor?” I was like, “yeah.” They were like, “Here, prove it.” They gave me “We Three Kings,” that Christmas song, and sang it on tenor and they were like, “What?! That’s crazy.” And, he didn’t have a lot of tenors so he was like, “Great. Let’s try it out.” (...) So, sophomore year I sang some songs on tenor and some songs on alto. It was a mix. It was like, if there was a song where it was just men, it wasn’t bass/tenor, if it wasn’t SATB then I would sing alto. But that only worked for the first half of the year then I just started ignoring what he said and I would just sing all the guys parts... So by spring of my sophomore year I was just singing all the tenor, all the guy parts. If he tried to get me to sing an alto part I would just tell him no. (Interview #4, 11/17/15)

It is interesting that Jon classified the tenor parts as “guy parts.” As suggested above, Mr. Mullins was open to Jon singing tenor from the beginning of his time at LHS:

Freshman year, Jon was Jane, and she [*sic*] was in chorus, and singing tenor even her [*sic*] freshman year, because there was really no head voice, and had the lower voice, so I was like, “Ok, sing tenor,” and I think that’s what happened over at the middle school as well. So I was like, “Yeah, you can continue on the same voice part, that’s fine and dandy.” (...) At that point sophomore year, you’d easily mistake Jane for a boy. So, last year was junior year. So we didn’t really talk about that at all. (Mullins, Interview, 10/13/15)

Jon’s ability to sing “guy parts” in choir is part of his performance and discursive construction of male gender. Jon was quite forceful in making his desire to sing tenor explicit. Although Mr. Mullins assigned him to alto on several pieces, he would sometimes sing tenor.

He came back one day [to the practice room hallway where sectionals take place] and he was like, “Why are you...[in the tenor room]?” I was in the tenor practice room, the altos practiced in the [other room]. He’s like, “Why are you in here?” And I was like, [*mischievously*] “You know, I was going to sing that song on alto, but I’m already in here with Tim and we’re already working on the other pieces, why move? That’s such a waste of time.” He’s like “fine.” That was it. Then from that day on [I sang tenor]. (Interview #4, 11/17/15)

When prompted, Jon identified close ties between his vocal and gender identities.

Vocal Range, Gender Identity, and Vocal Health

As mentioned above, Jon always had a naturally low speaking voice. I asked Mr. Mullins about the factors that led him to allow Jon to sing tenor, even before he began his formal transition:

I did the voice testing that I do with all the kids, and it [Jon's voice] gets to A4, sometimes B-flat, right around there, then it drops off right around E3. Yeah, about E3, so it's not as low as most of the tenors, but I've also had the discussion that when it gets low you just stop singing, you're not going to *do* anything there—you just stop. It's what the basses do—my high school boy basses don't really get there either and actually the boy basses don't have the upper end, so you just either falsetto it or you stop singing. So, I tell him to be cognizant of that and not push one way or the other, but at this point, given that there is vocal damage, I don't know: that has a potential to get him smaller and smaller range-wise as the nodes get worse until something's done to fix that. (Mullins, Interview, 10/12/15)

As can be inferred from Mr. Mullins' comment, Jon spent a long time purposely lowering his voice in an attempt to be “stealth” in public, which caused vocal health issues.

I used to not speak this high but I have nodes now, and I got nodes because when I came out to pass in public I pushed my voice really deep, which, you know, obviously caused friction in my vocal folds and now I have nodes. So now I have to make sure that I'm keeping my voice higher, which is hard, because it's harder to pass in public or not look like a 12 year old boy when my voice is this high and I obviously don't have facial hair or anything... I have a baby face. (Interview #1, 10/12/15)

Mr. Mullins was helpful in getting Jon to see an ENT who eventually helped diagnose said vocal issues.

What happened was, last year during musical, and not even during musical last year during any time we'd get to a concert week I'd lose my voice constantly. And Mr. Mullins was like, "You need to go to an ENT. It needs to stop." (...) I had a yeast infection *on* my vocal folds. (...) So I went to a vocal ENT and they did the scan where they put the microphone and the video camera down your throat, which is pretty cool. (...) So, they found a node, it's not huge, you can't see it, but the bottom my vocal folds just do not close. They get down here [*indicating with fingers*] and then they just stop closing because obviously I have a node. So I got put on medication and I had to start going to therapy so I'm seeing a vocal therapist at [local university] (...) So I go there every week or every other week and my vocal doctor was the one who first mentioned I needed to kick up my voice like an octave and needed to stop speaking the way that I was. So we're working on that. He works with me on ways that I can sing the low notes that I need to sing without constantly damaging my voice. I drop out when we get to low parts now. Low parts that I can hit or that I like to *prove* that I can hit, I step back and I'm like, "No, I can't do it," because it's bad for me. (Interview #1, 10/12/15)

If and when Jon starts taking testosterone ("T"), it will aid in improving his vocal health:

Jon: And he [the voice doctor] said when I start taking T it will help because [the hormones will] expand [the vocal folds]. Not much, but they'll expand a little bit, and that will help with all of the friction that's being pushed at the bottom of my vocal folds.

Joshua: Have you taken private voice? Singing lessons?

Jon: No. No never. I took vocal tech last year with M, but that's more of a solo performance class but we also studied the voice and all that. So I mean, I take my music to Dr. Endroth... he's a vocal therapist but he's like my voice teacher I guess essentially. He helps me with music and ways that I can be singing as low as I can without damaging it.

Joshua: Yeah. That's really important, 'cause=

Jon: =Once you damage them to a certain point, there's no going back. (Interview #1, 10/12/15)

Several months later, I asked Jon if had had any further follow up with Dr. Endroth.

No not really. I need to go...I'm probably going to start T in May, so that's exciting. So I have to go to a specialist. I have a doctors appointment on February 13th to go to my regular doctor and I'm going to have him give me the referral. So that's exciting! (Interview #5, 2/5/16)

During my third and fourth interviews with Jon, he was starring in the fall drama at LHS and sounded noticeably more vocally fatigued than in our first two interviews. He explained how his role in the fall drama influenced his vocal health:

I guess I wasn't really going to be able to tell until I did another show, which I'm now doing and I'm losing [my voice] again. But it's holding on. It's getting there. It's just, because I'm on stage and I'm so low in my range and *screaming* in an accent: so it'd be strenuous on anyone's voice. So that's why I'm losing it. So, I don't know if that's the nodes or if that's just me pushing my voice constantly every night. (Interview #4, 11/17/15)

I followed up with Jon several months later and asked him about how his voice held up during the dress rehearsals and performances of the fall drama:

Joshua: The last time I was here you—well, let me say that you sound vocally better now than the last time I was here—there was some concern about your voice holding up for the show.

Jon: Yeah, that was tech week, so that’s why it was in shambles [*chuckles*]. But yeah, it held up. Our middle show was pretty questionable. My voice did not hold out for the middle show, which kind of sucked because I rely heavily on my voice, obviously.

[*chuckles*] So, I mean, I’m being very careful, especially with the musical just because I am singing so much so I’m drinking *so much* water. So, yeah, my voice is doing better.

[I] still [have] little nodes but making it work as best as I can. (Interview #5, 2/5/16)

This need for Jon to sing and speak in a low voice was an indication of the way that his voice is an integral part of how he performs his gender identity. Jon reiterated the encouragement from his vocal specialist to raise the pitch of his speaking voice:

Dr. Endroth said that I need to bring up my voice an octave. So I work on it. And I’ve tried to bring it up in school and bring it up at home, but when you go out places, it’s hard. Because I already look like I’m twelve. So as much as Dr. Endroth is like, “That doesn’t define your gender: your voice doesn’t define your gender.” Of *course* it defines your gender. So, it’s hard. But I know that I need to, so I try to and it’s obviously a lot easier and helpful—beneficial... I don’t think I’d be as strong or as confident of a singer if I didn’t sing a male voice part. I really think it gives me confidence to be able to sing and to want to sing. I don’t think I’d want to sing if I was still an alto. But, you know, even just my speaking voice, I think it makes me more comfortable when I’m out

and about. Especially if I'm with a group of guys that I don't know. It's a grrrr [*growling sound*] thing. So, there's definitely a correlation and a connection. As much as there's no connection and it doesn't define who you are or define you, it's the same as how I dress or how I wear my hair. It's an appearance aspect of myself. (Interview #4, 11/17/15)

In our interviews, Jon seemed to speak naturally—pushing his voice lower now and again—in what I'd consider a fairly low range for a trans guy who has not begun hormone therapy. Jon revealed that a lower speaking voice was an important part of being *stealth* in public around “a group of guys that [he doesn't] know.” He also pointed out something significant in that he would not want to continue singing if he were still singing alto. Jon had been able to develop norms about his gender identity in the context of high school performing arts programs, meaning that he has been able to develop his voice as an actor and singer while transitioning at school. Jon's vocal health was one of the major concerns of the teachers in his state's music educators association who sponsor the All State Choir.

“He fought for me”: Motivation and All State Choir

Why Jon sings. When asked why he sang, Jon said:

[*long pause*] I had always done it. And I don't know why. I don't know why I always did choir. But I just loved it: I've always loved my teachers, and my middle school teacher, he was fantastic. Despite the fact that I couldn't sing high that didn't mean I didn't get parts. He gave me parts that I could sing. And I was grateful for it. I don't know why I stayed. I don't know why I came back sophomore year. I think it was a lot because all my friends did it. And I *loved* it. I loved it. I wished I could do it better. But I didn't do it because I was good at it. I did it because I loved it. (...) There's something about singing with an ensemble, especially select, there's something about singing with a small group

of people and in that moment, you and this exact group of people may never ever sing this song again and have this moment again with this audience and this conductor, but in that moment you all have that memory together. And I think that's such a special thing. And I'm sure on sports teams, that happens and whatever, but [in choir] you're all on the same page, literally. *[both laugh]* Especially being in All State, being in [the performing arts center]... standing up there and the acoustics are crazy and ending a piece and having that moment of silence: I love that moment of silence more than I love the entire song. It's so beautiful. And I love that I can be a part of something that's so beautiful.

(Interview #4, 11/17/15)

All State Choir. Mr. Mullins did some intense advocating when Jon wanted to audition for All State Choir. This was a significant musical experience for him. In addition to enjoying the musical aspects of All State Choir, Jon even had input about the gender delineations used on the All State form:

So, [Mr. Mullins is] on the board for All States so he does the whole thing, and he wanted me to audition for All States last year [2014-15] (for this year [2015-16]) and I was like, "Well, would I have to audition as an Alto 2? How would that work?" And he's like, "You know, let's do some things, let me talk to some people." So he went to the board and fought on my behalf, and was like, "Hey look I have a transgender student who wants to audition as a tenor" (...) It was this big thing—he fought for me. They changed the way in which they do the format of the website. Now under gender it's male, female, cis, and transgender. (...) He was telling me for Regions, "Yeah we're trying to figure out what we're going to do for regions, what do you think?" (...) I told him to do male, female, cis and transgender, because I think that covers all of it. They were talking about

doing an “other” category, but I was like, “How do you do an ‘other’ category then take all of the others and put them in a pile? You can’t do that—you’ll be stuck with 17 piles. It’s not going to work.” So, I told him that I think that covered most of it and no one would really get angry. So, that worked. But, All States, he advocated for me and I went and I auditioned and then I made it in. (Interview #2, 10/13/15)

I asked Mr. Mullins about the specifics of his advocacy.

Up until this past audition season, so last April, there was something that clearly came out in every bulletin that boys can only audition for tenor and bass parts, girls can only audition for soprano and alto parts. So, at this point, Jon was still Jane, so I went to the state and said, “Here’s the thing: I have a trans student.” His name is Jane (this is where pronouns got fun on the phone). *He* wants to audition for tenor. The legal name is Jane. What can we= *[impersonating person on the phone]* =“Well we can’t do that...” And I’m like, “Well, that’s not an acceptable answer. So I’m going to have to ask you to think about this a little bit more.” “Well I’m going to have to go to the board meeting with this.” “Well then go to the board meeting with this.” And I did get a little pushy in my first conversation because I felt a lot of resistance from the person that I was talking with and I’m like, I think my parting words were something along the lines of, “The right decision needs to be made here, because if it’s not, I’m going to be very vocal about it,” *[chuckling]* because I wasn’t going to take no for an answer. I told Jon that, and I’m not going to take no for an answer. So I was prepared to go to [state LGBTQ organization], whatever I need to do to push this, so at the next state board meeting, it was brought up and they argued about it for a while. Now this is second-hand information so it’s not, you know, I wasn’t there, but they wanted—[if there is a] “girl auditioning on voice parts who

says he's trans well then we're going to need a doctor's note or something, we need verification that this is the case." Or "The parents have to sign off on something, we have to have all this information." And finally someone said, "Call the lawyer. Call the [state] MEA [music educators association] lawyer." And that conversation happened and the lawyer was like, "You can't say no *and* while you're at it, take out the 'boys can only do this and girls can only do this' policy because if you're ever taken to court, you're going to lose, and you're going to have a lot of bad press in the process. So get rid of it right now, be done with it." And that's ultimately, once that came down from the lawyer, they were like, "Ok! I guess that's what we're doing then." So, they took that out completely. At the Region level we're not even asking for gender anymore, because there's no need. So that's completely been taken out so you can audition for whatever voice part you want. There are still concerns at the state level about vocal health and what these kids may or may not be doing to their voices. And my argument, even from the very first phone conversation was, "That's not our decision to make." We can advise based on our professional thoughts and opinions, but at the end of the day, if my trans boy wants to sing tenor, that's his decision. If I ever had a trans girl that wanted to sing soprano or alto, that's her decision. I don't get to say, "No, because of my vocal training, you need to do this." And yeah, there may be vocal health issues and we certainly have to be forward about that with the singers but at the end of the day, I don't think it's my place. It shouldn't be anybody's place other than that individual to do that. So, I guess that makes it easier—kind of. (Mullins, Interview, 10/13/15)

As evidenced by the quote above, not everyone at the state level was comfortable with the idea of having a trans student audition for the All State Choir on a voice part that matched his gender identity. Part of the concern was over logistical concerns like rooming assignments.

Well, when they finally decided that I could audition as a tenor, they were like, “Where is he going to want to sleep?” Actually it was funny; the president of the board brought it up as if it was the end of the world. She was like, *[in a character voice, imitating the president of the board]* “Oh no... but, where will he sleep?” And Mr. Mullins was like, *[matter of fact]* “Wherever he wants.” So, the way that it’s working with the school board is I’m allowed to room with the guys—my friend Tim who’s a tenor with me, we were just going to room by ourselves (...) But, the way that it works is that the school board had to get involved because of parents and stuff. They and administration said it’s fine as long as Tim and the other guys’ parents put in writing that they understand that I’m biologically female and they understand that that I’m going to be sleeping in the same room. And none of their parents care. They all know me and they’re like, “Yeah, what? Of course we don’t care.” But legally they have to get it in writing so that there’s no backlash for All State or the [school] board. (Interview #2, 10/13/15)

Although Jon’s experience in All State Choir was positive overall, there were instances in which he was publically misgendered, something that the event organizers may not have considered a major issue. For Jon, however, this misgendering was hurtful.

Joshua: Yesterday morning you mentioned something about the testing? And something that happened at the testing?

Jon: Yeah... This guy. And I’m pretty sure he was gay, too, so I was like, “come on... come on.” What happens is they test people randomly. What they do is everyone has a

number. You have your voice part, SATB 1 or 2 and then a number. (...) So I'm T1-27. So they'll be like, "If your number ends in a seven, come up to get tested," and a handful of kids go up... you go and you stand so your section, usually seven or eight of you in that section, stand with someone and the conductor goes and you sing in front of the man and he listens to you. So, we did three songs... So what happened was, I walk up and this kid Frank who's been sitting next to me the whole time, of course for some reason he ended in a seven too. So we both had to go up.

Joshua: Is he from here [Landerstown]?

Jon: No, no. Frank O'Harrah. Everyone's obsessed with him... He's like a little prodigy. He's a sophomore and he knows everything. He's adorable... So we walk up and I'm like, "Oh god, please don't—*please* don't say my name." And I look at the guy and I say, "Kade," thinking that he'll check me off for my last name. And he ignores me and he *screams* my first name. And Frank looks at me, and Frank's very confused. I'm like, *you've got to be kidding me*. And so that ruined my day. I mean, not that Frank cares, it's just—I mean... I don't know if Frank cares, I don't know Frank that well.... I'm sure Frank doesn't care. It was annoying.

Joshua: Did you say anything?

Jon: No. I'm not one to start things like that. It was just more like [*heavy sigh*]

Joshua: It was unnecessary.

Jon: It was just unnecessary. I mean, I know that the people that run it [All State] obviously know who I am. I have to sign in every morning when I go in and my name is down there. But there's no reason for the kids to know, and that's just... It was just annoying. But, I got over it. I don't care. [*trying to convince himself, perhaps*] It happens.

It was just a place where I was going that no one knew. Except for the kids from my school. So it was nice to be somewhere where I didn't have to worry about that.

(Interview #2, 10/13/15)

A similar misgendering incident occurred in the All State Choir context between my second and third interviews with Jon:

Jon: So we got there and my nametag said "Jane" on it and we tried to get it fixed and I texted Mr. Mullins about it. He said that they couldn't change it though, because it was our credentials like our ID, but I took a sharpie and I wrote over it... and we just told people that they misspelled Jon... But we had to check in and out of dinner every night and all that, and I'd walk up to the desk and instead of saying my full name I'd just say "Kade" and sometimes people would just be like, "oh, Kade" and then they'd give me a weird look and then they'd just mark it down. Other times people would be like *[speaking slowly]* "Jaaaaaanne. Thank you." And I had friends behind me, and so I would try my best to go in line when none of my friends were in line. 'Cause there were *hundreds* of kids, so there was ways to get around it... And for me it's like, if I don't have to tell them, why tell them? But I got to room with the guys and that was fine. (Interview #3, 11/16/15)

Because Jon "officially" auditioned for All State Choir under his birth name, that was the name that appeared in the program.

My name was in the program as Jane. So the kids that I met that I was sitting next to, they brought a program up with us on the risers to know which songs were coming next. And this one girl that I had been talking to for a couple of days, she was flipping through the pamphlet. And she was on the Tenor 1 page and I could *see* in her eyes that she saw it

and I was trying to clear the air, so I was like, “OK, just ask me the question. I know you’re going to ask me. Just ask me.” She’s like, “What? What are you talking about?” And she didn’t ask me about it. So I was like, “OK.” So either she’s dumb as a post *[chuckles]* or she just didn’t want to address it or she just didn’t care. I mean, I really don’t care what the reason was. So that was stressful sitting there, anxiously knowing that she’s looking at the program. *[pause]* But it’s just surprising how many adults didn’t understand... like the woman who came into check in our room at night, she called me Jane, but then she said “goodnight gentlemen.” It’s just—I don’t know, it’s just little things. But I guess the most nerve-racking or anxious thing was the nametag and having to sign in and out and worrying that people would hear me. (Interview #3, 11/16/15)

This story exemplifies the fear induced by the prospect of trying to be stealth in public. Being faced with his birth name is not something that Jon enjoys; yet until he has his name legally changed (which will require parental permission until he turns 18), he will continue to encounter it outside the walls of his home and of Landerstown High School.

Next Steps

Throughout our interviews in the fall semester of 2015, Jon was applying to colleges. He had applied to several state universities. Though he once dreamed of studying acting, he compromised with his family and decided to study business “as a backup” (Interview #5, 2/5/16). As of February 2016, Jon had been admitted to Harperstown State University³³, a medium-sized public university with approximately 20,000 students located outside a large city in the

³³ As of our final meeting to discuss the details of this chapter, Jon told me that he had decided against going to Harperstown State University. Instead, he will be staying at home in a newly remodeled apartment above his parents’ garage. He will be attending a local private university where he will study theatre. Jon also told me that between February and May 2016, that Landerstown High School had installed two gender-neutral bathrooms.

Northeast. Though he will not be studying theatre or music formally, Jon always told me that he planned to continue in the performing arts while in college.

I want to work at ABC [standup comedy troupe], on the weekends in the city (...)

Anyone who ever got on SNL [*Saturday Night Live*] either started there or [at] Second City in Chicago. (...) So my plan is to start doing stuff there and hopefully get into a show there. ABC scouts go there and find people that they want and have them on the show. So that's kind of my plan. It's a pipe dream, but I have business as a backup. But I'm just happy that I have a plan. (Interview #5, 2/5/16)

Jon also said: "I want to start an a cappella group [at Harperstown State]. And they don't have one (...) I don't know how I'd go about that, but I'm going to go about it" (Interview #5, 2/5/16).

Advice for Other Trans Choral Students

I told Jon about Ronn, the high school student referenced in Chapter One, who e-mailed me about the frustration with his choir teacher and the state vocal music association. I expressed dismay that there are choral teachers who do not accept the true gender identity of their students, to which Jon said: "It's bullying... it's bullying. I think that's a large problem. How can we expect students to respect students if there's bullying and intolerance at the adult level in schools?" (Interview #4, 11/17/15) I then asked what advice he had for students like Ronn who do not enjoy the many courtesies and privileges that he has enjoyed in Landerstown.

[long pause] I guess not being afraid. You're going to get backlash and you're going to be hated by some people and I know that there's certain limits that a person can go to protect themselves and make sure that they're safe. But, just going out there and finding the support, because it is out there. It might not be in your town or in your school, but it's there and if you want it. I mean, I don't want to say "if you want it bad enough," but, you

have to know that it's making you who you are. And what you're going through is going to shape who you are one day. (Interview #4, 11/17/15)

Advice for Choral Teachers

Jon: Acting like trans students are an issue that need to be addressed rather than just another student with another situation is, I think, the main problem... I think that's the biggest hurdle... you know, they [teachers] deal with students that have disabilities or students that are sick or students that have this or that. That's the everyday challenges of teachers and I think that's why teachers teach, because they're able to help their students through so much. And I think that if music teachers got over that hurdle of thinking that it's a blockade that they just can't approach or won't approach, they'd learn that it's simpler to deal with it rather than ignore it.

Joshua: So, what I hear you saying is that maybe it shouldn't be such a big deal.

Jon: If you get rid of the stigma and you get rid of the fact that it's taboo, then you almost delete the problem. And I think... the fact is that it's seen as a problem and it's seen as something that you have to *deal with* rather than just another thing with another student.

Joshua: Yeah. I mean, I hear you, I think from the teacher's perspective, if they don't know any trans people and they don't really know what trans is, and they have this student that's asking to do something, like I'm thinking about singing a voice part that maybe a teacher thinks you shouldn't be singing. And they're concerned about your vocal health, right? Definitely there are teachers who stigmatize it and see it as a problem, but I don't think that that's always the case.

Jon: Oh no, absolutely not. It's not that it's not something that needs to be handled. In the same sense that the other things with the other students need to be addressed, and

handled—but the point is to deal with it and then move on. You know? It's the moving on part. It's addressing it: "OK here's the situation, this is what we're going to do about it," and then continuing to just treat that student as if they're any other choir student. And I think that's so important that schools have policies with it. Not only schools just having broad policies about it but especially music policies. In the same sense that bathroom policies need to be a thing, music policies need to be a thing. (Interview #5, 2/5/16)

CHAPTER 6: “LETTING MY VOICE BE HOW IT IS”—SKYLER’S STORY

Table 4

People Interviewed and/or Mentioned in Chapter 6

Person	Description
Skyler Codey	Junior at Parkton High School (PHS); the main focus of this chapter
Mr. Cooper	Parkton High School choir teacher
Mr. Carter	Parkton Junior High School choir teacher
Ani	Skyler’s girlfriend
Steve Codey	Skyler’s father
Victor	Skyler’s friend, a trans guy, who was in the orchestra program at PHS

Skyler

Skyler was home alone when I arrived (well, their³⁴ brother may have been downstairs playing video games—Skyler was unsure). Immediately upon entering the Codey house, one faces the staircase to the second floor of a lovely home in a quiet suburban neighborhood. The living room is to the right of the stairs and the hallway to the left of the stairs leads to the kitchen. Skyler leads me to the dining room table where we chat. Skyler is of medium height, quite thin, with sandy blond hair—clipped very close to the head on one side and long on top causing a majority of their hair to sweep at an angle toward their right ear. They are dressed in a green hooded sweatshirt and green sweatpants bearing the name “Slytherin,” of Harry Potter fame. Skyler immediately strikes me as incredibly intelligent and well spoken—kind, rational, calm, measured, and engaging. They identify as agender, having previously identified as various monikers including gender fluid, genderqueer, and non-binary. Skyler jumps right into discussing the quandary of trans students in choir. They have a trans friend who was in orchestra and astutely noted that there seemed to be less gender implications in orchestra than in choir. (Fieldnote, 1/23/16)

³⁴ Skyler’s pronouns are they/them/their.

Place: Parkton

I headed out to the suburbs to meet Skyler today. As I travel west out of Kendonville, a fairly typical suburban scene unfolds. Strip malls, big box stores, some dry cleaners, many churches, and upscale homes. Skyler lives in a nice two-story house tucked safely inside a large subdivision. I was more excited than nervous as I ring the doorbell, causing the two dogs to bark in what I thought was terror but turned out to be excitement. (Fieldnote, 1/23/16)

As I drive through the business district of Parkton, I think of how it looks like every other suburb in this part of the state. As I follow my GPS to the high school, however, I exit the business district and pass through a residential area and eventually a patch of farmland. Suddenly an imposing building appears on the left side of the street. I realize that this large structure is the performing arts center for the high school. Parkton seems remarkably quiet. (Fieldnote, 2/16/16)

Background

Early Gender Inkling

When I asked Skyler's father if, looking back, there were any signs of gender issues to come, he said:

In retrospect, yes, but when you don't know—if you don't know what you're seeing, you don't recognize it... Even looking back on it sometimes, I'm not sure how much of that was really a clear indication of any sort of gender issues or just a kid. (...) I think where it started was more with Skyler wanting us to call them Skyler instead of their birth name... because they wanted a gender-neutral name. At the time, I was like, "oh, you just don't want to be put into a box, right?" And there's truth to that but I think it's more that they

didn't want to be put in the wrong box, and I didn't see that at first. (Steve Codey, Interview, 4/18/16)

Family

Skyler Aron Codey was born and raised in the American Midwest. At the time of data collection, they were a junior at Parkton High School, a large suburban high school outside of a medium-sized city in the Midwest. Parkton had a population of 17,000 people, approximately 99% of whom were white. Their father grew up in a state straddling the Midwest and the Deep South, and their mother grew up in a nearby Midwestern state. Skyler and their family moved to their current residence in Parkton when they were three years old.

Both my parents work at Harper Glen [State University]. They're in the math department: math professors. My mom teaches future teachers basically so she does elementary ed. and stuff like that for math. And my dad just teaches more of the math majors. (...) My family is *very* math-oriented but also music-oriented. Pretty much my entire family does math and music. Actually funny story, my brother is a math major at Harper Glen. And [my parents are] both math professors at Harper Glen. Not me, though. That's not what I want to do. (...) My dad's really into theatre: he likes theatre a lot. He's in a musical right now and he usually does several a year when he has time, or when he doesn't. [*chuckles*] My mom is in the Keener Choral Union. So, she's been in there for a couple of years and she really likes to sing in choir. She takes voice lessons and stuff. [My brother] Ben's in the choir at Harper Glen and he used to be a part of the same music program that I was: he was in the same choir that I am right now for his last two years of high school. So, we're all very much into music: mostly singing. (Interview #1, 1/23/16)

Skyler described being surrounded by music in their household:

My parents were always very into music, and I remember things like, we sang songs to remember things, we sang songs to go with words in books, we sang things that we heard in church or on the radio... My parents would sing: I don't know, I'd sit in the bathroom in the morning and they'd be singing that "Hit the Road Jack" song. It's a *constant* part of our life in there. You hear Italian art songs from the shower. It's great. (Interview #3, 3/3/16)

Skyler identified their parents as a source of support in terms of their gender journey.

Joshua: Your parents have been supportive the whole way?

Skyler: Yeah, they really have. I always tell people, especially about my dad, that he did *not* understand at first. It took him awhile but that's not what's important. What's important is that both he and my mom ask questions all the time and *especially* my dad. Sometimes he'll say something that's not perfect and me or my brother will explain to him why that's not a great thing to say. (...) And so what's important to me is that he's been *so* amazing with just accepting it. This is actually what he said to his mom, one of the [southern state] relatives who absolutely do not get it, but when she said she didn't get it, he was like "neither do I but that doesn't mean... I can still accept Skyler and everything like that" and that's what she needs to do. But, yeah, they've both been pretty incredible with the whole thing. So, I'm *very, very* lucky with my parents. (Interview #1, 1/23/16)

Their father echoed these sentiments:

One of the things that I said to Skyler fairly early on, and this has kind of been my touchstone, is that I don't have to understand what you're going through. I just have to love you. And that's been a—I keep coming back to that. *[pause]* And there's different

kinds of understanding, right? So, I know a lot more about issues with transgender, but I don't understand it viscerally. I've only ever been male. And there are certain aspects of masculinity that don't fit well, but that's all I ever knew. (Steve Codey, Interview, 4/18/16).

Dr. Codey said that he had grown during Skyler's gender journey—noting that Skyler's experiences influenced his higher education teaching experience.

I've grown an awful lot. And I think it's been good in my work also. About a year and a half ago, [I] had my first student who came out to me as transgender. And she just asked if I could use her name, not the name that was on the class list, but to use her name. And it was really kind of neat because then—that happened early-ish in the process and then when we started thinking about schools I actually passed her in the halls and said, "Hey, I'd like your opinion on how Harper Glen does as far as being accommodating to you, to transgender people." She said that she'd had, not uniformly good experiences, but overall, very good. So that made me feel good about the school and that she was comfortable enough with how I had dealt with her that she could tell me that too. (Steve Codey, Interview, 4/18/16).

Dr. Codey and I also spoke at length about Skyler as a child. They had seemingly always been adventurous and creative, and experiences from their childhood support this supposition.

Childhood

Skyler described themselves as a creative child that appreciated the outdoors. They recalled a patch of land near their house where they played in their youth.

We did a lot of pretend-type things. In kindergarten it was dragons all the time. And then we got a little older then it was those warrior cat books and then it was *Harry Potter* and the Percy Jackson books. (Interview #1, 1/23/16)

In addition to this type of fantasy and creativity, music intrigued Skyler from a young age, which is not surprising considering the importance that both of their parents place on music making and music listening.

I think [in] about fifth grade is about when actually doing organized music started, but I'd still been doing—[pause] I mean, my whole family has been into music for forever, so there was always—when I was really little I remember basically—you know, I was young and my brother played piano and he was my big brother so of course I wanted to play the piano and my mom told me I could start when he had started, when I was that old, but I *really wanted to start*. I was probably four or five and I was really upset that I didn't get to play piano until the end of kindergarten, because that was something I really wanted to do. I eventually did get to start. (Interview #3, 3/3/16)

As Skyler grew older, they began to have strong feelings about something other than music and math—gender. They began to explore their gender identity more seriously in middle school.

“I Think Gender is Kind of Dumb and I Really Don't See the Need to Have One”

Name Change

In middle school, Skyler began to use the name Skyler rather than their birth name. Their freshman year of high school, Skyler's birth name was still in the school's record system but their parents made a request to individual teachers asking that they use “Skyler.” Their father recalled that, “some of the teachers already knew Skyler by their birth name, so there was some of that—so there were mistakes, but I think everyone was pretty receptive to it” (Steve Codey

Interview, 4/18/16). Skyler began their freshman year requesting that teachers call them by their real name in class.

I mean some [teachers] were better than others. The nice thing is that most of them didn't know me any other way so they just kind of did it and it wasn't a big deal. I did get questions about it and I kind of blew them off a little bit and I had a little prepared thing that I would say where I would tell people that I felt like it fit me better, which was true, but I didn't want to get into trying to explain non-binary genders to every ninth grader who asked me in all of my classes... The name has been around for years now: a little over two years. (...) Well usually what I did is they would take roll on the first day and a lot of students at that time... someone's like "Jessica, call me Jessie," so that's kind of what I did. And it did confuse people a little because it doesn't sound like a nickname for my old name. That's because it's not! [*chuckles*] But, you know, people were expecting a nickname so I did get some questions, but most people were pretty good about it. And luckily—I don't know if this is luckily exactly—there was one teacher that I had I think in eighth grade, for my math class (or maybe ninth, I honestly can't remember). But, anyway I had a teacher at some point, I want to say before I changed my name, who my friend who changed his name several times had also had, and this teacher had not been great about it for that person because he kept asking questions about it and wanting to know "well you know that's not actually your name why do you want me to call you that? I'm just going to call you this." So, I didn't have trouble with that, luckily.

(Interview #2, 2/24/16)

Skyler's father recalled:

We basically wanted to make sure [the new name] was going to stick. And so Skyler decided that that was their name. And what it really came down to was “I’d like to have my name legally changed but if we don’t do that I’ll do it once I’m 18.” And, I was like, “Well, why would we do that? Why would we push back?” (Steve Codey, Interview, 4/18/16).

Of the name change process, Skyler said:

I wasn’t really sure how to do it, but I knew I wanted to do it and originally my plan was to wait until big transition periods like I did with first using my name. So I was like, “Ok, I’ll do my name change and all this other stuff right before I go into college.” And then it seemed pointless to wait that long and I think it’s cheaper anyway if you’re not an adult yet, as long as your parents are consenting to it. And it’s cheaper and easier if you’re under 18 and with their help, so we decided to do that. (...) It ended up going pretty smoothly. It costs some money because you have to pay to get an ad in the newspaper that says you’re changing your name because that way if anybody in the area is like, “Oh, that’s wrong for this reason” or “You’re trying to steal this person’s name for fraudulent reasons” or whatever they can come up and say something about it. I was surprised, too, but you have to. You have to put an ad in the newspaper that says, “blank blank Codey: the name is being changed from this to Skyler Aron Codey.” That sort of thing.

(Interview #1, 1/23/16)

On the topic of the use of names in concert programs at school, Skyler and I had the following exchange:

Joshua: Before you legally changed your name, what name would be in concert programs and things?

Skyler: It depends on whether they actually went in to change it. (...) Orchestra was—the program was [an] automatic thing, and Mr. Paulson would have to go in and change my name and Victor’s to the correct name and sometimes he’d forget, or the thing would just print out wrong, or he’d accidentally print the original instead of the fixed version. So occasionally it was wrong, but people would always tell him when it was wrong. (...)

Joshua: Yeah. These are seemingly simple logistical things that I think are going to be really important for teachers to think about.

Skyler: Yeah. I agree. A lot of these little tiny things like... you wouldn’t think that, “oh your name is different... the name that you use is different from the one that’s technically in the school’s documents,” but then of course there’s things like programs and stuff.

(Interview #3, 3/3/16)

I asked Skyler if their name had ever appeared incorrectly in a school concert program, and they said that it did happen before the legal name change, but not after.

In addition to music, Skyler also had been involved with the theatre program at Parkton High School—a program that was accommodating of their trans identity.

I know theatre has always been amazing—if I ever got called down to the office before I changed my name, if I got called down to the office by Skyler, I knew it was some sort of theatre thing, because they would write my name on it and then they’d write it correctly.

So, theatre always had my name right. (Interview #3, 3/3/16)

Most high school students take standardized tests. Here Skyler brought up a quandary trans students often have while filling out their personal information:

Then you take a standardized test and it’s like, “Well this is going to colleges, but I’m changing my name in a year. And so what do I write? What do I do?” And I couldn’t get

my scores for one of my tests for a really long time because they were screwed up about the fact that I didn't put a name in... [Another] fun story, my PSAT scores: we couldn't access them online because I didn't put a gender in the box that they gave me. So I think I mentioned that, so we couldn't get my scores because of one box I didn't fill out. So, that was interesting. (Interview # 3, 3/3/16)

While the use of the name Skyler came fairly early on, the decision about which pronouns to use continued to emerge.

Pronouns

In our first interview, Skyler clarified their gender identity and pronouns. I knew before meeting Skyler that they identified as non-binary.

Skyler: I'm agender. So, I'm pretty much, I don't know, I've identified as a lot of things over time and that's pretty much the one I've settled on for now because I think gender is kind of dumb and I really don't see the need to have one. *[chuckles]*

Joshua: And so which pronouns do you prefer?

Skyler: They/them. (...) I did a lot of realizing stuff in eighth grade-ish, so a little bit after that I started going by a different name, asking people to try and use that: just my family. In the summer after eighth grade and I was planning to go to high school in ninth grade and introduce myself to teachers and people as Skyler instead of my old name. So, I guess it was around then. Before that, I never had a super big coming out thing but I was just sort of—that was when I started asking people to use my name. (...) Originally agender wasn't my original label that I was using. I went through a couple of things... Maybe at first I was like, "Maybe I'm gender fluid or something because sometimes I still feel like a [birth sex] and I don't really mind." (...) I changed labels a lot because

once I started, I started realizing more and more about it. So eventually I got to the point where agender is what I'm using and it feels pretty good right now. (Interview #1, 1/23/16)

As of the spring of 2016, Skyler had only requested that their family, girlfriend, and select close friends use their gender pronouns.

I think I waited on the pronouns a little, because the pronouns were a little more confusing for everybody, I guess. In fact, it was interesting because that was actually a much more recent thing and I still don't use them with teachers and stuff—just my family and friends that I've told. They at least try. (Interview #1, 1/23/16)

Skyler's family has tried hard to use the correct pronouns at home, but as their father said:

That's still a struggle. And it's not that it's an intellectual struggle, it's just—sometimes we will mis-gender the pronouns. At first it was really, really hard for me because I was like, “No! That's plural! We can't use they/them!” And actually it occurred to me today, I don't know, I should ask Skyler, but when you say for example, if you're talking about a group of people you might say “they themselves.” Is it “themselves” or is it “themselves”?³⁵ (Steve Codey, Interview, 4/18/16)

At the time of this writing, Skyler still struggled with pronouns and how to feel about people using them.

Skyler: I mean, confusion was probably the worst it got: people wanting to know *why* and me not really knowing how to explain it or wanting to.

Joshua: Right. That is a dilemma.

Skyler: Yeah. That's still my dilemma with pronouns, is that I kind of *want* to tell people

³⁵ Skyler found “themselves” preferable, and it is used throughout this chapter.

to use the right pronouns but I also feel like at this point, there's going to be... first of all, it's something that requires my explanation and second of all, it's something that people aren't used to. And, so, I just feel like even with my explanation it would be a lot of "well I'll try but I can't make any promises." And I understand that from teachers: they have a lot of students and they have a lot of things happening, but, I mean honestly, that's not the best response you can get. The preferable response is—I don't know—with someone saying "Well I'll *try* but I can't make any promises"—I'd rather start doing that and asking everybody to do that once I reach another turning point like college or something. Because then, first of all, it's not something they have to get used to. The only thing they have to get used to is getting past their own first impressions of me. And then I feel like at that point I'll be more willing to stop people and just say, "No, that's wrong, use the right pronouns." So that's kind of my *dream* is to not *care* and just correct people when they're wrong.

Joshua: You're just not there right now.

Skyler: Yeah. And sometimes I feel like it would be easier if I used binary pronouns, but I really *don't* want to. I know some non-binary people just end up using he/him or she/her anyway, but that just doesn't work for me. (Interview #2, 2/24/16)

Stereotypes/Pigeonholing and Emerging Gender Identity

Along with pronouns, ideas and tropes surrounding stereotypes played a role in Skyler's evolving and emerging gender identity. Skyler spoke several times about pigeonholing and stereotypes: about why we have them, why they can be hurtful, and why they can sometimes be useful. This idea of gender role stereotyping seemed to play a significant role in the early years of their gender journey:

When I was really young I was kind of always—and this may have made it harder for people to believe me when I was like, “actually I’m not a [birth sex]” or whatever—“not a boy or a girl” sort of thing. My whole thing when I was little is I really hated being pigeon holed as a [birth sex] and I think looking back, I *wasn’t* a [birth sex]... I was in elementary school and the girls do this thing and the boys do this thing. If I don’t want to be one gender, then I kind of have to be the “opposite” thing. So, I guess I basically never really liked pigeonholes and stereotypes and stuff, which I think a lot of people deal with, but—so then when I started actually finding stuff out by just being online and seeing people openly talking about gender... I started realizing [that it] almost made it harder for people like my dad to get it, just because he was very good about it, but he was just like, “Well, are you sure? Are you sure you’re not just trying to avoid stereotypes? Well you always didn’t want to be pigeonholed so how is that any different from just not being a [birth sex]?” (...) [In elementary school I remember] being really upset about people lumping me in with [a single sex group]. I remember things: in gym or in classes when they split you up boy/girl, I was always kind of upset about that because—and I mean part of it was [that] I really didn’t like being split up like that. And just being forced to go to one. I wanted to switch around and do whatever I wanted. And, you know, at recess there were things that were kind of stereotypically: this is the thing that the girls do and this is the thing that the boys do. (Interview #1, 1/23/16)

Sometimes, it seemed that Skyler had a love-hate relationship with stereotypes—expressing that, they are in some ways harmful, but they may be born out of truth.

I know [people] who are very [stereotypical]: they fit the stereotype of a gay man and obviously that’s—I think we need to stand behind people who don’t fit the stereotypes,

but we also have to stand by people who do, because they often get discredited by the actual community. Like “Oh you’re just a stereotypical white guy,” you know “you’re stereotypical gay” and “oh you’re just going to be all flamboyant and stuff.” (...) It’s a fine line between disliking stereotypes and then taking it a little too far and getting annoyed when somebody actually fits them. Because that’s just how people are: there are people like that, otherwise there wouldn’t be a stereotype. People like that exist. And just because they fit the stereotype, that doesn’t make them bad just because the stereotype is bad. (Interview #4, 3/29/16)

In an earlier interview, Skyler applied this idea of stereotypes to a cisgender-centric society:

I think people have a harder time accepting people who *look* drastically different than what their stereotypes and impressions are, you know? Honestly, it’s not right, but the best people in the world still sometimes have trouble when they see a trans woman and it challenges all of their engrained deep stereotypes about women and men and they’re confused and they’re afraid, and it’s *wrong*! It’s not right that people should look at me and be more comfortable with me than with a trans woman or something, but it’s kind of how it is. So, I can expose them to a confusing topic while at the same time being stereotypically non-threatening. (Interview #2, 2/24/16)

Here Skyler illustrated that not only is American society cisgender-centric, it is also misogynist in the way that a trans woman threatens the dominant masculine paradigm.

Romantic Orientation

As gender and sexuality are related yet distinct, I inquired about Skyler’s “sexuality” (Interview #1, 1/23/16), only to learn that this is not a term with which they identified. Rather, Skyler used the term “romantic orientation”:

I'm asexual. I'm not into sex, but pretty much, I don't know, I call myself gay *a lot*. But, I don't know if it necessarily applies, because depending on—even if you say “gay is when you're attracted to someone of the same gender,” I'm not *just* attracted to non-binary people or specifically agender people, but pretty much romantic orientation is I don't like guys. I like girls. I like non-binary people. I have a girlfriend right now. She's pretty awesome. (Interview #1, 1/23/16)

Seeking Online Resources

In addition to their community at school and in their family, Skyler sought information, support, and community online:

Ninety-nine percent Tumblr. Because it wasn't so much I was specifically looking for these things, but on some social media places, and Tumblr, whether it's perfect or not, I can at least say that people on there are... if you look at Facebook it's like your family and friends and weird things like that and on Tumblr you pretty much don't know 80% of the people. And they're all just really super open with names and pronouns and mental illness and gender identity and sexuality and romantic orientation: basically everything. And they'll just list a whole bunch of this stuff in their description or whatever. And it's actually really interesting to see because it's a lot of people who, maybe they're “out” in real life or maybe they're not, but whether you are or not, you don't really just go up to someone and say all this stuff about yourself. They figure it out as time goes on. And since you don't really have that opportunity online, it's actually kind of neat to just be able to state everything that you might want people to know about you right then and there. So I started seeing a whole bunch of that and I saw people identifying certain ways and I saw people making infographics saying “this is what this means” or “I'm this

gender and this means that.” So I started seeing that kind of thing and, yeah, I guess it sort of had me start figuring things out. (Interview #1, 1/23/16)

As intimated by scholars including Beemyn and Rankin (2011), the Internet has become a powerful tool in helping trans youth seek resources, friends, and community.

Voice, Gender, Roles

Skyler did not seem to feel an overwhelming connection between their voice and their gender.

My voice is a [voice part type] voice or whatever—you know, it’s a [range] voice. That doesn’t mean it’s a [birth sex] voice necessarily. I’m the type of person that is comfortable with my voice. Personally, since I don’t really have an ideal to work toward if that makes any sense, it makes some things harder but some easier. Because I’m not working toward presenting as a specific gender—I’m not trying to get people to look at me and think I’m male or female, so it makes some things difficult, because I’m not sure what I actually want out of my transition sometimes, or how to get what I want, because some things I want are impossible. But, it does give me a little more freedom... because I’m not working toward a specific presentation ideal, I feel like I’m a little more comfortable just letting my voice be how it is. (Interview #2, 2/24/16)

They expressed comfort in singing roles in musical theatre and opera that fit their voice.

I think if I was going to audition for shows I would make it clear: I would want to explain to them my situation a little bit and be like, “I’m looking to be considered for something that fits my voice.” And, I understand that looks and voice both play a part in these. And, as far as I know, I don’t think there’s any theatre with non-binary characters yet. Even if there were, that would be cool, but it wouldn’t necessarily matter to me, because when

I'm acting, I don't feel odd playing a girl or playing a boy when I'm acting. It's not a problem for me because that's not me: that's a character. A lot of theatre is gendered like that, especially musical theatre, because society genders voice. And the ideal would be for voices not to be gendered, but you know, that's a difficult place to get to. So, I'm open to a lot of things. (Interview #5, 3/30/16)

The comfort Skyler felt expressing their voice "how it is" may have come from the supportive music educators with whom they've worked. Also note that Skyler stated plainly that, "society genders voice." Because they did not seem to feel a strong sense of connection between their voice and their gender identity, this statement may be referring to the notion that the sound of one's voice helps in attributing a gender. If one hears a low voice, one likely expects to see a cisgender male.

Parkton School District Music Education

Middle School and Mr. Carter

The Parkton School District was known for its strong music programs. The high school choir teacher interviewed in this study, Mr. Cooper, identified the junior high school choir teacher, Mr. Carter, as a "kid magnet" (Cooper, Interview, 3/30/16). Mr. Cooper described Mr. Carter's strong disposition and opinions about gender roles and how they played out in class. Here Mr. Cooper recounted a story in which he was passing out a sight reading handout on pink paper and made a passing comment about how the "guys wouldn't like these":

Mr. Carter has been known for years to have prejudices: he will not wear pink and he will not wear purple because those are not *manly* colors. He will not wear shorts in the summertime because it's not 'manly' when you show your legs. I mean, all of this, and he's kind of played it up: kids have fun with it, ok? Well what has happened is that one

year, the accompanist bought pink pencils and had written in purple on the pink pencils, “Property of Mr. Carter.” And gave them all to the kids and he said, “Get out your pencils and mark” and all of a sudden they're all pink pencils and he goes, “WHAT?!” He looked over and it was in purple, “Property of Mr. Carter.” *[silly laughter]* So we’ve had fun with this kind of thing, so I was referring back a little bit, as I’m passing out the pink papers, it was like, “Well, the guys wouldn’t like these, you know, I mean after all...” It was just sort of like, “Mr. Carter wouldn’t like [these].” (Cooper, Interview, 3/30/16)

These gendered associations with choir continued as Skyler entered high school, though their interactions with Mr. Cooper would prove very different than those with Mr. Carter.

PHS Choir

I signed in at the office and headed past a buzzing lunchroom to find Skyler’s class rehearsing in the spacious choir room. This is the most organized high school choir room I have ever seen. Maroon posture chairs sit in straight rows facing the white board in the part of the room nearest the door through which you enter from the hallway. The harsh fluorescent light beat down on students who were working on sight-reading in E major. Music literacy is obviously a huge part of the curriculum here at PHS. To the left of the white board is a big bright yellow poster containing the grand staff with little Velcro sharps and flats. Other posters show the order of flats and sharps in both treble and bass clef. Behind me are Wenger folder cabinets and a tan curtain that covers the top half of the wall.

As I walk in, Mr. Cooper leads students through a single-line, sight-reading exercise that was written on the board. “One of your classmates wrote that,” Mr. Cooper says. “Skyler wrote it—[incorrect pronoun] did that!” He describes how he worked on the same exercise with the treble choir earlier that day. It is obvious to me that Mr. Cooper runs a very orderly classroom.

He seems extremely supportive, kind, and perhaps even fatherly. Mr. Cooper began his teaching career in 1977 and has had a well-established and successful choral program at Parkton High School for many years.

In the posture chair formation, Skyler sits in the third row between two students. After the sight-reading exercise on the white board, the students move to the risers set up on the side of the room opposite the main doors. Skyler is wearing a dark colored oversized hoodie, yellow-ish tights, and short dark colored boots. Here, Skyler takes their seat in the middle of what I assume to be male and female students. Is this a deliberate choice or just a coincidence? (Fieldnote, 2/24/16)

Mr. Cooper. This chapter could be subtitled “Skyler and Mr. Cooper: A story of mutual respect and admiration.” It became clear to me on my first visit to PHS that Mr. Cooper was masterful at creating strong, appropriate relationships with students. He would be at the door greeting students, he would joke with them, he would listen to them, he pushed them, and he encouraged them. He loved them.

I try to make eye contact with every single kid during the course of an hour every single day so that eye contact says, “You’re here. I know you’re here and I’m glad you’re here.” (...) You’ll notice, most of the time, I station myself outside and I’m high fiving or I’m elbowing or I’m shaking hands or whatever: looking them in the eye. And one kid who’s not even in my class walks down and says, “I like walking down this hallway past you every day because you always have a smile on your face.” And I’m thinking, “Well it didn’t always used to be that way but I’ve determined that I want to create that climate before a kid walks in my door.” That is *critically* important to me. (Cooper, Interview, 3/30/16)

Mr. Cooper felt especially strongly about Skyler and their talent.

I'll just tell you right now, Skyler Codey is the best musician in the entire program. I have put them³⁶ in leadership positions number one because I know that they can handle them, number two they are gifted and capable, and number three, they are the kind of human being that I would like everyone to be. And so given that, why wouldn't I hold them up as one of these people who's a *fantastic* musician, a *fantastic* person, who accepts everybody as they are in *THEIR* own right. Why can't they come back and forth? We're seeing it happen in this room and I think something is landmark that's going on in here. And so, I'm not pushing that agenda, but I'm not going to *resist* it. It's a matter of: here's this really gifted wonderful human being who's going to be wonderful to other people and give what they have (and by the way, I'm going "Skyler, you realize you could be a *fabulous* teacher—just saying"). (Cooper, Interview, 3/30/16)

One aspect of this positive classroom atmosphere is an open door policy: "I've always told them, 'My door is open. And if you come in and you treat me with respect, you can say anything to me you want to as long as you say it in the right way'" (Cooper, Interview, 3/30/16). I inquired further.

Joshua: Has your office—have you been somebody that's been safe for LGBT students to talk to?

Mr. Cooper: I really think so and I hope so... I understand that there are differences in students, and I totally get that. And because of that, I have to say that I don't care if you want to be addressed as "they." I'm trying to do that for Skyler and they say, "I know it's new and I know that sometimes..." Because I'll say, "ladies" and then I'll follow up

³⁶ These pronouns, which were Skyler's birth sex pronouns in the interview, were corrected at Skyler's request.

with—as soon as I say that it triggers in my mind—and so the next time it’s “altos, sopranos,” I want to be thinking about that. I also have caught sometimes that I’ve said something like that and then I’ve said a couple of minutes later, it’s been like, “Everybody up—we’s, you’s, they’s, us’. We love everybody in here, come on, let’s go.” I want to reinforce that... Skyler trusts me—they *deeply* trust me. And I won’t do anything to hurt that trust. But I feel that way about all of my students. (...) I want you to know that I don’t have an agenda. I don’t have a way of saying, “well you ought to be labeled this or that” or “no, you’re not really this or that.” I’m saying this: you are a precious person that walks in my door and I want to do *everything*... I can form and shape you into a wonderful choral group that accepts every single one with your strengths, with your weaknesses... and there are just certain things that don’t matter. And certain things that do deeply matter to individuals, I want to protect that as long as we don’t violate the rights of others. (Cooper, Interview, 3/30/16)

As a result of their close relationship with Mr. Cooper, Skyler had considered studying music in college instead of going into the sciences.

[I wondered] would it be fun if I had to do [music] as a big competitive thing because everyone talked about how competitive music performance was. I was like, well would that be fun anymore? So, I had sort of decided that I was just going to do science or something and just do music for fun. And, Mr. Cooper really kind of—I don’t want to say he changed my mind, but he actually—he did encourage me, and he really got me thinking about it. I guess I kind of realized, he really encouraged me to think about it more deeply and realize that this is really what I want to do. At least where I’m at right now. So, I’m just going to give it a try. (Interview #5, 3/30/16)

I realized early in the data collection process that Skyler had not disclosed their transgender identity to Mr. Cooper and had not requested that he use they/them/their pronouns in class. Skyler said:

I've been *wanting* to have a conversation with him anyway and none of the fact that I hadn't told him was anything about, "oh, I don't think he'd react well" or anything along those lines. It was honestly just I hadn't really told anybody and I hadn't had a really big reason to. But, honestly, I did tell him and I did talk to him. And, I mean he just—he responded like he always does to things, which is a good response, but it's very Mr. Cooper. And he talked a lot about how he likes me and stuff because that's Mr. Cooper for you. (Interview #2, 2/24/16)

Early in 2016, Skyler did have this conversation with Mr. Cooper and I was curious to know if this disclosure had changed their relationship:

I don't think anything about his perception of me has changed because he's Mr. Cooper [*chuckles*] and he really likes me and I really like him and it's just kind of a non-issue in some ways. Like, he's definitely doing his best to make me comfortable, but he also just kind of has this opinion of—which, I don't know if it's necessarily the perfect opinion, but I think it's something that's really good for people to start with, which is that it really doesn't matter. He's going to make his students as comfortable as possible and he wants them to be happy, but he also just likes them as people and he really doesn't care.

(Interview #4, 3/29/16)

Though not stated publicly, Mr. Cooper's open door policy has always catered to all students—including those who identify as LGBTQA. He confirmed this by saying:

I mean, I don't care. *I love them*. And when you love you don't care [about the ancillary thing]. So there's where I'm at. You know, it's not very complicated. And in that sense I think I'm a pretty simple guy. I don't know that I'm supposed to be against this person or that person or I'm supposed to be abusive to this person because they like this or that or because God made them a certain way I'm not supposed to *like* them. It's like, "Get away from me. OK?" I'm here to teach music and I'm going to uphold the human spirit. That's the constant that's in *everything*. (Cooper, Interview, 3/30/16)

Skyler seemed to think that Mr. Cooper's office has been a safe place for LGBT youth to be open and honest.

Joshua: Have there been other LGBT students that have been out to him before?

Skyler: *[pause]* I think he's—he's definitely had some gay students who I don't know if [they] specifically told him, but I mean, Ani was in this choir and we were a little bit obvious. And there was also a senior last year who was pretty much "out" to everybody about being gay. So he's definitely had gay students. And I get the impression that this other young man talked to him about it, because I think—I remember at the end of the year we do a thing where we sit in a circle right near the end of the year before the seniors leave, and the seniors start and we talk about how they feel about choir and stuff like that and how they felt about their years in choir and that sort of thing, and I remember Anthony, this guy, talking about—I think he cried at one point—but talking about [how] he'd been able to talk to Mr. Cooper during hard times in his life and stuff. And so I think Mr. Cooper almost certainly has had students talk about it with him before and he's definitely had students in his choirs that have been LGBT. (Interview #4, 3/29/16)

Semantics and vocabulary. Although Skyler preferred non-binary they/them/their pronouns, they realized that this could be a difficult switch for teachers to make. How Mr. Cooper referred to sections in class had begun to change.

Honestly I don't expect many of the teachers here to just fix it and I feel like where I'm at with the teachers and my age and my grade and everything, I don't feel comfortable correcting them in front of a whole class all the time. I feel like in college that's something I'm going to do a lot more, or I want to do at least. But in high school, I don't think it's worth doing that and so honestly the best response I can hope for right now is, like Mr. Cooper was saying, he's going to learn and he's going to use this as a learning experience to get better at it so that if he has other students; he hasn't experienced anyone like me, or honestly anyone "out" as transgender in choir before. So, he's going to learn from it...he told me that the main thing he was going to try and start with was instead of saying, "ok, ladies, ok, gentlemen" he's going to say "ok, altos and basses" And he has been, and he's actually corrected himself on that a bunch. It really does [make a difference to me], because honestly, his specific pronouns for me haven't changed too much, and that's understandable, but just the more broad description that really kind of includes everybody. (Interview #2, 2/24/16)

Skyler recounted how Mr. Cooper attempted to make vocabulary changes.

I'll just notice... he's been first of all just saying a lot more of "Ok, altos and sopranos, stand up." Or like he has some things that are kind of common to say and that I think a lot of teachers do, but he'll say "rise girls and guys," and it's kind of rhyme-y. (...) And the other thing—a couple of times he's said something like—he'll catch himself and adapt it

by saying, “rise girls and guys and theys and them and us and we” and something like that and he just keeps going with it. And I like that. (Interview #4, 3/29/16)

In addition to using “men” and “women” in class, here Skyler demonstrated the idea the assigning genders to choral ensembles (e.g., “men’s choir”) may be problematic for transgender students. However, Skyler understood why groups might be called such names and why they have been set up in that way.

Skyler: Sometimes I’m a little unsure about being in groups that are specifically labeled for a gender. But at that point, I wasn’t so much... I don’t know that I have a lot to say about specifically being in advanced [birth sex]’s, but if I were in it now, I think I’d still have a good time. I think I’d still be a good addition, be a good voice in there. And I don’t think necessarily that the name should be changed, because I don’t know what they would change it to. They come up with something better, I’m all for it, but I can’t think of anything. I do think if you’re going to have a “women’s choir,” you have to accept trans women who sing tenor and bass, too. And if you’re going to have a “treble choir,” then you have to accept higher voiced men like trans men as well. (Interview #2, 2/24/16; Follow-up 6/1/16)

Uniforms. Uniforms are another part of the standard high school choral tradition. At many American high schools, it is customary for high school singers to have tuxedos and dresses. This convention is used in the choral program at PHS, but not in the orchestra program.

The interesting thing about orchestra [is that] the guys have suits that they rent and then if you don’t want to rent a suit... and I mean it’s not just the guys is the thing. Anyone technically *could* rent a suit if they wanted to. It just so happens that nobody else really wants to because they’re more uncomfortable than just wearing what you want. But, I can

choose to wear an all-black suit in that and I do. It's exactly that—you just wear all black. And, I do like that, but I like the idea of everybody getting to express themselves a little, but occasionally things like that can be slightly distracting when you're in a group where you're all kind of exposed; some of the things that are worn in orchestra maybe wouldn't look as good in the choir because, do you have them all wear long sleeves and long bottoms? It seems like there is a little bit of a struggle to get what's going to look uniform and still have a little bit of you in it. So I do understand the concept of just having a single dress that everyone's going to wear and, I don't know, it's a hard thing because I think it's possible and I think maybe in an ideal world there would be a little more choice in what to wear for that but I do also see the difficulty of finding [attire]. (Interview #2, 2/24/16)

Skyler advocated for themselves in exploring the possibility of wearing an alternate uniform for choir.

I think I'm getting more used to my own sense of presentation now and what I want to wear. But then I was a lot more uncomfortable in gendered clothing. So, I went to talk to Mr. Cooper about the possibility of wearing a different uniform because beyond that, I think tail coats are really cool and I want to wear one as often as possible [*chuckles*]. (...) But what was really interesting was that Mr. Cooper's first automatic response was to say, "Oh no, we can't do that." And in some ways that makes sense, because in choir, sometimes you stand in sections, and having a suit in the middle of a section that's full of dresses or a dress in the middle of suits might be odd. But, I thought about it and so I was thinking of some ways to work around it. Even when we're in sections, we do: first rows are altos and sopranos, second two rows are tenors and basses. So over in the alto section,

first two rows on that far side of the risers [*pointing*], I was always in the middle row. And when we're singing blended, which we do semi-often, it really doesn't matter at all. So, I did bring those things up. And what I thought was *really* interesting is that although his first automatic response was to say no, he later talked to me about it and said, and he realized that his first response was no, and then he thought about it and realized that it wasn't that big of a deal. That it *could* be worked around. So, I think that was really honestly the best outcome of that. I like my uniform. It's black and white. I don't know, it's pretty cool looking. I don't really care enough to push the uniform issue for myself, but in a perfect world maybe uniforms would be gender neutral. (Interview #2, 2/24/16)

After considering Skyler's situation in the PHS music department, I then looked at Parkton High School as a whole. I wondered how accommodating the administration had been with Skyler's trans male friend Victor.

PHS Policies Regarding Trans Students

Orchestra trip rooming. Skyler began learning the cello in fifth grade, an experience they identified as positive. The following story regarding rooming assignments on an orchestra trip demonstrated the need for policies for trans students in school music programs.

My trans friend was in orchestra, so we went on an orchestra trip and we roomed together just the two of us because they wouldn't let him room with guys and he was not about to room with a bunch of girls, so he asked if he could room with me because (so usually it's four people per room but we kind of went and tried to get this specifically). And it's kind of a bit of an interesting thing, because they were going to make us pay extra, and then my mom kind of marched in there and was like, "OK, if you had a number that wasn't

divisible by four and you had a room of two or three guys that was left over, would you make them pay extra because of some fluke?” (Interview #1, 1/23/16)

Skyler did not travel on the PHS choir trip in March of 2016, but I did ask them what would have happened with rooming had they gone.

It’s possible I could have asked about a different rooming system, but considering that I don’t think there’s anyone else in the choir program right now who I know of who is trans or non-binary or anything like that (...) I’d probably just end up rooming with people of my assigned gender. Even if they’d let me room with cisgender students of a different gender than the one I was assigned—even if they would, I wouldn’t want to. Rooming with people of my assigned sex is the best alternative, just because I don’t think there’s a lot of other trans people in choir. (Interview #5, 3/30/16)

I wondered if Skyler’s trans male friend, Victor, had helped set any precedents for trans students at PHS.

Trans friend: precedent? Victor also was involved in the orchestra program with Skyler. They described how Mr. Paulson, the orchestra teacher, accommodated both Skyler and their friend Victor, who changed his name several times.

Surprisingly, some of the teachers that were the best with the name change were the ones that *did* know me. So, my orchestra teacher, who had been my orchestra teacher since fifth grade, I told him. I went to an orchestra camp over the summer and he was there. And I asked him if I could turn over my nametag and write my name on the back so I didn’t have the wrong name on it, and I *honestly* don’t think he’s messed up since. *[chuckles]* I feel like it might be because—I think he already had some experience with Victor changing his name he went through several different names before he decided on

one he actually wanted to change his name to legally. Mr. Paulson I guess already had experience from that a little bit, but it was pretty impressive. *[long pause]* I think Mr. Cooper was quite good about it, too. (Interview #2, 2/24/16)

Skyler also described Victor's struggles with the upper administration of the school district regarding starting a Gender/Sexuality Alliance (GSA).

I think our superintendent is pretty conservative as well. And I'm pretty sure that's where stuff with my friend Victor went on, you know, with—the principal was willing to listen to him and talk to him but the superintendent shut things down a little bit or—we now have a sort of GSA-type thing, but several years earlier when people tried to set one up, the school board and the superintendent shut it down pretty much right away. And they had several teachers backing it at that time as well, but that was not appreciated. *[nervous chuckle]* So, it's a little better now. (Interview #5, 3/30/16)

One of the other aspects of the high school experience that involves gender and names surrounds graduation—what students wear and which name appears on the diploma. For a trans college student who can have their legal name changed without parental permission, this may be less of an issue³⁷. I inquired about how Victor navigated this process at PHS.

Joshua: What was the name on Victor's diploma?

Skyler: It was Victor, because he did change his name

Joshua: Legally?

Skyler: Legally. We were all very happy that they actually announced him correctly, because there was some concern about them getting everything in place in time. But, he did actually—once he turned 18, he legally changed his name and he didn't need his

³⁷ Under the new Obama administration Title IX guidelines, this should no longer be an issue for public school students (Lhamon & Gupta, 2016).

parents' permission. But, mostly the school district: they did some things for him, but it was kind of minimum. (Interview #4, 3/29/16)

I also wondered about bathroom usage with Victor—a divisive topic in the news media at the time of this writing.

[Victor] was allowed to use the unisex staff bathroom in the office which meant if he needed to use the bathroom he had to go all the way down there, which is better than just saying, “Well, tough luck, you have to use the women’s room.” But, not nearly as good as saying, “Well we’ll unlock the unisex bathrooms.” You know what else is dumb? I’m sorry, I just keep thinking about this weird gendered stuff. The other thing that’s dumb is that there are single stall staff bathrooms but they’re all *inside* the other bathrooms. So, a female teacher will walk into the women’s room and then turn and unlock a door in the women’s room and go into a single stall bathroom IN THE WOMEN'S ROOM. *What’s the point of that?!* What is the point of an entire single stall bathroom *inside* a gendered bathroom? At the junior high there are a couple of single stall ones, but they’re mostly locked staff ones outside of the restrooms. Obviously I could talk all I want about unisex bathrooms, but back to what I was talking about before: for Victor, it would have been nice to let him use the men’s room [see footnote 38], but it also would have been nice to just have more gender-neutral bathrooms, because that would have helped more people. I get that they want to have specific staff bathrooms, but—I don’t know. (Interview #4, 3/29/16)

Considering the rash of anti-trans “bathroom bills” in various U.S. states (e.g., North Carolina) at the time of this writing, this seemed to be a topic of particular concern for trans high school students.

Overall, navigation of trans identity within the music program at PHS had been a rather uneventful process for Skyler. Because they were not “out” to most of their classmates, and because Mr. Cooper continued to use pronouns that align with Skyler’s assigned birth sex, most people within the choral program would not have noticed any change from before their gender realization. They did inquire about the possibility of wearing a different uniform, but Mr. Cooper initially did not seem open to that idea. Likewise, when Skyler roomed with their trans male friend Victor on an orchestra trip, the teacher attempted to charge them more money because of not staying four to a room—a blatantly discriminatory policy.

Skyler’s Future

At the time of writing, Skyler envisioned attending Harper Glen State University, where both of their parents taught and where their brother and girlfriend were enrolled.

You can do a normal Bachelor of Arts and then that’s way more flexible [than a Bachelor of Music program]: you can pretty much do whatever you want with that. So, I was talking to someone about it, and I can take theory and I can do piano and I can do music classes and I can take voice lessons. And then, that also gives me more flexibility and room to look into theatre and to look into, I’ve thought about seeing what some opera stuff is like... to look into both of those because I’d like to do *some* performance, but I don’t think I want it to be “I’m a music performance major,” because that’s a much more narrow set of guidelines on what you can and can’t do. And especially for an undergrad. degree when I’m not totally sure what I want to do with it yet, I think a more flexible degree would be better, and then I have a much wider range of experience when I go to grad. school. That’s the idea. (Interview #5, 3/30/16)

Advice for Choral Music Educators

As has been demonstrated in this chapter, Skyler is an extremely well-spoken, articulate young person. I asked them what they would say to room full of choir teachers on the topic of including and honoring trans students in the high school choral classroom.

The first thing I would tell them it is that if a student talks to them about something that they don't understand, don't respond immediately if you don't understand what they're saying. Don't just go with your gut feeling. Ask questions, look it up online or wherever, ask other music teachers who might have dealt with this before (if you haven't). Talk to the student. And think it over. Think about whether what they're asking for or what they're telling you is really that important, not to them, but think about if they say, "Hey, can I wear a tux?" If your gut reaction is "No of course you can't," think about *why* that was your gut reaction and then think about if it really matters. Why does it matter? Maybe there are some honest reasons. Maybe it matters because you stand in sections. Well, what can you do about that? Can you change the way people stand? Can you give people an option for different uniforms? Can you make the uniform unisex? Obviously not all of these are possible, but what's possible for you and your program? And just take some time. And then get back to them. And if you honestly... maybe not about uniforms, but if you honestly just don't understand or don't know what you can do about this... if a student comes to you and wants to change voice parts or sing with a different part and you don't—that's understandable if you look at it and say "I don't think that's healthy for your voice." But can you talk to them about it and figure out what makes them the most comfortable that's possible for the program and for their voice? What's the most comfortable for them and doesn't hurt them? So, that's what's most important and I think

most choir directors—most good choir directors—would agree that the program is about the students, not about you or about the way you want the choir to look. So, is the health of your students more important or is the fact that you have one person in a suit standing surrounded by a bunch of people in dresses more important? Is it the students' comfort and health or the way it looks? And I think most good choir directors should stop and think about this and realize that the student comes first. It's not about [the director]. It's about the kids in the program. And I think Mr. Cooper definitely feels that way because I've talked to him about it, and he did give me a knee-jerk reaction a couple of times, but... what he did is something that I think everyone could stand to do a little more, which is step back from that and take a look at what's the most important in the program. (Interview #5, 3/30/16)

CHAPTER 7—DISCUSSION AND CROSS-CASE THEMES

When narrative inquirers return to participants with text, their question is not so much, Have I got it right? Is this what you said? Is this what you do? Rather, it is something much more global and human: Is it you? Do you see yourself here? Is this the character you want to be when this is read by others? These are more questions of identity than they are questions of whether or not one has correctly reported what a participant has said or done.

(Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 148).

Sara: Discussion And Connection To Extant Literature

Place/Setting

Context is key in many facets of life. As we all live in various contexts (e.g., cities, neighborhoods, schools), it is important to examine the places in which Sara lived during data collection. Sara attended high school in a rural community approximately 20 miles from a medium-sized city in the industrial Midwest. Everyone I interviewed about Sara's story was pleasantly surprised by her experience in River Glen. In other words, this small town surprised many.

There is a trope about small, rural communities having "religious roots" (Hampton, 2014), and it may be assumed that such communities are conservative and not accepting of people who identify as LGBTQA. Hampton (2014) wrote, "On the whole, transgender youth perceive there to be few safe environments in which to express their authentic gender identity... [and] this is even more likely in rural communities founded on conservative values" (p. 178). As Ms. Dengler, Sara's guidance counselor at RGHS, noted, "Sometimes I am amazed that this little rural town: Sara exited, from what I see, fairly unscathed, physically. You hear horror stories of female kids being beaten up in bathrooms" (Dengler, Interview, 11/4/15). Here Ms. Dengler

portrayed the common trope of trans students as victims (e.g., Wyss, 2004). In a heteronormative and cisgender-centric institution such as a high school (Pascoe, 2007), it sometimes is assumed that anyone who transgresses gender and sexuality boundaries may be punished (e.g., Greytak, Kosciw, & Diaz, 2009). Students, education professionals, and community members may fear what they do not understand, and RGHS had no precedent for having an “out” trans student. As Sara noted,

I’m the only “T” [trans] person here and most of the rest are just bi[sexual], so that’s not regarded as a big deal or is something that is necessarily known about, so... since I’ve had the most trail to blaze and I’ve done it myself. (Interview #2, 5/4/15)

As noted by non-fiction writers (Beam, 2008), education scholars (e.g., Luecke, 2011; Payne & Smith, 2014; Ullman, 2014), and music education scholars (Nichols, 2013), the ignorance and fear surrounding trans students can lead to a school’s real or perceived lack of preparedness in “dealing with” a transgender student. All in all, it seems that many of Sara’s educational experiences in River Glen exemplify what Rands (2009) termed *gender-stereotyped education*—when teachers identify students by, and therefore reify, the gender binary of boy/girl and masculinity/femininity. For trans students navigating their gender identity at school, mentor figures can become all the more important.

Mentors

Sara’s parents were supportive of her gender journey. Her mother’s and sister’s undying love provided vital support as Sara navigated her gender truth. Though her father was slightly less supportive in general, he did help her legally change her name. Adult support can be critical, especially for students in rural communities. The help and support of mentor figures may aid in navigating gender issues in choral music (Brenneman, 2007; Palkki & Caldwell, in press). In

Sara's case, these mentor figures were Ms. Dengler, the RGHS guidance counselor, and Mr. Thompson, Sara's first high school choir teacher. Ms. Dengler was the one adult who was a constant fixture at RGHS during Sara's high school experiences, as there was a new principal and choir teacher during her tenure there. Throughout those four years Ms. Dengler remained a strong support figure—a person to whom Sara felt comfortable talking. Ms. Dengler seemed to be a kind of “coordinator” for Sara's transition at school, as outlined by Callender (2008) and Luecke (2011). Though not a parallel situation (the student transitioning in Luecke's study was in elementary school), there are many similarities between the transition process as reported by Luecke (2011) and that of Sara at RGHS. Ms. Dengler served as a source of information and support for not only Sara, but also school administrators and teachers. While RGHS had an administration change during Sara's tenure, Ms. Dengler continued to advocate for her. Though the efforts surrounding Sara's transition at RGHS were not as formalized as those outlined by Luecke (2011), Sara perceived them to be sequential and intentional. Ms. Dengler said, “I would like to say that we're organized and proactive, but I mean, no, no... I would say there were stages” (Dengler, Interview, 11/4/15). Even though she was never officially designated as such by the administration, Ms. Dengler served as a proxy coordinator/anchor for Sara's transition at school.

Because Ms. Dengler did not receive formal instruction about working with trans students in her training, she sought out education about working with LGBTQ students, a step suggested by scholars including Bilodeau (2009) and Sausa (2005). Ms. Dengler said that, “[My colleague and I] went to a couple of sessions on... it's basically educating ourselves on the LBGTQ population and [pause] I think they call it *The Silent Crisis* and sort of how we can be better advocates and educate [ourselves]” (Dengler, Interview, 11/4/15). This training was not

required by the school district, yet Ms. Dengler found it important to gain the knowledge and skills she needed to support students like Sara.

Mr. Thompson, the previous RGHS choral teacher, was another influential feature in Sara's transition. As Palkki and Caldwell (in press) discovered in their survey study, a majority (58%) of students reported having a high school teacher who encouraged acceptance of LGBTQ students outside of class, and a minority of respondents (30%) said that they would recommend that a queer/questioning student speak with their high school choir teacher about queer issues. Recall that, when Mr. Thompson gave Sara the "pep talk" about self-acceptance, Sara was not even a student in the choral program. This encouragement went far above and beyond the "call of duty" for Mr. Thompson. As Sara said, "[Mr. Thompson was] someone I could talk to all the while, the two years that he was there. He just sort of came out of nowhere and became a mentor figure, and then left" (Interview #3, 7/17/15). As is consistent with the qualitative data from Palkki and Caldwell's (in press) study, it is often these informal, outside of class conversations and encouragements that have a lasting affect on students struggling to navigate their gender and/or sexual identity at school. In terms of vocal pedagogy, Mr. Thompson encouraged Sara to continue singing bass after the transition. She saw him as a competent, caring teacher whom she trusted.

School Policies

As a self-identified MTF trans person, Sara is in a vulnerable population. As has been demonstrated in several studies, MTF students continue to be a highly marginalized population (e.g., Beemyn & Rankin, 2011; Dugan, Kusel, & Simounet, 2012; Seelman, 2014). Trans women are seen as a challenge to hegemonic masculinity—they cast aside their male privilege to join a group that celebrates femininity, which is far less respected in modern American society. As

Dugan, Kusel, and Simounet (2012) noted, “MtF students [who] transition may be perceived as an assault on perceptions of masculinity” (p. 731). This may be the reason that Sara faced taunts like “fag” at school. As DePalma (2013) wrote, “Children who present gender-variant preferences and behaviours can be automatically read as gay, or proto-gay, an assumption that is simply inaccurate” (p. 2).

As intimated in Chapter Four, Sara perceived the administration’s response to be coordinated and organized, a point disputed by Ms. Dengler. Though there seemed to be plans and structure in place, the administration seemed to be “building the ship as they flew it,” an idea discussed by DePalma (2013) and Payne and Smith (2014). Rather than having a coordinated effort in place (e.g., Luecke, 2011), Ms. Dengler served as liaison between the administration and Sara’s family. In addition, there seemed to be an air of “adultism,” as defined by Singh (2013), present in Sara’s story. Adultism is defined as “the system where adults hold privilege and power in youths’ lives” (p. 697). The principal of RGHS when Sara began high school, Mr. Calloway, set seemingly arbitrary stipulations before Sara would be allowed to wear a dress in public RGHS events. As Sara said,

My freshman year after I became certain of my own identity I talked to Mr. Calloway [the former principal]. My freshman year for the musical that was—I was in the chorus and I wore a dress and that was the first public “thing”... then the summer and fall after that is when I did color guard so that was the second step and then *Mr. Calloway made me do both those things before I could wear a dress for concert seasons*. He wanted to introduce it gradually so that the various performances would still be about the ensembles and not drawing attention to *me*. (Interview #2, 5/4/15, emphasis added)

In this instance Mr. Calloway placed barriers in front of Sara as she attempted to publicly transition at school. Note that she said he “*made* [her] do both those things” before moving on to the next phase of her transition, namely, wearing a dress in public for an RGHS event. Perhaps such barriers caused Sara to say, “Everything goes so slowly in the administration of this school that they probably just don’t see it [accommodations for trans students] as needed” (Interview #2, 5/4/15). This seeming apathy on the part of the administration may have stemmed from the fact that Sara’s name was on the “watch these students” list passed from the middle school to the high school. Overall, RGHS personnel used Sara’s name and pronouns—a vital policy suggestion from Beemyn (2005), Bilodeau (2009), and Sausa (2005) and required by the new Obama administration guidelines (Lhamon & Gupta, 2016). After the legal name change, Sara’s name appeared on all school documents, including her high school diploma.

A primary theme of Sara’s story is that she was a *major* advocate for herself (Luecke, 2011; Payne & Smith, 2014; Singh, 2013). She was unafraid to ask for what she wanted in terms of things like attire, name, and pronouns. Sara spoke “truth to power” as she shared resources and advice with Ms. Dengler, Mr. Ames, and other RGHS teachers. This also was true in honor choir experiences and in college choir in which she asked her conductors to please avoid using “men” rather than “tenors and bases” and “women” rather than “sopranos and altos.” As Callender (2008) noted, “Trans youth should not be expected to educate the adults around them” (p. 51). Ms. Dengler said,

I do remember Sara coming in and telling me that she is transgender and, it had to be tenth grade, and probably telling me of the name change and then offering me websites that I could go and educate myself if I had any questions and she did: she didn’t let me down on that end. She taught me a lot. (Interview, 11/4/15)

It seems that in this case, Sara did much of the educating that helped spearhead action on the part of Ms. Dengler and the rest of the RGHS staff.

Choir Policies

Overall, it seems that the RGHS music department was fairly unprepared to embrace a gender variant student. This mirrors findings by scholars who noted that their respective schools were “unprepared for [the] presence” (Nichols, 2013) of trans students or “voice variant” students (Bond, 2015). As with the school writ large, the RGHS choral program lacked policies and regulations to accommodate a trans student. There was an effort within the choral program, however, to honor Sara as she transitioned within the context of the choral program. Pascoe (2007) wrote that educators and “administrators can modify both the social organization of the school and the curriculum content so that they are less homophobic and gender normative” (p. 169). In the case of Mr. Ames, this certainly was the case. With the help of the students, he adjusted the vocabulary he used in class to address the sections of the choir:

A challenge for me has been to try to remove the gender terminology from my vocabulary. Now, it’s not just Sara who calls me out on it—it’s a lot of the girls and my other low voices—they’re like “Ames, don’t say that.” [*snaps*] So they’ve been really, really supportive of that language. (Ames, Interview, 5/4/15)

Mr. Ames took this one step further and has altered the kind of examples he gives in class:

I try to keep any analogy I’m using sort of gender-neutral as well—when we’re talking about a piece dealing with love, I try and say, “a *person* you might have feelings for” as opposed to the stereotypical *boy loves girl or vice versa*. I do this also because we have a gay student in our chorus, and probably more that I’m not aware of. (Ames, Interview, 5/4/15)

Here, Mr. Ames showed a keen awareness about the fact that issues of gender-sexual diversity can play a role in the identity development of teenage students and that these issues are ever-present in the classroom, though they rarely are acknowledged (McBride, 2016; Meyer, 2010; Palkki & Caldwell, in press; Pascoe, 2007).

In addition to in-class modifications, choral teachers must consider issues such as concert attire. As some respondents to Palkki and Caldwell's (in press) survey noted, this was sometimes difficult. This was also the main "sticking point" for the choir teacher of Ronn, the high school student from a southern state whose email message is included in Chapter One: his being forced to wear a dress ultimately made him leave high school choir. For Mr. Ames, Sara wearing a dress was not a problem. As intimated above, the administration of the school had some concern over this matter, but eventually Sara was allowed to wear a dress in choral performances. Recalling the notion of trans women being an affront to hegemonic masculinity, it is unsurprising that some people were surprised and/or troubled by the prospect of a trans woman in a dress. Even Ms. Dengler noted that the "administration's response was you put the spotlight on yourself instead of the group of concert-goers because people will be looking at 'who is the guy in the dress?'" (Dengler, Interview, 11/4/15). Especially considering the recent "bathroom bill" hysteria in the United States (e.g., Petrow, 2016), it is not surprising that many Americans see a trans woman and think "guy in a dress" rather than "woman." But for trans women, this is a vital distinction. As Wilchins (2004) wrote,

And what can it mean to feel like a natural woman or a real man? Since these are binary opposites, one can only distinguish feeling like a real man to the exact degree that one does not feel like a real woman, and vice versa. (p. 130)

“Natural woman” and “real man” are fallacies that are accepted by most people in the United States (McBride, 2016; Pascoe, 2007; Wilchins, 2004). Another part of Sara’s gender journey at RGHS deserving of attention is the way in which she was assigned to a separate dressing room for the school musical. Possibly related to the same fear about “men in women’s room,” Sara was asked to leave the female dressing room. Mr. Ames said: “I think there were a couple of girls in the chamber choir who were really upset about it—got some parents involved—there were some phone calls. He ultimately, I think, decided to move her out” (Ames, Interview, 5/4/15). In this situation, Sara was “othered” and forced to use a separate space in which to change. This is related to Payne and Smith’s (2014) notion that “Students who fall outside the heteronormative alignment of biological sex, normative gender, and heterosexual orientation are hyper-visible and often perceived as dangerous and hypersexual” (p. 408).

Mr. Thompson played a significant role in Sara’s transition. It is especially surprising that he went out of his way to give Sara a “pep talk” even though she was not his student at the time.

He took me into his office to give me a pep talk and I had never *met* him before. And, I wound up going into being transgender and “this isn’t just about spinning a flag” and how I had the two things linked together in my mind. (Interview #3, 7/17/15)

Sara always spoke of Mr. Thompson with great admiration and respect. In one specific case, Mr. Thompson was influential in setting a uniform precedent. As Sara said, “He was responsible for letting me dress as a woman in my first musical, which was sort of the first big thing” (Interview #3, 7/17/15). This situation demonstrates that sometimes it takes one teacher who will stand up for a trans student and advocate for their well being before school administrators will alter their stance.

Voice and Gender Identity

In addition to policies and mentorship, it is important to examine the connection between Sara's voice and her gender identity. Sara proudly exclaimed, "I'm a girl and I'm a bass and I own that," indicating that there is not a strong connection between Sara's deep vocal range and her gender identity/expression/performance. Sara said, "Much earlier on in my transition, two, three years ago I thought, '*Well, I'm not supposed to like this,*' but since the whole honors choir thing has happened it's become my signature" (Interview #2, 5/4/15, emphasis added). The statement, "I'm not supposed to like this," indicates a certain pressure that trans teens can feel to embody stereotypical gender traits (Pascoe, 2007). As Zimman (2014) wrote, some trans people "may prefer a nonnormative voice, in order to signal a queer or distinctly trans identity" (p. 127). Rather than feeling that she needed to alter her voice to "fit" her gender identity, Sara celebrated her rich, low voice as something unique to her. As Manovski, (2013) queried, "What if you had a girl who wanted to sing tenor or bass and could? What if they auditioned for the school musical, desiring to perform roles contrary to your expectations?" (p. 29). This is exactly what happened with Sara during her time at RGHS.

Sara also noted that she was not the only student at RGHS to sing a non-normative voice part. Bond (2015) used the term "voice variant" in referring to a countertenor navigating the binary world of vocal music (e.g., gendered vocal parts, gendered uniforms, gendered text in repertoire). Sara pointed out,

Well I mean everyone has a voice part. There is more overlap than just me. We have Ben Finney in concert choir who is a small guy who sings alto and we have some alto ladies who can reach very low into the tenor range. (Interview #2, 5/4/15)

There are many ways that choral music has become gendered. For example, it is not uncommon for children's choirs to have male and female students singing treble parts. Thus, most children's choir directors will refer to these sections as "sopranos and altos" rather than "ladies" (or similar). When working with guest conductors, however, this may not happen, causing the students with "non-normative" voice parts to feel awkward or uncomfortable. This can be especially true for trans people, who may feel dysphoric as a result of such vocabulary. As one respondent in Palkki and Caldwell's (in press) study wrote,

A trope that has become standard choral parlance of referring to TB voices as 'men' and SA voices as 'women' is EXTREMELY CISSEXIST IN NATURE and [makes] me as a trans person singing in a choir feel very awkward and uncomfortable. While I may sing in a section of all men, I am not a man, and I don't appreciate being called one, especially when that misgendering [*sic*] has been used to diminish/disregard my identity in many facets of life. I would strongly encourage choral teachers and the greater choral educational institution to begin to abandon this antiquated vernacular.

Fortunately, Sara's experience was positive overall, which can be attributed in part to the support she received within the school music program, echoing findings from Silveira and Goff (2016) and Sullivan (2014).

Gender Journey

Rehearsal vocabulary is just one part of Sara's larger, and fascinating, gender journey. The Internet has become such a powerful tool, online research and connection is a common theme among trans teens (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011; Singh, 2013). As Beemyn and Rankin (2011) wrote, "The importance of the Internet in the lives of many of the participants was reflected in how they first met other transgender people" (p. 58). This is certainly true for Sara,

who began her research on a website called Laura's Playground (<http://www.lauras-playground.com/>). As Sara said,

I talked to folks in an online chat room on a site called Laura's Playground, which is a very gaudy but very informative resource for all things gender and cross-dressing related. So, I learned more about all of the terms and the alphabet soup that goes into this stuff, and sometime during the beginning of eighth grade or before, I realized that there was more to it than clothes. (Interview #1, 4/23/15)

This connection to other trans people can be very important, especially for youth like Sara who lived in rural communities.

One aspect of Sara's gender journey that I had not anticipated was discussion of her having Asperger's Syndrome and similar diagnoses on the Autism spectrum (e.g., Ceglie, Skagerberg, Baron-Cohen, & Auyeung, 2014; de Vries et al., 2010; Robinow, 2009; VanderLaan et al., 2015). As Robinow (2009) wrote, "Individuals with [Autism Disorder] are over-represented in the population of those with Gender Identity Disorder" (p. 149). From a clinical perspective, de Vries et al. (2010) wrote that, for children with gender dysphoria, there is a need "to disentangle whether the gender dysphoria evolved from a general feeling of being 'different' or a 'core' cross-gender identity" (p. 935). While an extended discussion about Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and gender dysphoria is beyond the scope of this dissertation, research indicates that there is a high prevalence of gender dysphoria among those diagnosed with ASD (recall, however, that Sara has no formal ASD diagnosis). Like her dysphoria, she described it as "self evident."

In terms of support systems, Sara had an extremely supportive mother and sister. She also identified several friends as well as Mr. Thompson and Ms. Dengler as strong mentor/support

figures. As Ms. Dengler noted, “She was fortunate, as we all are if we have good friends, but she had some supportive people that I think helped it be easier because they protected her” and “her parents were very supportive of her” (Dengler, Interview, 11/4/15). This support is crucial for trans teenagers who must navigate their gender within the contexts of school and home simultaneously (Beam, 2008; Gutierrez, 2004; Kuklin, 2014).

Yet, Sara did experience some minor bullying during her tenure at River Glen High School, a phenomenon that is discussed by several authors (e.g., Beemyn & Rankin, 2011; Greytak, Kosciw, and Diaz, 2009; Manovski, 2013; McGuire, Anderson, Toomey, & Russell, 2010; Sausa, 2005; Wyss, 2004). Unlike many participants in Sausa’s (2005) study whose concerns were largely “ignored by administrators, teachers, and staff” (p. 20), the administration at Sara’s school acted quickly and purposefully when bullying occurred. Sara said,

When it’s people that I don’t know, I can’t report them. The last time it was someone that I did know, I did report them and, well, my sophomore year somebody who was just kind of a class clown said some stuff and then I reported him and then he stopped and he was nice. This year, there’s someone who’s a class clown, but more of just an annoying idiot and I reported him and he stopped. (Interview #1, 4/23/15)

Ms. Dengler concurred: “Three times a year, maybe four, she would come to me ‘there’s some kid harassing me in the lunch line’ and I felt like at least on my end and I think our current administrations end, it was handled expediently” (Dengler, Interview, 11/4/15). These data indicate that RGHS upheld the policy guidelines in Title IX that require schools to protect LGBT students (Ali, 2010). Reasons such as this led both Sara and Ms. Dengler to be somewhat surprised that the “small town thing” did not happen in Sara’s life.

Sara's parents helped her to facilitate a legal name change as part of her transition, meaning that Sara's name would be correct on school district documents, concert programs, etc. As Beemyn (2005) wrote, "Being able to alter their records and documents... is personally and legally important for many trans students" (p. 83). Sara's choice to change her name legally meant that she was able to have teachers and administrators use her real name in print and in speech. Sara had her name legally changed after sophomore year, but still some teachers had trouble using it: "Some teachers are a little bit older and it took them longer to get it. Some people still mess up pronouns. Pretty much nobody messes up my name now that it's on everything" (Interview #1, 4/23/15). This comment may be related to Beemyn and Rankin's (2011) assertion about a generational shift on trans issues.

Jon: Discussion And Connection To Extant Literature

Place/Setting

Jon lived most of his life in Landerstown, an upper middle-class suburb. Although Ms. Perkins the drama teacher classified the town as historically "incredibly conservative," Jon's story highlighted the fact that certain facets of the town (Landerstown High School included) were astoundingly progressive. The school administration led the charge in supporting Jon during his transition at school—a major departure from the more typical narrative of the parents encouraging the school to become more compassionate and accommodating (Hill & Menvielle, 2009; Slesaransky-Poe, Ruzzi, Dimedio, & Stanley, 2013). In terms of geography, some extant literature suggests that the Northeastern U.S. may be more progressive than the Midwest when it comes to acceptance of gender-sexual diversity (Hirsman, 2012; Palkki & Caldwell, in press).

Within the walls of LHS, the choir room and E-wing (band, choir, and drama) served as safe spaces sheltering safe people with whom Jon could be open about his gender identity. As Jon said,

I think when I'm back here [in the E-wing] in the department and I'm doing rehearsal or I'm in choir, people are calling me Jon and saying "he" because *that's what they view me as. That's who I am to them.* But when it's out in the rest of the school, people are calling me Jon because it's what they know I want to be called. So it's the difference between someone actually seeing me as male and someone just doing what is making me happy.

(Interview #2, 10/13/15, emphasis added)

Having a place within the school where he could be comfortable and safe played a major role in Jon's transition. This finding mirrors discoveries from music education studies (Palkki & Caldwell, in press; Silviera & Goff, 2016; Sullivan, 2014).

For Jon, singing in a choir has been a significant part of his life and will likely continue to be when he attends college.

There's something about singing with an ensemble, especially select, there's something about singing with a small group of people and in that moment, you and this exact group of people may never ever sing this song again and have this moment again with this audience and this conductor, but in that moment you all have that memory together... It's so beautiful. And I love that I can be a part of something that's so beautiful. (Interview #4, 11/17/15)

Palkki and Caldwell (in press) explored the notion of secondary choral rooms/programs as safe space for LGBTQ singers. On a Likert-type scale of one to five, the mean for the statement, "My high school choir room (the physical space) was a place at school where I felt

safe as an LGBTQ student,” was 3.73—the highest mean in the quantitative section of this study. This indicates that throughout the United States, choir rooms are spaces where many queer teens feel safe; these spaces are key for trans teens (e.g., Bryan, 2012; Hill & Menvielle, 2009). Similarly, for Sullivan’s (2014) participants, trans adults who reflected on their schooling experiences, the art room, library, and music room were the preferred spaces. In a recent survey study exploring the attitudes of music educators toward trans students, Silveira and Goff (2016) reported “fairly positive attitudes on average” (p. 1). Part of Jon’s feelings of safety may be related to the Landerstown High School GSA, which had been active since Ms. Perkins started the group. As Toomey, Ryan, Diaz, and Russell (2011) wrote, “We find that the presence of a GSA seems to be a more salient predictor of well-being than GSA membership” (p. 182).

Gender Journey

Jon disclosed his sexuality early, “coming out” as a lesbian in sixth grade. Though this disclosure was rife with fits and starts, Jon’s parents were not supportive.

And it became this big thing and my parents started to get angry at me when I came out to them and they found out that people knew. *[imitating parents]* “No one’s going to want to be friends with you anymore” and *[exasperated sigh]* “everyone’s going to think that you’re trying to *rape* them” and all these horrible things. (Interview #3, 11/16/15)

Here Jon’s story mirrors one of the milestones for FTM trans people set forth by Beemyn and Rankin (2011): “thinking of oneself as a lesbian, but realizing over time it was not a good fit” (p. 116). In addition, this quote is not unlike findings from Grossman, D’Augelli, and Frank (2011) who found that, among 55 trans youth, more than two thirds experienced verbal harassment from their parents. Jon had disclosed his gender identity to teacher/mentors at LHS before he felt comfortable speaking with his parents, mirroring data from Grossman and D’Augelli (2006).

Binary gender divisions have become so engrained in school culture that this construct rarely is questioned (Bryan, 2012; Meyer, 2010, 2014; Pascoe, 2007; Thorne, 1993). Ms. Perkins identified a potentially challenging situation for a LHS student—a difficulty based on the ignorance of society about a spectrum of gender, including those who identify as gender fluid—highlighting the changing landscape surrounding gender in schools and in society at large:

I have a kid who came out to me on the last day of school last year as gender fluid. And he's *really struggling* with that. But because that's brand new in the zeitgeist, *nobody* knows how to talk about that or deal with that, and if he were to come to school going back and forth between genders everyday, I *know* that people here would talk about that and take issue with it and whatnot in the beginning. (Perkins, Interview, 10/13/15)

As Davis (2009) noted, rejection of being a gender “seems to celebrate queer, postmodern valorizations of fluidity and the deconstruction of gender dualism” (p. 98). Some see this expanding gender landscape as a fear-inducing situation involving harmful stereotypes.

False tropes. The quote above from Jon exemplifies societal fear regarding gender variance. Unfortunately, this idea of LGBTQA people as pedophiles and rapists is a trope that has been perpetuated for years. As Beemyn and Rankin (2011) noted,

Anti-transgender bias is, in part, a logical outgrowth of the genderism prevalent in educational, religious, and governmental institutions. As demonstrated by the research on college campuses, this negative climate fosters hate crimes against transgender people and contributes to their ‘invisibility.’ (p. 89)

Considering this genderism and fear, perhaps it is unsurprising that, as of the time of this writing, the United States had seen a rash of “bathroom bills” designed to “protect normal people” from things like “men in the women’s room.” As Steinmetz (2015) noted,

Some social conservatives will say that they think transgender people are deluded. “I don’t want men who think they are women in my bathrooms,” testified a Maryland woman in a 2014 hearing on an LGBT non-discrimination bill. But a more common argument is that allowing transgender women to use the women’s room would open the doors up for sexual predators or peeping teenage boys to use those protections as a dangerous ruse to get into female spaces. (para. 5)

These tropes are unfounded and dangerous. When I asked Jon to clarify which bathrooms he has used at school, he said:

I really just avoid going to the bathroom. The school is fine with me using the men’s room, but I’ve always been afraid to, just because I don’t want to push any buttons. But it’s not on the school, or a repercussion of the Obama legislation, it’s just a me thing.
(personal communication, 5/18/16)

Frequent voiding (the clinical term for purposeful avoidance of urination) can cause health problems, including bladder infections, stretching of the bladder, and even bladder cancer (e.g., Mass, Goldfarb, & Shah, 2014). Especially in an era in which trans teens face bullying and harassment from their peers (e.g., Greytak, Kosciw, & Diaz, 2009), these institutional and legal efforts may be devastating to an already vulnerable community.

Through his “coming out” process, Jon had several powerful mentors who spoke openly about their support of him, no matter his sexuality or gender identity. He had a camp counselor and a middle school teacher who reassured him, even when he was not hearing positive messages

from his parents. This openness about LGBTQA issues at the middle school level is unique and encouraging.

Masculinity and sexuality. Jon's journey around performing his masculinity began sophomore year. As Elliot (2010) noted, "Masculinity meets with approval only when performed by trans and queer men who consciously refute dominant white signifiers of masculinity, as well as any permanent or coherent identity as men" (p. 66). Jon always seemed very comfortable with himself—confident, charming, and well-spoken, and "sensitive." As he said, "I'm so sensitive. It's horrible... I'm a hopeless romantic. None of that has changed, and I guess that's why I seem wimpy sometimes and my friends joke that I'm going to make the full circle and become a gay man" (Interview #2, 10/13/15). Here one can see the societal conflation between gender and sexuality. As Butler (1999) wrote, "Under conditions of normative heterosexuality, policing gender is sometimes used as a way of securing heterosexuality" (p. xii). Because Jon was "sensitive" and a "hopeless romantic," his friends joked that he may become a gay man, even though he has a girlfriend and has never expressed interest in dating other men (Pascoe, 2007).

Parents

Jon's parents did not have an easy time coming to accept his gender identity and/or sexuality. Because he "came out" first as a lesbian (which perhaps is considered more socially acceptable than being trans), his gender disclosure may have caught his parents off guard. As Hill and Menvielle (2009) wrote,

Parents offered several insights in their struggle to accept their children. The mother of one female-bodied child who had adopted a masculine name, dressed as a boy, and cut her hair short, eventually realized that acceptance was her only choice: "It was very tough adjusting to that and probably took me a year . . . or so." (p. 257)

These authors also noted that, “Many of the parents [in the study] had spent a great deal of time reading and thinking about what their child was going through” (p. 258). In a study by Grossman, D’Augelli, Howell, and Hubbard (2006), 54% of mothers and 63% of fathers reacted negatively or very negatively after disclosure. This struggle for acceptance was certainly present in Jon’s story. In fact, the school seemed to always be far ahead of Jon’s parents in terms of acceptance and aided his transition at school. As Jon said:

My mom called our principal last year and was like, “You can’t let teachers call my child by blah blah blah.” And the principal was basically like, “Look, my teachers are going to call your child whatever your child wants to be called.” (Interview #1, 10/12/15)

Also,

My parents are the only thing that really was an issue, which, you know, sucked because literally *everyone* was on board. My friends, my parents’ friends, my teachers, my coaches, my friends’ parents: *everyone* was on board except for the two most important people in my life. (Interview #1, 10/12/15)

Eventually, the perceived tension between LHS staff and Jon’s parents resulted in a meeting before Jon’s senior year to set ground rules and clarify policies. The drama teacher had listed his name as “Jon” on a cast list on the LHS Facebook page. Here Jon recalled how his mother reacted to this situation:

So, she got really upset. She freaked out. It was tough with them for awhile, but they finally came around, but it was tough. So the point of having the meeting was... the administration didn’t want that to happen again, so they wanted to sit down and make sure everything we were putting into play and all the guidelines we were setting were also OK with my parents. (Interview #1, 10/12/15)

This meeting followed recommendations about creating a coalition within the school and between the school and family members (Luecke, 2011; Meyer, 2010; Slesaransky-Poe, Ruzzi, Dimedio, & Stanley, 2013) and provided a model of how a school can follow the new guidelines set forth by the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice regarding transgender students in public schools (Lhamon & Gupta, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Voice and Identity/Vocal Health

Jon indicated that he felt a major connection between his voice and his gender identity. (Moore, 2008). As Edwards (2009) remarked, “Voice is one of the major cues that we use in ascribing gender—often in a nanosecond—and is a significant component of our identity” (para. 1). Jon’s speaking and singing voice played a major role in how he performed his gender identity (Davies & Goldberg, 2006; Davies, Papp, & Antoni, 2015; Edwards, 2009; Elorriaga, 2011; Faulkner & Davidson, 2006; Zimman, 2014). In speaking of a conversation with his speech doctor, Jon said:

Dr. Endroth said that I need to bring up my voice an octave. So I work on it. And I’ve tried to bring it up in school and bring it up at home, but when you go out places, it’s hard. Because I already look like I’m twelve. So as much as Dr. Endroth is like, “That doesn’t define your gender: your voice doesn’t define your gender.” Of *course* it defines your gender. So, it’s hard. But I know that I need to, so I try to and it’s obviously a lot easier and helpful—beneficial (Interview #4, 11/17/15)

As Zimman (2014) stated, “Some trans people may wish to change their speaking styles as part of a shift in gender expression, and the fact that many gender differences are learned rather than innate suggests that kind of change is possible, if challenging” (p. 127). This certainly was challenging for Jon, who had vocal problems for several years (Azul, 2015). Edwards (2009)

also noted that issues surrounding trans voice issues may cause fear—a statement that does not ring true in Jon’s story. Though Jon struggled to make his voice lower, he never seemed to feel shame about his voice: “I was never scared of the fact or embarrassed about the fact that my voice was lower” (Interview #1, 10/12/15). Regarding vocal health, Jon had several issues, likely due to him pushing his voice lower in order for him to be more stealth in public. He said, “And for me it’s like, if I don’t have to tell them, why tell them?” (Interview #3, 11/16/15). Also,

Even just my speaking voice, I think it makes me more comfortable when I’m out and about. Especially if I’m with a group of guys that I don’t know. It’s a grrrr [*growling sound*] thing. So, there’s definitely a correlation and a connection [between my gender and sexuality]. (Interview #4, 11/17/15)

Here the grrrr [*growling sound*] may be indicative of how Jon viewed the way that he was expected to perform his masculinity in public.

Eventually, Jon noted that his voice part was so important to his gender identity that he would not be “as strong or as confident of a singer if I didn’t sing a male voice part... I don’t think I’d want to sing if I was still an alto” (Interview #4, 11/17/15). This is a significant statement, considering the importance of music and singing in Jon’s life. For him, singing tenor signified a “guy part,” and that was important for him as he navigated his identities in the choral environment. Even in middle school, though Jon sang alto in choir, he played male roles in musicals. This means that, before high school, Jon already approached borderland between the alto and tenor range and between male and female. Recall that during Jon’s freshman year in choir, he was assigned to sing alto but sang tenor on certain pieces or in sections of pieces. This is true of some cisgender female singers as well³⁸. Fortunately, Jon had middle and high school

³⁸ I recently conducted a middle school honor choir in which a cisgender girl sang tenor 1.

choral music educators that listened to him and helped him find a range that worked with his voice.

Jon also struggled to find his head voice (Chapman & Morris, 2011). He spoke of having to “re-train” his voice, as he had spent such a long time pushing his range lower and not allowing his head voice to develop:

I’m obviously re-training it because I use it in a different part of my voice and having to learn to how to use my falsetto in my lower range not only because it’s for having to sing lighter, but when I’m singing with other tenors who can’t belt certain notes, which means I can’t belt those notes or else we can’t blend. (Interview #5, 2/5/16)

The result of this lack of head voice and pushing was vocal damage—specifically vocal nodes. This phenomenon of nodes in trans singers due to altering their vocal range to be “stealth” needs further study. As Azul (2015) and Van Borsel, De Cuypere, Rubens, and Destaerke (2000) noted, there has not been sufficient scholarship about the vocal issues of FTM trans people—much of the extant literature focuses on re-training the MTF voice. Van Borsel et al. (2000) wrote, “Six of 16 subjects had already tried themselves to change their voice before the start of the hormone therapy mainly by attempting to speak at lower pitch” (p. 430). Similarly, these authors wrote that:

Two of 16 subjects of the sample survey wrote that they did not experience any voice alteration. Both reportedly already had a low voice before the androgen therapy was initiated. It would seem then that measuring speaking fundamental frequency before hormone therapy is recommended. In this way subjects with a low speaking fundamental frequency may be informed that in their case the voice change to be expected may possibly be limited. Careful history taking with regard to the practice [*sic*] of singing

seems also warranted. Those patients who do practice [*sic*] singing and certainly professional singers should be warned that pitch range will irreversibly alter consequent upon administration of cross-gender hormones. (pp. 438-439)

Jon reported always having a lower voice, and, as of the time of data collection, he had not begun hormone therapy. It is hoped that doctors will take his performing and singing aspirations into account when deciding upon a course of hormone treatment. Jon's story is reminiscent of Constansis (2008), an accomplished singer who decided upon a lower dose of testosterone in an attempt to make the voice change more gradual (read: less severe).

Mentors

Teachers. Mr. Mullins and Ms. Perkins both were completely supportive of Jon once he had disclosed his gender identity to them. This is consistent with findings from Grossman and D'Augelli (2006) who found that 65% of the respondents reported disclosing their gender identity to their teachers. As Jon remarked:

They were just always there. Both of them have always been open books with me.

They've always been influential in letting me be who I want to be and supporting me and showing me that I can still be like a normal kid in the department and not letting who I am effect that, I think it's really changed how I think of myself. (Interview #1, 10/12/15)

This quote shows the power that positive mentors can have in the lives of trans youth. Jon was not receiving the same level of support at home, so having his gender identity validated at school, and specifically in the performing arts programs at RHS, was extremely influential. Mr. Mullins even seemed to "lay down breadcrumbs" for Jon before he had even "come out" as trans. Jon said,

It's weird, he made me a tenor before I knew and he put the suit option on the table before I knew. It's always been weird, he's got this little intuition... and has always given me a little push. *[chuckling]* He's never cared. He's like, "yeah, wear a suit, what do I care?" (Interview #1, 10/12/15)

"Safe people" can be important in the gender journeys of trans students. Perhaps because of a confluence of luck, privilege, and geography, Jon grew up in a progressive suburb in the Northeast where he came into contact with teachers like Mr. Mullins who supported him, even when his own family did not. Jon's situation, then, stands in stark contrast to the plight of Ronn, the high school student in a southern state, who wrote

I quit choir last year because my director forced me to wear a dress. I begged him and begged him to let me wear the attire of my gender identity, but he repeatedly refused, even after talking with the counselor about it. I was furious and miserable, and I quit.

The contrast between this teacher and Mr. Mullins could not be more dramatic.

Mr. Mullins even went "above and beyond" for Jon when he advocated for him with the state music educators association regarding All State Choir. When the initial reaction of the officials in the state music education organization (the group that organizes and sponsors the All State Choir) was negative, Mr. Mullins pushed back—hard—to advocate for Jon's right to sing a voice part that matched both his range and his gender identity. Mr. Mullins perhaps did not anticipate that this action would lead to systemic changes in the state music education organization, a policy shift that will influence countless future All State Choir auditionees and members in the state. This shift has been taken as a blue print by other states working to make their policies more inclusive of gender diversity.

As noted by Grossman, D’Augelli, and Frank (2011), K–12 teachers need to be equipped to advocate for the well being of trans youth with whom they have contact. This construct is exemplified in the smooth transition to a new choir teacher Jon experienced at LHS when Mr. Mullins left for another high school teaching position. In the middle and high school choral programs in Landerstown, Jon had an open, honest relationship with Mr. Mullins about his gender identity and vocal issues. Because the new teacher came from within the district and had worked with Jon in several musicals, there was no need for Jon to worry about having to “come out” to the new teacher and to educate him about his gender identity.

Ms. Martinez. As was true in Sara’s story, Ms. Martinez, the LHS student assistance counselor and anti-bullying specialist, served as a mediator, a confidant, and the coordinator of Jon’s transition at school (Callender, 2008; de Jong, 2014). Martinez spearheaded a conversation about policies, organized the meeting between Jon’s parents and school officials, and crafted an email to the faculty to explain the outcomes of said meeting.

School Policies

Landerstown High School, with the help of Ms. Martinez, honored Jon by using his name and pronouns. As Sausa (2005) noted, for trans students, especially those who do not wish to broadly disclose their gender identity at school, this can be an extremely important part of their ability to feel safe and comfortable at school. This is an instance in which secondary schools may look to higher education professionals for guidance. As Beemyn (2005) wrote, “Updated records and documents can ensure that trans students will not be outed” (p. 83). Unfortunately, once Jon left the LHS campus, the use of name and pronouns could not be guaranteed, as evidenced by honor choir experiences in which he was continually “outed,” misgendered, and called the wrong

name³⁹. For Jon, who was simply trying to be a “normal” high school student in an honor choir, these instances were hurtful. The misgendering and unintentional outing at choral events, and Jon’s comment that “this generation is *very* different from the old generation,” are indicative of a generational shift discussed by Beemyn and Rankin (2011) and others. Jon’s experience in honors choir also demonstrates how, generally, it is much easier for trans men to be stealth when compared with other subsets of the trans community (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011; Kulkin, 2014).

Jon’s experiences led to systemic changes, both at Landerstown High School and in the state music educators association, and laid foundations for long-term change, partially because he had input in the process (Meyer, 2010). Because of Mr. Mullins’ advocacy and refusal to compromise, future trans students in this state will not face the same issues while auditioning for honor choirs and other state choral events. Jon’s experiences also are helping to shape policy across the country. Since undertaking this research project, Mr. Mullins and I have communicated with professionals in several other states about their policies regarding trans students in state choral/vocal events (see footnote 40).

At the school level, Landerstown High School had an active GSA. As Bilodeau (2009) noted, often training and education about trans issues is necessary even within the LGBTQA community. This is exemplified in the story about Jon’s “testing” at All State choir rehearsal (recall that he assumed that one of the teachers there was gay).

So we walk up and I’m like, “oh god, please don’t—*please* don’t say my name.” And I look at the guy and I say, “Kade,” thinking that he’ll check me off for my last name. And he ignores me and he *screams* my first name. And Frank looks at me, and Frank’s very

³⁹ Though the new U.S. Departments of Education and Justice guidelines regarding trans students (Lhamon & Gupta, 2016) apply at school, it is unclear if/how these regulations should apply at outside events like honor choirs.

confused. I'm like, *you've got to be kidding me*. And so that ruined my day. I (Interview #2, 10/13/15)

Based on her work regarding gender and sexuality discourses in high school, Pascoe (2007) suggested that high schools allow the creation of groups like the Landerstown High School GSA. In terms of bullying, Jon noted several times that "I'm not the good example of trans kids going through bullying." Certainly, his story stands in stark contrast to the horrifying stories of harassment conveyed by scholars including Beam (2008), Greytak, Kosciw, and Diaz (2009) and Wyss (2004).

Choir Policies

In terms of policies surrounding Jon's experiences in choral music, several examples highlight a lack of readiness on the part of many music organizations where gender variance is concerned (Manovski, 2013; Nichols, 2013). For example, Jon's rooming situation for All State Choir was far more complex for the state music education association officials than for Jon or Mr. Mullins (All State coordinators are legally responsible for the students during these events, so it is unsurprising that they hesitated). As Jon recounted,

When they finally decided that I could audition as a tenor, they were like, "Where is he going to want to sleep?" Actually it was funny, the president of the board brought it up as if it was the end of the world. She was like, *[in a character voice, imitating the president of the board]* "Oh no... but, where will he sleep?" And Mr. Mullins was like, *[matter of fact]* "Wherever he wants." (Interview #2, 10/13/15)

This is Jon's interpretation of events, and, of course, Jon could not literally sleep wherever he wanted. Considering that a majority of high school students are under age 18, it makes sense that caution would be taken in what was likely an unprecedented situation. This instance exemplifies

Payne and Smith's (2014) notion about gender variant young people being perceived as hypersexual. According to the new "Dear Colleague Letter" guidelines (Lhamon & Gupta, 2016), which specify that trans students be able to stay in rooms according to their gender identity, LHS and the state organization made the right choice.

Because Jon is trans, it was assumed that his rooming with cisgender boys would be a problem with the parents of his roommates. Yet, the parents of the three male students with whom he roomed had no issue with the situation. This situation also highlights how much less comfortable conversation about gender is when compared to discourse about sexuality. Consider a high school student who is "out" to her friends as a cisgender lesbian. I conjecture that school and organization officials would not object to her staying in a room with other cisgender women. Why should the situation be different for trans students?

Mr. Mullins was very understanding prior to and during Jon's transition, including with the issue of choir uniforms. Jon noted that Mr. Mullins allowed him to wear a suit in choir performances even before his official "coming out." The uniform question was never a major concern for Mr. Mullins, though he admitted that he was initially skeptical.

Two years ago, it was—well forever it had always been boys and girls. Boys dress code, girls dress code and two years ago a student asked me, a female student who identifies as female, is female said, "Can I wear a suit?" And without thinking, I said, "No, you can't." And I just dropped and went on to something else and I sat down after the period... "Why the hell did I say no?!" That doesn't make sense. So the next day I had another section of Chorus. Before it could even be asked, I corrected myself and said, choose either or. Doesn't matter to me. And then the day after that, with that same student, I said, "I

misspoke after I thought about this and realized my decision made no sense, yes if you want to wear the boys attire, that's fine.” (Mullins, Interview, 10/13/15)

The importance of concert attire should not be overlooked. As Edidi remarked in Edidi and Palkki (2015),

We must also begin to move towards distinguishing the difference between gender and gender performance especially as they will both manifest differently within the classroom. For example what clothes to wear is a part of gender performance and while a student may decide what uniform feels best suited for them determined by their gender, you will find the expansion of this thought will also help with engaging with cisgender students as well who may not find themselves on a strict binary of gender performance. (para. 35)

Even for Mr. Mullins, an “out” gay man who had fought for LGBTQA rights at LHS, was caught “off guard” by a request from a female student to wear attire normally worn by the “wrong gender”. Gender norms are deeply engrained in our society, in our schools (Pascoe, 2007) and in our daily discourse (Butler, 1993, 1999).

Skyler: Discussion And Connection To Extant Literature

Gender Identity and Stereotypes

Unlike Sara and Jon, who still, in their own way, subscribe to the gender binary, Skyler considers themselves agender—without any gender and with no plans of having one. This is a major difference in their story and a reason why Skyler's story played out rather differently, especially at school. As Davis (2009) wrote: “Rejection of being a gender seems to celebrate queer, postmodern valorizations of fluidity and the deconstruction of gender dualism” (p. 98). Davis' scholarship raises the question echoed in Skyler's story: does gender fluidity signify an

expanded spectrum of gender or simply a rejection of binary gender labels? The latter seemed to be the case for Skyler, who said,

I'm agender. So, I'm pretty much, I don't know, I've identified as a lot of things over time and that's pretty much the one I've settled on for now because I think gender is kind of dumb and I really don't see the need to have one. (Interview #1, 1/23/16)

As Wells, Roberts, and Allen (2012) wrote,

Breaking down stereotypes and releasing students from their gender straightjackets is one critical way in which educators can open up space for all students who define themselves as outside of the mainstream to find support and to be valued for who they are and not for what society tells them they should be. (p. 8)

Several studies have explored these concepts. In exploring data from the National Transgender Discrimination Survey, on which the options for gender identity were (a) male/man, (b) female/woman, (c) part time as one gender, part time as another, and (d) a gender not listed here, Harrison, Grant, and Herman (2012) found that 13 percent of respondents identified as “a gender not listed here” (p. 14). Of this 13 percent, “Several... [claimed] a genderqueer identity while expressing the belief that they possess no gender” (p. 20). These data indicate that the “transgender umbrella” is expanding and that more and more younger trans people identify more with Roen’s (2001) concept of both/neither, as opposed to either/or. Rankin and Beemyn (2012) also reinforced this point in their research. In taking a closer look at the data collected for their 2011 book *The Lives of Transgender People*, the authors compared various milestones for different groups, including those placed under the label “genderqueer.” These milestones included: “(a) feeling and often expressing a different gender identity from a young age, (b), realizing that genderqueer is a viable identity, and (c) not fitting in to transgender/LGBT

communities” (p. 4). Certainly (a) and (b) resonate in considering Skyler’s story. From a young age, they felt awkward about having to identify with either end of the gender binary; this is demonstrated by the fact that they explored several labels and did research to find a moniker that made them feel most comfortable. It is untrue that Skyler did not feel part of the trans/LGBT community. They have identified as “gay” in the past and spoke eloquently about their feelings about oppression and violence against trans people. I never got the sense that they feel like an outside in the LGBTQA community.

“Coming out.” A major difference for many gender non-conforming people is that there may be no “coming out” in the traditional sense. While trans women and trans men may “come out” as identifying as the opposite gender, gender non-conforming people often are left trying to explain a complex shade of grey in a world that mostly recognizes only black and white.

I did a lot of realizing stuff in eighth grade-ish, so a little bit after that I started going by a different name, asking people to try and use that: just my family. In the summer after eighth grade and I was planning to go to high school in ninth grade and introduce myself to teachers and people as Skyler instead of my old name. So, I guess it was around then. Before that, *I never had a super big coming out thing* but I was just sort of—that was when I started asking people to use my name. (Interview #1, 1/23/16, emphasis added)

Pronouns. In addition to this lack of a more “traditional” disclosure process, Skyler was not widely “out” at school. Their parents understood their gender and used their chosen pronouns (they/them/their) at home; however, Skyler did not expect their teachers to use singular they pronouns in class. In this way, they were continually misgendered at school, including by Mr. Cooper, the choir teacher with whom they are very close. However, this did not seem to be a major issue at the time of data collection:

I think I waited on the pronouns a little, because the pronouns were a little more confusing for everybody, I guess. In fact, it was interesting because that was actually a much more recent thing and I still don't use them with teachers and stuff—just my family and friends that I've told. They at least try. (Interview #1, 1/23/16)

Here Skyler seemed to hint at the fact that many people see the use of they/them/their pronouns as strange and exotic—an exoticism that may ultimately contribute to the erasure of trans identities:

While intersex, “inter-gender,” “non-gender,” or even “post-gender” conditions exist in different individual's lived reality they do not in language, thus people who do not conform to a rigid two-sex system are relegated to the discursive purgatory of non-signification. (Wayne, 2005, p. 87)

Wayne (2005) further noted that:

A number of resolutions to the grievous restrictions of our sex-specific pronoun system have been proposed. One popular solution is to use the third person plural in order to dissolve the sex/gender specificity of “she” into the sexual ambiguity of “them.”

Grammatical purists might contend that this use of the plural “they” as a singular neutral pronoun is improper and that “he” is already in common use. However, linguistic historian Ann Bodine shows that use of singular “they” has been common for over two hundred years, prompting an English Act of Parliament in 1850 that legislated the replacement of “they” with “he.” (p. 87)

In this way, they/them/their pronouns may become the new normal after some time. Just as “Ms.” took some time to become part of the established lexicon (Wayne, 2005), so too must American society have time to grapple with calling one person “they.” As Walsh (2015) noted in

an opinion piece on changes in pronoun policy at *The Washington Post*, “Simply allowing *they* for a gender-nonconforming person is a no-brainer. And once we’ve done that, why not allow it for the most awkward of those *he or she* situations that have troubled us for so many years?” (para. 18).

This shift in attitude toward pronouns may reflect a growing generational shift in societal thoughts about gender. Even within the transgender community, opinions about non-binary people are changing,

[There seems to be] an age division in some transgender communities between older individuals, who came of age when the only viable options were identifying as a transsexual or a cross-dresser, and younger people, who day live in a world in which it is common to identify outside of the binary gender categories. (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011, p. 4)

This generational shift in attitudes toward gender may be part of the reason that Skyler felt uncomfortable asking their teachers to use they/them/their pronouns in class. They seemed to insinuate that their teachers would never *really* understand. This raises the question: why would a non-binary student put themselves in the vulnerable situation of disclosing their gender identity to a teacher who may not understand or respect said identity?

Gender Journey

Early binary realizations. As Skyler noted, they were always uncomfortable with binary gender distinctions in school, which mirrors findings from Thorne (1993). They said,

I was in elementary school and the girls do this thing and the boys do this thing. If I don’t want to be one gender, then I kind of have to be the “opposite” thing. So, I guess I

basically never really liked pigeonholes and stereotypes and stuff, which I think a lot of people deal with. (Interview #1, 1/23/16)

As Thorne (1993) noted,

Gender [was] threaded through the routines of lining up, waiting and moving in a queue, and dispersing in a new place. In Oceanside School it was customary for girls and boys to line up separately, a pattern whose roots in the history of elementary schooling are still evident on old school buildings with separate entrances engraved with the words “Girls” and “Boys.” Several adults who have told me their memories of elementary school recall boys and girls lining up separately to go to different bathrooms. (p. 39)

This sentiment is consistent with the research literature about gender in schools, which indicates that a routine such as lining up “boy/girl” reinforces gender stereotypes and the gender binary (e.g., Basow, 2004; Fausto-Sterling, 2012; Pascoe, 2007). Fausto-Sterling (2012) wrote,

Children first develop sex and gender knowledge including the sensory and cognitive skills to make culturally “correct” associations between adult activities and males and females. They also develop culturally “correct” play preferences, and as they master these skills they place themselves in the gender picture, learning first to accept a label of male or female and then to self-label. (p. 55)

From a young age, Skyler had no desire to partake in these “culturally correct associations” linking their assigned birth sex and gendered activities at school.

Supportive parents. A significant part of Skyler’s gender journey involved their supportive parents. Although their father was initially somewhat skeptical, he came to be an ardent supporter of Skyler, driven in part by a core belief about unconditional love:

One of the things that I said to Skyler fairly early on, and this has kind of been my touchstone, is that I don't have to understand what you're going through. I just have to love you. And that's been a—I keep coming back to that. (Steve Codey, Interview, 4/18/16).

Skyler noted this love and respect:

I always tell people, especially about my dad, that he did *not* understand at first. It took him awhile but that's not what's important. What's important is that both he and my mom ask questions all the time and *especially* my dad. (...) I'm *very, very* lucky with my parents. (Interview #1, 1/23/16)

This kind of support outlined above counteracts findings by scholars including Grossman, D'Augelli, and Frank (2011), who discovered that the parents of trans young people reacted in a negative manner to their child's disclosure.

Perhaps one reason that Skyler's parents have had a somewhat easier time accepting their gender identity is related to the fact that Skyler is not “visibly trans,” and therefore perceived as less threatening than, for example, a trans woman. Skyler referred to this in their interview, noting that:

It's not right, but the best people in the world still sometimes have trouble when they see a trans woman and it challenges all of their engrained, deep stereotypes about women and men and they're confused and they're afraid, and it's *wrong*. (Interview #2, 2/24/16)

This finding is consistent with research by Schilt and Westbrook (2009) who contended that, “Whereas transmen may face less censure because they are accepting the socially respected traits of masculinity, transwomen are understood as committing the double sin of both abandoning masculinity and choosing femininity” (p. 460). Similarly, Seelman (2014) argued that a potential

“overlap of transphobia and misogyny” (p. 193) might shape negative societal attitudes toward trans women.

Problem with the term “sexuality.” One thing that I had not expected to uncover in this study is the paradox surrounding the word “sexuality.” This word could be seen to imply that everyone is inherently inclined toward desiring sexual activity. Just as “sexual preference” and “your lifestyle” are generally considered pejorative within the gay and lesbian community, so too does “sexuality” fail to apply to a subset of the LGBTQA population as the A stands for asexual. Skyler identified as both agender and asexual; they said, “I’m asexual. I’m not into sex” (Interview #1, 1/23/16). Scherrer (2008) noted, “Asexual identities make explicit a romantic dimension of sexuality as distinct from a sexual identity based on lack of sexual attraction” (p. 636). This was certainly true of Skyler, “Pretty much [my] *romantic orientation* is I don’t like guys. I like girls. I like non-binary people. I have a girlfriend right now” (Interview #1, 1/23/16, emphasis added). Here Skyler separated the concepts of romance and sex.

Internet research. The Internet was a powerful tool for Skyler while investigating their gender identity. Internet research can be particularly influential for those who identify in the “grey area” of gender. “The Internet has been critical to the growth and visibility of a greater diversity of transgender identities, including gay FTMs, drag kings, genderqueers, and other gender nonconforming individuals” (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011, p. 59). When asked where Skyler did their online research, they noted:

Ninety-nine percent Tumblr. Because it wasn’t so much I was specifically looking for these things, but on some social media places, and Tumblr, whether it’s perfect or not, I can at least say that people on there are... if you look at Facebook it’s like your family and friends and weird things like that and on Tumblr you pretty much don’t know 80% of

the people. And they're all just really super open with names and pronouns and mental illness and gender identity and sexuality and romantic orientation: basically everything. And they'll just list a whole bunch of this stuff in their description or whatever. And it's actually really interesting to see because it's a lot of people who, maybe they're "out" in real life or maybe they're not, but whether you are or not, you don't really just go up to someone and say all this stuff about yourself. They figure it out as time goes on. And since you don't really have that opportunity online, it's actually kind of neat to just be able to state everything that you might want people to know about you right then and there. (Interview #1, 1/23/16)

The myriad of gender information available online may prove helpful to people like Skyler, who do not feel comfortable "coming out" more widely in their own context.

Legal name change. The ability of a transgender high school student to have their name legally changed prior to turning 18 can be a turning point in their gender journey. Referring to trans college students, Beemyn (2005) noted,

Not only does having the appropriate name and gender listed reflect and validate their identity, but it can also protect trans students from constantly having to explain why they use a name different from their birth name and why their appearance does not match a photo or gender designation on an identification card. (p. 83)

Because they was insistent about changing their name to Skyler—something gender neutral—and because their parents were supportive, this legal change occurred the summer before Skyler's junior year (the 2015-2016 school year). As Steve Codey said,

We basically wanted to make sure [the new name] was going to stick. And so Skyler decided that that was their name. And what it really came down to was "I'd like to have

my name legally changed but if we don't do that I'll do it once I'm 18." And, I was like, "well, why would we do that? Why would we push back?" (Interview, 4/18/16).

Names can be one way that trans people express their gender identity in society, and in the case of high school students, at school. PHS honored the Codey family's request to begin using "Skyler" their freshman year. However, having the name legally changed allowed Skyler to have their name on concert programs and school documents, including their high school diploma⁴⁰.

Voice and Identity

Another way that trans people may express/perform their gender in society is through their voice. For Skyler, the voice seems somewhat paradoxical. They speak of "letting my voice be how it is," but also said: "A lot of theatre is gendered like that, especially musical theatre, because society genders voice. And the ideal would be for voices not to be gendered, but you know, that's a difficult place to get to" (Interview #5, 3/30/16). Skyler's notion that "society genders voice" is consistent with research by Davies and Goldberg (2006), who wrote that, "Societal norms of speech, voice, and non-verbal communication are often strongly gendered" (p. 167).

The fact that Skyler is not looking to represent either end of the gender spectrum may play into their thoughts about their voice. Because there is a societally expected sound (and even Hz range) for both male and female voices, societal norms continually are reinforced (e.g., Byrne, Dacakis, & Douglas, 2003; Coleman, 1976; Titze, 1994). Because there is no generally accepted model for what a non-binary voice should sound like, Skyler had no past aural experience with what is "normal" for someone who is agender.

⁴⁰ Under guidelines from the "Dear Colleague Letter" (Lhamon & Gupta, 2016), students need not change their name legally to have their real name used at school.

School Policies

Another way in which Skyler's story might differ from that of someone who considers themselves closer to one end of the gender binary is that, because they are not "visibly trans" and because they are not widely "out" to teachers and administrators, the school has not felt the need to create or clarify policies to honor them. However, the school had worked with Skyler's friend Victor, who identified as a trans guy; thus, some precedent for working with trans students had existed at PHS before Skyler's gender disclosure to Mr. Cooper in 2016.

One specific instance in which being non-binary was difficult for Skyler was when they took the PSAT test at school. They refused to check a gender box on the text booklet. Skyler noted,

My PSAT scores: we couldn't access them online because I didn't put a gender in the box that they gave me. So I think I mentioned that, so we couldn't get my scores because of one box I didn't fill out. (Interview # 3, 3/3/16)

This policy seems unfair to trans students who have not legally changed their name. If seeing one's birth name in print causes dysphoria, trans students now have the right to not have that name on official documents and test results (Lhamon & Gupta, 2016).

Cross-Case Exploration

As previously stated, the foundation of this study is the lived experiences and stories of Sara, Jon, and Skyler. Each person's story is unique and set in a specific context (see Chapter Three). The point is not to compare the three stories, but it may be helpful to examine themes that run through and across all of their stories. Fraser (2004) recommended scanning each narrative for themes that may appear in each. Therefore, this section explores an analysis of main themes present in each of these three stories. During the coding process, I created three columns

for each transcript: a catalogue number indicating the participant and where this transcript fell in the succession of interviews, the data itself, and a code for themes or “confronting and/or unpopular” ideas. It should also be noted that, although broader inquiry into the participants’ gender journeys was not part of the original research problems for this study, issues such as place/setting, “coming out,” and disclosure are vital in placing each of these three students in their given setting.

Gender Journey

Geography. An emergent theme in this study was the importance of place in shaping the stories and musical journeys of Sara, Jon, and Skyler. The area of the country seemed to be the biggest differentiating factor. As reported by Palkki and Caldwell (in press), the Northeastern U.S. seems to be the most accepting of LGBTQ choral students. This is consistent with the data from the present study. Jon’s school in the Northeast was extremely welcoming and progressive—even more accommodating than his parents in many cases. He said,

The fact that I live in [Eastern state] really, you know, I don’t live in the South. I’m sure this would NOT be the case if I lived somewhere else. So that’s why I’m staying north for college. Yeah, I’ve really lucked out, you know? (Interview #1, 10/12/15)

Though it is a stereotype, Jon assumed that he would not be safe in the Southeastern U.S. Sara and Skyler, the two students in the Midwest, attended high school in more conservative communities: Sara in a small town and Skyler in a suburb in a conservative region of the state. Thankfully, none of these three students experienced anything close to the horrific bullying and harassment described by scholars including Grant et al. (2010); Greytak, Kosciw, & Diaz (2009); Manovski (2013); and Wyss (2004).

Early realizations and disclosure. Each of the three students in this study had some early “gender inklings.” While Sara pictured herself being transformed into a girl, and Jon preferred playing with boys and toys coded as masculine, Skyler recalled disliking the idea of gender stereotypes and resisted being pigeonholed. Each of the three proceeded on their gender journeys in different ways. Sara’s fantasies went on hiatus for a time and Jon continued to feel less like a girl. Skyler, on the other hand, continued to be uncomfortable with the notions of binary gender and gender stereotypes. Several scholars noted that children often come to major gender realizations early in life, including Beemyn and Rankin (2011); Grossman, D’Augelli, and Salter (2006); and Stufft and Graff (2011).

Eighth grade seemed to be a pivotal time for all three participants in this study, as all three had significant gender discoveries and/or revelations at or around this time. As Beemyn and Rankin (2011) noted, a majority of respondents reported feeling “different” by age 12: “More than 90 percent [97%] of members of all age groups realized that they did not fit in with others of their assigned gender by the end of their teen years” (p. 40). Most students are around age 13 while in eighth grade, so the experiences of Sara, Jon, and Skyler are all consistent with these findings. Of the three, Jon is the only participant that disclosed his sexuality before his gender—he “came out” as a lesbian in sixth grade.

Experimentation/research. As emphasized above, the role of the Internet in the gender explorations of trans people can play a significant role in the disclosure processes of trans people (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). Both Sara and Skyler found significant support online—Sara through a website devoted to trans and cross-dressing issues, and Skyler through Tumblr, a popular blogging and social media website not tied to any particular topic. For Jon, face-to-face contacts were far more significant; he participated in the active GSA at his high school as well as a trans

teen support group in a nearby college town. Hampton (2014) and Turnbull (2011) both described the importance of personal support and Beemyn and Rankin (2011) noted the importance of the Internet in creating community for trans youth.

Name change. As discussed several times in this study, names can have multiple levels of meaning for trans people. On a personal level, being called by one's real name can be an important part of the identity development and social transition (e.g., Beemyn, 2005; Meyer, 2014; Sausa, 2005). Logistically, having one's real name on school documents, transcripts, and test scores can help remove the necessity for a more complicated change process once the student is older and has more places with which to register their name (e.g., college/university, bank, student loans, department of motor vehicles). Sara's legal name change occurred before her junior year of high school; she wanted to have the name changed before she took the ACT test. As of this writing, Jon still has not had his name legally changed, though the adults and students at school used his real name upon request—which is in keeping with guidelines set forth in 2016 by the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice (Lhamon & Gupta, 2016). In this and in several other facets of Jon's transition, people at school were ahead of his family in terms of acceptance and support. Skyler had their name legally changed before sophomore year of high school, but the teachers at PHS used their real name before the legal change occurred. As a result, Skyler has had issues with their PSAT scores. This is just one example of a logistical obstacle that cisgender students or students who do not change their name will likely never face.

Voice and Gender Identity

The issue of a connection or lack thereof between one's voice and gender identity is central in this study. The literature reviewed suggests that there may be a connection, but this question has not been thoroughly explored. For example, Edwards (2009) noted that,

Silence often occurs as a way to avoid this discomfort or, tragically, as a safety precaution since identifiably transgender people face a high risk of violence and hate crimes. Thus, claiming a singing voice takes on particular significance for transgender people, despite the added psychological and physiological complexities. (para. 1)

Conversely, Zimman (2014) stated that some trans people may revel in a voice type/timbre/range that is in some way non-normative or distinctly queer. This discrepancy is revealed in the experiences of the three participants. Sara clearly saw little, if any, connection between her voice and her gender identity. She originally felt conflicted: “Much earlier on in my transition, two, three years ago I thought, *‘well, I’m not supposed to like this’*” (Interview #2, 5/4/15, emphasis added). Later she came to see being a bass as her “signature.” As she clearly stated, “I’m a girl and I’m a bass and I own that” (Interview #2, 5/4/15). Sara said:

Some people still mess up pronouns. Pretty much nobody messes up my name now that it’s on everything. Yeah, it’s just people that either their only impression of me is my voice or they’re just older and don’t really get it will use the wrong pronouns, but, that’s about it at this point. (Interview #1, 4/23/15)

Although Sara became quite comfortable with her voice, other people still occasionally misgendered her on the basis of how her voice sounds.

Conversely, Jon felt a very strong connection between his voice and his gender identity. He said that he may not sing at all if he could not sing the “guy parts” that fit him—vocally, socially, psychologically, and sociologically. Jon spent many years trying to alter his voice to fit his gender identity, which eventually caused vocal damage that can be difficult to overcome—especially for someone who planned to pursue a future in performance.

Finally, Skyler said, “I’m the type of person that is comfortable with my voice. Personally, since I don’t really have an ideal to work toward if that makes any sense, it makes some things harder but some easier (Interview #2, 2/24/16). As discussed above, because being non-binary (agender in Skyler’s case) comes with no societally accepted blueprint for how one should speak and present oneself, they were presented with the possibility of simply accepting the voice that they have. As Davies and Golberg (2006) wrote, “Changes to the gendered aspects of communication can help reduce gender dysphoria and facilitate gender presentation that is consistent with the felt sense of self, resulting in improved mental health and quality of life” (p. 167), but that “There is great variation in the extent to which speech changes are undertaken or desired by transgender individuals” (p. 168).

Mentors and Relationships

Family. In a situation in which a child informs their parent(s) about their gender identity, the reaction of parent(s) can play a significant role in the disclosure and acceptance process (Ehrensaft, 2011; Grossman, D’Augelli, & Salter, 2006). Each of the three students in the present study experienced some kind of questioning or disbelief from at least one of their parents (i.e., Sara’s father, both of Jon’s parents, and Skyler’s father). On the other hand, two of the students had at least one parent who was supportive from the time of the initial disclosure (i.e., Sara’s mother and Skyler’s mother). These school officials are like the “gender angels” described in Luecke’s (2011) study, and the school staff profiled by Slesaransky-Poe, Ruzzi, Dimedio, and Stanley (2013). Jon had a supportive sister and an extremely strong support network at school, though his parents struggled to find acceptance. As Ehrensaft (2011) wrote, “The transgender child who transgresses binary gender norms may face culturally imbued transphobia and psychological trauma within the family” (p. 530).

Relationships with choir teachers. While all three participants had many important people in their lives, Sara, Jon, and Skyler all had significant mentor figures that helped them navigate their transgender identity within the high school choral context. In each case, at least one of their choir teachers proved influential. Sara often spoke passionately about her first choir teacher—the one who left for another school district after her sophomore year. Even before Sara was Mr. Thompson’s student, he reached out to her to give her a “pep talk” when he could tell that she was struggling socially at RGHS. This extraordinary act of kindness played a large role in two main facets of Sara’s life—her musical life and her gender journey.

Jon’s relationships with his middle and high school choir teachers were tremendously positive. During the period of data collection, Landerstown High School lost its’ founding choir teacher, Mr. Mullins, and another teacher came from the middle school mid-semester to replace him. Jon felt a very strong bond with Mr. Mullins, who had been a vocal advocate for queer students at Landerstown High School and in the state. Jon was comfortable with this change and expressed that the new teacher was well liked by him and the other students. This new teacher had worked with Jon in summer theatre productions and was always supportive of his gender identity.

Skyler and their choir teacher Mr. Cooper had a strong relationship marked by mutual respect. Skyler was accepting of the fact that Mr. Cooper did not fully understand non-binary gender and forgave the fact that he has struggled with pronouns. I wrote in my fieldnotes:

Mr. Cooper is old fashioned. He’s a storyteller. Today he was recounting the importance of the Great American Songbook. He’s also incredibly punny (e.g., “wizard of Ah’s,”

“holy jeans”). He’s from a different time, but nobody seems to care. (Fieldnote, 3/30/16)

Skyler spoke about Mr. Cooper with great respect and admiration. Of Mr. Cooper, they said:

He's going to make his students as comfortable as possible and he wants them to be happy, but he also just likes them as people and he really doesn't care. (...) I don't think he could honestly care less about what gender most people in this choir is, because, at least interacting with them personally, he doesn't care. There might be some confusion that he has over voicing and where they sing and what they wear, but just talking to them personally, I don't think that matters to him. (Interview #4, 3/29/16)

These data complement recent research by Palkki and Caldwell (in press) about high school choir teachers being supportive of LGBTQ students. Their survey data indicated that a higher-than average number of participants (3.43/5) considered their high school choir teacher a safe person to whom to disclose their LGBTQ identity. Also, the high school choir room was shown to be a safe space for these participants.

Important others. In addition to their choir teachers, the three participants in this study had several people in their lives that proved influential—and in some cases vital—as they navigated their gender identity in a high school. For Sara and Jon, the two students in the study who were widely “out” at school at the time of data collection, these important others were especially influential. Both Sara and Jon had a high school guidance counselor with whom they could speak openly and honestly. Ms. Dengler (Sara) and Ms. Martinez (Jon) were at the helm of how their respective transitions played out at school. Both coordinated meetings, facilitated conversations with parents, spoke at length with the students, and served as a liaison between the students/families and the administration. In addition to his guidance counselor, Jon also had Ms. Perkins, the high school drama teacher, as a major advocate. She started the Landerstown High School GSA and had spent many years being an outspoken advocate for LGBTQA students. As

for Skyler, returning to the idea that they are not “visibly trans,” and also not “out” at school, they had not sent indications to adults at PHS that they are in need of extra support.

Policies

The policies under which students operate in a school can play a significant role in their educational experiences. Policies related to gender identity and expression “can affirm or disavow students’ identities” (Catalano, 2015, p. 425). Especially for trans students, who disrupt the normative gender practices established in most American high schools (Pascoe, 2007), policies shape their day-to-day experiences in a tangible way. For example: which bathroom will they use? On which sports team will they play? With whom will they room on school field trips? For the three students in this study, policies were not simply words in a handbook. They had real implications in their experiences at school. It is possible that schools may not have policies in place to support trans students, causing further confusion among the very adults who are meant to protect and mentor them⁴¹ (Callender, 2008; Luecke, 2011; Meyer, 2010, 2014; Sausa, 2005; Wells, Roberts, & Allan, 2012).

Bathrooms. At the time of this writing, there was a major debate happening in the U.S. about which bathroom transgender students can/should use at school:

The Obama administration’s directive Friday [May 13, 2016] on the use of school bathrooms and locker rooms by transgender students intensified the latest fierce battle in the nation’s culture wars, with conservatives calling it an illegal overreach that will put children in danger and advocates for transgender rights hailing it as a breakthrough for civil rights. (Healy & Pérez-Peña, 2016, para. 1).

⁴¹ For guidelines from the U.S. Government, see Ali, 2010; Lhamon & Gupta, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2016; and U.S. Department of Justice, 2016b.

The participants in this study dealt with this issue at school long before the Obama administration weighed in. Sara was asked to use a single-stall staff bathroom and Skyler used the bathroom corresponding to their assigned birth sex. Jon avoided using the bathroom altogether.

Safe spaces. Consistent with findings from Palkki and Caldwell (in press) and Sullivan (2014), all three participants considered the choir room a safe space in which they could express their gender identity. This was slightly less true of Skyler who was not widely “out” to their choral peers. Overall, however, it is encouraging that these students recognized the choir room as a space in which they could exist free from discrimination (e.g., Ali, 2010).

Choral Classroom

Voice part assignment. The vocal part assigned to, or chosen by, trans singers may influence their gender identity and expression. Each of the three students in this study had vastly different experiences with this process. Sara decided to sing bass 2 after consulting with her first choir teacher Mr. Thompson; she trusted his opinion. Jon insisted on singing tenor 1, even when his teacher requested that he sing alto on some pieces. Skyler, who had been taking voice lessons for several years, decided to continue singing the voice part that matched their “natural” (biological?) voice.

Choral program structure. Of the three schools in which I spent time, only Parkton High School had “gendered choirs”—two curricular treble choirs and one after-school tenor/bass choir. Skyler started their high school singing career in one of these single gender ensembles but then transitioned into two of the co-ed groups, including the Chamber Singers. I wondered what influence, if any, the structure of these three choral programs played in these students’ experience. For example, I wondered if a school had a “women’s choir,” if a trans woman would

feel comfortable singing in that ensemble—or if they’d be welcome⁴² (Steele, 2016). As Skyler said,

I do think if you’re going to have a “women’s choir,” you have to accept trans women who sing tenor and bass, too. And if you’re going to have a “treble choir,” then you have to accept higher voiced men like trans men as well. (Interview #2, 2/24/16; Follow-up 6/1/16)

Because Skyler is non-binary, they admitted feeling somewhat conflicted over membership in a single gender ensemble. There is great disagreement in the choral community about the use of single gender ensembles. Ashley (2010) advised against tenor/bass choirs, O’Toole (1998) noted that the structure of many “traditional” choral programs disrespects girls and women, and Gauthier (2005) and Wilson (2013) found that single gender treble ensembles are less respected than co-ed mixed choirs. On the other hand, Freer (2009) and Ramsey (2013) advised that single gender tenor/bass choirs might be helpful in male vocal and identity development.

Uniforms. The role of clothing in performing one’s gender identity and can be important to trans teens. All three of the high schools at which I collected data had more than one uniform choice. The two Midwest schools had a “traditional” binary set-up: women wore dresses and men wore tuxedos. “Traditional” seems an appropriate word in this context, as the idea of choral uniforms as sacrosanct came up several times in my conversations with these students. Sara, in particular, had no problem with dresses and tuxedos, noting that:

As far as the “ceremoniousness” (if that’s a word) of the uniforms and everything, people should be able to just—I mean, even in terms of people that—like, *I subscribe to the binary* but even in terms of people who don’t... well, I haven’t met people that couldn’t

⁴² See Chapter Eight for a more thorough discussion of this topic.

choose between a suit and a dress, so... I think as long as everyone's comfortable, it still works. (Interview #2, 5/4/15, emphasis added)

One might assume that as someone who identifies as agender, Skyler would be a person that could not choose between a suit and a dress. However, this is not their reality. They continue to wear the uniform that corresponds with their assigned birth sex. Skyler also spoke to the tradition of choral dresses and tuxedos; when I asked them about the possibility of choir members wearing concert black, they said,

I like the idea of everybody getting to express themselves a little, but occasionally things like that can be slightly distracting when you're in a group where you're all kind of exposed; some of the things that are worn in orchestra maybe wouldn't look as good in the choir because, do you have them all wear long sleeves and long bottoms? It seems like there is a little bit of a struggle to get what's going to look uniform and still have a little bit of you in it. So I do understand the concept of just having a single dress that everyone's going to wear and, I don't know, it's a hard thing because I think it's possible and I think maybe in an ideal world there would be a little more choice in what to wear for that but I do also see the difficulty of finding [attire]. (Interview #2, 2/24/16)

Here Skyler seemed to privilege the more pragmatic aspects of shopping for attire over how tuxedos and dresses are a visual representation of the gender binary, as discussed by the respondents in Palkki and Caldwell's (in press) study. I have heard anecdotally from several choral conductor-teachers and female singers that many choir dress designs are unflattering to many individuals. If this is true, perhaps a re-thinking of this tradition is in order.

Rehearsal vocabulary. The way that choral conductor-teachers use gendered language in rehearsals has been a topic of recent discussion (Palkki, 2015; Palkki & Caldwell, in press).

Not unlike the discussion about uniforms above, trans singers may feel differently about language used in rehearsal based upon their feelings about subscribing (or not) to the gender binary. For example, for Jon, having Mr. Mullins use “men and women” in rehearsal was only problematic pre-transition—when he was still Jane in the tenor section. Now that he has transitioned, Jon has no issue with “men and women” (and similar) in the choral context.

This type of rehearsal vocabulary was important to Sara. She considered the use of verbiage like “men and women” in rehearsal extremely offensive. Luckily, her choir teacher for junior and senior years, Mr. Ames, eradicated such statements in class. Perhaps one of the reasons this change in vocabulary is so important to Sara is because, by societal standards, her voice part and her gender do not match. Because Sara has a low voice, it was assumed that she would be in the tenor or bass (“guys” or “men’s”) section. Sara is not a man and did not want to be called one. Conversely, because Jon’s low voice matched his gender identity, the ability for him to sing “guy parts” was helpful in having his gender identity confirmed in the high school choral classroom. Skyler claimed that, “society genders the voice” but had no problem “letting my voice be how it is.” Still, Skyler felt strongly about the words that their choir teacher, Mr. Cooper, used in class:

[Mr. Cooper] told me that the main thing he was going to try and start with was instead of saying, “ok, ladies, ok, gentlemen” he’s going to say “ok, altos and basses” And he has been, and he’s actually corrected himself on that a bunch. [JP: Does that make a difference to you?] Yeah, it really does, because honestly, his specific pronouns for me haven’t changed too much, and that’s understandable, but just the more broad description that really kind of includes everybody. (Interview #2, 2/24/16)

This issue of verbiage choral conductor-teachers use in class will likely become an increasingly complex topic as the possibilities for gender identity and expression continue to expand (Edidi & Palkki, 2015; Manovski, 2013; Palkki, 2015; Palkki & Caldwell, in press). In an effort to expel gender stereotypes from choral music, to the extent that is possible, choral teachers should consider language that addresses sections, not genders as discussed by the respondents in Palkki and Caldwell's (in press) study.

Summary

As stated previously, the goal of narrative inquiry is not to generalize broadly to a wide population, but implications and conclusions may be transferable to trans singers in other secondary school choral programs (Bassey, 1999; Webster & Mertova, 2007). Even within these three cases, one can see the rich diversity within the trans community (e.g., Beemyn & Rankin, 2011), especially among trans youth (e.g., Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006). While each of these three students had unique experiences in their own context, one can extrapolate some lessons that may inform the practice of secondary choral educators, teacher educators, school administrators, and researchers. Chapter Eight provides a summary, conclusions, implications for practice, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 8—REFLECTIONS, APPLICATIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS

I guess you have to begin by educating teachers about gender, and about their own assumptions and comfort levels and discomfort levels with people breaking the typical limits of gender

(McCarthy, 2003a, p. 178).

Reflections and Overarching Conclusions

Conceptual Links

It became apparent while conducting this study that several of the foundational concepts underlying the data and writing herein are linked. For example, the bullying and lack of compassion Sara experienced in school was likely due in part to her transgression of gender norms and her refusal to be masculine. This illustrates a conceptual link between gender and sexuality (or romantic orientation). Sara was on a list of ‘students to watch’ sent from the middle school guidance counselor to their high school colleague. Ms. Dengler told me that the reason Sara was included on the list was because adults at the middle school saw her as a gay boy—failing to explore the possibility that Sara was actually a girl. For Jon, refusal to enact elements of hegemonic masculinity caused his friends to joke that although he considers himself heterosexual, he would eventually “become gay”—another clear illustration of the conflation of gender and sexuality.

The link or lack thereof between one’s voice and gender identity was a focus of my conversations with Sara, Jon, and Skyler. One of the most important takeaways from this study is that the connection or lack thereof between voice and gender is intensely personal. For choral music educators who teach an “out” trans student, one of the most important discussions to have is one regarding gender and voice. It is important that choral educators feel comfortable having such a conversation with trans or gender creative students. Partially because of her conversations

with Mr. Thompson, Sara chose to continue to sing bass even after her transition—she seemingly saw little or no connection between voice and gender.

This ability to speak openly about gender issues in choral music is also context-dependent: if a teacher fears getting reprimanded or fired for speaking openly about LGBTQA issues in the context of secondary choral music (McBride, 2016), then students in their care may not get the help and support that they may so desperately need.

Reflections on the Research Process

Assumptions. When I began this research project, I thought that I would be helping three brave students tell their stories to a wider audience. What I learned, however, is that the students had much to teach me, and that I went into this study with many assumptions. Because I was a shy, awkward teenager who was afraid to speak up for myself, I assumed that these three students might be the same. I also attended school in a small, socially conservative, blue-collar town where hyper masculinity was rewarded and celebrated. Even in Sara’s community, which was in some ways similar to my hometown, things were different. Also, society has changed considerably since I “came out” in the mid-1990s. When I was navigating the closet door, I experienced a gay culture that was still grappling with the AIDS crisis. Almost every gay-themed movie that I rented featured at least one character dying of AIDS. Today, marriage equality is legal in all 50 states, there are openly LGBT figures in popular culture and politics, and there is a more open dialogue about LGBTQA issues in education (in most places).

In my fieldnotes I often acknowledged these assumptions:

Realization: I’m projecting my own baggage onto Skyler and the other students in this study. Because my reaction to being uncomfortable with my gender/sexuality in high school was to become a wallflower, I expect these students to be that way, and they’re not—especially not

Skyler. They are smart, articulate, and not afraid to make their voice heard. (Fieldnote, 3/30/16).

I went into this study with many assumptions, most of which were challenged or debunked.

These students are *incredible*. As I sat down to transcribe the interviews, I constantly was struck by their eloquence, poise, and intelligence. I am grateful to have heard their stories.

Pronouns. Gender-neutral pronouns have proven challenging for me to use. Namely, fluent use of they/them/their in conversation has been surprisingly difficult, as evidenced by the following fieldnote: *SHIT SHIT SHIT. Today I'm very tired and feeling slightly frantic. I was running behind for the interview with Skyler. I show up and headed into Mr. Cooper's office to interview Skyler, who told me they wanted to tell me a story. So I press "record" and start introducing the story and getting ready for the interview, and I used the wrong pronoun. I'm so angry with myself. I just have such a difficult time with they/them/their pronouns. I told them that in the first interview, and I thought I was getting better. Now Skyler's openness and understanding about people like Mr. Cooper struggling with the pronouns makes more sense* (Fieldnote, 3/3/16).

Getting used to using they/them/there has been a process for me, and one that has forced me to face some implicit gender assumptions. Because my first mental snapshot of Skyler carried a gendered association, nearly every time they and I spoke, that gendered association came to mind. Breaking out of this habit was difficult. As more and more non-binary people begin to use gender-neutral pronouns, education professionals will need to adapt their vocabulary and school forms to become inclusive of all genders.

Inserting myself too much/often? In my experience, researchers undertaking a qualitative study struggle with how much to insert themselves into the study. I certainly wondered about this quite often. Because this topic is so close to me personally, I feared I was

inserting too many of my own thoughts and opinions into the interview process. Overall, a few times, elements of my story ended up figuring prominently in the middle of the interview process.

In the interviews, I found it easier to “burrow” and ask clarifying questions or to simply say, “please say more.”

Sara: Dr. Price is at least on Mr. [Thompson]’s level. And I have a director who has the insight of a mentor even when I don’t get to confer with them directly again, so, everything else in my life just sort of falls into place when I have that every day.

Joshua: Please say more. That’s a pretty big statement.

Sara: Her energy is infectious and just—it’s a motivator and I imagine that with her as with Mr. T, some people just don’t buy into that, they think “this is a class, it’s done in however many minutes.” But I feel that’s much less the case in a choir like College Singers. Everyone, or most everyone is there to make it better, everyone wants to get better and for me personally, I take that energy with me and try to—and have more stock of that motivating energy to apply to other things that I do. (Interview #5, 1/23/16)

I don’t believe that Sara would have elaborated and clarified her statement without my asking. This happened several times—especially in my conversations with Sara.

Knowledge Equals Power; Knowledge Drives Policy

The data from this study seem to indicate that the knowledge that teachers, school administrators, and state music organizations have about gender diversity, the more inclusive their approaches and policies. This is evidenced in Mr. Mullins’ adamancy about Jon being able to audition for All State choir as a tenor and by the Landerstown High School principal (an “out” lesbian) standing up for Jon’s right to use his name at school—to his own parents. The lack of

knowledge and training about trans issues in the choral music education community is clear when considering messages like the one from Ronn (the trans high school student in a southern state who was forced to leave his school choral program) and some of the ignorant social media posts quoted in Chapter One. As Mr. Ames said,

I think transgender students are going to force choir directors to re-think some things that they do. (...) I think it's important for us to continue to grow as educators to create a safe and comfortable space for our students. The arts tend to be a place where people feel the most comfortable—feel at home. I preach that with my kids, I really do. I want them to know its ok to be who they are. They don't believe me necessarily and it'll take some years because I'm still new here, but you know, choral musicians are the most accepting people that I have ever met. I think that the choral environment really helps to create a sense of openness and acceptance, and the choral director helps to foster this environment. (Ames, Interview, 5/4/15)

It is important for all choral educators to have knowledge about LGBTQA issues, and about trans issues specifically.

Resilience

All three of the students in this study described themselves as fortunate or, for Jon, “lucky.” The fact that all three had, up until the end of data collection, mostly positive experiences at school stands in stark contrast to the many tragic stories of trans youth who have faced hatred, bullying, and violence. This realization can be a useful tool for music education researchers. For example, Kruse (2016) used resilience as a framework in his exploration of a black, gender non-binary hip-hop artist. It is possible that because these victim narratives are so prevalent in research and in the media, trans youth and education professionals *expect* bullying

and violence to occur. Jon made several remarks along these lines: “I have to say, this has to be the best school community out there. And that’s why I’m not really a good example of trans kids going through bullying” (Interview #1, 10/12/15). It is telling that even though Jon lived in a fairly progressive part of the U.S., even he seemed to expect some level of harassment at school. For Sara, in a small rural community, school officials handled the bullying aimed at her in a timely fashion—the “small town thing” did not happen. The stories of Sara, Jon, and Skyler, which run counter to the dominant narrative, certainly are encouraging. However, these three cases should not blind education professionals to the severe trauma trans students can face while navigating their gender identity at school.

Implications for Practice

It is important to state yet again that trans people are not monolithic. Every trans person comes from a different family, varying geographic/socioeconomic/cultural situations, and different types of educational and religious traditions. While the three students in this study have provided rich, in-depth descriptions of their experiences, many of which I witnessed through ethnographic observation, their experiences are not meant to be generalized to all trans people, all trans students, all FTM-identifying people, all MTF-identifying people, or all non-binary people. Their stories do, however, highlight trends in how gender plays out in the secondary choral classroom.

School choral music in the U.S. in the 21st century is gendered in many ways. Considering “men’s” and “women’s” choirs, choir dresses and tuxedos, and lyrics portraying heteronormative situations, choral programs exist within a highly gendered school environment (McBride, 2016; Pascoe, 2007), and gendered rehearsal language, one can see that it may be difficult for transgender students to navigate their gender identity within a school and a program

that may continually reinforce cisgender-centric and heteronormative ethos. Many of the main tenets of these school choral traditions have remained unquestioned (Palkki, 2015). As trans people become more prevalent in American society, and as more trans youth disclose their gender identity at an earlier age, it behooves choral music educators to learn about the complexities of gender and how these intricacies play out in the choral classroom.

Title IX and the accompanying “Dear Colleague Letter” (Lhamon & Gupta, 2016) should influence the experience of trans students at school. As trans scholar Genny Beemyn noted, schools must:

- (a) not discriminate against trans students and take steps to prevent it,
 - (b) treat trans students in keeping with their gender identity, which includes giving access to the appropriate gendered bathroom, changing room, and overnight accommodation;
 - (c) [use] the name and pronouns used by the student; and [allow] them to dress in accordance with their gender identity, and
 - (d) keep a student’s trans status, birth name, and gender assignment at birth confidential.
- (personal communication, 7/27/16)

As choral educators navigate an educational climate in which more trans students are comfortable expressing their gender identity within the choral context, they must keep these mandates in mind.

Gender Journey

Context. All stories take place within a specific time and place, with different characters, and in different political climates. These contextual elements can influence the characters and trajectories of stories. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) wrote, “We need to continually ask questions about the way narrative inquiry illuminates the social and theoretical contexts in which

we position our inquiries” (p. 124). Similarly, according to Riesmann (1993), “Meaning is fluid and contextual, not fixed and universal. All we have is talk and texts that represent reality partially, selectively, and imperfectly” (p. 15). The contexts in which the three students in this study lived could not be more different.

Geography. Based on these data, it seems that in the 21st century in the U.S., where a trans student lives can make a major difference in their experience. The two students in the Midwestern U.S. lived in more conservative communities—places in which there had been no real precedents for being “out” as trans. Jon’s suburban community in the Northeastern U.S. seemed to be far more progressive in terms of acceptance of gender-sexual diversity, based on previously established school policies and the attitudes and beliefs of school personnel and community members. Perhaps it is no coincidence that both of the students from the Midwest turned to the Internet to find resources and community. As noted several times above, the Internet has become a powerful tool for trans youth in locating vital information and resources.

Choral teachers and other education professionals who wish to be openly affirming of trans students may need to carefully consider their specific contexts, including the state and community in which they live, including religious and cultural norms. Just as Sara’s first high school choral teacher was highly influential as she navigated her gender identity in a small Midwestern town, so too can choral teachers in small rural communities across the country provide safe spaces for *all* youth—regardless of gender identity (Palkki & Caldwell, in press; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Teachers in more traditionally progressive communities should not assume, however, that their schools and/or communities are supportive of trans youth. These participants’ stories indicate that making support explicit is important for LGBTQA students regardless of state or community. This may be more complicated for non-binary

students who may not be “visibly trans,” as discussed in Skyler’s narrative. Recall that McCarthy (2003b) encouraged teachers to ask themselves: “Do I stifle nonnormative gender expression in my classroom?” Because gender identity is not necessarily something that can be seen with the plain eye, and because the gender landscape in the U.S. seems to be rapidly expanding, it is best for choral educators to employ inclusive practices (e.g., rehearsal vocabulary) *all of the time*—not only when there is a trans or questioning student in the program. In addition, schools can establish Gender-Sexuality Alliances to provide support and mentorship to LGBTQA students.

Realizations and transition. The concept of “transition” implies certain assumptions about a trans person’s disclosure process. Because people may conflate the terms “transgender” and “transsexual,” there can be an inherent assumption that *all* trans people transition in some way, which is not accurate. For example, Skyler noted that they did not have a transition in the same way that Jon and Sara did. Skyler has not disclosed their gender identity to most people at school.

It is important that choral educators and other education professionals not superimpose their assumptions about transitioning onto a trans choral student. Likewise, teachers should not assume that their trans student is a victim—they are a student who happens to be transgender, just as some students happen to be Hispanic or happen to be an immigrant. As Jon said,

Acting like trans students are an issue that need to be addressed rather than just another student with another situation is, I think, the main problem... I think that’s the biggest hurdle... you know, they [teachers] deal with students that have disabilities or students that are sick or students that have this or that. That’s the everyday challenges of teachers and I think that’s why teachers teach, because they’re able to help their students through so much. (Interview #5, 2/5/16)

Although in Jon's and Sara's stories, their experiences in high school choir were part of gender journeys and elements of the choral experience helped shape their broader experiences with gender. For example, Sara's administrators placed seemingly well thought-out yet rather arbitrary rules on when she could wear a dress for high school performing arts events.

Voice and Gender Identity

As evidenced by the social media posts quoted in Chapter One and also by the questionable advice by Silveira and Goff (2016) that "the case could certainly be made that students should sing the voice part appropriate for their vocal development" (p. 16), there seems to be great concern and confusion about the connection between one's voice type/part and one's gender identity. As Bond (2015) demonstrated, countertenors or cisgender females who sing tenor can be considered "voice variant." As noted by Zimman (2014) and others, trans people are not monolithic, and, when it comes to issues of voice and gender, there are no easy one-size-fits-all solutions. Some trans singers may revel in the fact that their voice does not match society's notions of how their voice "should" sound. Some trans people, however, consider the voice a vital way that they "do" their gender in society. *Choral music educators must determine through conversation the level of connection, if any, between a trans student's voice and gender identity.* Based on this conversation, a personalized voice part plan can be devised. Conceptually, this is similar to middle level choral educators who modify, adapt, or compose voice parts to fit the vocal range of singers in the midst of the voice change (e.g., Ramsey, 2008).

In light of this recommendation, following are three examples of hypothetical students who do feel a connection between their voice and their gender identity: (a) a trans girl who previously sang tenor who wishes to sing alto or soprano, (b) a trans guy who previously sang soprano but now wishes to sing tenor, and (c) a non-binary student joining choir for the first time

as a high school sophomore who is unsure about their voice part. *One necessary caveat here is that if a choral music educator determines that a student is not able to sing healthily in their preferred voice range, a rapport should be developed between student and educator in which the teacher is comfortable recommending that the student stay on the same voice part as they had previously been singing.* Making changes to one's vocal habits can be challenging for everyone, and so while switching voice parts might not initially be possible, re-assessing and providing ongoing individualized feedback might enable a healthy change in vocal range later on.

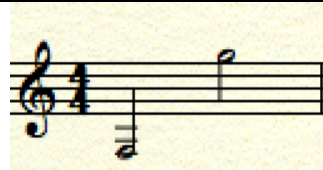
For example, Sara initially desired to sing soprano or alto, but after working with her choral teacher Mr. Thompson one-on-one, he recommended that she remain a bass, and she was comfortable with that. In hypothetical example (a), the choral teacher could work with the student to determine her ability to sing healthily in falsetto. If the student was able to do so, the teacher could chart the student's range and determine which voice part would be healthy to sing on each piece.

When considering example (b), the choral teacher could determine the full range of notes the student is able to sing healthily. Based on this data collection, the student and teacher could devise a plan together for a hypothetical upcoming concert in which the following pieces are being performed: "Little David, Play on Your Harp" arr. Rollo Dilworth (Hal Leonard), "Conditor alme siderum" by G.P. da Palestrina (Choral Public Domain Library), and "Domine, ad adjuvandum me festina" by Il Padre G. B. Martini, ed. John Castellini (Concordia). See Table 5 below.

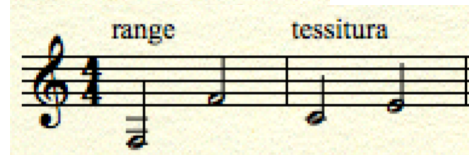
Table 5

Hypothetical example (b) vocal range and tessitura illustration

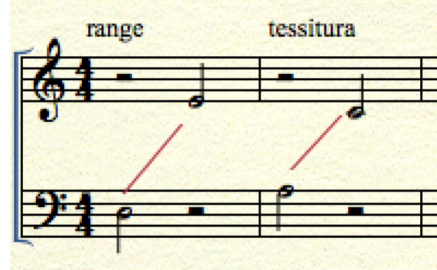
Student's vocal range



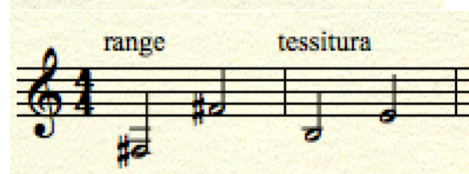
Range and Tessitura of the tenor part for "Little David, Play on Your Harp"



Range and Tessitura of the tenor part for "Conditor alme siderum"



Range and Tessitura of the tenor part for "Domine, ad adjuvandum me festina"



While the student could theoretically sing nearly every pitch in the tenor parts of these three pieces, it may not be advisable for them to sing in such a low range for an entire concert. For example, during Jon's freshman year in choir, he was assigned to sing alto but sang tenor on certain pieces or on specific sections of pieces. This is also true for some cisgender women who have naturally low voices. Vocal health should *always* be taken into consideration, of course, but the connection between the choral experience and gender identity can determine whether a student continues to sing in choir or not. In Table 2, notice that the tessitura of these three tenor parts does not sit at the very bottom of the student's range, but rather surrounds middle C—a range in which most sopranos and altos sing regularly. For this student, the conversation may

involve them singing tenor for some (or even most) of the piece and switching to the alto line where the tessitura is consistently too low (see Figure 1).

In example (c), in which a non-binary student joins choir in high school, the choral teacher could begin with a conversation about their voice and if using any part of it causes feelings of dysphoria; this conversation could be followed by a vocal range check. After determining which pitches the student can healthily sing, a determination can be made through further dialogue. This decision may be quite simple (e.g., “you can sing alto 1”) or quite complex (e.g., the kind of voice part exchanges described above for scenario (b)). *These conversations must be had between choral educators and their trans students.* As Mr. Mullins (Jon’s choir teacher) said,

If a student comes to you and wants to change voice parts or sing with a different part and you don’t—that’s understandable if you look at it and say, “I don’t think that’s healthy for your voice.” But can you talk to them about it and figure out what makes them the most comfortable that’s possible for the program and for their voice? What’s the most comfortable for them and doesn’t hurt them? (Mullins, Interview, 10/12/15)

This process may involve trial and error and may be time consuming. But consider this: if a student is told they *must* sing a voice part that triggers gender dysphoria, they will likely leave choral music—potentially forever. Recall that the aforementioned suggestions apply specifically to students who *do* feel a connection between their voice and their gender identity. If a student does not experience such a connection, they can be classified like any other student in that section. However, when such a student is in the choir, rehearsal vocabulary will need to be altered. If there is a guy who is singing soprano, then a choral teacher should not refer to the sopranos and altos as “women.”

6

2. Qui con - do - lens in - te - ri -
4. Cu - jus for - ti po - ten - ti -

2. Qui con - do - lens in - te - ri -
4. Cu - jus for - ti po - ten - ti -

2. Qui con - do - lens in - te - ri -
4. Cu - jus for - ti po - ten - ti -

11

tu mor - tis per - i - re - sac - cu - lum,
ae ge - nu cur - van - tur om - ni - a,

tu mor - tis per - i - re - sac - cu - lum, sal - vas - ti
ae ge - nu cur - van - tur om - ni - a, sal - vas - ti mun - dum,
cae - les - ti - a, ter -

tu mor - tis per - i - re - sac - cu - lum,
ae ge - nu cur - van - tur om - ni - a,

Figure 1. Illustration of tenor/alto voice part swap in “Conditor alme siderum”

Mentors and Relationships

All education professionals should learn more about gender and transgender issues. School counselors and all teachers should receive training in their undergraduate and/or graduate programs as well as professional development. School districts can make sure that they have policies regarding gender—policies that honor trans students and also policies that specify details regarding anti-bullying. As recommended by authors including Bryan (2012), McQueen (2006), Rands (2009), Roberts, Allan, and Wells (2007), and Ryan, Patraw, and Bednar (2013), schools can include gender and transgender issues as part of the normal curriculum—perhaps making it a less “taboo issue” for students.

Choral teachers. In each of the three cases in this study, the relationship between the student and choir teacher was significant. Positive adult mentors and role models can prove extremely influential for trans youth—especially those who are not finding support at home. If it is true that (choral) music educators often provide safety for LGBTQA students (Palkki & Caldwell, in press; Silveira & Goff, 2016), then all choral teachers should be equipped with the knowledge, vocabulary, and skills to honor a trans student in the context of a secondary choral program. Grossman and D’Augelli (2006) reported that 75% of their respondents disclosed their gender identity to their teachers—a larger percentage than disclosed to their parents (66%) or grandparents (50%). This is a significant statistic for educators—especially music educators who often have deeper relationships with students than teachers in other subject areas. Choral music education can be a powerful part of students’ lives—not just musically, but emotionally as well.

Wells, Roberts, and Allen (2007) posed guiding questions for all teachers who wish to create an inclusive classroom:

Ask yourself, how is gender represented in your classroom? How are these representations related to traditional social and cultural understandings of masculinity and femininity? How is gender represented and reinforced in your school and community? How do different cultural, ethnic, and faith-based contexts influence members of a gendered minority? What are the effects of these representations on youth who do not conform to traditional gender norms and sex role stereotypes? (p. 31)

Based on recent research and on the data from this study, it seems likely that a large number of music teachers in America eventually will have a trans student in their program that openly discloses their gender identity. So, for most secondary choral teachers, having a trans student eventually may be inevitable. As Mr. Mullins said,

If it's not an issue for you yet, it will be. It's not a matter of *if*, it's a matter of *when*. So yes, we should be having these discussions and laying the groundwork *now* so that when you do have a trans student, you're not wondering what the hell you're supposed to do.

(Mullins, Interview, 10/12/15)

These data indicate that mentors, supportive teachers, and other educational professionals may encourage trans students. For example, individual adults may decide whether or not to use a trans student's name and pronouns—a small detail to cisgender people that can have a deep emotional impact on a trans student. This concept is evidenced in Jon's experiences in honor choir in which he was continually misgendered and called by his birth name. Choral educators can provide safe spaces for queer youth and make their acceptance of LGBTQ students explicitly known (Palkki & Caldwell, in press). This can be through stories or words in class or via a Safe Space sticker on an office or classroom door/wall.

Family. For trans youth, the support or lack thereof of parents can play a major role in their lives and their experiences at home and at school. Especially because students under the age of 18 need parental approval for logistics such as legal name changes, the level of support a trans teen receives from parents may drive the trajectory and speed of their transition. For Sara, support from her mother and sister helped her navigate more complicated relationships with her father and some RGHS administrators. Jon's parents took much longer to support him than did most people at his school. In his case, in somewhat of a role-reversal, the school helped him navigate the sometimes-volatile relationship with his parents. Choral music educators may have a fine line to walk when interacting with trans students and their families. The following recommendations are based on the data in this study: (a) speak with the student and ask about their name and pronouns, (b) inquire about the status of the legal name change, (c) ask to whom

the student is “out” at home and at school so as to not inadvertently disclose their gender identity, (d) if there has not been a legal name change, teachers may choose to communicate with the parents/guardians of the student to encourage them to OK the use of the student’s new name in concert programs and other choral department documents/websites.

School administrators. As indicated by many of the authors cited in this study, school administration can play a crucial role in the experiences of trans students (Bryan, 2012; Hernandez & Fraynd, 2014; Roberts, Allan, & Wells, 2007; Stufft & Graff, 2011). The way the administrators at the three schools in this study navigated interactions with trans students differed greatly. While Sara’s first principal seemed to micromanage aspects of her transition, Jon’s principal was completely supportive—even in the face of displeased parents. Skyler’s administrators did not know of their gender identity and therefore had not made any modifications on their behalf. However, Skyler’s trans male friend Victor set several precedents for trans students at Parkton High School.

Consider the difference between Sara’s first high school principal and Jon’s principal. While Sara’s administrator put several arbitrary timelines on her disclosure process, Jon’s principal was more supportive than his parents. In terms of policy, administrators can enable significant progress for trans students. It is hoped that in the future all administrators and education professionals receive education about gender-sexual diversity in their training programs. For choral music educators, this means infusing the teacher education curriculum with a burgeoning line of scholarship and resources on LGBTQ issues in music education.

School Policies

Guidelines and resources. In terms of policy, there is a great need for suggestions and

blueprints of inclusive policies for choral educators, school administrators, and state music organization officials. Wells, Roberts, and Allen (2007) suggested the following for schools:

(a) provide leadership, (b) establish basic expectations in your school code of conduct, (c) be inclusive, (d) create inclusive and user-friendly libraries, (e) be prepared and proactive, (f) provide resources and training for school counselors, (g) maintain confidentiality, (h) update school policies and procedures, (i) continue to educate yourself. (pp. 34-35)

For example, if one state has a new, inclusive policy about honor choir auditions and uniforms, this could be written up as a blueprint for other states that may be grappling with similar issues and shared via professional associations' (i.e., NAFME, ACDA) websites, publications, and email communications. In addition to such research, more pragmatic projects such as a website chronicling state policies regarding trans issues (e.g., legal name change/transcripts) can help trans teens, their families, and their teachers understand how to navigate the complex logistical issues involved with social transition or change. Maintenance of confidentiality is extremely important for trans students—especially those who are not yet 18. Clear communication with trans students about to whom they are “out” is vital to ensure that the student’s wishes are honored by education professionals. The “Dear Colleague Letter” stipulates that:

Nonconsensual disclosure of personally identifiable information (PII), such as a student’s birth name or sex assigned at birth, could be harmful to or invade the privacy of transgender students and may also violate the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). A school may maintain records with this information, but such records should be kept confidential. (Lhamon & Gupta, 2016, p. 4)

Finally, in terms of teacher education, a large-scale survey can determine what content, if any, regarding trans issues is being included in undergraduate teacher training curricula.

Names and records. Under guidelines from the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice, schools are now required to change education records to reflect a student's gender identity:

A school may receive requests to correct a student's education records to make them consistent with the student's gender identity. Updating a transgender student's education records to reflect the student's gender identity and new name will help protect privacy and ensure personnel consistently use appropriate names and pronouns. (Lhamon & Gupta, 2016, p. 5)

School officials should ensure that all records are updated before the beginning of a new term to ensure that rosters are correct. This will ensure that a trans student's birth (or "dead") name does not appear on a roster that may be read publicly.

Bathrooms. Wells, Roberts, and Allen (2007) suggested, "Create a school policy to ensure that all transsexual students can use the washroom that corresponds to their consistently asserted gender identity" (p. 35). With the "Dear Colleague Letter" (Lhamon & Gupta, 2016), during the time of this writing the Obama administration sent a directive to all public schools in the United States stipulating that transgender students must be able to use the bathroom that aligns with their gender identity (Lhamon & Gupta, 2016; U.S. Department of Justice, 2016a, 2016b). In her speech announcing a lawsuit against the state of North Carolina that had recently passed a discriminatory "bathroom bill," (SB 2) U.S. Attorney General Loretta Lynch said:

Let me speak now to the people of the great state, the beautiful state, my state of North Carolina. You've been told that this law protects vulnerable populations from harm—but

that just is not the case. Instead, what this law does is inflict further indignity on a population that has already suffered far more than its fair share. This law provides no benefit to society—all it does is harm innocent Americans. (para. 7)

Lynch went a step farther than simply announcing a Justice Department policy:

Let me also speak directly to the transgender community itself. Some of you have lived freely for decades. Others of you are still wondering how you can possibly live the lives you were born to lead. But no matter how isolated or scared you may feel today, the Department of Justice and the entire Obama Administration wants you to know that we see you; we stand with you; and we will do everything we can to protect you going forward. Please know that history is on your side. This country was founded on a promise of equal rights for all, and we have always managed to move closer to that promise, little by little, one day at a time. It may not be easy—but we'll get there together. (para. 9)

At the time of this writing, the bathroom lawsuits are still ongoing, as 11 states have sued the federal government over these new directives regarding school bathrooms (Montgomery & Blinder, 2016).

Based on the data from this study, it appears that the ability to use the bathroom that matches one's gender identity was important for Sara and to Jon. Officials in the states suing the federal government disagree: "Louisiana...Attorney General Jeff Landry said he worried that federal officials would 'wreak further havoc on our schools,' and...that the administration's guidance 'puts the safety and security of all of our children in jeopardy'" (Montgomery & Blinder, 2016, para. 10). What is ironic about such statements is that the data from this study indicate that it is not cisgender students who feel unsafe in school bathrooms—it is trans students. As Jon said,

I really just avoid going to the bathroom. The school is fine with me using the men's room, but *I've always been afraid to*, just because I don't want to push any buttons.

(personal communication, 5/18/16, emphasis added)

Ms. Dengler, Sara's guidance counselor said, "Sometimes I am amazed [at] this little rural town: Sara exited, from what I see, fairly unscathed, physically. You hear horror stories of female kids being beaten up in bathrooms" (Dengler, Interview, 11/4/16). Students should have the right to take care of their natural bodily functions while at school. Thus, schools should work to create safe and inclusive policies for trans students. If they *wish* to use a private bathroom, then that request should be honored. If they feel more comfortable using either of the binary bathrooms, that request should be honored as well.

Choral Classroom

Most high school choir teachers have a great amount of autonomy over the policies that govern their school choral programs. "Schools should work to foster environments that challenge binary representations and, in turn, embrace the fluidity of sex, sexuality, and gender" (Wells, Roberts, & Allen, 2007, p. 33). As discussed several times in this study, in taking a cue from the data and from recent guidelines set forth by the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice, there are several aspects of the secondary school choral experience that may be reconsidered in light of the inclusion of trans students.

Name change and rooming arrangements. As a common practice, all secondary teachers should ask for their students' pronouns on the first day of a new school year or term. Likewise, students must be able to go by a different name in class than the one printed on the school roster (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Teachers should understand that these names and pronouns may not remain static—they may change as students' identities evolve.

Once again, an open and respectful dialogue between trans students and education professionals is key.

For trans teenagers, the ability to use their real name can be an important part of how they “do” their gender in society and at school. As previously discussed, under the new guidelines from the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice (Lhamon & Gupta, 2016), schools are required to use a trans students real name. Choral educators can choose to learn each students name by asking for any modifications on the first day of a new year or term; they can and should use these names even without the legal name change. They should use this name in concert programs and other publications (perhaps in consultation with the student’s parent(s)/guardian(s)).

Similar discussions could occur regarding rooming arrangements on overnight choir trips. Most importantly, the choral teacher can have a dialogue with the trans student to see how they feel about their rooming situation. According to the “Dear Colleague Letter,”

A school must allow transgender students to access housing consistent with their gender identity and may not require transgender students to stay in single-occupancy accommodations or to disclose personal information when not required of other students. Nothing in Title IX prohibits a school from honoring a student’s voluntary request for single-occupancy accommodations if it so chooses. (Lhamon & Gupta, 2016, p. 4)

Conversations with supervising adults may be required, especially if the trans student is not widely “out.” Choral teachers should also consult with their administration and school district policies.

Structure of ensembles. As the gender landscape in the U.S. becomes more complex, choral teachers may find it necessary to reconsider the structure of their choral ensembles. Will a

“women’s choir” at the high school level serve the needs of *all* women—including trans women? Will a “men’s choir” be inclusive of trans men who formerly sang soprano—or still wish to? Sara and Jon both sang in co-ed ensembles in which they transitioned quite easily. Skyler began in a single-gender ensemble then moved into two co-ed choirs. Skyler was unsure about how they would feel about singing in a single-gender ensemble now that they have disclosed their non-binary identity. There are no easy answers. Choral educators should learn as much as they can about gender and how it influences their choral philosophy and pedagogy. If they discover incongruence, perhaps a change in program structure is called for—yet one more context-dependent consideration.

The presence of “gendered choirs” in the American choral community is a mainstay in many communities; for example: collegiate glee clubs, treble choirs with feminist roots, boychoirs, and single-gender college a cappella groups. Many of these ensembles have proven vital to identity development for males (Elorriaga, 2011; Freer, 2009; Ramsey, 2013) and females (Bartolome, 2013; O’Toole, 1998), and thus, personally important for many individual singers. I have met many women that feel empowered through membership in a women’s ensemble with feminist roots. Many men feel comfortable in all-male choirs. I think that these traditions have merit and I do not deny their importance to countless musicians. If conductor-teachers choose to stay with the “gendered choir” paradigm, however, they must find ways to be inclusive of trans singers. Ensemble name changes may be necessary (Palkki, 2015). As of the time of this writing, several states have re-named their All State women’s choirs as “treble choirs.” Because, as Skyler so aptly noted, if a choir is going to use the word “women,” then these ensembles must be accommodating of *all* women; likewise with men’s choirs.

It is interesting to consider the topic of “gendered” choirs in light of Title IX, which established regulations concerning the terms of sex separated activities (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). This U.S. law speaks to accommodations schools must make for trans students and may even influence what choruses they might join. A Department of Education (2015) Title IX guide included the following:

The Department’s Title IX regulations do not prohibit recipients from grouping students in physical education classes and activities by ability as assessed by objective standards of individual performance developed and applied without regard to sex or using requirements based on vocal range or quality that may result in a chorus or choruses of one or predominantly one sex. (p. 21)

According to the recent Title IX “Dear Colleague Letter” (Lhamon & Gupta, 2016), it is unclear whether schools are even *allowed* to have something like a “women’s chorus,” and it is unclear whether or not anyone can join a women’s chorus. Lhamon and Gupta (2016), on behalf of the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice, stated: “Although separating students by sex in classes and activities is generally prohibited, nonvocational elementary and secondary schools may offer nonvocational single-sex classes and extracurricular activities under certain circumstances” (p. 3). It is likely that choral classes are considered “nonvocational single-sex classes.” It seems that this will continue to be a topic of conversation—both within the choral music education community and within the broader education and perhaps even legal communities.

Standing arrangements. When an “out” trans student is involved in a choir, teachers should carefully consider seating/standing arrangements. Sara sat on the edge of the soprano and bass sections so that she could be near her correct voice part but also stand next to other female

students. Choral educators can create similar arrangements in which trans students can be successful and comfortable vocally, socially, and visually. In concert settings, such careful standing arrangements may be less crucial visually if all students wore gender-neutral uniforms.

Uniforms. Skyler said, “In a perfect world maybe uniforms would be gender neutral” (Interview #2, 2/24/16). Uniforms did not prove to be a challenge for Jon as he navigated his gender identity in the context of high school choir. Things were less smooth for Skyler, who seemed to settle a bit, and Sara, who needed to wait until administrators gave her permission to wear a dress in public. In the changing gender landscape of the 21st century, choral teachers may need to decide whether or not some of the traditional choir uniforms (e.g., dresses and tuxedos) best honor the gender identity of all students. The U.S. Department of Education (2016) stated,

Dress codes that apply the same requirements regardless of gender are the most inclusive for all students and avoid unnecessarily reinforcing sex stereotypes. To the extent a school has a dress code that applies different standards to male and female students, *some schools have policies that allow transgender students to dress consistent with their gender identity.* (...) The Washington State Guidelines encourage school districts to adopt gender-neutral dress codes that *do not restrict a student’s clothing choices on the basis of gender*: “Dress codes should be based on educationally relevant considerations, apply consistently to all students, include consistent discipline for violations, and make reasonable accommodations when the situation requires an exception.” (pp. 10-11, emphases added)

Choral teachers may explore a “concert black” approach in which every singer dresses in all black within specified guidelines to ensure that all outfits are school appropriate. Perhaps in the future, choral teachers could employ fashion designers to create gender-neutral choir uniforms.⁴³

Rehearsal language. Choral music educators can refrain from using blatantly gendered language in rehearsal. Not all basses are “men” and not all sopranos are “women.” As suggested by Palkki and Caldwell (in press), choral teachers should refer to sections, not genders. Trans singers who do not feel a strong sense of connection between their voice and gender may experience this even more often, as evidenced by Sara’s insistence that her teachers not refer to the tenor and bass sections as “men.” Using gendered language in rehearsal is making a tacit assumption that everyone is cisgender. These data suggest that that assumption can no longer be made. In addition to honoring trans students by carefully choosing words in class, Mr. Ames (Sara’s choir teacher) demonstrated how rehearsal language could influence other subsets of the LGBTQA community:

I try to keep any analogy I’m using sort of gender-neutral as well—when we’re talking about a piece dealing with love, I try and say, “a *person* you might have feelings for” as opposed to the stereotypical *boy loves girl or vice versa*. I do this also because we have a gay student in our chorus, and probably more that I’m not aware of. I try really hard to be as neutral as I can when using examples or analogies. (Ames, Interview, 5/4/15)

All choral teachers should bear in mind what kinds of examples they use and what those examples say about gender-sexual diversity.

Honor choirs. State choral associations and music education organizations will need to explore their honor choir audition policies. At the time of this writing, I have coordinated with

⁴³ Many thanks to my friend and colleague Andrew Minear who came up with this idea.

choral officials in various states. On May 28, 2016, there was a change made to a large Southwest state's honor choir policy, which had previously not allowed females to audition as tenors and forced students to audition for a voice part that matched their assigned birth sex. These restrictions have now been abolished. Recall that Mr. Mullins was instrumental in having honor choir policies changed in his state in the Northeast:

And finally someone said, "call the lawyer. Call the [state] MEA [music educators association] lawyer." And that conversation happened and the lawyer was like, "you can't say no *and* while you're at it, take out the 'boys can only do this and girls can only do this' policy because if you're ever taken to court, you're going to lose, and you're going to have a lot of bad press in the process. So get rid of it right now, be done with it. And that's ultimately, once that came down from the lawyer, they were like, "Ok! I guess that's what we're doing then." So, they took that out completely. At the Region level we're not even asking for gender anymore, because there's no need. (Mullins, Interview, 10/13/15)

State officials will need to consider state education law and policies while examining how they run their honor choirs—including considerations about ensemble types (e.g., the large Southwestern state to which I referred changed "women's choir" to "treble choir"), voicing, and uniforms.

Suggestions for Future Research

There is much to be done in terms of examining the role that gender plays in secondary school choral music, and there is much research that can be done to support these efforts. Wilchins (2002) wrote: "The time for changing the mainstream is now. Gender *is* the civil rights movement for our time, because gender rights are human rights. And I look forward to a day

when they are universally recognized and respected as such” (p. 17, emphasis in original). As trans issues in choral music education are something of a new frontier for researchers, respectful research can help grow our understanding of gender identity in the choral context. Qualitative explorations of trans choral teachers may illuminate a different facet of gender in choir. Further exploration of the experiences of trans students, and non-binary and/or gender fluid students may help the trans community seem less monolithic to choral educators. Studies of trans students exploring an intersectional approach could help address concerns of authors like Namaste (2000) who do not see people of color represented in much trans research.

The question of voice-gender identity connection is ripe for further exploration. A longitudinal study of trans singers at various ages could help illuminate this phenomenon. An ethnographic study of one of the trans choruses in the U.S. (e.g., Butterfly Music Transgender Chorus in Boston or the Trans Chorus of Los Angeles) could help choral conductor-teachers understand the specific needs of trans singers who wish to sing in an inclusive environment. In addition, more research is needed to understand vocal pedagogy for trans singers. The work of Steele (2016) and others will help all choral educators understand the inner workings of the trans singing voice and how to best promote healthy singing for trans individuals.

Conclusion

Are we at a transgender “tipping point” in American music education? That question remains a complex one with an elusive answer. What is clear, however, is that gender issues and transgender rights have come to the forefront of political discourse. As Rands (2009) noted, transgender students exist everywhere—including in school choral programs. It is my hope that this study will add to the ongoing discussion about how to include and honor *all* gender identities in the choral context. The experiences of these three articulate students illuminate new issues for

consideration and multiple possible paths forward. It is my sincere hope that in the future, choral conductor-teachers are not afraid to traverse these paths. As Slesaransky-Poe, Ruzzi, Dimedio, and Stanley (2013) wrote: “Recognize how the work you are doing now will help other children in the future... You must be willing to spend the time and effort, and know you are making a difference” (p. 40).

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